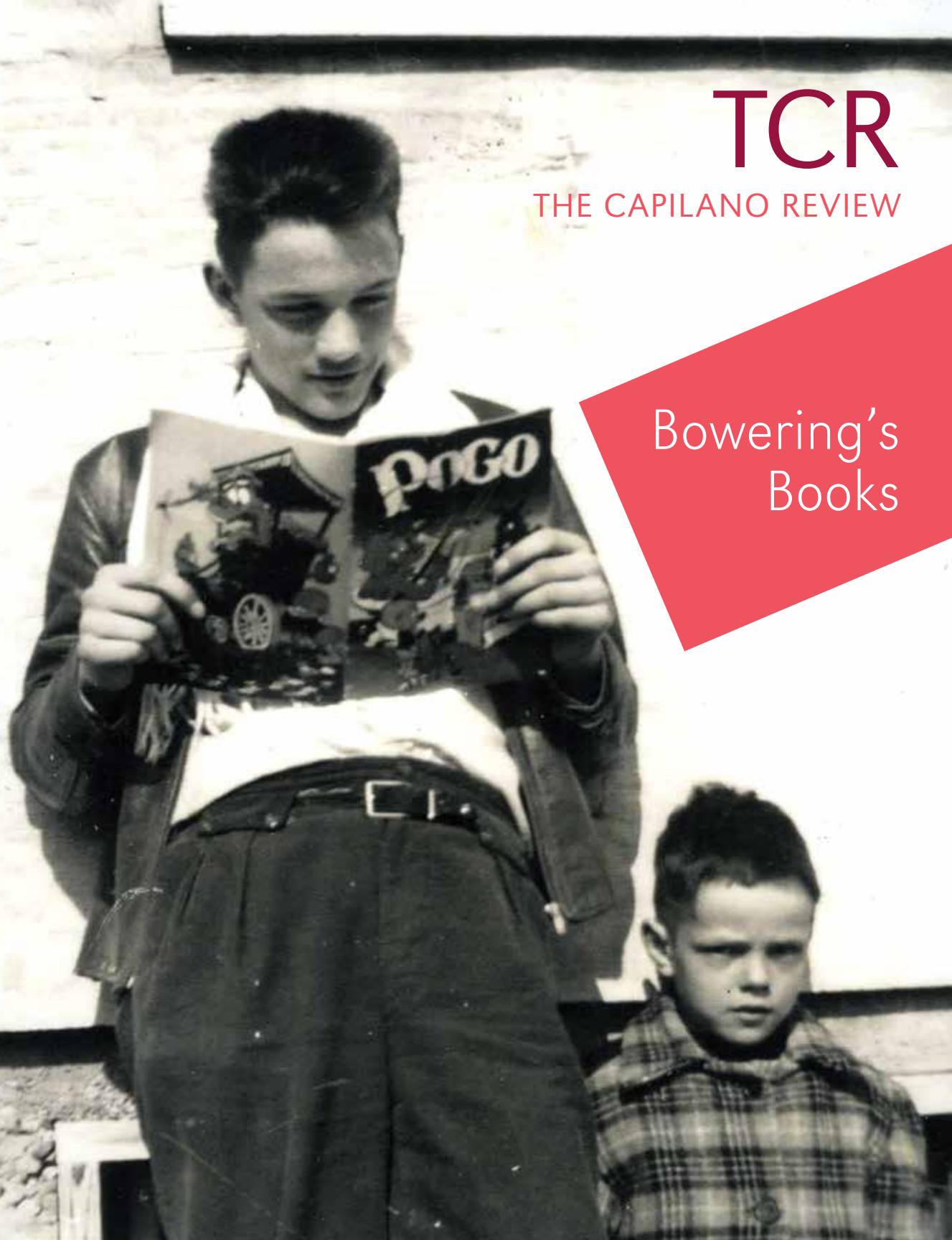

TCR

THE CAPILANO REVIEW

Bowering's Books

"Thea, do your piano practice! Oh, excuse me, I was sposed to shout that, not type it. I am an automatic narrative plunker-down. I cant help myself, a slave of Gutenberg or Cupertino."

—George Bowering
letter to Michael Ondaatje (25 Dec. 1984)

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TCR

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Cover Image:
George and Roger Bowering, c. 1959
Photo credit: Fred Miller

Editors' Note

This special issue of *TCR*—our largest yet—pays tribute to the mercurial and inestimable genius of George Bowering.

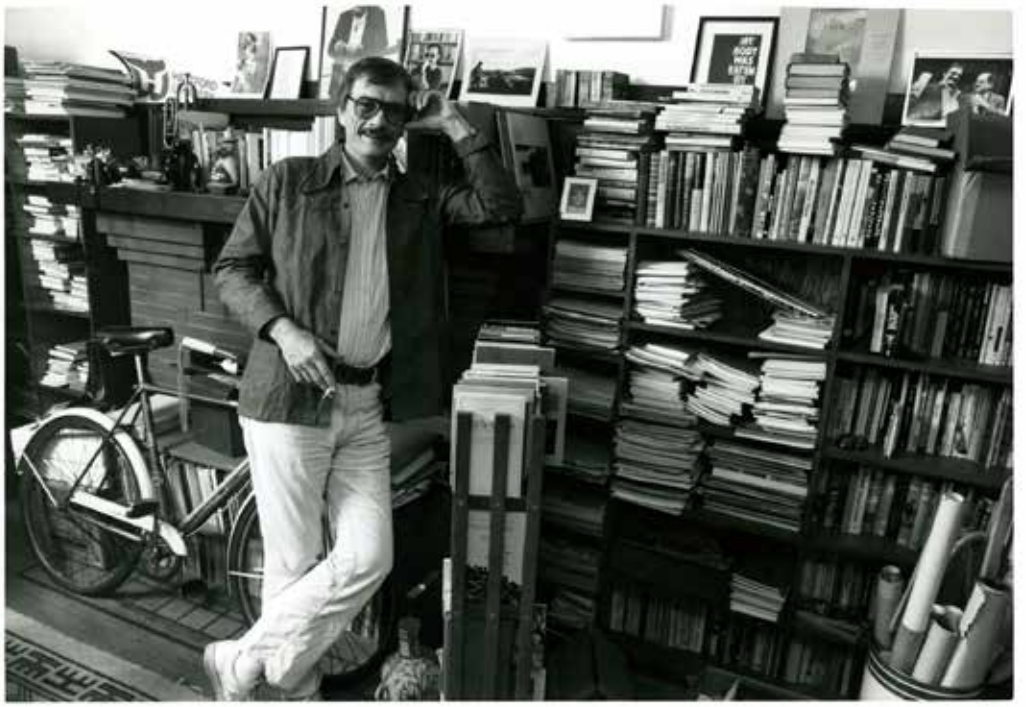
George summons big numbers. In fifty years of publishing he has seen over a hundred books into print by over sixty different publishers. The print and online editions of "Bowering's Books" assemble forty-six writers with a wide variety of pieces, some of them critical discussions of George's books, some of them memoirs and biographies, some of them tributes that adopt language-stratagems that rival his own. We include reflections by his publishers, by his former students, and of course by his irrepressible friends. Other pieces refer to his meticulously amassed book collections, another examines his long history of public readings, and a recent interview asks George to create yet another collection, a library of the fifty books most important to him. Accordingly, we include an architect's vision for a "George Bowering Library."

It's a major challenge for even a committed reader and writer to keep pace with George, let alone capture the extraordinary subtlety of his work: we offer instances, we describe, and we swap anecdotes. But his genius is a spirited and elusive entity. There's a tease waiting for the critic at every turn and a goading to keep at it and see if we're equal to his wit and invention. Meanwhile his eye's on the tangent, on a new experiment, on another hybrid, on disruption of his and our paths of thinking.

This issue is for George, with awe and with gratitude for the laughter and the joy in language!

For their help, thanks to Tony Power at the Contemporary Literature Collection, SFU Special Collections; to Monroe Lawrence; to Jean Baird; and to Roy Miki and his extraordinary tribute to Bowering's books—*A Record of Writing* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1989)—invaluable to the process of editing this issue.

—Jenny Penberthy & Aurelea Mahood



George among books in his study at 2499 West 37th Ave., c. 1981.
Photo credit: Paul Little for SFU

Colin Browne / George Bowering: The First Fifty

The following conversation took place in Vancouver in the kitchen of Jean Baird and George Bowering on the afternoon of Saturday, August 16, 2014. Prior to turning on the recorder, I asked George, given the theme of this special issue of The Capilano Review, *to consider building a library from scratch. With this undertaking in mind, what would be the first fifty books, and why would we make this library?*

George Bowering: Oh, in the hope that archaeologists far in the future will dig it up and say, "Oh! This is what they had before they imprinted things in our foreheads!" No. I guess I've always been fascinated with libraries. I built one in my house and then got rid of it and then built another one. When I was a kid every time I read a book I'd give it away. I'm now starting to do that again except with very certain authors, like you, for instance. [Laughter] But I always did that up until I was 22, or something like that, which meant several hundred books I just gave away—magazines and books—and whatever I read I would give it away when I was finished with it. Except for sports magazines which I kept and still have.

Colin Browne: Was that because you didn't have a place to keep them?

GB: I think I had a sense that I would try to get through life with nothing but a briefcase. This was when I was thirteen. I didn't want to have things. I was never going to smoke, I was never going to drink, and I was never going to have things. It was partly because I was like a personal, private Jesus freak, and He didn't have anything, right? I thought, "That's really cool," because it's the opposite of what most people are urged to do—get a car, get a house, etc. Nobody had to teach me to be different from everybody else.

There is a copy of Hesiod's Theogony *and* Works and Days *on the table between us.*

CB: I see we have a copy of Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. These two works are almost always included in one volume. Is this the first book that you'd include in the library?

GB: Yes, because that's the first book. And not because of my personal experience and all that stuff, but because that's what my teachers always said. Not my college teachers but my real teachers, like Robert Duncan, said to read that, or even Olson said to start off with that, and everything Hesiod says you say, "Yeah, that's right!"

CB: Maybe that's because it's such a thin book? It takes us back to the agricultural round. You can see why Olson would be so interested in this pre-urban, pre-industrial life.

GB: And the same experience happens—oh God, here I go, I'm like 91 years old and I can't remember names any more—that Roman guy who travelled to Sicily, who wrote the book that explained the whole universe. Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. A Roman writing a treatise on Epicurean philosophy.

CB: So these would be the first books. We can imagine a shelf, but we don't know how that bookshelf would be organized.

GB: There'd be Hesiod and the Bible.

CB: Which translation of the Bible?

GB: The King James translation with an explanation or with a justification. The writing is so much better, even though there are some things that modern Bible scholars would say are mistakes. Have you ever picked up the modern ones that southern Protestants get? It's just so awful. It's like The Poppy Family! And the question would be: would you throw in a Concordance to a Bible? I'd say no, because we've only got fifty books.

CB: And should we restrict ourselves, for the sake of simplicity, to books written in English or in English translations?

GB: Yes. Well [laughter] I've got to tell you Rimbaud sounds better in French than it does in English! But I'm not putting Rimbaud on that shelf.

CB: You're not?

GB: No. I'm sorry. Because if you do then you have to put all the other French poets on. You can't just say okay, he represents….

CB: You can't go right to Mallarmé?

GB: Well, Mallarmé. If I was going to add one he would be the one I'd put on.

CB: Okay. So we've got Hesiod, the King James Bible, and Mallarmé. We're starting from the beginning, aren't we?

GB: Not necessarily, because remember, that's how they organize classes in our universities. They would say okay, we're starting with Chaucer or Dunbar or something and going up to, I don't know, Browning. But after a while I thought that's kind of stupid. Maybe you should start with writers from your own period, in your time, and find out what they read. So I thought okay, T.S. Eliot's not necessarily from your own time, but you go to T.S. Eliot and you ask who T.S. Eliot was reading, and then you say, Oh yes! Rimbaud! Or Mallarmé. Then you ask who's he reading? Oh, he was reading Edgar Allan Poe. What was Edgar Allan Poe reading? Thucydides, and do it that way. That made a lot more sense to me. But to leap over a thousand years of literature and read some writing from the year 1000, and then come from there up to here? That's stupid.

CB: When you said *leap over* I thought you were about to add Li Po to the list.

GB: No drunks on my list.

CB: Well, we should pack up and go home. [Laughter]

GB: Oh yes, the new American poetry.

CB: Okay, we have three.

GB: Shakespeare. That could be one book. *Complete Poems and Plays of William Makepeace Shakespeare*. That would be a book. You can't just say okay, we'll take *Hamlet* and *Pericles*.

CB: So explain why you'd want our ideal reader to read Shakespeare.

GB: Because everybody else who wrote after Shakespeare had read Shakespeare. A lot of my writing is fooling around with previous writing. And in a less straightforward way that's what most, or a lot of good writing is. How many times in the twentieth century did a major poet write in such a way that you had to check out that Greek guy Heraclitus?

CB: How about the Greek who wrote about a guy named Odysseus?

GB: Yes, Homer. And Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. But there isn't, for instance, Dryden. But I'd still say Shakespeare as a book.

CB: What I like about this list so far is the poetry.

GB: There weren't many novels back in the olden days.

CB: It's all for the ear.

GB: I'm thinking now, there's my favourite stuff—it would go into my library—and then there's the stuff that I think *should* go into the library, which is not necessarily the same thing. Like, for instance, my favourite living American novelist, until a couple of years ago, was Gilbert Sorrentino, but I wouldn't put Sorrentino on the same list as Shakespeare.

CB: You could find a reason to put him there, though.

GB: If somebody said you can have only three novelists from the latter half of the twentieth century he could very well be one of those three. Because of the attitude towards writing that he had, and the sheer…the curiosity of his mind to go out and try so many different things that had to do with the state of literature, right? Every time he wrote a novel it was a kind of a criticism of the novel.

CB: I'm going to include Sorrentino because that puts into relief the kinds of choices you make. So, the first six include Shakespeare, Homer, Hesiod….

GB: Our literature wouldn't exist without them, they say. But it probably would, you know. There might have been somebody who was just as good a writer as Aeschylus, who just somehow or other disappeared because nobody bothered publishing it any more.

CB: But then we have Sorrentino, who is there for a different reason. I think that's quite acceptable.

GB: And also, he's a model for me. His first books were poetry. They were done by really small presses, published by people like LeRoi Jones and so forth. Then he became more of a fiction writer. First of all he was published by companies like Bobbs-Merrill, hard-back publishers in New York, etc., and then Grove published *Mulligan Stew*, after all kinds of other publishers didn't, but Grove was still kind of

a major New York publisher. And then after that his publishers got to be smaller and smaller and farther and farther from New York. And while that's happening the writing continued to be more and more interesting. But there aren't that many readers for it, as there are for John Updike, who should not only not be on the list, he should be a negative on the list. How about a list of fifty books you should *not* read? Okay, well, the greatest poet ever in the English language was Shelley. See, the trouble with this is you can't have a list of fifty books. It has to be five thousand. Because if you stick Shelley up there you say why not Keats? Why not Wordsworth, why not Blake, and so on. If I were to say I'm only going to get one romantic poet I'm going to take him. I mean in English. I haven't got any English women writers yet because we're still dealing with the days when there weren't many, or they didn't write much or they didn't get anthologized or didn't get taught and so on.

CB: So I've got Shelley, but why not include Blake?

GB: Because if you do then you've got to say, "Okay, then we can't have any writers from Germany or the early twentieth century or something like that because there's no room." I want to put H.D. in there. I had one room in the old house I used to live in back when I had a lot of books—I got rid of ten thousand books, right? And I do quite often say, "I wish I still had that!" But I knew I was going to say that. So I had one room whose bookshelves had only William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. That's all that was in that whole room. But there were a lot of them! That was my actual bookshelf. Okay, those four people have to go in then. But they're all writing in English, aren't they? They're all American.

CB: Yes, but this is your list: H.D., Stein, Williams, and Pound.

GB: Which is kind of interesting because H.D., Williams, and Pound all went to university together. But we're not talking authors, we're talking books. *The Cantos*, eh, that's one book. And for Williams—he published a couple of thousand pages of poetry. I guess *Paterson* is what you want to put in there. Yes, *Paterson*, okay. And then H.D.? I would say *Trilogy*. And Stein—hmmm. *The Making of Americans*? Nobody ever reads that. Except…Barry Nichol carried it around and read it. He did! Books that poets carry around…. Newlove used to carry around the collected works of Stevens. Hmm, so I've got Stein. She's not really excerptable that way, is she?

CB: *Tender Buttons*?

GB: Yes, I was just thinking of *Tender Buttons*. *Three Lives*. It's such early stuff, though. Both of those are early.

CB: There are also her essays.

GB: Maybe the book that I keep coming back to, *Geography and Plays*. Yes. I think *Geography and Plays*. Or *Everybody's* or maybe the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

CB: But then you're not getting the kind of syntax…

GB: Yes. *Geography and Plays*. Yes. So that takes care of the twentieth century pretty well. [Laughter]

CB: But did you want to put Blake in there?

GB: Nah, not necessary. I'm telling you something. I'm not putting Neruda in there. That Stalinist! That murdering Stalinist! There, I said it.

CB: Would you put Marx on this list?

GB: No, because I've hardly read Marx. I've read very little Marx. I'm not going to put Freud on either. Screw them. They might be on the list of poets, writers, we don't put on.

CB: Freud's an interesting case. People like to have a sense of what he's written but very rarely do they read him. When you do, you suddenly find a proud and vulnerable character.

GB: We've got H.D. in there so at least we've got Freud's rival. H.D.'s book on Freud is a great book. That way we can get Freud in, right?

CB: *Trilogy*, or *Tribute to Freud*?

GB: No, *Trilogy* is more important.

CB: So we're talking about books that have influenced writers.

GB: See, Milton's a giant poet but I ain't putting him there. Hell with him. Fuck Milton! [Loud laughter] Can I put on a book that I haven't read, *Don Quixote*, because of the tradition Cervantes started, which I would like to adhere to?

CB: So now we're moving to novels?

GB: What did we do with Sorrentino?

CB: Sorrentino's on.

GB: Yeah, but that's just a name, that's not a book.

CB: *Mulligan Stew*?

GB: I guess *Mulligan Stew*. Except it's funny to have *Mulligan Stew* without having the novel that *Mulligan Stew* was a deconstruction of. But on the other hand that's not like a giant novel in the world. It's for us cult-type people.

CB: We can't include everything.

GB: I haven't read Tasso either. I just recently acquired a translation of Tasso.

CB: What about *Tristram Shandy*?

GB: I was just thinking of that. That would pretty well cover the 18th century in England. But if you're going to put in *Tristram Shandy*, why wouldn't you put in *At Swim Two Birds*?

CB: I'm putting it in.

GB: [Laughter] People are going to say, "You don't have anything by any Indian writers, or any Chinese writers, Japanese writers, or Finlandic writers."

CB: That's a big question for us, isn't it? But Flann O'Brien we do need.

GB: It's not your fucking list.

CB: Okay, I'm crossing it out.

GB: No, put it in. Put it in. And put Robert Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said*. How many have we got so far? Is that fifty? Are you putting a number beside them or are you just scrawling them down and counting them later? And what if you count them and we come to fifty-four? Then we've got to start subtracting.

CB: Fifteen so far.

GB: Let's see. I wouldn't object to Borges. *Ficciones*.

CB: It's got Pierre Menard.

GB: Yeah, that's right. So you get his method as it pans out.

CB: And again you get writing on writing.

GB: And we had *Don Quixote*, so you can see what's happening! Okay. *Ulysses*. Yes, of course.

CB: It's the funniest book written in English.

GB: It's pretty funny. I read it in a basement room two blocks from here. I still have that copy here.

CB: Flann O'Brien and Joyce—maybe you're telling me something.

GB: How many Irish do we need? It's a small country.

CB: What about Sam Beckett?

GB: Sam Beckett! Would a trilogy be one work?

CB: You have to read all three. *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*.

GB: I don't know how to handle that. Because *Waiting for Godot*—we don't have that many plays, but *The Unnamable* is my favourite book of that whole era.

CB: Then let's put it in.

GB: No, let's put in *Waiting for Godot*.

CB: What would be of interest to someone reading this list would be to say, "Hah! He could have included *Waiting for Godot*, but…."

GB: I see what you mean, yeah. Wait a minute. Are you supposed to be influencing me?

CB: I'm just listening. [Laughter] What's interesting to me is the developing distinction between the books you love and cherish and the books you perhaps believe *should* be on the list.

GB: Okay, we're leaving both of those out and putting in *Ill Seen, Ill Said*. No! I'm only kidding! I'm going with *Godot*. I'm keeping *The Unnamable* for myself.

CB: It'll be in the supplementary or shadow list.

GB: Okay. Hey, I get to not put in Frost! And I get to put in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and, while we're at it, um…

CB: …more Hardy?

GB: No. *Vanity Fair.*

CB: Oh, *Vanity Fair.* Thackeray. Okay.

GB: *Moby Dick*.

CB: At last. But then the big question is…

GB: …no *Clarel*.

CB: No *Clarel*. But the big question really is what about *The Confidence Man* or *Pierre?*

GB: *The Confidence Man* is his most interesting book, but…

CB: *Moby Dick* you want?

GB: Yes, and I actually have read *Typee*. I think I read *Omoo*. In fact I recently re-read "The Encantadas."

CB: There's also "Billy Budd." There are those marvellous short fictions. Or, we know who….

GB: Yeah, I'd rather not. I choose not to remember!

CB: I've got *Moby Dick* then.

GB: Okay. We're finished with that. We're pretty well done. Have we mentioned Whitman?

CB: Are we going to?

GB: I'm reserving opinion on that. Could I mention Jamie Reid? No. We've already got Mallarmé. Actually, Jamie was our young, drunken boat, in the good old days. Hmm. I'm not putting in Neruda. He's out for sure.

CB: So that may also cancel out Aragon and Paul Eluard.

GB: Yeah, they're out. Besides Beckett, what French writers of the 20th century, which neo-novelists, would I put in? I guess probably Claude Simon. Now, which book? *Flanders Road*, I guess. Claude Simon. He's so good.

CB: Now, what about contemporary work you think readers should look at? It could be exemplary, or it could be one you love and admire.

GB: Something by Toni Morrison. I am so impressed with her as a writer. But what? I really like *Jazz*, but *Jazz* is not really one of her main…oh, one of her slavery ones…is *Beloved* the one about people trying to get across the Ohio River into Cincinnati? I think it is. Yes, I would put in *Beloved*. And you know who else can really write is…this is a guy who's never won the Nobel prize, and he's a couple of years older than me and he's published like thirty-five books of fiction…

CB: …and his initials are P.R. and he writes the best sentences in…?

GB: I think *Patrimony* might be the one. Is it *Patrimony*?

CB: *Patrimony* is the memoir of his Dad.

GB: I don't want that one. I want the one…

CB: There's *I Married a Communist*, there's *The Counterlife*.

GB: *American Pastoral*!

CB: That's the one you like?

GB: Yes, that's the one I like. Now we haven't mentioned Faulkner. Or Hemingway. On the other hand, we haven't said anything about Euripides. Now, I'm a Euripides fan, if you can say that. I guess *Ion*. It's funny because I hardly ever see a Greek play and I don't read ancient Greek so I'm reading these plays in English, so I don't know what comes through, but—and it sounds really corny—he seems to me to be the most human. That's not very good, is it? See, we used to get impatient with readers who would try to identify with Lear or with Othello, right? It's a *tragedy*. What's important is your whole fucking world is going to be cut off above your head! You and your whole family are going into the abyss! It's got nothing to do with you sympathizing with some poor guy in black tights. But Euripides, his stories have moments that you could write poetry about.

CB: It looks like we're at twenty-five. We might not fill this bookshelf.

GB: *Absalom Absalom*.

CB: What did Faulkner mean to you?

GB: You see, before Faulkner I'd read all Hemingway. I still like Hemingway. I still really like his writing except those things that were published after he died. They were awful. *Farewell to Arms* is probably the book I've read more often than any other book, and I still think highly of it.

CB: Are you going to put it on the list?

GB: Yes. I'm going to put it on because it's so representative, somehow or another, of the situation that people found themselves in in the relationship between the intellect and the social order. Like, shit, is this what it's going to be like from now on? And yet it's beautiful. Is there something wrong with that? To go to places where there are wars and terrible things are happening and end up writing beautifully? So I read Hemingway, and okay, yes, good clear sentences with not many adverbs if possible and hardly any adjectives unless they're a colour or something, and recognizing that nobody talks the way they talk in his books anyway, and then along came Faulkner and it's just the opposite. The world finds itself winding round his language—oh! Dante! *The Human Comedy*! If you don't allow me to have all three of them I'll take the first one. How did we almost forget Dante? I even mentioned Tasso!

CB: Should I include Tasso?

GB: No, because I haven't read him properly yet. I think maybe *Huckleberry Finn*.

CB: Okay. What about women writers?

GB: Not a lot so far. The only Canadian we've got in here is Kroetsch, so, I'm thinking, which one of Nicole Brossard's books should I put in?

CB: One of the early ones, maybe with the beautiful blue covers?

GB: *Sold-Out*, or, in English, *Turn of a Pang*. That takes care of Canada and women. [Laughter] How many is that now? About thirty? Thirty-five? Later on we're going to think, "Why didn't we think of…it's so obvious!"

CB: What were the books that were milestones for you?

GB: The first time I ever read a novel by James Farrell. It wasn't *Studs Lonigan*, it was the other guy, his other more intellectual, autobiographical hero. I can't remember which one it was because there was a sequence. Danny O'Neill. A character named Danny O'Neill. And he had to change names because he changed publishers, so he had to change a lot of the names in his books. That was a nuisance. I was reading him when I was in the Air Force and he became a guy I wanted to be like. They always take place, the stories and novels take place in Chicago and the rugged Irish streets of Chicago where I'd never been or anything but I felt like he'd penetrated my soul, right? That was a big deal. The book that—I've told the story many times—made me drop it on the floor, on the concrete floor of the library and made the sound resound all over the place, was *The Desert Music* by Williams. That's the one that turned my life around in terms of what I thought poetry should be.

CB: I'm putting that on the list.

GB: That was so important to me. See that's important to me more than it's important to somebody in the future.

CB: It's still important and I'd say worthy of being on the shelf of books that meant something to you. So if I came to that shelf I'd say, "This is a portrait of George, these are the books he thought I should know, and these are the books that touched his heart."

GB: Yes. Okay. Well, then I'd probably have to get a Conrad book in there, probably the one about the Central American war. *Nostromo*. It stands out for me the way *Absalom Absalom* stands out in Faulkner. Conrad wrote a whole pile of novelettes. And there are a lot of them yet to read, like forty-five page stories, right? So every once in a while I go and—I know where I can buy some.

CB: What about Henry James?

GB: That thought passed through my head a minute ago. And went right out again. But, you know what, when I was reading him I would read one every six months when I was in my 20s and 30s. And I would say why aren't I reading this all the time? And when I did get rid of that huge library I got rid of all my Henry James

books, including several I hadn't read, *Princess Casamassima*, *The Golden Bowl*, and so on. Hadn't read them. Brand new! But they're gone.

CB: George, do you read while you're writing? I mean you're writing all the time, but when, say, you're working on a novel?

Wearing famous Georgie Hat in hills east of Oliver, c. 1949.
Photo credit: Bill Trump

GB: I read whatever I happen to be reading. I'm reading a book of poems right now by Tom Clark called *The Truth Game* and I'm reading Lawrence Block's *Hit Man*. It's so funny. Whatever I happen to be reading I just keep reading it. I don't say I can't stop reading while I write, or I'm not going to read a novel that fixes up this novel, but I did, when I was going to write my two westerns—I had read a thousand westerns when I was a kid but I hadn't read a western for fifty years—I went and read a whole pile of westerns, mostly by authors that I knew from olden days, just to get me back in so I'd remember what a remuda was. And so on. And so I could steal a bit of stuff, too. Both of my westerns steal; one steals a story from Louis L'Amour—that's in *Caprice*—and the other one steals a couple of characters from David Markson, the guy who wrote *This is Not a Novel*. One of my very

favourite authors. Died four years ago, from New York City, didn't write enough books but wrote the Dingus McGee stories. I stole him. In the novel he's only 18, a killer cowboy, but in the movie *Dirty Dingus McGee* Frank Sinatra plays the part, Frank Sinatra at the time being about 55. So they screwed that up. Markson also wrote *The Last Novel*.

George on Mr. Zarelli's lawn, Oliver, c. 1948.
Photo credit: Sally Bowering

CB: I'm wondering about poems and books of poems.

GB: Well, the best non-book-like poem that I know is Shelley's *Mont Blanc*, which I have understood three times and now don't because you have to work and work and work to understand it—it's like climbing the mountain—then eventually you say, of course, now I remember, having figured it out before. But right now I can't, so I'd have to go and study like crazy and read all the philosophical background to get there, and I'd get it again and say, "This is bloody amazing, that some twenty-five year-old mind could do this!" Ah, Christ! So that's the best poem I know, but one of my very, very favourite poems is Williams' "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." When it was first published it had another title. I forget. But "Asphodel" I thought

was just amazing. He was really an old guy then, but I'm older now than he was when he wrote it!

CB: I'm going to put that in. I'd wondered why you hadn't mentioned that.

GB: There have been other poems that have really knocked me out. It's happened. Duncan's done it, Creeley's done it and H.D.'s done it, and so forth. Poems that just—shwee—exploded with their power!

CB: Do you think you would put Olson on the list?

GB: I'm toying with it. I always used to love going up to Ralph Maud and saying, "Ralph, a hundred years from now this will be known as the Age of Beckett." Also, as you probably know, I think very highly of the the *Four Quartets*.

CB: Let's add that.

GB: I'm not going to put in any of Winston Churchill's books.

CB: So far we've had literary texts…

GB: I'm going to include Sheila Watson, *The Double Hook*. *The Double Hook* is my happiness. It confirms me in my beliefs. Back east the few who notice it say that it is a regional fiction. Writers who are hip and/or western know its centrality (due to its marginality). It appears in texts by others, such as Ondaatje, Kroetsch, and me.

CB: It's on the list.

GB: That's three women now. [Laughter] Another book that I thought was interesting—but is it as big a deal as say, Milton, who I'm leaving out—would be Pico Iyer's *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World*. It's about six or eight places on the edge of the world that hardly anybody ever goes. One of them was North Korea. It's really something. It's really good. Oh. Kawabata. I'm very big on Yasunari Kawabata. I think probably *Snow Country*. Some of my favourite writers are not on there because I don't think it's right, just because they're my favourite writers.

CB: Why not? They could be on there *because* they're your favourite writers.

GB: Like Jerome Charyn. I haven't read his new book but I've got it. *I Am Abraham*. What's my favourite book of his? He's written some wonderful non-

fiction. He wrote a wonderful book about ping-pong, *Sizzling Chops & Devilish Spins*. But my favourite novel of his is probably *Pinocchio's Nose*. What a sense of power I'm feeling! I guess I want to put Margaret Avison on. Yes. I mean we've got to have Canadian content. Margaret Avison. *The Dumbfounding*.

CB: Do you think it's a fact of Canadian literature, at least in English, that many writers' first books are the memorable ones?

GB: There used to be a thing that happened quite often in Canadian literature that a person would publish one novel and then publish a second novel thirty-five years later just before he died.

CB: We've got a lot of American literature in there.

GB: We've got Conrad, we've got *Nostromo*. My favourite Australian writer is Murray Bail but how many people know about him? There's a book of his right there that I haven't read yet. Now which of his books? I guess, probably, *Homesickness*. He's wonderful.

CB: We don't have any German writers.

GB: We don't have Garcia Lorca. We don't have Rilke. What about the giants I'll think of later? I've got to put in Heraclitus.

CB: We have Homer, but which book? Which poem?

GB: The *Odyssey*. Yes. Then we've got *Ulysses*, too, right?

CB: We could think of more women writers who have shown us what we didn't see because we were so wrapped up in ourselves.

GB: Okay. George Eliot. But not the stuff we usually get from her. The one I like is about Renaissance Florence, about 900 pages long. *Romola*. And Emily Brontë.

CB: *Wuthering Heights*?

GB: *Wuthering Heights* for sure.

CB: What about contemporary women? And Emily Dickinson?

GB: Yes, I was thinking about her. Yes, put in Emily Dickinson. *Collected Poems*. So you're going to put her in and you're not going to put in Whitman, eh?

CB: I'd include Whitman.

GB: Okay, Dickinson and Whitman. We don't need Emerson. We don't need *The House of Seven Gables*.

Michael Ondaatje reads the *TV Guide* and George reads William Carlos Williams, posing for the camera in the Bowering apartment, Montreal, c. 1969.
Photo credit: Angela Bowering

CB: I've been thinking about Audubon, Whitman, Melville, Edward Curtis—artists creating encyclopaedic studies of what they thought of as a vanishing America. It struck me a while ago that Ishmael wrote *Moby Dick* by the light of a kerosene lamp; American oil wells were beginning to gush as he sat at his desk.

GB: What about whale oil?

CB: It was all over for whale oil. Epic stories take place during epic transformations. Okay, Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*.

GB: I'd like to promote Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*.

CB: Were you affected by Cortázar's *Hopscotch*?

GB: I thought about him, actually. He was on my mind. Let's do that. Let's do *Hopscotch*. Of course you know that's not its name in Spanish. It's *Rayuela*. I really like his story about the guy who every time he opens his mouth to say something a frog comes out of his mouth!

CB: Were you sold on the idea of "magic realism"?

GB: A little bit. And I guess probably…gee, some people would give me shit for not having certain authors in here. I'm going to put in a book that's not fiction. It's Émile Zola's *The Experimental Novel*. But then, you see, oh boy. That sets up a whole tradition. Like what about that French hyphenated guy from the new novel?

CB: Alain Robbe-Grillet?

GB: Yes. And what about Nathalie Sarraute? Yeah. Because Robbe-Grillet has a wonderful book that's in the tradition of *The Experimental Novel*, a book about fiction, about writing fiction. Okay, that's fifty-two and that's my unlucky number, so…

CB: Should we drop Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute then? It means we'd finish with *The Experimental Novel*.

GB: Have to. And then people can set up their own goddamn lists. But they don't get fifty, they only get forty. We didn't get Zane Grey! When I was a kid Zane Grey really turned my head around. Then Max Brand. And that's when I first learned something. There were two writers, Max Brand and Luke Short. Short was the realist and Zane Grey was the romantic, and my leaning was towards the romantic in the cowboy stuff. Max Brand, the big hero, was a guy who had a wolf for a companion and a horse and a special weapon and—Silvertip, his name was! You know, Max Brand, he wrote about 500 books and he died before he was 50! You know how he died? Sitting in a chair on a mountainside in Italy during the Second World War. He got shot. He was a war correspondent. He was just sitting on a chair.

I always wondered, do you think Luke Short knew Rex Stout? They must have known each other. And…we didn't include Mickey Spillane!

CB: These are the names I expected.

GB: They are not!

CB: Well…

GB: I actually was a snob about Mickey Spillane. Yes. I looked down on Mickey Spillane, although I read him assiduously until he became a Jehovah's Witness, then I quit.

CB: What about Dashiell Hammett?

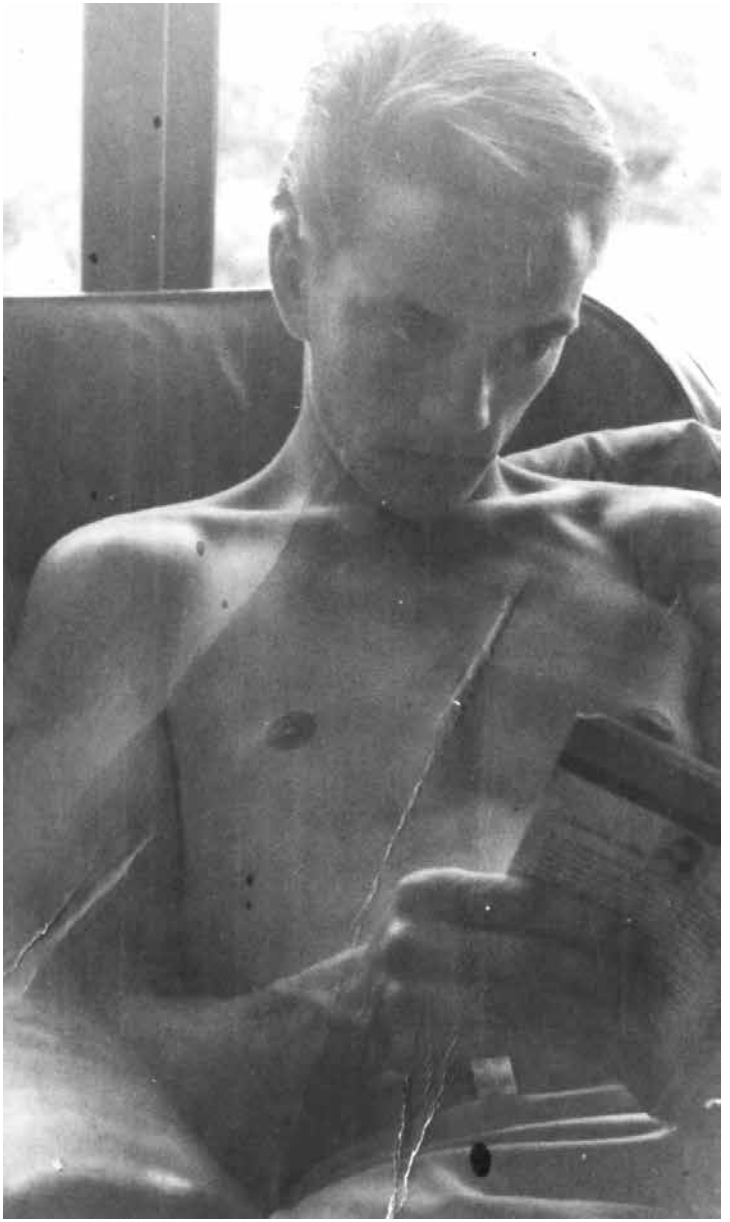
GB: I didn't read Dashiell Hammett until a couple of years ago, but I did read Raymond Chandler about twenty years ago, twenty-five years ago. And before that—see, this is what I'm talking about. Before that I read John Ross Macdonald. Ross Macdonald was called the new Raymond Chandler, and Raymond Chandler was his hero, so I went back and read Raymond Chandler, and people said Raymond Chandler's rival was Dashiell Hammett, etc., etc., right? When I was a kid, though, it was Murray Leinster and Ray Bradbury and those guys. Curt Siodmak. The science fiction guys. I read westerns, then I read science fiction novels. Every once in a while something else would seep in. When I was in Grade 11, I read *1984* which had just come out in drugstore paperback, and I did a book report on it, and got shit for it. "You should be doing serious books instead of science fiction," my Grade 11 teacher said. Now they teach it in school, or at least they used to, back when they did books in school. Gosh! Jeez! Names tumble through my head now. Not so much names as guys whose names I can't remember tumble through my head now. [Laughter] What about Lady Murasaki? We didn't even mention Dhusvam Sayami.

CB: We're slyly sneaking in more names here at the end.

GB: Yes. Georges Perec! Italo Calvino! Gosh! What's his name that starts with Q? There's so many of them. John Berger—the list just goes on and on and on. If I was allowed to have seven hundred then I could just put everyone on…Gerry Gilbert…. But it's a start. It's something.

CB: It fills the first shelf.

GB: Incidentally, everything I've said so far was a lie.



George in Joan Huberman's apartment, West Point Grey, 1959.
Photo credit: Joan Huberman (Payne)

Rebecca Wigod / The Three-Ring Binders

The summer before he turned twenty, George Harry Bowering set out to become a poet. He made a pact with himself: whenever an idea came to him, he would sit down with a pen and paper and work out a poem. He figured that if he approached the task seriously and devoted enough time and effort to it, his skills were bound to improve. As he would put it many years later, in the preface to one of his books, "Just about everybody writes poetry. It's just that most people never try to write better poetry."

He was a tall, skinny, creative, book-loving teenager. Then, after spending a less-than-stellar year at university and failing to hang onto the love of his high school sweetheart, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in July 1954—a gesture that seemed bold and romantic in the moment but one he regretted almost immediately. Although he had been an Air Cadet as a boy, he was constitutionally a leader, a joker, and an unapologetic eccentric, so he didn't have much patience with being told what to do. (There were compensations, though. Thanks to Air Force training he became an aerial photographer.)

The following summer, time off brought him back to his parents' house in the village of Oliver, British Columbia. He had grown up in the Okanagan Valley, where irrigation had made the province's south-central desert bloom extravagantly, its orchards sending crate after crate of apples, peaches, apricots, plums, pears, and cherries off to market. In late June 1955, against that backdrop of ripeness and abundance, he wrote "Pessimism." The first poem he thought worth keeping, it reeks of youthful *Weltschmerz* and is bitterly satirical. The "I" of the poem is so jaded that birds' songs sound to him like "horrendous cacophonies"; where others see beauty, he can see only cysts. The last line—"Thank God I have money!"—confirms the reader's suspicion that the poem's "I" is an invented character, not the young George. Was he suggesting that wealth strips people of the ability to appreciate nature?

He gave titles like "Waste," "Failure," and "Dismay" to poems he wrote in the next few months. But when I began reading through his early poems—they are stored in Ottawa, part of his voluminous archive at Library and Archives Canada—I

could see that he outgrew his youthful nihilism fairly quickly. It is also evident, from the record, that practice made him an increasingly fluent and versatile poet. As he experimented with form, rhyme, rhythm, and tone, his poems came thicker and faster. "Saturday Night," the seventeenth poem he saved—written in August 1956 but never published—came from a write-what-you-know place and throbs with dangerous energy. Military men and their girlfriends are drinking in a bar when jealousy flares and a fight breaks out. The poem begins: "Saturday night / And all the guys are / Yelling and running and belching / Beer runs with blood and lipstick."

The pact Bowering made with himself involved not only perseverance but also careful documentation. With a penchant for order and neatness (acquired partly through marshalling sports statistics when, as a teenager, he covered sports for two Okanagan newspapers), he numbered, dated, and typed out his hand-written poems. When he had a stack of a hundred, he filed it in a three-ring binder, typing up a single-spaced table of contents for the front. What a fiddly job that must have been, and how unexpected it is to learn that a man who gives the impression of irreverent, joshing looseness is a meticulous record keeper, at least in his writing life. He gave each binder a title. The one containing his first hundred poems he dubbed *The Immaterialist*; the titles he gave the second, third, and fourth binders are *The Adventurist*, *The Projectionist*, and *The Psalmodist*. By the end of 1984 he had filled eighteen binders with 1,700 pieces—mostly poems, though in the '70s he began letting essays, stories, and book reviews into his filing system. The titles of the later binders include *The Haruspex* and *The Duodenum*—he has always been a fool for recondite, toothsome words.

When he was starting out, eager to be published, he sent copies of his poems to magazines across North America and beyond. His early diaries—he began keeping a journal in 1958, and keeps it to this day—are peppered with comic groans about his work being rejected. In 1959, he lamented, "It's about time I was published. Hell, I'm 24!" The next year he wryly noted that *Esquire*'s rejection letter began with the words "Sorry, no." But rejection wasn't the norm for long: enough acceptances came in to ward off despair. He noted them in ballpoint on the typed poems in his binders. According to those notes, the first of those poems to be published was the twenty-fifth, "The Intellectual Turned Artist." It appeared in *Raven*, a University of BC literary magazine. (He enrolled there after leaving the Air Force in July 1957. He finished his bachelor's degree and stayed to do a master's.)

Bowering's diary shows that in the fall of 1958, when Marianne Moore came to the Vancouver campus to do a reading, he was able to talk with her privately and read her "The Intellectual Turned Artist." He was thrilled that the great American poet, then in her early seventies, had "nice things" to say about it. The poem is short but not easy to fathom: it mentions both the Jivaro, a tribe of Amazonian headhunters, and Beelzebub. One line reads, "Laugh, hyena, and swallow quick your innards."

Of his first hundred poems, "Soliloquy on the Rocks," No. 87, impressed the most editors. It was published four times, according to his notes on the typed copy. He wrote it in the spring of 1957, when he was twenty-one. A group of friends is at the water's edge, walking across rocks at low tide, crushing mussels underfoot and feeling "crackling, crunching guilt with every step." A line that brings the reader up short comes when the voice in the poem wonders whether the mussels are "seaweed-shawled in effigy of our own waterfowl existence." Why "effigy"? Why "waterfowl"? *Raven* published "Soliloquy" and so did *Prism*, a UBC creative writing department magazine that made its debut in 1959 and is still going strong.

As he kept working at his poetry, its appeal grew and the hurdle of publication became easier to clear. Several poems from his second binder were published. The third contains the still exciting "Radio Jazz," its barrage of words conveying the thrill of hearing raw, urgent improvised music pour from a "shelf radio in a hot night kitchen." Jamie Reid, a fellow BC writer and a friend of his for decades, says this early Bowering poem has influenced him throughout his writing life. "I like the way that it doesn't draw conclusions but makes the thing manifest in an important way." By the time George wrote it, he and Reid were members of UBC's *TISH* poetry collective and so had a say in which poems appeared in the brash little lit mag. As Bowering would put it forty years later when writing about the era of little magazines, "the means of production [had] got into the hands of the unwealthy young."

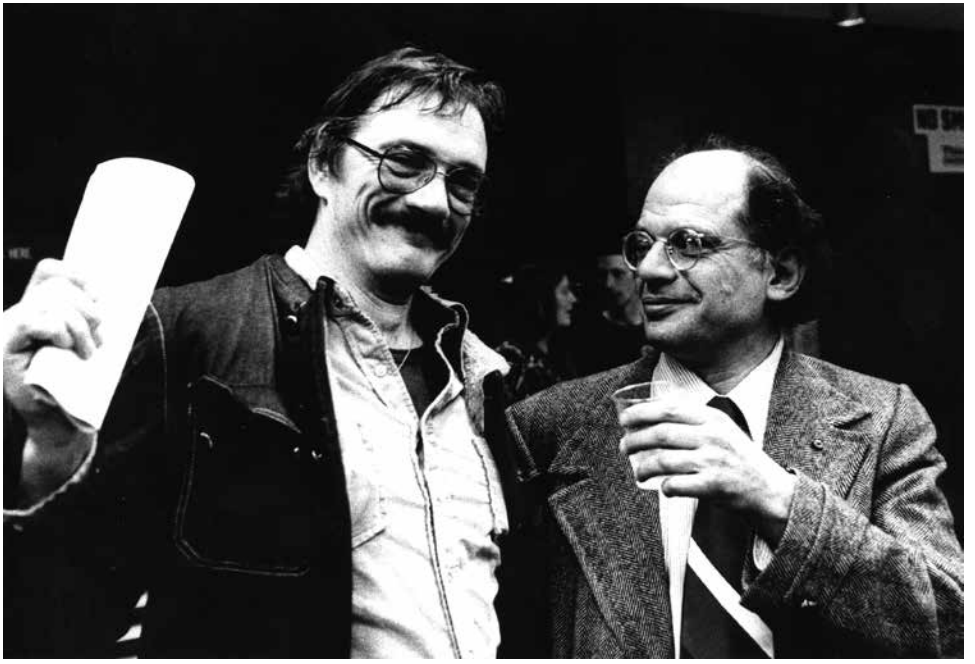
With his poem No. 383 he hit the jackpot. "Grandfather," which he wrote on October 8, 1962, tells his paternal grandfather's life story on a single sheet of paper with as much idiosyncratic verve as anyone could wish for. It spoke loudly to editors compiling anthologies to showcase the virtuosity of Canada's poets. His notes on the archived typescript indicate that it has been published thirty-one times—first in *TISH* and later in such anthologies as *15 Canadian Poets* (1970), edited by Gary Geddes, and *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1982), edited by Margaret

Atwood. Frank Davey, the first editor of *TISH*, recently described it to me as a teachable poem: it is relatively short, has a clear, formal structure and comes to a firm ending that has "portents and implications which students can identify and talk about." Bowering is almost embarrassed by its enduring popularity, especially since it doesn't conform to his theories of poetry. In "Rewriting My Grandfather," a funny five-part essay first published in 2005, he said the poem's exaggerated centrality in his oeuvre helps him to understand why, after a certain point, Allen Ginsberg demurred when asked to read "Howl" to audiences. No one likes to be seen as a one-trick pony.

In 1964, while living in Calgary and teaching his own university classes for the first time, Bowering started a literary magazine called *Imago*. He told potential contributors it was intended as a home for "the long poem, the series or set, the sequence, swathes from [a] giant work in progress." He urged poets to send him their thick manuscripts, the cumbersome things that "the ragbag mag won't have room for." So, before he turned 30 he was a poetry publisher and could, if he chose, publish his own work in his magazine. (His poem sequence *Sitting in Mexico* filled the twelfth issue.) Some of his poet friends also had little magazines and asked often to see his new work.

By 1970, he was established enough that McClelland & Stewart was ready to publish a book of his selected poems. The poet John Newlove, who was about his age and worked there, wrote him from Toronto, saying: "It's a damned good idea, with all your small and various books and booklets scattered about." Fifteen years after Bowering had begun writing poetry in earnest, he was an admired practitioner of the art.

He feels obligated to write poems—it is a duty, he has said—although no one gets rich doing it. In a 2005 essay, "God Only Knows," he pronounced that writing poetry probably pays about eleven cents an hour, "less than I got thinning apples in Naramata, B.C., when I was fourteen." Mind you, when that essay appeared in his book *Left Hook: A Sideways Look at Canadian Writing*, he had just wrapped up his two-year term as Canada's first Parliamentary Poet Laureate. Glory, if not gold, can come to those who do it well.



George Bowering and Allen Ginsberg at the Western Front, Vancouver, 1978.
Photo credit: Taki Bluesinger

ROB MCLENNAN / A Shelf of Bowering's Books

On my shelf, Bowering. A whole row, a metre of books: poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Both a physical and mental space. A row of his name: George Bowering. Books, chapbooks, journals, broadsides, and anthologies. He has published well over one hundred books—poetry, novels, short stories, plays, young adult novels, essays, and history—aiming at what he referred to as "George Woodcock's record."

When I first discovered the work of George Bowering, it was through a girlfriend gifting me her copy of *Contemporary Canadian Poets of the 1960s* when we were seventeen years old. I discovered poems by Bowering, John Newlove, Al Purdy, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Margaret Atwood, and numerous others. It was 1987. I was writing terrible poems and terrible short stories—surrounded by a small social group who were doing the same—and with very little opportunity to access any 20th-century poetry titles. The high school library had but one contemporary poetry title: Irving Layton, *For My Brother, Jesus* (1976).

By my early twenties, I was scouring used bookstores and library shelves in Ottawa for Canadian poetry, and Bowering's books existed as both guide and gateway. I based a chapbook-sized long poem magazine *Stanzas* on his *Imago*. His books led me to others: Bowering's introduction was the biggest reason I picked up Artie Gold's *The Beautiful Chemical Waltz*, and subsequently wandered Saint Catharine Street for a glimpse of my new favourite Montreal poet. Through Bowering's books, I discovered the work of Daphne Marlatt, bpNichol, Gerry Gilbert, Fred Wah, Sharon Thesen, Judith Copithorne, Barry McKinnon, Maxine Gadd, David Phillips, Phyllis Webb, and Robert Kroetsch. The book as unit of composition and the book-length poem. I discovered Roy Kiyooka, David W. McFadden, and David Bromige. The way the poem can shape and re-shape how a story is told, the permission to create a literature using material immediately at hand.

I discovered the *TISH* poets, and the Vehicule Poets. I discovered Greg Curnoe. Through Bowering and his peers, I learned the role of literary community, exchange, and conversation. I explored back issues of *Open Letter: A Journal of Writing and Theory*. I read and re-read Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, turning back pages more than a few times to understand what I'd missed. I discovered

titles by Talonbooks, Coach House Press, and House of Anansi. I read Angela Bowering's *Figures Cut in Sacred Ground* (1982), her critical work on Watson's *The Double Hook*. I read Bowering's critical book on Al Purdy. I discovered *The Capilano Review*, *Writing*, and The Kootenay School of Writing.

Through Bowering, I moved further out in my reading, and discovered the works of Jack Spicer, William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, and Robin Blaser. The long poem, the serial poem, the short breath-line, and poem as long as a life.

There are countless other examples, as his writing inevitably sent me off in other directions. If he dedicated a poem to another writer, I immediately looked up their work as well. I requested review copies of new titles. I spent days deep in the stacks of Canadian literature shelves at the University of Ottawa, with notebook in hand, scribbling furiously, attempting to absorb decades of material, back through to the start of the 1960s.

It was through Bowering's books that I learned structure, cadence, and rhythm—from the long poems to the extended sequences to the short occasionals, and the line breaks caught up in breath. I heard him read, his right hand conducting the metre of "Do Sink."

From *Delayed Mercy and Other Poems* I attempted quick riffs from lines by other writers, something I extended later on after reading *Curious*. My favourite of Bowering's books remains *Urban Snow*, the first poetry title of his that I purchased new.

Through *Rocky Mountain Foot* I attempted a collage of lyrics on my own geography. From *The Concrete Island* I began composing Montreal poems, and other short poems from travel. His fearless curiosity encouraged mine, and exploring the histories and geographies of his local through language gave me the permission to attempt the same, especially during a period where I saw no one else writing the poems of what I understood of my rural Ontario. Don McKay's Glengarry County was not mine, yet closer to what I saw as familiar than Glengarry works by Henry Beissel and Gary Geddes. Bowering's books provided an alternative to the metaphor-driven lyric narrative used to depict the landscape of my youth.

I trusted his work and I trusted his judgment. Through Bowering's books, I learned that to engage with the work of others—as editor, reviewer, and critic—is often the best way to learn how to approach your own work, and the best way to remain energized, passionate, and involved. I learned to read as much as possible.

Sacha Milojevic / Dreaming a Space for Books and Reading: Project for a George Bowering Library

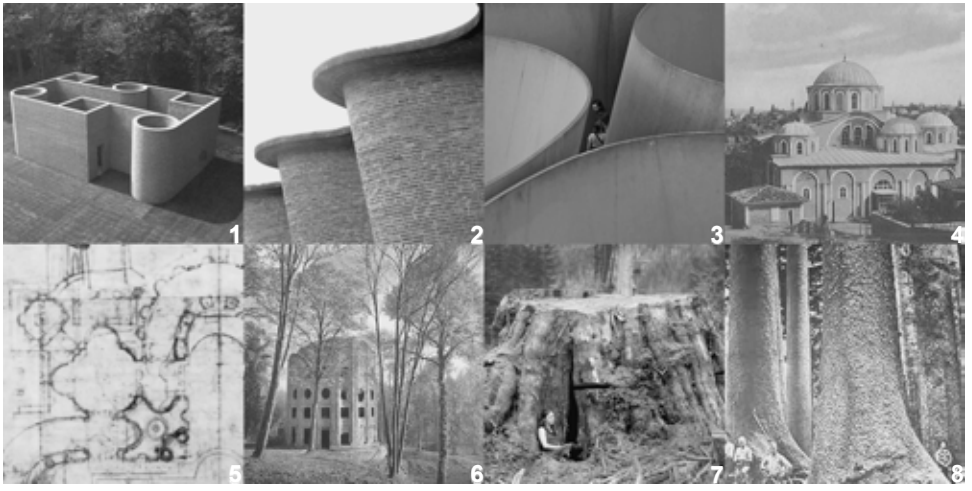
In the stand of trees just up out of the clearing occupied by the cylindrical Capilano University Library, one can dream of a small cluster of domestic-scaled reading rooms to house the library of George Bowering.

To evoke the strong geometries of prehistoric structures made of brick inside and out—the oldest, simplest, and most plastic of building components—is to evoke the authentic and the timeless. In the monumental brick forms of Per Kirkeby,[1] the exceptional brick churches of Eladio Dieste,[2] and Richard Serra's quasi-cylindrical masses, such as Junction / Cycle (2011),[3] there is the sense of gravitas. The spatial character echoes the interstitiality of stands of old spruce and cedar and the spacing between the different-sized domes in the Kariye Camii[4] and the volumes of Bramante's plan for Saint Peter's.[5] In the forest the forms appear as ruins, fragmentary like François Racine de Monville's Désert de Retz colonne brisée[6] or like the enormous hollowed out stumps[7] scattered among the treed slopes of the North Shore of Vancouver.[8]

The tall vertical silos emulate the grand but protective forest experience. Accessing the interior through catenary arched apertures—like those found in nature—one is sheltered in the enveloping circular and basic shell form. Light filters in from many directions registering the times of day, the tall openings formed and placed to afford views to the surrounding trees. The reading room interior is ringed with a framework of cast bronze book shelves and fitted with bronze light fixtures, tables, and stools forming articulated jewel-like aedicules of space welcoming the book collection.

Uniting the spirit of nature and of the mind, a primal and contemplative place, above all, for the pleasure of reading.

Notes

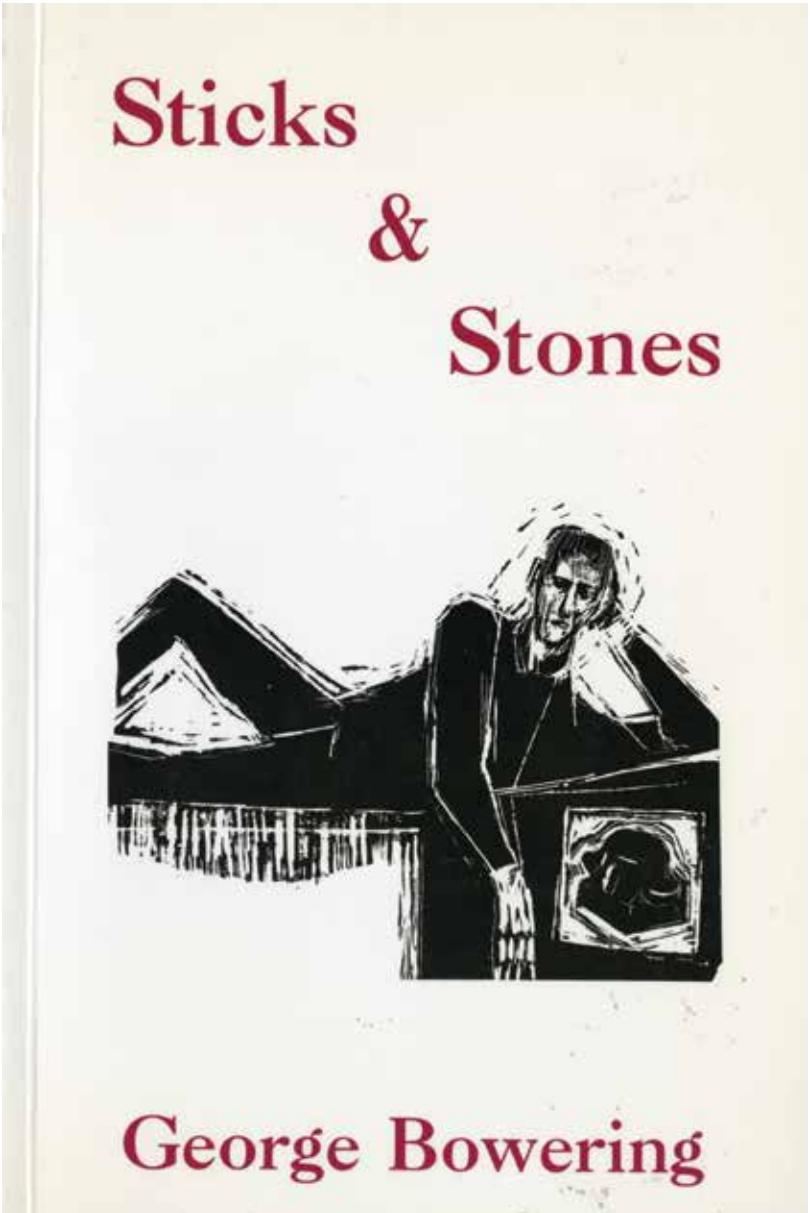


The George Bowering Library sits in a small wooded area in the middle of the Capilano University campus between Lynn Creek and the Seymour River on the lower slopes of the North Shore mountains.

From the point of view of the Capilano University campus quad to the side of Richard Henriquez's University Library, the entrance gate of the George Bowering Library and the reading room towers are tucked into the edge of a stand of Douglas Fir and Hemlock.

On approach the George Bowering Library is intended, rather like a Morandi *natura* morta, to be read as a composition of vessels on a tray.

The upper reading room of the George Bowering Library is suffused with light through apertures carved from massive brick walls illuminating gleaming bookcases, pendant lamps, and circular reading tables all of polished bronze.



The reprint of the 1962 *Sticks & Stones* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1989). Cover image by Gordon Payne.

"*Sticks & Stones*, with an ampersand, suggested to me at the time an Imagist sense primarily, a Williams and Pound interest in the image as the adequate symbol…. [T]he main notion was that you built poems out of actual things—and some poems in there carry that through, poems made of actual things." (GB to Roy Miki, 6)

Fred Wah / Messing around with *Sticks & Stones*

In Buffalo in the fall of 1984 at the university in English grad studies taking seminars from Charles Olson and linguist Henry Lee Smith, Jr., Pauline and I have arrived in the VW Van that we bought in Trail, BC with our daughter Jennifer just born that summer. We're short of cash (I think I was getting $1600 as a TA), living on S&H Green stamps, living in a small apartment just off Elmwood. David Posner in the Lockwood Library agrees to buy some of our literary dendrita for their Special Collections so, as I recall, I sold him a run of *TISH*, a duplicated set of the tapes I made at the Vancouver '63 poetry conference, maybe the first issues of *SUM* magazine that we had produced from Albuquerque, and my printer's copy of Bowering's first book, *Sticks & Stones*. I faintly recall that I managed to get $40 for the whole batch.

In the spring of '62, we (the *TISH* people) were looking forward to Creeley coming to teach at UBC for the coming year. In anticipation of publishing *Sticks & Stones*, we asked him to write a preface and he obliged. We had it in hand before Creeley actually arrived that summer and we set up to print during May/June. George got some drawings from Gordon Payne, we laid out the book, and he started typing multilith stencils (offset press, plastic-coated or metal stencils fixed onto a drum which took type from a carbon ribbon which, in turn, picked up the ink from the dispenser tray on the press). The stencils were laid out in landscape with two pages per stencil. George typed them and I tried to print them. We used metal stencils since we were hoping to print an edition of several hundred. But the printer rollers screwed up and we ended up with a bit of a mess; text would suddenly float into the gutter, paper would get skewed, pages would offset off of one another, and so forth. According to the note on my copy in the Lockwood, we came out with no more than fifty copies, some in better shape than others. As Roy Miki notes in his end note to the Talonbooks edition, some of the copies were missing poems and/or drawings. Apparently George sent out some of the copies to a few friends. He still has two.

Here are the two pages in my copy that have Gordon Payne drawings. That first one of George is pretty accurate, though I've never known him to be that serious.

(benzedrine

holding my eyes open
early Sunday morning

I sit & look at Chinese poetry

Han Shan)

keeping me awake
& I am tired
with no sleep

it must be two or three days
but someone would say
less

Used to load his animals
with containers of whitewash
& hike far into the steep mountains
where no one would go again
but maybe walking Buddhists years later

looking for tall bare cliffs
he could lay his brush to

to make huge white calligraphs
of poems fifty feet high

& pack up & go to another place
never returning to look
published to himself, his animals,
& Buddha

It will keep me awake

till the sun comes over
Sunday morning

(and that will be another night
didnt get away from me)

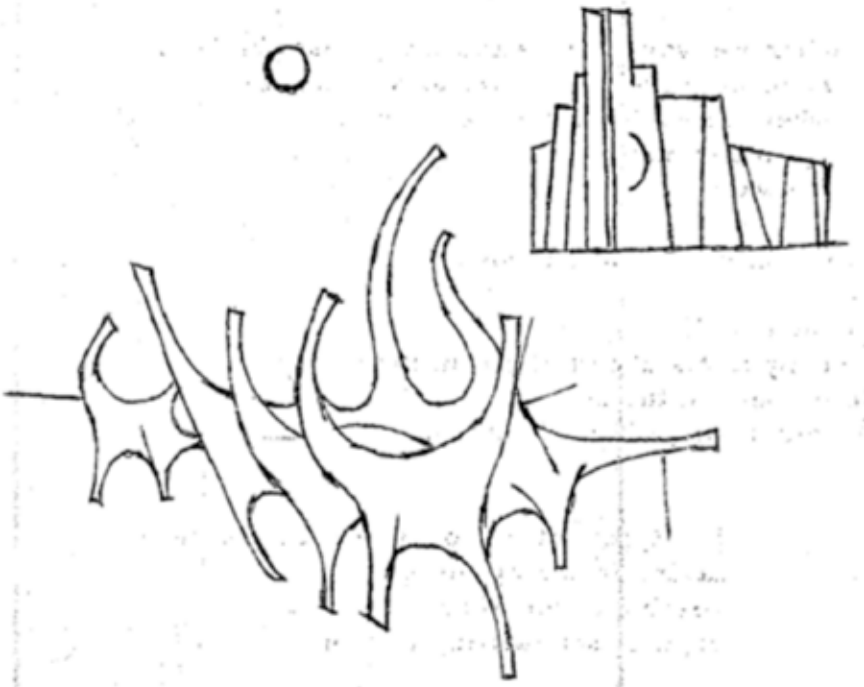
*LOCUS SOLUS

(for Bill Trump)

Attaching toes to Vancouver downtown sidewalks
over-
sluiced with rain water
under billowed concave black
umbrella dripping around me
eyes down on neon
reflections
wiggled in the gutter cursing & moving
alone
next to shoulders of down looking strangers
soggy in the rain

I remember dried out lips & tongue
long trip without water-
bottle down the side of old Blue Mountain
It was a hundred & twenty
in the shade
but there was no shade
& coming down was harder than going up
down in the empty water-
drainage slashes
in dust now
& over boulder slides

Finally down
to lichen green rocks
& face first into the stream
muddied
by the dog a few yards up
head pushed into the water
teeth aching & belly pulled tight by the cold
sucking
down the throat



& the final walking home
respecting the sun & taking it
easy
planting feet in long easy strides

John O'Brian / The Day before the Chinese A-Bomb

I want to look at *The Man in Yellow Boots* by George Bowering through the lens of a camera engulfed in a mushroom cloud. Bowering was an aerial photographer with the Royal Canadian Air Force in his early years, shooting film through a peephole in the wing of an aircraft. "It was always a movie of one thing, / a target," he remarked later (Bowering, "Taking Pictures" (1982), qtd. in Rae 143). In modern warfare, especially in aerial reconnaissance, photography provides those in charge with pictures of targets. It is a sighting technology that complements the deployment of troops and weapons of mass destruction (Virilio 1). When it was published in 1965, *The Man in Yellow Boots* also provided pictures of targets, but of a different kind than Bowering produced for the RCAF. By then the threat of nuclear war, one of the book's recurring themes, had made a target of everyone.

In her monograph *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour*, Eva-Marie Kröller devotes a chapter to *The Man in Yellow Boots*. She identifies four poems as being more politically charged than the others: "Her Act Was a Bomb," "The Good Prospects," "The Day Before the Chinese A-Bomb," and "Vox Crapulous (alternate title: J. Edgar Hoover)" (35). I would add a fifth poem to the quartet. Although Kröller characterizes Bowering's "Old Time Photo of the Present" as an elegy, possibly a lament for the death of his father and friend Red Lane, to whom the book is dedicated, it also reads as intensely political (Kröller 35). The elegiac is in dialogue with the political, and the poem oscillates between the two.

I shall clamber out filthy
from the wreckage
of collapsing universities!

There is not much time
not much time…

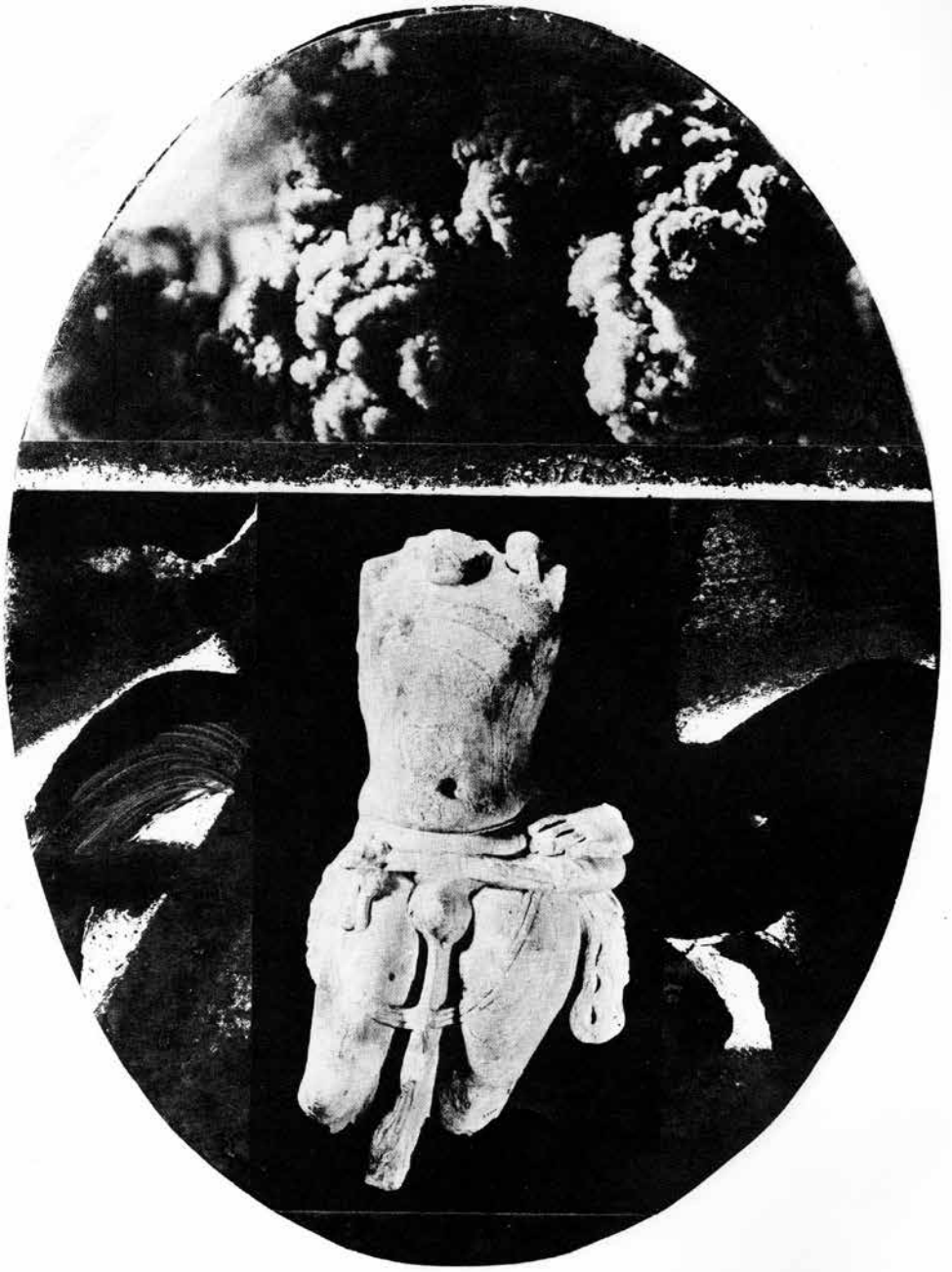
…fingers pasting my picture
in the photo album of death!

At the time he was preparing the book, Bowering was waging war against serial attempts by the University of Calgary to censor his work and teaching.[1] "Now listen, George Bowering," the poet admonishes himself in "Old Time Photo of the Present," "don't write poems in an office / yell poems of destruction." In 1964, there was a lot to yell about, starting with Western Canada. "Alberta is a terrible place for anyone who wants to say fuck without going to the firing squad," he wrote in a letter to Sergio Mondragón and Margaret Randall, the Marxist editors of *El Corno Emplumado: The Plumed Horn*, who were publishing *The Man in Yellow Boots* as a special issue of the journal. In North America, there was no shortage of terrible places and of firing squads. J. Edgar Hoover was still giving orders to armed agents of the FBI in Washington, DC; President John F. Kennedy had been murdered in Dallas, Texas; Malcolm X was soon to be gunned down in the Audubon Ballroom, New York. The big gun that everyone feared, the one that could go off at any time, was the atomic bomb. The principle of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), in which Soviet and American firing squads faced one another while trying not to sneeze, was an uncertain guarantee against nuclear Armageddon.

There is an affinity between Bowering's poems and the black-and-white photocollages that Roy Kiyooka made for the book. Reproductions of the collages are glued into the centre of the volume. These collages—there are twelve in total —also yell of destruction. A mushroom cloud occupies the top portion of Kiyooka's first collage, spreading above an antique Japanese sculpture of a male torso, its wooden limbs truncated, like the exfoliating leaves of a doomed tree. In another collage, a parachutist tumbles into a void with his chute still unopened, his fall underwritten by a printed question cut from a magazine, "Do you have to be asked?" In yet another, Malcolm X lies dying of gunshot wounds, his white shirt ripped open at the chest, while to his left a figure is injecting heroin into his arm with a syringe. Crowds look expectantly up at the sky in yet two more collages, perhaps transfixed by a falling figure or an atomic explosion.

Kröller observes that the twin of collage is montage. She is struck by the elements of montage found in the poem "Her Act Was a Bomb," pointing out that three synchronous but unrelated events are juxtaposed, two of them banal and one catastrophic (36).

1 Bowering comments on some of the censorship battles in letters published in the back pages of *The Man in Yellow Boots* (97-101). The letters are printed on yellow paper.



Roy Kiyooka, photocollage for *The Man in Yellow Boots*, 1965.
Thanks to Kiyo Kiyooka for permission to republish the photocollages.

Roy Kiyooka, photocollage for *The Man in Yellow Boots*, 1965.

All over America I know
people are switching off the sound
when Sophie Tucker appears
on the Ed Sullivan reruns.

It is of course
an honest gesture, severe
perhaps. But in Las Vegas
I saw an old heron woman

pull down the lever
on a café slot machine
and fifteen miles away
on the desert, America

dropt a Bomb on Nevada.

The montage in the poem stitches the unconnected events together by means of conjunctions and enjambments between the stanzas, and the sequencing produces a chain reaction that culminates in the "dropt" bomb. The muting of Sophie Tucker, known to her fans as the last of the red hot mamas, on Ed Sullivan reruns leads to the arm action of the old heron woman in Las Vegas, and the lever on the café slot machine leads to the red button that detonates a bomb at the Nevada Test Site. The conjunction is between the forces of consumer capital and those of the military-industrial-complex. In Japanese folklore, the heron woman has transformative powers. The wife of a poor fisherman, she turns herself into a white heron to weave bolts of exquisite cloth from her feathers. When the fisherman discovers her at work, a spell is broken and she is free to leave.

The United States christened each atomic bomb it dropped on Nevada from 1951 to 1962. *Moth*, *Stokes*, *Climax*, *Wheeler* (one bomb, two bombs, three bombs, four). *Smoky*, *Sugar*, *Shasta*, *Diablo* (five bombs, six bombs, seven bombs, more). The United States did not, however, give a name to the bomb it dropped on British Columbia.[2] On Valentine's Day, 1950, ice had caused three of the engines of a United

2 Information on the detonation was classified until recently. The story of what occurred is recounted in Norman S. Leach, *Broken Arrow: America's First Lost Nuclear Weapon* (Calgary: Red

States Air Force B-36 bomber to fail while it was flying south along the British Columbia coast en route from Alaska to Texas. Following the emergency protocol established for aircraft carrying atomic weapons, Ship 2075 released its nuclear payload over open water. An Mk IV bomb, the same kind of weapon that was dropped on Nagasaki, was detonated in Queen Charlotte Sound approximately 90 kilometres northwest of Bella Bella, minus its plutonium core. The device consisted of 5,300 pounds of conventional explosives and 100 pounds of uranium casing. It exploded like a dirty bomb, dispersing radioactive fallout across the region. The crew had time to bail out over Princess Royal Island before the aircraft turned inland and crashed into a mountain in the Kispiox Valley near Smithers. Twelve of the crew survived but five were never found; the last survivor was located hanging upside down in a tree from the harness of his parachute. Despite a massive search, the aircraft was not discovered until 1953, three years after the accident. In the language of the United States military, this nuclear incident was a Broken Arrow, the codename for a nuclear weapon that has exploded or been lost but without risk of igniting a war.[3] It was the first Broken Arrow ever recorded (and likely the first dirty bomb as well), making the incident a foundational story in the history of nuclear failure. Bowering's poems and letters in *The Man in Yellow Boots* are also alert to nuclear failure. It is a dominant theme in the book.

When China first detonated an atomic bomb on October 15, 1964, it also christened the explosion. At the suggestion of the Lop Nur basketball team, at the nuclear weapons base in Xinjiang, the test was named *Tou Lan* or "Shoot the Basket." News of the successful test was immediately relayed to Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai by telephone, during which the reporting officer exclaimed, "We have seen the mushroom cloud!" (Lewis and Litai 188) Bowering did not see the Chinese mushroom cloud—it was not broadcast in China or abroad—but he did see the St. Louis Cardinals beat the New York Yankees to win the World Series on the same day. He wrote about the coincidental events, and two others as well, to Mondragón and Randall in Mexico City.

Deer Press, 2008). Other accounts of the accident can be found in John M. Clearwater, "The First One to Get Away," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Nov./Dec. 2004): 22-27; and John M. Clearwater, *Nuclear Weapons in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 1999), 97-103.

3 Had the accident risked starting a nuclear war, it would have been categorized as a "Nucflash." In descending order of calamity, the names of the four coded categories of nuclear accident are "Nucflash," "Broken Arrow," "Bent Spear," and "Dull Sword."

> Oct 16/64 . . . What a lovely day yesterday! The Cardinals batter the Yankees for the 1964 World Series, the Laborites knock off the Tories in Britain, Khruschev is deposed as bossman in Russia, and the Chinese drop their first A bomb. What are the Americans going to do now a country they dont recognize has detonated the Bomb? Theyll have to keep it a secret from America, or walk around wondering, where did that noise come from? It cdnt have come from that part of Asia because there aint no county there, you can see for yrself. (Bowering 98)

The conjunction of political and sporting events that caught Bowering's attention might have excited him even more if he had known that the Chinese test was named by a basketball team. At the beginning of the poem "The Day Before the Chinese A-Bomb," Bowering repeats the events listed by him in the letter. Each event represents a cleansing, a throwing out of the old. "The Great Purge / begins today, the Cardinals are / World Champions," the final lines of the poem read. It took eight years for the United States to respond to the noise produced by the Chinese atomic test. By comparison, Canada had established trade relations with China as early as 1961, starting with a wheat sale agreement. President Richard Nixon met with Chairman Mao in February 1972.

When George and Angela Bowering left on a road trip to Mexico in the summer of 1964, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, first released by Columbia Pictures on January 29, was still playing in some theatres. Stanley Kubrick began shooting the film after the Cuban Missile Crisis had raised the stakes in the Cold War game of thermonuclear extinction. The nightmare comedy, an exercise in nihilistic satire, concludes with a vision of nuclear apocalypse unfolding to the refrain of "We'll Meet Again Someday," sung by Vera Lynn. "The greatest message of the film is in the laughs," Kubrick remarked. "You know, it's true. The most realistic things are the funniest," which is another way of saying that humorous things are sometimes the most horrific (Kubrick qtd. in Suid 232).

Bowering does not refer to *Dr. Strangelove* in *The Man in Yellow Boots*, but its presence is felt in both the atomic poems and in the letters. A note beneath "The Good Prospects" informs readers that the poem was written on the occasion of a meeting in Moscow to discuss a test ban treaty. The poem and the note are

reminiscent of a conversation in *Dr. Strangelove* between United States President Merkin Muffley and Soviet President Dmitri Kissov. "Now then, Dmitri. You know we've always talked about the possibility of something going wrong with the bomb. The bomb, Dmitri. The hydrogen bomb" (*Dr. Strangelove*). The good prospects announced in the title of the poem have turned to cinders by the end of it:

> Because
> there may be
> half erected
> superstructures
>
> left unfinished
> done
> with ash
> falling on them.

Kubrick gives his characters in *Dr. Strangelove* scatological names to match their personalities. The effeminacy of President Merkin Muffley earns him a colloquialism for female genitalia, the attraction of Dr. Strangelove to atomic devices a sobriquet for sexual perversion, the obsession of General Buck Turgidson with bodily functions a moniker relating to defecation.[4]

When Bowering writes to Mondragón and Randall "a last letter in case Goldpiss gets in as prez," he is working the same ground as Kubrick (Bowering 99). Goldpiss, or Barry Goldwater, won the Republican nomination in 1964 despite calling for military action to overthrow communism that could have risked escalating into nuclear conflagration. Hence Bowering's ironical comment about sending "a last letter" to the editors of the book. "I would remind you that extremism in defense of liberty is no vice," Goldwater declared in his acceptance speech at the Republican convention ("Barry Goldwater's 1964 Acceptance Speech"). Lyndon B. Johnson and the Democrats wasted no time in exploiting widespread public anxiety about the risk of an atomic showdown triggered by Goldwater. They commissioned a fifty-eight-second television ad of a little girl counting daisy petals. The girl

4 Margot A. Henriksen, in *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 319-20, discusses the exaggerated names of the characters in the film.

counts unevenly from one to ten before a male voice, reversing the order of the numbers, counts decisively down from ten to one. As the numbers decline towards the inevitable atomic explosion, the camera zeroes in on the girl's frozen face, producing a series of still photographs that belong in "the photo album of death." "The Daisy Ad," officially called "Peace, Little Girl," aired only once before being pulled as too inflammatory, but by then the damage had been done.[5]

During the lead-up to the 1964 elections, Malcolm X addressed a chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, at the Cory Methodist Church, in Cleveland, on April 3. In the speech, called "The Ballot or the Bullet," he cautioned African-Americans to exercise their right to vote judiciously, arguing that if they continued to be refused equality and justice by white America it might be necessary to take up arms. To emphasize the gravity of his message, Malcolm X called up a nuclear metaphor. "Whenever you got a racial powder keg sitting in your lap, you're in more trouble than if you had an atomic powder keg sitting on your lap. When a racial powder keg goes off, it doesn't care who it knocks out of the way." Among the white Americans with an atomic powder keg on his lap, and with a particular loathing for Malcolm X and African-Americans, was J. Edgar Hoover. Bowering addresses Hoover's hates in the poem "Vox Crapulous (alternate title: J. Edgar Hoover)."

In "Vox Crapulous," the rawest poem in *The Man in Yellow Boots*, Bowering adopts the voice of the racist Right to satirize J. Edgar Hoover's anger at losing ground in his battle against African-Americans, not to mention his battle against Jews, socialists, gays, and beatniks.

> J. Edgar Hoover hates beatniks
> and perverts and niggers and
> Brazilians and socialists and
> presidents from the lunatic Left
> that is Harvard University
>
> J. Edgar Hoover didn't go to
> Harvard University full of Jews
> no doubt and even now niggers

5 "The Daisy Ad" was made for the Democratic Party by Doyle Dane Bernbach and aired on Monday, September 7, 1964, on NBC.

and if not Brazilians at least
Fidel Castro was there and

Kennedy was there and birds of
a feather and Martin Luther King
wins the Nobel Prize and the foreigners
are supporting the niggers who
are liars the biggest liars

The liars were not Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. The biggest liar of all was J. Edgar Hoover himself. Recent scholarship has shown that he had black ancestry and was only passing as white (Mathúna).

Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965, just as he was beginning to speak to a meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in New York. Kiyooka was working on the collages at the time, and he clipped a photograph from the newspaper of Malcolm X lying on the floor of the Audubon Ballroom bleeding into his white shirt. He used the clipping to make a collage that parallels the emotional force of "Vox Crapulous." The collage also parallels the force of Malcolm X's speech on the built-up frustration that "makes the black community throughout America today more explosive than all the atomic bombs that Russia can ever invent." Malcolm X predicted race riots and mushroom clouds in the same breath. To complete the collage, Kiyooka used a magazine clipping of a sepulchral white sheet and a newspaper clipping of a man shooting up. The sheet fills most of the lower half of the oval format and reads as a shroud for the black leader and the junkie. The collage is the only work in the Zodiac series made entirely from photographs.

"Vox Crapulous" and the other politically charged poems in *The Man in Yellow Boots* occupy a pivotal place in the volume. Their themes of prejudice, death, and nuclear threat are the same themes that Kiyooka takes up in his photocollages. It seems to me that Bowering and Kiyooka successfully bring the work of writing and the work of photography together in the book. There are references to language in the photocollages and to photography in the poems; no hard and fast lines are drawn between the two. Bowering and Kiyooka both traffic in fragments—fragments are the way we see in the modern era—confident that the fragments will add up. We do not need photographs and other material forms of visual representation to produce

a set of images of what is described in the poem "Her Act Was a Bomb." We can see the flickering television set, the old woman with her hand on the lever of the slot machine, the flash of the bomb's explosion. The imagery is vivid. For the same reason, we do not need language to understand the relationship of a mushroom cloud to a limbless sculpture in Kiyooka's photocollage. But the juxtaposition of the poem and the photocollage in the same volume resonates loudly.

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A longer version of this essay, originally commissioned by Ian Rae, was published in *Open Letter* 14.4 (Fall 2010): 63-77.

Margaret Atwood / George Bowering and *The Gangs of Kosmos*

I first met George Bowering and his wife Angela at a writers' party in Montreal in 1967. I was teaching at Sir George Williams (now part of Concordia), and so was he. She was wearing a mini-dress and white knee-high go-go boots, one of the fashions then; he was wearing a Donald Duck tie and doing a silly duck walk, and quacking—he was in the habit of acting up to disguise shyness, I suppose—eliciting from Angela the cry of, "Oh George!" that was familiar to all acquainted with their curious doubles act, in which George would step outside the lines in a deliberately embarrassing manner and Angela would catch him doing it and rebuke him for it. In those early days, she would also giggle delightedly. How could he be so naughty?

The English Canadian writing community was quite small then. Maybe it wasn't a community as such, but a flotsam-jetsam agglomeration of people interested in writing, and a small enough agglomeration so that those individuals tended to clump together for warmth. It was mostly the poets who knew one another, they having drifted hither and thither on buses and other modes of cheap transport and also having read together in various dives and at various universities. (The novelists were mostly holed up in private, bashing out their novels on their typewriters, though I did meet Clark Blaise in Montreal then as we were both teaching at Sir George; and Mordecai Richler wafted through town, and John Glassco was there, and Hugh Hood.) There were not yet any writers' festivals, and Jack McClelland had just started his ambitious and successful cross-country book tours, so you met other writers by happenstance, and through mutual friends. Poets in or around Montreal, or coming through for readings, included F.R. Scott, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and Doug Jones, Al Purdy, Irving Layton, and Leonard Cohen. And George Bowering.

I already knew George's work through *Points on the Grid* (Contact Press 1964) and *The Man in Yellow Boots* (El Corno Emplumado 1965), and I knew about the TISH group, as I had been in Vancouver in 1964/5. We poets read one another's work in those days; there wasn't so much that you couldn't keep up. At that time I was also working with Anansi in its early days—days in which it published mostly poetry, including my book *The Circle Game* (Contact 1966), which had won the

Governor General's Award but was out of print by that time, having printed the large number of 420 copies. So Anansi did a reprint, over 2,000 copies. (I thought they were mad. But the book has not been out of print since…)

So I knew George and Angela, and I also knew Anansi, and I ended up putting together a collection of George's poems, *The Gangs of Kosmos*, which came out from Anansi in 1969. The magazine citations for the poems are a trip down memory lane, a trip that sometimes draws blanks: *The Ant's Forefoot*: what was *that*? *Camel's Coming*? *The Resuscitator*? But there's *Quarry*, and *Poetry* (Chicago), and *The London Magazine*. Not so shabby.

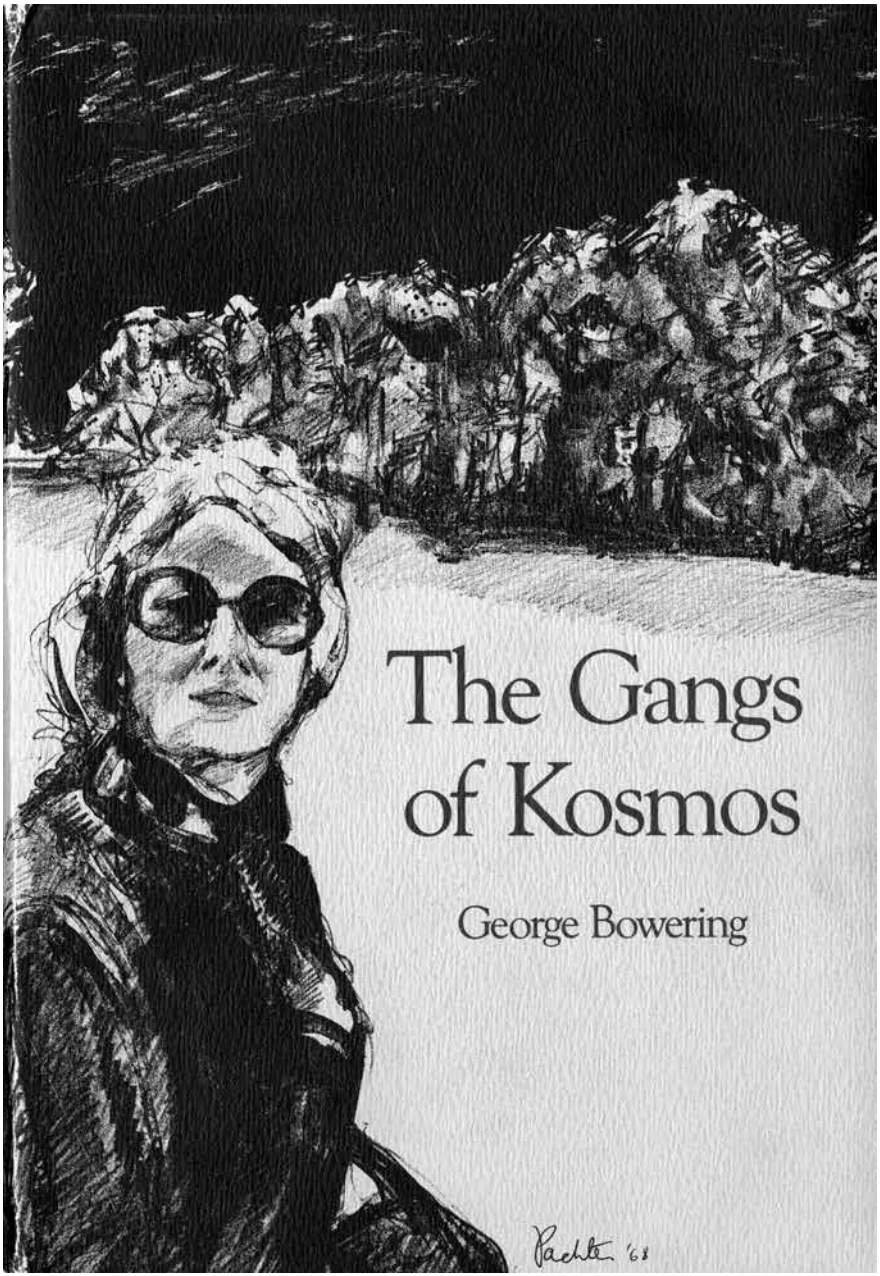
On the cover—back and front—there's a 1968 print by our mutual friend, Charles Pachter, back in the days when he had hair. That's me on the front, wearing mysterious sunglasses; that's Angela on the back, looking either at me or at the forest behind me, from which humanoid faces either do or do not peer out. Charles said that he was in among those trees. Maybe George is in there too. Anyway, he chose the cover.

I think it's a pretty good collection. All the strengths. George was already worried about growing old, on page 62 (Haha, we laugh now: we thought *that* was old?) and is already as elegiac as he later became. No silly duck walks in the poems; those were done by his bodyguard, at parties, and for faking his own biography from time to time. All writers keep a double in store so they can save the reality for the art, and George's double was just more obvious than most.

The last poem, "You too," ends with an *envoi* to the reader:

> *How can I die alone.*
> *Where will I be then, who am now alone,*
> *What groans so pathetically*
> *In this room when I am alone?*
>
> I do not know, I know
> you begin where my eye
> leaves off, you too, turning
> my pages are alone.

So there you are, George: I just read the poem. Again. Alone.
It all came true.



The Gangs of Kosmos (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969)

Title taken from Whitman's "Democratic Vistas." Dedication: Love and gratitude to the three people | on the cover. Epigraph: *not God merely in bread* | *but God in the other-half of the tree* | H.D. [*Tribute to the Angels*]

Ken Norris / Bowering's Books

Long before I ever met George Bowering I corresponded with him. I was still living in New York, playing in a new wave band called Bogart, but my career in music was winding down. I'd pretty much decided to return to Canada and, with friends, had decided to start a magazine called *CrossCountry*, which was going to be a little magazine of Canadian and US poetry. Had I read any of Bowering's books yet? I don't think so. Somehow his name came up and I wound up sending him a letter soliciting poems. He sent poems. As I remember it, some of those wound up three years later in *The Concrete Island*, a book I would co-edit for Vehicule Press. But that comes later in the story.

I don't think I was reading George when I was still living in New York. I was reading Margaret Atwood, and I was also selling her at The New Yorker Bookshop on 89th and Broadway, where I was working my day job under the tutelage of the wonderfully eccentric bookseller Peter Martin.

No, I started reading George in the spring of 1975, once I was back living in Montreal, hanging around the gallery Vehicule Art, and getting to know the Vehicule Poets. My first book, *Vegetables*, was published in March by the fledgling Vehicule Press. Now I was a published author and a magazine editor and I was all of twenty-four years old. Since I was now a Canadian author it was time for me to start reading some Canadian poetry. Artie Gold turned me on to my first George Bowering book. And that book was *Curious*.

Curious

Artie Gold had an amazing library. I still have dreams about it. It contained every hip book of poetry you would ever want to read. He had no Robert Frost, Richard Wilbur, or Robert Penn Warren. But he had first editions of Jack Spicer, and Frank O'Hara, and Barbara Guest, and Gregory Corso, and maybe even Francois Villon. He had Canadian poetry—not a lot of it, just the good stuff. And he had every George Bowering book.

I think I was allowed to look through *Points On The Grid* if I was sitting in Artie's study. But he wouldn't lend it to me, on the basis of too many bad experiences. I

don't think he would even lend me *Curious*. But he took me to The Double Hook where I could buy a copy of my own and start my own library.

But I first saw *Curious* in the context of its being in Artie's library, and its being at the time, I believe, the latest George Bowering book. It was the new one, and it was certainly…curious. I remember being intrigued by it.

Here I was, getting to know this poet (Artie), who knew all these poets and had all of these poetry books. Bowering had been his teacher, introducing him to all of these poets and poems, and here was this curious book, written in what seemed to me (at the time anyway) odd prose lines, all about these poets, mostly American and Canadian, most of them living, who I would try to corral for my magazine of Canadian-US poetry.

"He was coming down the stairs…." I don't remember if that is actually how *Curious* begins, and I will have to check, but that's how I remember the book beginning: with the large, looming presence of Charles Olson. And later on bpNichol is playing ping pong. So much of my future life is contained in that book, the roots I was searching for and the older brothers and sisters in poetry that I was longing for. And I was first encountering it in the study of the person who would become my best friend in poetry for the next thirty-two years.

So I paged through *Curious* in Artie's library, and we probably both decided that it was a book that I needed to have, so off we went to the bookstore to buy me a copy. I read it much more closely once it was a book I owned, and it started up the double relationship I was to have with George's work and with Coach House Press. Because it was one of those books that was magic, and my desire for a Coach House book of my own started with reading *Curious*.

Genève

I have read *Genève* maybe ten times. I don't think I have ever understood it. But that really doesn't matter. For me, as a young poet, it was an important energy field. Never mind that you could take the dust jacket off, open it up, and there was the sequence of the Tarot cards as they were drawn.

George certainly introduced me to the world of strange initiatives in poetry. Interesting strategies for writing book-length poems or serial poems. *Curious* was a serial poem. It was also a collection of portraits or were they experiences? More experiences involving poets than portraits. Against still life. Everything was moving, something was certainly happening. Interactions. Fields of energy.

I am pretty sure that I bought my copy of *Genève* at The Word. The Double Hook was where you went for new books, and The Word was where you went for used, though they had new Montreal poetry books too. But *Genève* was another one of those Coach House books, and who WERE these guys anyway, and why and how were they making all of these fabulous books?

Genève comes tied to *Curious* in my mind, but it also comes tied to Frank Davey's *Arcana*, another Coach House book, another Tarot card book. I remember at the time that I actually liked *Arcana* more, liked the poems more, thought the book went deeper. Was I right? Who knows? I was twenty-four years old.

So I never quite "got" *Genève*. Nevertheless, there were so many reasons to love it. The cover, the paper, the press, the mysticism, the methodology. It's almost like the poems came last in my shaky hierarchy of what mattered to me about the book. It was THE BOOK that mattered, everything the book was doing, all of the ways it moved out into the traditions of composition and imagining and unfolding. It completely sold me on the serial poem as a way to do things. Names pinned some things down in *Curious*. In *Genève* everything floated.

The Concrete Island

I wish I could remember the first time I met George. I remember him reading from *A Short Sad Book* at McGill in 1976. I remember my girlfriend sitting on his lap at Vehicule Art in 1977. I remember sleeping on his couch in Kerrisdale in 1982. I remember him trying to cheer me up at a reading in Toronto when I was getting divorced in 1994. I remember he and I and Frank walking back to our hotel after a Talon reading in Calgary in 2010. But I don't remember the first time I met him.

It was probably at a reading at Vehicule Art that he gave, maybe in 1975. That is the most likely scenario. Because a lot of things were going on in 1975.

One of the things that was going on in 1975 was that Vehicule Press was getting ambitious and putting together an editorial board.

Simon Dardick and Guy Lavoie decided it was time to get serious and to start going after Canada Council funding, under the Project Grant umbrella. So we needed a manuscript that would secure funding. Artie wrote a letter to George Bowering.

George wrote back saying that he had two manuscripts, and we could have the one of our choosing. The first was called *Poem And Other Baseballs*. The second was

called *The Concrete Island: Montreal Poems 1967-1971*. After some discussion, the editors decided to ask George to send along *The Concrete Island*.

George has written somewhere that his years in Montreal were his "symphonic period." I think *Autobiology* was written in Montreal. *Genève* was written in Montreal. At least part of *Curious* was written in Montreal.

The Concrete Island was the "other" George Bowering. The guy who wrote little and not so little lyrics. Most of the poems in this manuscript were little lyrics. A couple of them had even appeared in *CrossCountry* Issue #1.

Anyone who has read a lot of Bowering knows that it is pretty easy to spot what is a primary text and what is a secondary text. *The Concrete Island* was a secondary text. There were a half-dozen really good poems and then a lot of fooling around. It was an interesting way to cut our teeth as editors. We asked George to take out a few poems that were either dreadful or inappropriate, and then we packaged it up and sent it off to the Canada Council, fingers crossed. It was a second tier manuscript by a first rate author: would they fund it?

They did. Vehicule Press was in business.

In hindsight, *Poem and Other Baseballs* would have been the better choice. It was the better book. I have read it quite a few times. *The Concrete Island*: not so much. But it was Montreal-based, and maybe it helped to make the case for Vehicule Press as a fundable regional press at the time.

A Short Sad Book

I was born and raised in the United States. Everything I know about Canadian history I learned from *A Short Sad Book*. That is maybe not such a good thing.

Memory is faulty, but I remember having a really interesting relationship with this text. I experienced it in three ways: I heard it read out loud, I read it in installments, and then I read it as a book.

As I remember it, I heard George read from *A Short Sad Book* at three different readings, as he was writing it. I also read it as it was published in installments in Fawcett's *NMFG*. Then I bought a copy and read it when it was published by Talonbooks in 1977.

In a funny way, listening to George read from *A Short Sad Book* was an interesting way of getting educated in Canada. There were all the references. There was his Western sense of humour. There was the homage to Stein. There was all

the xenophobia about "the Black Mountain Influence" that was being skewered. He was telling me a lot about the country I was living in. He was telling me a lot about the country I would eventually choose to call my own.

It seemed very Canadian. And that seemed to me like a real accomplishment.

I liked the fact that it was all being written by hand in notebooks. Four years later I started writing all of my books by hand in notebooks and I haven't stopped yet.

I haven't read *A Short Sad Book* again since the early eighties, so a lot of it is echoes for me now. Every now and again some line from it will pop into my head, and I will wonder for twenty minutes where that line is from, and then I'll know.

Kerrisdale Elegies

Allophanes is a book I wish I could understand. *Kerrisdale Elegies* is a book I wish I had written.

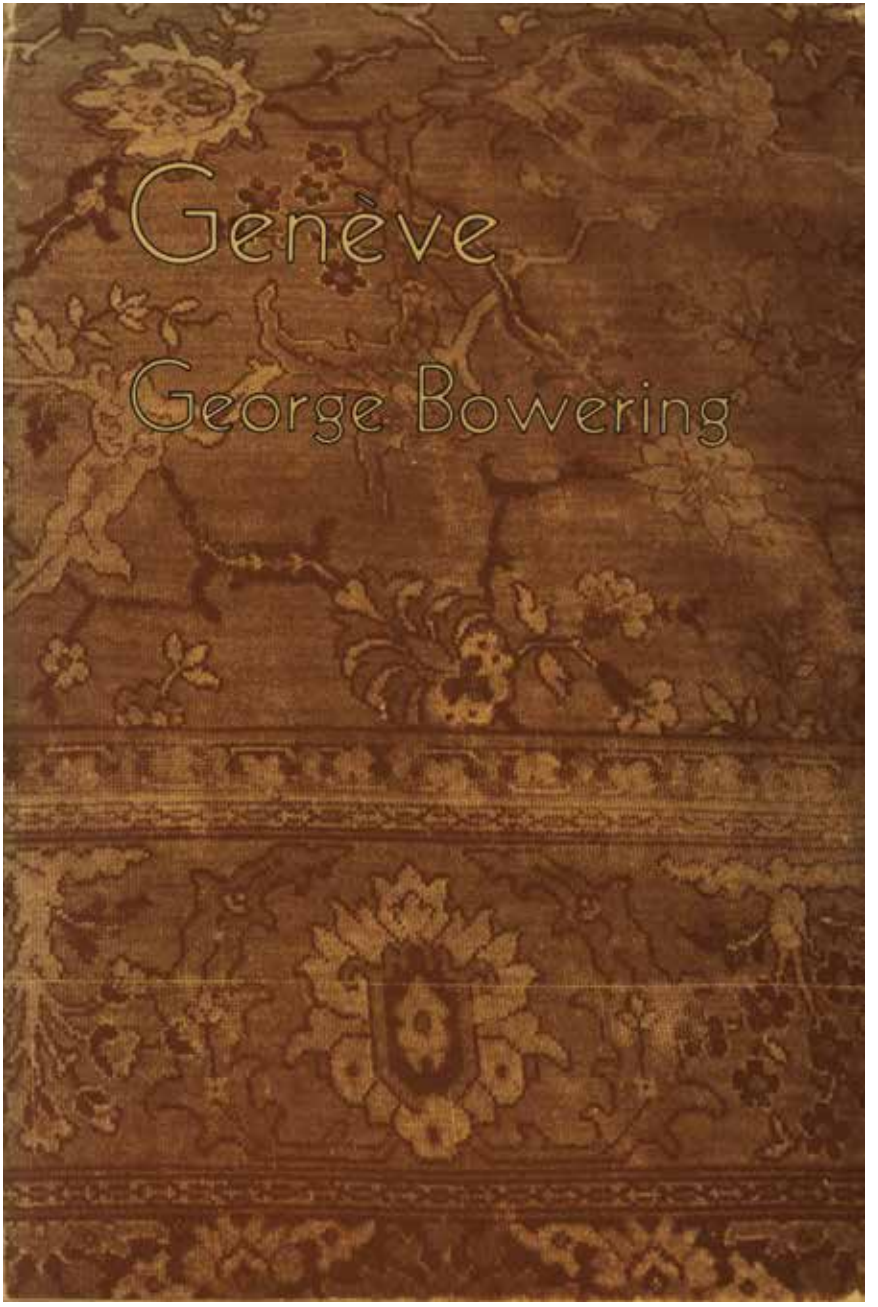
Years after reading *Kerrisdale Elegies* I sat down and read *Duino Elegies*. I didn't much care for them, particularly all that stuff about dolls and acrobats. I would take Lorca and Neruda over Rilke any day of the week. With Lorca, I like reading Lorca and I like reading *After Lorca*. With Neruda I like reading Neruda and I like translating or adapting Neruda. With Rilke, I don't much care for *Duino Elegies* but I love George's *Kerrisdale Elegies*. Perhaps mostly because Bowering's shifts in tone make everything much more palatable and human. *Kerrisdale Elegies* is a fabulous postmodern correction of everything that was wrong with Rilke. It isn't just the academic translation of Rilke that is stilted. There is something stilted about the poetic sensibility as well. Of course, I don't read German. I am having to trust my translators to understand what it is that they are trying to translate.

Bowering doesn't translate. He adapts and shifts. He pours Rilke through his own sensibility and comes up with something that is more inherently satisfying. He utilizes Rilke to tap into his own Romanticism. Bowering is a poet who loves Shelley, and has more than a little of Shelley in him. Modernism can become the crossroads between Romanticism and Postmodernism, or the place where the two meet, negotiate and reconcile.

I find reading *Kerrisdale Elegies* to be remarkably satisfying. Ironically, perhaps, Bowering's most original poetry is work that he adapts. In this, he is not unlike Spicer.

George in his book-lined office at Sir George Williams University, Montreal, 1968.
Photo credit: Stan Hoffman

The dust jacket of *Genève* (Toronto: Coach House, 1971) unfolds to reveal a spread of Tarot cards arranged from the centre out in the order GB turned them up as he wrote the poems.



Genève (Toronto: Coach House, 1971)

The cover features a detail from the carpet at Coach House Books in the 1970s. Photo credit: Stan Bevington

Ted Byrne / Justice is a Woman: Reading *Genève*

Genève is a serial poem based on a shuffle of the major arcana and court cards of the Swiss Tarot deck, also called the 1JJ deck because it replaces *le Pape* and *la Papesse* of the Marseille deck with Jupiter and Juno. It is not insignificant to its reading that the poem makes use of a Protestant deck. One dimension of the poem is that of marriage, "binding" according to Paul, but "made not too strong," or perhaps not strong enough, according to experience and the vicissitudes of the drives (the "luminous arrows of heaven we inhabit," 14, XVI The House of God[1]).

A serial poem consists of a sequence of stanzas, or rooms, that are not constructed according to a plan. It is made of a series of forgettings that persist and return. Using the Tarot procedurally to structure the poem may seem to contradict this description, but it actually introduces a complementary element of chance that is not, in the non-occult practice employed, undermined by the pre-existing emblems or tableaux.

Genève is a translation of the Tarot cards in much the same way *Kerrisdale Elegies* is a translation of *Duino Elegies*. Both translations can be seen as acts of disrespect or of hubris. The targets merit disrespect: Rilke's snobbism; the Tarot's 19th-century appropriation of a good card game to mystic hocus pocus. The translator, as poet, hubristically invests himself with a poetic license to kill, so to speak. Not servant but master. Not fidelity but betrayal—"betrayal by augment" as George Steiner says of Rilke's translation of Louise Labé's sonnets. From this perspective, the poetic act has priority, is always prior to what is being translated.

Genève is not a Tarot reading. It is a simultaneous act of reading and making that uses the Tarot for its comprehensive representation of the objects of the world. It proposes itself as an innocent description: "I make no assumptions / about their meanings, / they / are such strangers to me; seeing them, / I will tell what they look like" (Section 16). As such, it seems at first to operate in a register that is flat

1 *Genève* has no pagination, and the sections have no titles, and so, for convenience, I have numbered them in accordance with their sequence in the book, and titled them according to the card being read. Although the deck Bowering used has French titles, I've used their English titles, except where these differ from the French title, in which case I've translated the French title (as in The House of God, rather than The Tower).

or prosaic, being, as it is, about surfaces and lines. It's hard to determine how and where, after how many readings, this impression is undone. In fact, the reader (that is, the author) is there, on the other side of the picture plane, from the very beginning, by way of projection.

The first two sections describe strong male and female figures: The Knight of Clubs in aggressive battle posture, holding the phallus high, not a wand but a weapon; and the bare-breasted woman called The Star (XVII), announced as a mother by way of denial—"She is no mother of mine." In the first section, the reader asks if he, himself, is not the weapon, the club. That is, the projection is of anger, of affect, not the full figure of an ideal, of the fighter as protector and destroyer. But at the same time he refers to the weapon as a "tree." This is a complex image, one that represents life in its entire cycle, hidden and revealed. It is an image not found in the tableau, but which overwhelms, or wants to overwhelm the father, his horse, and the reader's "loneliness." In the second section, the reader is present in the tableau only by way of denial, the contention that she is not his mother. But she is "the" woman, the image of woman we had no embarrassment in worshipping for millennia, with her "two earthen jugs" and her celestial face, the woman that does not exist (Lacan), with all her "men-children," her caring and cleaning, her knowing. These are not archetypes, but persistent, repressive, and mechanically reproducible images, or stereotypes.

The poem proceeds in a series, carrying thereby a narrative charge, but eluding narrative capture, except in a terminal moment that may have been trumped up. He suggests, in a retrospective presentation of *Genève*, that the Death card may have been moved to the end of the shuffle by, one assumes, his wife, who had reasons of state. The poem was written during a period of "bifurcated" love, as the poet euphemistically describes it, but which in the poem itself is marked as infidelity (Bowering, *How I Wrote* 38). This knowledge forces a kind of psycho-dramatic reading, as opposed to a merely psycho-dynamic or structural one. I won't be able to exclude this dimension in what follows, but it is certainly not what I wish to pursue. What I want to do is to set forth a hypothesis related to the optical dimension, where reading is a reading into, or a seeing into, a series of mirror-like tableau.

I initially set out to test the following model, which was derived from my first few readings of the poem, but which, I admit, did not really hold up when applied. It seemed to me that the cards can be seen, or read, in four distinct ways:

a) Looking at the tableau and projecting onto it by way of description or interpretation. In this manner, one might see, for example, what one fears or wishes, which is to say what one is not.

b) Being looked at by the tableau, in which case the figures of the tableau are, for example, attacking ("I could get ready for them / as they come over the hill"), or offering (a cup that "contains poison / only for me"), or duping ("How they / set me up").

c) A movement into the tableau ("The mountains are / a distant horizon / I may step over / to walk away").

d) Assimilation to a figure in the tableau, for example, in section 5, becoming the victim ("His lolling red tongue / in my mouth").

I expected that there would be a progression from a) to d) as the reading deepened. In fact, a global reading showed a predominance of a), as is prescribed by the poem's own rules, substantial occurrences of b), and very few instances that could confirm a progression to c) and d), or even their more than occasional presence in the poem. Rather than try to force the poem into my model by over-reading it, I drew two conclusions. Firstly, the model fails primarily in its anticipation of a progression through different layers of looking. In this respect, c) and d) are remnants of an idealism that the poem does not share with me. If the model has any validity, the different types of reading have to be understood as overlapping, oscillating, or simultaneous. Secondly, the predominance of a) and b) indicates that the poem operates in the realm of neurosis or of normal misery, c) and particularly d) being indications of psychosis. The anxiety that suffuses the poem hovers on that borderline, but the poem itself, the writing, operates as a defense against it.

In this optic, the gaze is directed from a point constructed in the imaginary, which is to say the ego (a). What is regarded, the tableau, is the arena within which the ego is constructed—the objects it desires, the phantasms by which it tracks them, the law that forbids or allows them, the words that give them shape (b). Within this space is also found a knowledge, or truth, a point from which one can see, but not quite ever grasp the conditions of one's existence (c). There is yet another position, on the far side of the mirror, where one loses access to structured phantasies and the law or they become overwhelming (d).

Of course, there is a narrative, born from the marvelous coincidence of cards dealt, and the default of the serial. After the first two sections, described above, there follow two figures of the poet. The "successful poet" (V Jupiter) who, just as Orpheus in Cocteau's film is bored and spurned by the young poets at the Café des poètes, is spurned by young Bowering. And the sword-carrying valet (Page of Swords), who inhabits a complex of subordination, dandyism, scholarship, and fear. A long procession of masculine cards follows, until the tenth section where the absence of women is remarked on—"Are there no women / in this apparition? Or women / only disguised as these / bearded creatures?" The preceding cards are also full of anxiety about gender.

In the fifth section (XI Power or Strength), the tableau is described as being like an Italian epic film. This section enacts the model I did not find in the poem as a whole. "We," an audience before the projected image, fantasize an omnipotent ideal, "feed our empty spines upon, / that nervous / extension of our dreams." We wrestle with the lion, display our "strength" and "grace." As the fantasy deepens, the audience dissolves, the "we" becomes "I," and the gladiatorial struggle is described subjectively, not as a collective pleasure, but rather as single combat to the death, at which point the I assimilates the lion, his mane, his tongue, his single eye. The latter, the single eye "in my forehead," is an artifact of how the lion is drawn, in profile, but also a mad extension of this innocent description, a fantasy of omniscience.

In section 6 (The Knight of Cups), the reader is being watched by an aggressive stranger, who offers him a poisoned drink. Such aggressions and deceptions continue in the following sections, until section 10 (King of Cups) where the masculine challenge is overcome: "He is a sad weakling / old monarch. He offers me no fright…." The cards that follow provide a more complex mixture of male, female, and topical emblems. In section 11, The Hanged Man (XII), the reader is "caught" in the image, hanging upside down, blood-filled head, all clarity of mind. This section gives way to The Sun (XVIIII), a pastoral interlude in which a woman makes her first appearance since section 2. The sun fills the sky above two seated lovers, looks out directly at the reader. Like Paolo and Francesca, the lovers hold a book, but their eyes have turned to each other. Having abandoned "the light of reason," there would seem to be no turning back. But, of course, this illumination must be followed by guilt (he was "a puritan lad, after all," (Bowering,

How I Wrote 36). The Devil (XV) hovers over a woman sitting in "resolvd anguish." The anguish is the reader's. He (she) hides his (her) face from the devil's "cock." As in the previous section, the reader is looking at the scene, a voyeur, but is also looked at. However, in this case, he denies but anticipates being seen—"She hasn't yet seen me." He thus attempts to reinforce his position outside the tableau, as the one looking rather than the one being seen.

The next card shows The House of God struck by lightning. Here the reader, the poet, in a horrifying inflation of the ego, assimilates himself to God, killing "what he makes / in order to make." The equilibrium or simple majesty of the poet is re-established in section 15 (King of Clubs) and reinforced in section 16 (IIII The Emperor), where the male figure is invested rather than feared. The antagonist reappears in section 17 (Knight of Coins, or Pentacles). But now, and from here on, there is less fear, although still considerable anxiety before the accusatory other.

Temperance (XIIII, section 18) is another strong woman, more like mother than lover. The Hermit (VIIII, section 19) is a figure of wisdom and calm, an ideal. The lovers return in section 20, under the moon, above the cloistered emblem of a "primitive fighting beast" (a crab). This image is followed by the censuring Queen of Clubs. In section 22 (III The Empress) the reader announces the increasing appearance of the women. But the ambivalence, or narcissism, that subtends the poem is underlined again: "or are they as they would appear / only men in skirts & jewels?" As he says in section 8, "you know all along it's myself / I'm talking about." In section 21 and 22, he plays adroitly with subject and object, male and female. She is object, but "we" are subjected to her "by virtue of the force promist / by her readiness / to do violence" (21).

Section 23 deals up another king (King of Cups), but the anxiety remains diminished, "the fear made subtle." The lovers appear again in section 24 (VI The Lovers). According to a pattern that by now seems unavoidable, the lovers' brief encounter is followed by an avenger, The King of Swords, "the most martial, the most / powerful body of them all." Section 26, the Page of Coins, reinforces the narcissistic position described above, a defensive strengthening of the ego. He looks into the mirror held by the page and sees: "flowering," which is to say Bowering. And to make sure we don't miss the function of this rhyme, it is repeated: "towering…overpowering…not glowering…flowering." He is, alas, unafraid and secure: "What then of my fear?… // I am imagining all this // real as I can be."

Juno (II) in section 27 is the "power woman," frightening, and not desired; whereas The Queen of Coins in section 28, is "the sweetest young girl," "shy," "awkward," and "the muscles beneath [his] skull // respond…." This card is followed, predictably, by the Queen of Cups (29), "again / demonic," and then by Judgement (XX, 30). Judgement shows a winged trumpeter in the clouds, and four figures below, two men and two women, up to their thighs in mud and water. But the plea is one of not guilty based on several arguments going to the impossibility of a fair trial and, finally, to mistaken identity: it's too early or too late; the judge "is not knowing enough"; the judge cannot understand me ("Who's to judge?… / Does this stranger / know the key I've always playd in?"); and besides I wasn't even there ("None of them is I.").

The major anxiety of the first few sections, which was largely expressed by an onslaught of warrior-like figures, has given way mostly to the female figures, and to those cards that represent aspects of the world: Judgement, The Wheel of Fortune, The World and Death. The only remaining male figures are The Chariot, The Fool, and the Page of Cups. The Chariot (VII), in section 31, shows a "man in [a] warlike crown," but rather than a description of aggression, we get a meditation, a questioning. The question put to the oracle produces an oracular riddle. Similarly, in section 32, The Wheel of Fortune (X), the meditation produces answers, prescriptive aphorisms.

The next card is The Fool, *le Mat*, which could be translated as "the excuse" (Dummett). The Fool, with whom the reader clearly identifies, makes the hand signal which, at the time of the first Italian cards, was used to ward off the evil eye. But it's not an aggressive gesture. "It's all bullshit," he seems to say. Here description fails the reader, he stumps himself, and names himself: "I've never known what to say about him, / try desperately as I may / toward this end, // fool."

And then, in section 34, the World (XXI), another naked beauty, always there, always absent, forgotten, always coming back unexpectedly. She is vicious and happy. The Queen of Swords, in section 35 of the poem, is "a symbol of power and grace," but "the sexiest yet." However, he does not want this "symbol of woman," he wants "that other naked one, the world." In the following section, The Page of Cups, the reader has three teeth removed, again as a kind of *contrapasso*. He is offered a "giant cup / seen to be empty / or just ceremoniously fed with some unseen fluid," clearly the spitting basin that used to stand beside the dentist's chair.

He spits his teeth into the cup. "I'd give my eye teeth / to see where the cup is offered," he concludes. Here a part of the body has been removed, presumably the wisdom teeth—the unmanning feared from the beginning—and, against "the light of reason" (12), counter to "the wisdom I desire" (24), he offers more, he offers his eyes, in order to see, in order to get behind the mirror, in order to know.

Section 37, Justice (VII), is retrospective. Justice is a woman. He "fear[s] her sword more than her scales." He asks himself about the effects of the "deep drug"—the laughing gas of the previous section, but also, of course, love. He wonders what he has "opend / to her eyes," to the eyes of Justice, with "these thirty seven pictures." In this observation he draws to his own attention, with some discomfort, the fact that the poem is legible to anyone who can read.

The last section is Death (XIII, 38). Melodramatically, his last wish is for two minutes in which "to score / a power play goal." Will this boy never learn? All he wants is to "score" one more time, "then fall forever to the ice," beneath the cheers of "the lovely ladies, naked & robed & armored," echoing in the halls of Dis.

Despite the narrative structure I've just outlined, when I say that there is no "narrative capture," I mean that, strive as he does, the reader finds no comfort in the series, no origin, and no closure. The tree of the opening section comes after, not before the wooden club, as fantasy, imagined but entirely outside the image. This tree is like the lyric that has been banished from the serial, a utopian memory. The lyric is another severable object—this time the voice or tongue—that may be desired, but always under the threat of loss. In the end, the poet has "no lyric in [his] throat / to be cut away." And in the ending, facing a death that must be a fiction because "after all it's only others who die" (Duchamp, epitaph), the poet has nothing to say, just bows out with a bit of malarkey, like a fool, for love.

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Carl Peters / George Bowering's *Autobiology*: A Boat

"We're nowhere else yet."
—M.A.C. Farrant, *The World Afloat*

If you wanted to write the "autobiography" of George Bowering, and be rather experimental or playful about it, you could cite the first sentence from each paragraph in his chapter "Autobiology" published in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. Bowering's autobiography would read and sound like this:

> I lived in Montreal from 1967 till 1971.
> But still my attentions were elsewhere. (41)
> And like a lot of her faithful readers, I imitated [Gertrude Stein].
> Yeats got his metaphors from creatures in his wife's dreams, of course, but he knew that he was one of many co-workers in the great task of poetry. (42)
> Naturally.
> It's not hard to figure out which writers I have derived from over the years. (43)

Memory is generative. The act of remembering produces another story. *Autobiology* is "anecdotal," but the stories are true in the sense that they are firmly grounded in linguistic and literary etymology; in *Autobiology*, etymology is image (the thing in place).

Autobiology composes a self but it more significantly announces the presence of the whole body inside and outside of language; in other words, the book takes "self" to be self-evident. In 1972, anticipating the semiotic challenges posed by the "identity writers," the book goes far beyond identity politics. Today, the dominant delivery systems (digital and information technologies—from universities to blogs) allow the vanguard to do anything it wants. Bowering discovers for himself techniques coming out of hand-eye skills such as those we see in Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Marcel Duchamp, among others:

> The word from my hand follows
> the release of my eye from the
> dream of my release from the ground

but just. Growing up is knowing
all the evils of the world & fail
ings of all people

will not be corrected before the
end of my life. (*Autobiology* 18)

Postmodernism can be said to eliminate historical consciousness, the individual, and the creative process to the extent that it eliminates memory. Bowering's writing puts memory back into the present, "writing *writing*."

Memory also fractures. But a poet like Bowering puts memory back into the continuous present by making it into *writing* writing; hence, he pushes tradition (in Eliot's sense and in Duncan's sense) further. Like the derivative, memory "derives." Memories, like photographs, are not static images. They spin. "[Everything moves; nothing is still; everything passes away; nothing lasts.] I like this sort of thing a lot better than describing a room, say," Bowering writes in *Harry's Fragments*. This is why the photograph of Bowering as a child with his mother on the front cover of *Autobiology* is printed vertically; however, the photograph of the author with his daughter on the back cover is printed horizontally. One must turn the book in order to read it. Bowering's writing embraces this turning and returning; *Autobiology* is also the text from which other "Bowering" texts derive ("writing writing"), even though it originally derives from Gertrude Stein. That is interesting. "Tradition" is both enacted and engaged.

Put another way congruent with Bowering's poetics of intelligent attention, memory "composes." Hence, in a more recent poem, "*from* West Side Haiku":

Fred thinks his memory
    beats mine just because it's
more like what happened. (175)

Stein reminds us that memory destroys creation. Bowering's praxis eschews the self, as well, and foregrounds the notion that significant art needs the private, intimate self. What that is, is anyone's guess; suffice it to say: "LOVE is FORM / intimacy is the loveliest / part of thought" (Blaser 16). "This has nothing to do with self-expression," as Calvin Tomkins asserts, "and everything to do with the

discovery of personal integrity, an integrity that [comes] from dealing honestly with materials, and that [can] be translated into dealing honestly with one's fellow creature/creator" (25-26).

In *Autobiology*, we catch a glimpse of the real: "The word from my hand follows / the release of my eye" (18). The passage foregrounds an ethical ("but just") imperative, one that cannot be separated or divorced from being "in" a body: "release." The word is mentioned twice in the first three lines of this chapter and that is important. "I believe," writes Bowering, "that the human intellect is the closest thing we have to the divine. It is the way we can join one another in spirit" ("The Holy Life"). Bowering: "I was two, I was three, I was nearly four" (18). Counting is a precise act of mind and each number, preceded by the past tense "I was," marks change; the additive act of counting is also a counting down—a preparation—a call to action and attention. And the numbers may also signify voices—voices deriving from elsewhere or out there, as they do in Stein's portrait of Picasso:

> One.
> I land.
> Two.
> I land.
> Three.
> The land.
> Three….[1] ("If I Told Him" 192-93)

If the intellect is the closest thing we have to the divine then our failings and imperfections are the closest things we have to each other; in *Autobiology*, error reminds us of the other:

> I conceived my love for nature
> when I burned the hillside & this I
> did before I began school….
>
> The name of the town was
> Greenwood & the war was on, where

1 "One / I land" points to "Two" and also *to*; the repetition of "three" rimes with and thus relates to *see* and *free* "The land." As with Bowering's text, the I is released.

cities burned in their cement.
What held the hill together beneath
the flames I did not know but I
learned love for it & saw those men
joined to the hill & my shame. (20-21)

Into chaos, burning, and history, but the language is also on fire illuminating the word as image. We name and thus we know. Or, "consciousness is how it is composed" (*Autobiology* 38).

The name
of the town was Greenwood & when I
returned a few years later the hill
was green. I feared…

I ran home & waited for the
punishing hand…
It never came & when I went back
a few years later the hill was
covered with green wood while the
nearby hills were brown & the war
was over, & I loved it. (20-21)

Bowering follows in the tradition of his predecessor Sheila Watson; their texts do not describe; they depict and their method of depiction derives from Stein and Cubism, which Watson thoroughly understands.[2]

George Bowering is a derivative ("re-combinative") poet—he states as much in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. In this text he cites the poet Robert Duncan on tradition—that a poet learns his or her craft from other poets; thus, Duncan

2 "[If] I wanted to use the gestalt way of explaining the work of art, I would say that what I was concerned with was figures in a ground, from which they could not be separated. I didn't think of them as people in a place, in a stage set, in a place which had to be described for itself, as it existed outside the interaction of the people with the objects, with the things, with the other existences with which they came in contact. So that the people are entwined in, they're interacting with the landscape, the things about them, the other things which exist" (Watson 15).

writes a book derivative of Gertrude Stein; and Bowering writes a book derivative of Robert Duncan writing about Gertrude Stein *writing* about Gertrude Stein. This technê is more than mere imitation and mannerism and closer to a certain asceticism that defines the very best modern works. By "derivative" Duncan is referring to the *modern* writer. As Bowering points out:

> It was a negative word because poetry teachers were always going on about being "original," as if that were (a) positive and/or (b) possible. "Original" goes with "creative" and "unique" in some debased creative writerly jargon. We are also here remembering Yeats, who said something like "speak to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage."
>
> That is to say (a) there are muses, and (b) poetry is a job that we, if we are serious, are in together. We continue the work.
>
> The same third-rate newspaper reviewers who complained that the poet was "not in control of his materials" would say, "he's imitating Gertrude Stein." As if Gertrude Stein's decades of work were useless because no one should learn from her and carry on her work. When Pound said "Make it New" he was talking about the tradition, keeping it awake. Those moribund Victorian rimesters he did not like were not deriving from Shelley and Coleridge. They were leaning on them. (Email to the author)

Autobiology's chapter 6, "THE VERANDAH," derives as much from Williams—see "The Dance" below—as it does from Stein. Bowering's proprioceptive performance gestures towards the cinematographic guiding readers to listen with their eyes:[3]

> In Brueghel's great picture, The Kermess,
> the dancers go round, they go round and
> around, […] Kicking and rolling
> about the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
> shanks must be sound to bear up under such
> rollicking measures, prance as they dance
> in Brueghel's great picture, The Kermess. (147)

3 I cannot resist the pun embedded in *Vermeer's Light* (Verm*ear*'s Light).

In works of art that are modern we simultaneously confront or engage synchronic and diachronic time. What we experience is closer to the synchronic sense (the time "in" the composition) while what we recall or remember is diachronic (the time "of" the composition). "THE VERANDAH," like Williams's poem, conjoins the two time-senses into one "continuous" reel or loop, bringing both into a singular perception or focus. The two senses of time defined by Stein and improvised in Bowering's autobiological *message*, are summarized by Charles Olson:

> The message is
> a discrete or continuous sequence of measurable events distributed in time
>
> is the birth of the air, is
> the birth of water, is
> a state between
> the origin and
> the end, between
> birth and the beginning of
> another fetid nest
>
> is change, presents
> no more than itself
>
> And the too strong grasping of it,
> when it is pressed together and condensed,
> loses it
>
> This very thing you are ("The Kingfishers" 9-10)

Modern poetry is an art of perceiving movement. "Sometimes when you are listening to a great jazz musician performing a long solo," Bowering suggests, "you are experiencing his mind, moment by moment, as it shifts and decides, as it adds and reminds…. You are in there, where that other mind is. His mind is coming through your ears and inside your mind" ("The Holy Life"). "THE VERANDAH" is a continuous line drawing the continuous present, at least prolonging it in other (and the same) words—this chapter is all one sentence.

Some poets fancy themselves archaeologists, mining what they write. Bowering reads. He is anti-archaeological, anti-absorptive.[4] Others may engage the creation of art as a critical practice—that is postmodernism—but the point I am making is that George Bowering *reads*. He is the "author" (creator) of a world rooted in a poetics of reading as labour, as love; that is his singular (outstanding) contribution to literature and art.

I imagine that *Autobiology* is one of the most difficult books for George Bowering to revisit and re-read. Bowering is saying what Eliot is saying when he quotes Yeats: "Speak to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage." Each chapter in *Autobiology* is about the deep struggles with history and the history of art.

The book is framed by two photographs and prefaced with a discontinuous line drawing of the photograph on the front cover. This paradigm shift transforms the image; the image disappears and the writing begins.

A photograph is another kind of derivation. The experience of the object shown in a photograph is shadowed by the object that is represented in the photograph and that is one kind of loss; however, the loss of the place where it inhabited the world, and the person with whom we experience our sense of loss and recovery, is the entire context in which that loss is figured; and if the art or photograph is genuine then the context comes alive as in a painting by an artist who discovers more than the eye can see.[5]

A photograph can do that, too, but the material means are different. It is a matter always of negotiating the real.

> Derive means of the river, and though we may not step into the same river twice (hence cannot copy) we can continue to dip (imitate), and Stein has not come to an end. You might attend to WCW's key distinction between imitation and copying. Derivation is akin to imitation. My poems are not Stein copies.
>
> What is the boat, eh? (Bowering, "Email to the author")

4 See Charles Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption" in *A Poetics*.

5 See *Autobiology* 38-39.

The last sentence of *Autobiology* reads "What is the boat" and it is self-referential (107). "What is the boat, eh?" The boat, *à la* Gertrude Stein, is, "but just." Placing "a consciousness astonished at itself at the core of human existence" (Merleau-Ponty 203). It is the place.

Autobiology and its composition is about afterwardness and aftermathness, remembering where we stepped and the transitional world that needs other worlds for anchoring memory from time to time on that river. And yet, "We cannot retrace our steps, going forward may be the same as going backwards. We cannot retrace our steps, retrace our steps. All my long, all my life, we do not retrace our steps, all my long life, but" ("The Mother of Us All" 87).

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of George and his *Curious* (1973), a book of portraiture that is part of my diminishing autobibliology, for unlike Tennyson, I am apart of all that I have met, a subtraction of infinite regress

the portrait of Birney, knowing *less and less*, but not shrinking in his lessness, only growing, sideways, the unclosure of collage

the rebus of concrete, how complete these letters turn, these pictures, how the square becomes a diamond, but for baseball, not Angela

has yellow hair
at least in/ the poem

Olson down the stairs, quantifiably bigger than Plath's Hughes, the only man "huge enough" for her, down the Tallmans' stairs, a tall man himself, full of breath, lines, field, held in by his belt, its buckle crooked

Daphne Buckle, of whom Blaser later wrote when she was a Marlatt, "Wanted so to enter the brightness," *In the midst of her sorrow she was*, but was she amidst those at the foot of the stairs?

readers of the *New American Poetry*? a record spinning, a saxophone heard one summer's night in Summerland, notes floating north on the airwaves from Salt Lake City

and introduced to those gathered by George, as Olson was to them?

•

I am not sure what use it is to read like this, as writing, but because the book needed to be retrieved from the boxes, or one of them, I am now reading it, mindful of Stein's portraits, but in this case George's

contribution is not the paragraph but the poem, or at least it looks that way, breathes that way, with attention paid to the styles of those who sat for them, as photographs, pictures, subjects, we see

the dust in Ed Dorn's hair, but it is really overexposure, the camera aimed at both Dorn and the sun, the absence of contrast, definition, this dust

to Williams's music, his books in the UBC Library, *The Desert Music*, where "Memory is a kind/ of accomplishment," the desert itself an instrument, a maker of dust, its motes notes

but I could only remember, or misremember, parts of George's book, embarrassed by what I could remember

where I was/ shat on by a seagull & what would/ that look like on black velvet to stand in for Marianne Moore, whom he had applied that fabric to, and, in contrast to Dorn, without

a photo to support it, unlike Atwood, who has that which George *is led to believe I havent* writes in her bestknown poem, the one us youngers read in high school: "This Is a Picture of Me"

"It was taken some time ago./ At first it seems to be/ a smeared/ print: blurred lines and grey flecks/ blended with the paper," but in George's photo she is at a desk, talking on the phone

until we come to Spicer's death, his portrait, reforming as we read it, like Dorian Gray's, becoming something else, an obituary, something he could not sit for, but nothing of Olson's death in his

•

years ago I read in one of George's biographies that he was an aerial photographer for the RCAF, and years later I asked Jean if she had some of these photos, an afternoon that became an event, a tour

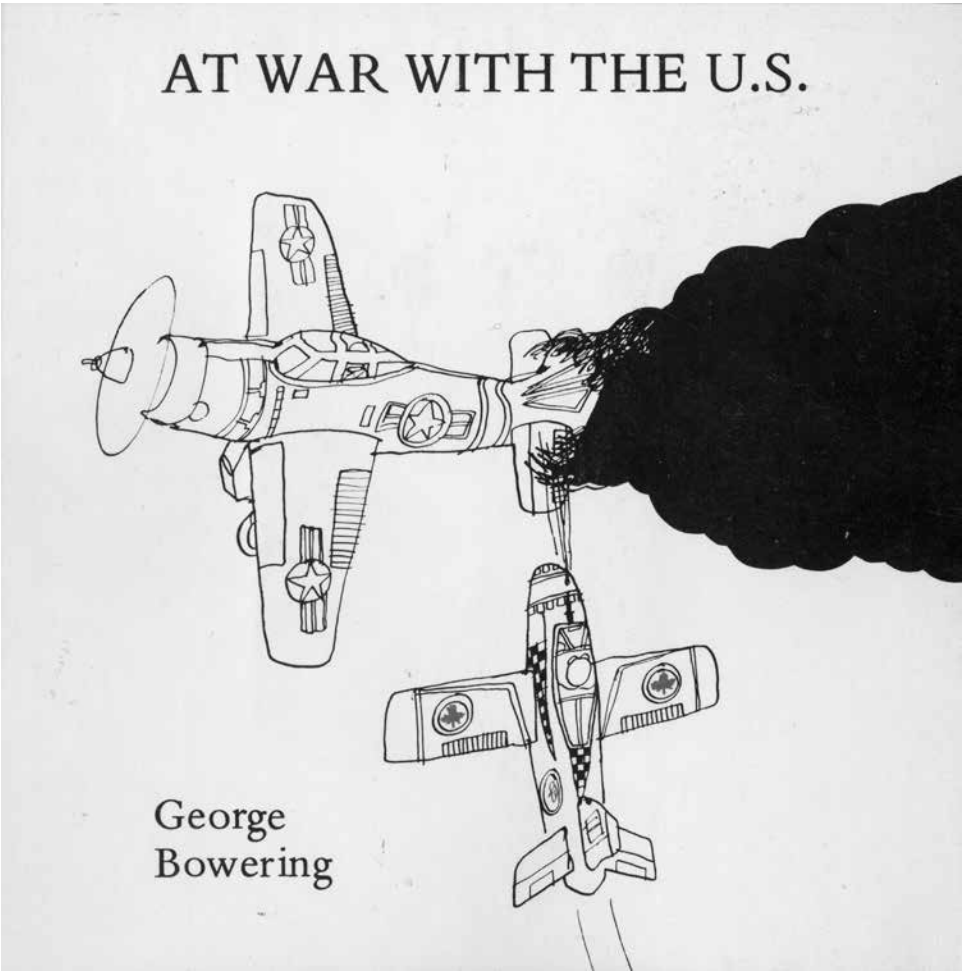
of the new house, with the paintings Thea showed me during an afternoon years earlier at the house on West 37th, across the street from the church where my parents were married, where I was christened

Thea indulged my stories, and my unreliable memory has her remembering me standing outside St. Mary's one cold Tuesday night in January waiting for my mom to pick me up from cubs

Thea before a Fisher painting, the one given the only good wall at the house on West 11th, the dining table before it, and on that table the photo albums, most of them of George's

girlfriends, Jean said, opening another album, pushing it towards me, this time of cars, baseball games, my curiosity growing, and in growing, my quest forgotten

from the photo album:
Joan Huberman and George on Granville Street, 1960.
Photo credit: Foncie Pulice



At War With the U.S. (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974)

Cover drawing by Greg Curnoe of a Canadian fighter plane with red maple leaves on its wings shooting down a US plane. Dedication: *for Frank Davey.*

"The things the Americans were doing were getting more and more outrageous.... Everybody hated the American invasion of Vietnam but the bombing of Cambodia was even worse; it was somehow more atrocious." (GB to Roy Miki, 38-39)

Reading Notes

1. The poem begins with an invocation of "measures." What measures? The poem as measure, metrically, of compressed language rendered in rhythmical pattern. Here, Vancouver, especially, early 1970s, the serial poem of Spicer and Blaser, whereby "measure" becomes deep structure—architecture—rooms visited briefly in an onward flashing progression, turning on and off the lights as the poem moves, instanter.

2. But another deep structure—another measure. Taking stock of the imperial state. The poet has declared war—midst continuing shocks of the Vietnam War—with the US military industrial juggernaut (which extends right into—the poet fears—pre-school rules and childhood games with plastic toys in suburban streets).

3. Still another hidden structure—Canada, lying in the US imperial slip-stream, seeming haven for draft dodgers—but a state is a state by whichever name it's known—they measure by similar yard sticks (whether metrical or imperial). In 1970 Prime Minister Trudeau invoking the War Measures Act. What do war measures do? They take away rights—so that we can no longer measure the state, take stock, rein it in. Hard not to see this shadow cast by Bowering's title, as the poet lobs a rock from his glass castle nation.

4. The poem dives into its forward movement, technology, speed, the news, dailiness, what does not change is the process of change. The poet looks through the news and sees the United States at war with—itself? "So that's what passes / thru minds in the USA / every day"—the "transparent" markers of what empires do—delimbing bodies, bringing the abstraction of "geopolitics" home to the bodies the empire writes with and on. I am always interested in a poet's public acts, the entrance of poetry into the public domain. This is Bowering at his most topical, his most engaged. And it is a Bowering testing—and fearing—the possibilities of poetic engagement.

5. "& who are we…." Indeed. Pan-American citizens—either side of the border—"helping count" the bombs endlessly raining down, eyes fixed to the same cascading media that "obliterates measure." And now, summer 2014 reading this poem again, the American made bombs are raining down on Gaza—Canadian and American politicians are falling in line to support Israel and the complete devaluing of a Palestinian life—and the body counts rise again, so many of them children.

6. Fear of a red, white, and blue planet. Dennis Lee, in 1973, writing about "the fact" that Canada "in the last 25 years…has become an American colony"—inundated by "the American tidal-wave" of cultural, economic, and political domination. Canada, now, seems to aspire only to supply the fuel for the American Empire—to rip its resources from indigenous hands once again, and fan the flames of the world system.

7. This is what we do—all of us watching the same media show—"we help them count," a counting which deprives us of any ability to truly measure. Where has the count moved on to now? Syria? Palestine? We count bombs and bodies, mesmerized. We. Who cannot be sure who we are.

8. The anguished cries poets often channel as they write in the face of war. As they look askance at their own children, then back to the blitz being mediated for them. To rain down death from afar is the "reason" of war measures. The poet brings things close again, offers the more affective analysis, the heart cradling the head in the hands once again. So in Bowering's "Letter to Richard Nixon," a kinder, drunker America staggers home—echoes of Whitman and Ginsberg—the "lost American of love." If only it were so.

9. So the poet's affective analysis comes close to the political-economist's cool dissection. Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin in *The Making of Global Capitalism*: "The American state, in the very process of supporting the export of capital and the expansion of multinational corporations, increasingly took responsibility for creating the political and juridical conditions for the general extension and reproduction of capitalism internationally." *Took responsibility.* By arming the system.

10. It's always a "war of words." It's just that some words are backed by jets, and there is "music" (whose "melody" with Emily we can possibly "stroke") "heard only / when the jets / are turned off." But when are the jets ever turned off? All words embed, establish, maintain, and extend division and inequality. This is one of their primary, institutional operations.

11. Which interrupts, obfuscates, and erases one of their other primary operations—a reaching out and across the abyss of subjectivity—to touch and join—"Reader," the poet apostrophizes (reaching back through Eliot to Baudelaire), touching the sleeve of the other, in search of their heart, "I just want you here right now."

12. Everywhere in Bowering's poem this dialectic—what Empedocles figured millennia ago as a struggle between Love and Strife. A father meditating on his young daughter, his extension now into the heart of another, into a future beyond his own mortal limits, from which loving perspective the strife of war—the normalization of war measures as a part of the measure of daily life (inescapable news reports, limbless veterans staggering in the street)—reveals itself as a ghastly mechanism even the poet, perhaps, plays a small part in—"Oh poet! Numbers, numbers, your tawdry / body count, & those rich old women / with a cute name on their plate." That devastating line break—from the tawdriness of a poet's "counting" of poetic measure to the war measures of body counts! And then the next step too—into commodity, the rationale of all modern war—the production and consumption of arms, the production and consumption of these capitalist relations themselves, the logic of accumulation, bombing all into consumptive behaviour.

13. Panitch and Gindin: "US military interventions abroad were primarily aimed at preventing the closure of particular places or whole regions of the globe to capital accumulation." The poet, in 1973, with the neoliberal structural adjustment campaign locked and loaded, ready to unleash Pinochet (and Chicago School economics) on Chile, nods his head.

14. The Bowering of "At War with the U.S." is in close agreement with Walter Benjamin: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a

document of barbarism." Thus the doubting of the difference between the poet's accounting and the militarized state's, the confusion of any sort of "making"—make love not war—but both sorts of making can be "institutionalized" as dark satanic mills? So the poet seems to be saying, as he sees his daughter off "to her war called school." An institution is an institution. It's there to structure the advantage of the few, to skew love towards strife, to make us markets, marketable.

15. So what's a poet supposed to do? "I surrender // I embrace you." Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer: "Stand / in the light / where I can see you." Once embraced, you keep a kind of compromised watch. True, there's nowhere Empire is not (thus the surrender). Except—everywhere—there are little tears in it—in our hearts—in our communities—in our stupid not understood poetic acts and wild embraces. And so we escape in torn moments—those sequential room light flashes of the serial poem—we escape in moments the embrace of the war state. (And perhaps—though it doesn't show in Bowering's poem—perhaps we can weave those tears into some other fabric, some other world.) That's the hope this dark poem extends like the light held out into the middle of Picasso's *Guernica*. Sometimes we can see, sometimes we can hide. This is Bowering's "Guernica"—although it's a quotidian Guernica—shedding light on the horrible rotten heart, the banal evil of the space from which the bombs come—the space in which the bombs are made.

16. "When the war is over / there wont be any more newspapers." Why? Because what we call the news arose along with states, colonialism, capitalism, and modern war? Because—if there ever is such a thing as peace, we really will be able to get the news from poems (and no one will die for lack of what is found there…). The poet's slim halting hopes.

17. And where are we left? "Let me fail you no more / than I can support," the poet addresses his daughter at the end. Another marvellous Bowering enjambment. This long poem of contraries and contradictions, of "two minds" struggling—Love and Strife, never quite letting go of each other, held together by the corpus callosum of culture's capacities and incapacities. Let me fail you no more—though I will fail you, you can count on that—so just let me fail you no more than I can support. Why

"support"? Why not the Beckett option, which hovers there—fail—fail again—fail better? There is no "better" in the Bowering of "At War with the U.S." But there is a desire, an attempt, to be able to "support" the burden that must be borne, and to support others who the poet sees taking on their burdens, the approach of the full weight of a world of institutionalized war and exploitation. I will fail, the poet accepts (and the serial poem is always written in a failing light)—but please please just let me support myself in my failures, and those others who I also fail, loving them in this failure.

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Daphne Marlatt / In Search of Plot (Deceased)

a bout of ambush
riding through bush
a band of word
bandits

reading nouns
naming or clowning around

8 poets on a 14-hour train ride
Pacific Rim Express on Pacific Great Eastern Rail
PRE on the PGE to PG 1974

masked figures heading towards
Suspense's Bridge

sending each other up
on pages of various
provenance

hand to hand
word combat

which hand belongs to whom?
now 2 of them gone

narrative a spur of the past riding the present
curve perhaps

severe mockingbirds all up in a tree call'd train, askin' where's the nightin- gone?

asides a siding
stoned trains
slide by

Plot looked about him, wondering how to get beyond the Events lurking in the hedge.

stick-handling story by different or differing
non-deferent hands

Setting was hardly to allow herself to be obscured, but she wasn't in a position to argue.

as gender takes a turn

Plot stuck in Evelyns throat. Her name was Evelyn but her friends called her Eleven. She had a bunch of hardy hedges and never went back.

so Laurel was there from the beginning
a form of hedging bets on where
this comedic saga was heading

Later, she told Bud Baron how she fell out of the phone-tree into the Hardy Hedge. "That I saw Greg Corso's naked torso hiding behind every pillar & post…" Hiking back towards Squamish, she thot fuck those poets!

politics erased
climax delayed

in a likely story

Has plot thickened yet? he felt between Grace's Kelly as the train hitched its cock sureness thru the next tunnel.

in the background
duly ordained
nouns or nuns
board a lewd Western

each with *a sprig of laurel* each
presented with a George V dollar

zeitgeist entering

Anger
Vats
Cambodia

Dear Evelyn, dear dear
Evelyn:

How I miss you. Events seem
to be everywhere, despite the
presence of the Americans…

nuns are nouns
without u

in the habit of
sly exchange

news of these events passed from character to character, from setting to conflict & back again before Eleven or ten-thirty.

as the V-2 dipped
its wings in setting
unlikely uni-
corn in his lens

It's all these mountains are bad for—a kind of war where-in arms are pitted against arms, as according to the will of the little boids off the voids (BIRDS of the WORDS)…

conning a
version a
narrative à
clef trans-
figured plot
affair

or serial
conte

-station

(adding es)

That's just scrub oak & them's the train crew, she replied—he spun on the heels of his well-oiled pun, How'd YOU get here? he said, this is the men's smoker.

a lot of pseudo
& some weary
or wary
real

She collared Plot . . . clued him to the business at hand + told him to cut out now. "I can't do that," he whined, "I got a public to think of—" Landscape darkened + then brightened. I've got it—you can stay—clean up yr act—+ come on as Process. No one will know."

how to reel
it in or end
cliché sendup

in no res-
er -ection

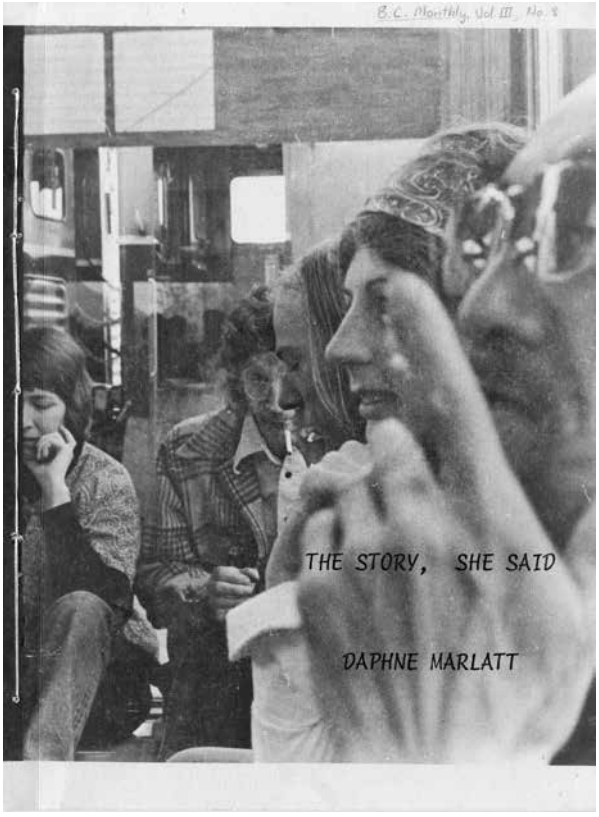
Peck and Plot were dead & both of them new it. Sub-plot strolled into the landscape looking for a proper setting. Little did Subplot know of poor lil' landscape's scrapes. Music lulled its romantic hush over the Peegee Electronic Wailray.

thus ends Chapt. II
of a stoned story
more chaps
in their chaps
to come

Note

The above take on our collaborative mock Western arose from re-reading some of it all these years later, prompted by George's description (see "Collaborations," in his *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, Mansfield Press 2011). To repeat specifics: in 1974 eight of us took the train from Vancouver up to Prince George to join Barry McKinnon there to read, talk, drink and otherwise cavort our way through a poetry event organized by Barry and Gerry Gilbert at the College of New Caledonia. Dubbing ourselves the Pacific Rim (Rhyme/ Rime/ Grime or Grim) Express, those of us on the train were George, Gerry, Gladys (now Maria) Hindmarch, Dwight Gardiner, Brian Fawcett, Carole Itter, Roy Kiyooka, and myself. We were young enough, in

our 30s (well, George was edging into his 40s), to be full of ourselves, except for Roy, who would have been in his late 40s and possessed a measure of wry distance. The Pacific Great Eastern Rail which, despite its name, served the western part of BC took fourteen (George says sixteen) hours to get there. In Prince George Barry McKinnon joined our writing spree. In the beginning, as I remember it, all of us took turns writing entries although there were only a few die-hards still writing by the time we climbed back on the train. It's been difficult to decipher some of the handwriting now that we're so much older and two of us have died. Gerry gave me the original pages so I could put together *The Story, She Said* (a combination of excerpted passages from our collaboration and from the journal account I also wrote at the time), published in 1977 as one of his issues of *BC Monthly*. The handwritten and typed pages of our collaboration exist among my papers at Library and Archives Canada.



Front cover of *The Story, She Said* by Daphne Marlatt published as an issue of *B.C. Monthly* 3.8 (Dec. 1977). From the foreground, Roy Kiyooka, Daphne Marlatt, Dwight Gardiner, Brian Fawcett, Gladys (Maria) Hindmarch. Photo credit: Gerry Gilbert

Steve McCaffery / Snowballs in Hells: George Bowering's *Αλλορηηες*

Allophanes begins with a citation, claimed to be dictated to the author by the deceased poet Jack Spicer: "It began with a sentence heard in the author's head: The snowball appears in Hell every morning at seven. It was said in the voice of Jack Spicer."[1] The book emerges beneath two signatories: the author George Bowering (whose proper name authenticates the book) and the disembodied voice of Jack Spicer, whose proper name re-formulates the deceased, primal father of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and who, as a spectral subject, haunts the text's unwindings to a degree that can never be fully ascertained.

The poem opens with a paradoxical phenomenon: a snowball in hell placed in the book prior to all metaphoric operation and akin to an arche-image, providing the *condition*, not the sense of, *Allophanes* as a writing. From its initial appearance the snowball in hell will extend a profound ambivalence. Reappearing and permuting, it will always be that to which the work is attached yet from which it is constantly escaping. At times the condition of change, at times the change itself, the sentence will never escape its temporal predicament and will raise constantly the question of the productivity of its own significatory ground. As Jean Paris puts it, "the question which begins here no longer springs from the sign because, on the contrary, it supposes it; it no longer concerns in criticism, either the signifier or the signified, either speech or writing, but the gap itself from which these will be engendered, or, if one prefers, this articulation whose other name would be: *change*" (11). This moment, where space explicates itself, will be the moment in which the infernal snowball is born into writing as a writing; a dictated and a written moment that asserts its identity as its own rupture.

Allophanes's cover merits attention, its central design is an excised triangle in the space of which is a text comprising geometric shapes and symbols suggestive of pictographs or hieroglyphs. Through a fold in the paper, the cover's underside becomes a surface. The triangular excision in this way serves to frame a part of the cover's unexposed side. As a result of this cut and fold, the cover's recto-verso distinction collapses producing a profound discontinuity upon the cover's plane. An interiority is presented as external and the notion of page is immediately doubled

1 From the jacket copy of *Allophanes*.

(opening the cover to meet the title page this other surface is not seen).[2] The triangle is redolent with associations; it is the diagrammatic relation of signifier to signified through a referent apex doubling the form of the Greek letter *delta*. It also appears at various points within the body of the poem: the horizontal effect of the tent (at the end of section VI) and the triangular torso of the pictogram of St. Arte (Astarte?) that concludes section V. Letter, talisman, Christian trinity, Mesopotamian female deity, pyramid, inverted pubis are all evoked.

Clearly this cover lacks a utilitarian function. Partly concealing, partly announcing a promised interiority it folds to bring its verso plane into visibility through a gap in the front, presenting a physical lack that shows more than it would had the surface not been excised. An instability is introduced into the nature of the surface which now carries tri-partite implications as a cover, a frame, and a frivolous subversion. The non-phonetic "text" thus framed in the triangle participates in the cover's system without actually being an element of it. The opening sentence is framed precisely in the way these non-phonetic characters are framed "inside" the cover. As a received dictation, it enters the poem as a perverse "fold" in the writing and similarly participates without membership. Rendering *all* quotations in the book contaminated, this sentence further prevents the writing from being a first order operation; it cannot even gain an innocence but must inscribe itself and its implications intertextually, with a constant referral to another voice beneath the surface of the writing, held absent but constantly recalled inside of the writing's shifting scenes, which work ambivalently throughout the poem to include the exclusion of this sentence.

Catastrophic moments in *Allophanes* occur when the poem's continuous and repeated fabric, its homogenous, phonemic plane, erupts into non-phonetic events. There is always the danger of this other script (occasionally folding to reveal from its back the script of the Other, i.e. Spicer's) emerging as an alternate writing. As the cover erupts its under-surface, so too the 25 sections of the poem always threaten a catastrophic folding into another script. We have already witnessed the appearance of St. Arte in section V and the non-phonetic complex in the cover's triangular lack. But there are several others too. We should take instant account of the facts that the poem's title (on cover and title page) is spelled in Greek, that

2 We might note, in passing, that the cover in this way reveals its material *from the back*, i.e. the copulatory position of the Wolf Man's parents as Freud recounts it in his famous case history. It is also the direction of weaving (i.e. textuality). Freud can be sensed throughout *Allophanes* as a voice beyond the absent one of Jack Spicer.

the Hebrew aleph appears in section XVI, and that a gestural mark resembling a hand-drawn number 9 appears in section XIV. These other scripts inscribe cultural difference within the poem's anglophonic medium and suggest not the protean combinatory structure of phonetic writing, but a prior writing, now banished (like Freud's primary repression) to a place behind the cover, folded, reversed, engulfed, and smothered below the surface of the manifest writing.

The poem's key image too, is not without its catastrophic part. SNOWBALL in its pure, phonetic form is host to a pictographic element. The third letter O functions as an introjected pictogram visually miming the word's meaning. We can think of this letter as the snowball's anasemic state, phoneticism's radical other within itself, invaginated, like the cover, and disseminated as a pictographic contaminant throughout the poem. In acknowledging this anasemic element in *Allophanes* we open up the poem to a bewildering play within its own micro-structures. Wherever an O occurs (in "god" and "dog" for instance) then the catastrophic moment takes effect, unassimilable in a conventional reading and on the order of a waste in the poem's semantic economy.

The scene of *Allophanes* can now be specified as the field of a thread working back and forth across two spectral columns: a spectral subject (Spicer as the absent-cause, the Primal Father in a new guise) and spectral scripts (Greek, Hebrew, non-phonetic, pictographic, and anasemic). The transformations of the infernal snowball are staged upon this field. Section I introduces the matrix sentence, "The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven" which itself seems aporetic: how can a snowball that depends on cold for its existence appear in Hell with its attendant heat and flames? This in itself generates a binary opposition: cold / heat to be submitted to numerous permutations. In section II, the sentence bifurcates and pursues two different itineraries. One links snow *to* architecture: ("snow castles / are alright for lyric poems"), while Hell connects with mass communication ("Now its as real as a newspaper / headline in Hell"). The snowball appears iconically for the first time in section III as a picto-ideogrammic mark: a black sphere. Its shape figures the *ball*, yet its blackness opposes the white of the snow. (These oppositions within items are numerous and prohibit any simple, unitary meaning to the work.) Hell shifts context into "we grow old together, / we will never meet in Hell" and the snowball re-situates in the assertion "the snowball is not the cold." The anasemic operation can be traced in the emergence of the letter O as a pictographic imbed.

In section IV the two images contextualize within the heat-cold opposition. Hell's thermal connotations echo in the "*coeur flambé*" while the snowball develops in a question: "& what would a snowball / know about polar knowledge?" In VI, Hell initiates a literary allusion ("I haven't got a Dante's chance in Hell") before the snowball transforms to become the white sphere of the baseball and ignites a chain of content that will be centered on George's favourite sport. ("That snowball's got red stitches (& it's imitating God. / Tells me from third to home / is The Way Down and Out.")

Hell's thermal connotations appear again in section VII. Asking where "Maud has gone" the speaker elaborates: "She crouches / over the fire / her back curved / to her care." The matrix image at this point begins to self-contaminate and fold back into itself. As a scene of repetition the section invests in the possibility to break down the discrete partition of the binary opposition. In this case Hell's thermal territory is insinuated by at least three terms from baseball: "crouch," "curve," and "back." A clean structuralist reading of *Allophanes* is thus impossible, for one set of oppositions erupts inside the other and proliferates a carcinoma of highly local, ludic meanings. In VIII Hell assumes the role of destination as the snowball-baseball transmogrifies into "a spilled ice cream ball, / kick it to hell & Gone, / & turning the cone over, / place it on your head." The triangle here has become conical, while the transformation: snowball/ice-cream enjoys a thermal rationale for the change. In section IX the snowball becomes a "hot" image: "pluck the melting sno-cone of the lightbulb." This melting process (the "w" has melted from "snow") continues through section X, but not without contamination: "See the word made white & melting / before the turn of the fiery wheel." The heat here is *white* heat, i.e. the colour of snow. Then the snowball reappears ideogrammatically in "The world's meaning is exactly / fol de rol de rolly O." In the concluding command of this section ("Stamp the snow off your boots / onto the face of the rug") the final word echoes *rouge* (i.e. the red stitches of the snowball-baseball of section VI) whose semantic associations through colour lead back to the red-heat-fire-Hell series.

In section XI the snowball as egg reappears in a scene of word-play: "the egg ziled gods," and Hell inheres homophonically embedded in the "ell" of "Nellie": ("*Run for the roundhouse, Nellie, he cant corner you there.*") The triangle-cone development re-enters in the allusion to Empedocles ("Wear your best suit / when you jump into a volcano"). The *cano* in "volcano" continues another homophonic chain, inaugurated earlier with the phrase in section X: "I see the dog licking it

up, i.e. the white word melting he turns & goes home cano mirabilis." (The "I see" beginning this phrase further contaminates the heat/cold opposition in being the homophone of "icy.") "Dog" itself is a reverse form of "god" whose theological meanings proliferate the poem. Section X, in fact, opens with "et verbum cano factum est" and later (XIX) comes the "Dog turds / discolouring the snow / about them." The volcano reechoes in two phrases of XII: "the perilous deterioration of dynamite" and explicitly in the following: "on TV we sat breathless as death, / watching them blast the top off the mountain, // to begin, to make a perfect earth, a perfect smooth black orb."

Speaking on the nature of poetic images Paul Valery makes mention of their "indefinitely repeated generation" in a system of "cyclical substitutions" (29). Creativity and repetition for Valery are conjunctive, but repetition is of a different order in *Allophanes*. The reiterations here are disjunctions staged within the scene of the "other" writing. The book is profoundly dialogic and its writing situates between two further writings: a spectral and largely non-phonetic other, and a manifest writing of permutation and homophonic play. Recall that the play of the same and the other is carried out upon a space of repetition that sets the grid for the series of spatio-temporal recurrences. As linguistic imbeds inside floating contexts they are marked more by their provisionality than by their semantic obdurance. Moreover, the repetitions serve as generative disjunctions and logical contaminants, which determine the semantic rhythm of the poem through its 25 sections.

Allophanes is weighty in its insistence that we cannot write the word, only process it through a labyrinth of re-writings leaving as a residue, the space of spacing itself as the condition of the gaps that delineate the poem's discontinuities and the differential zones in which its transformations occur.

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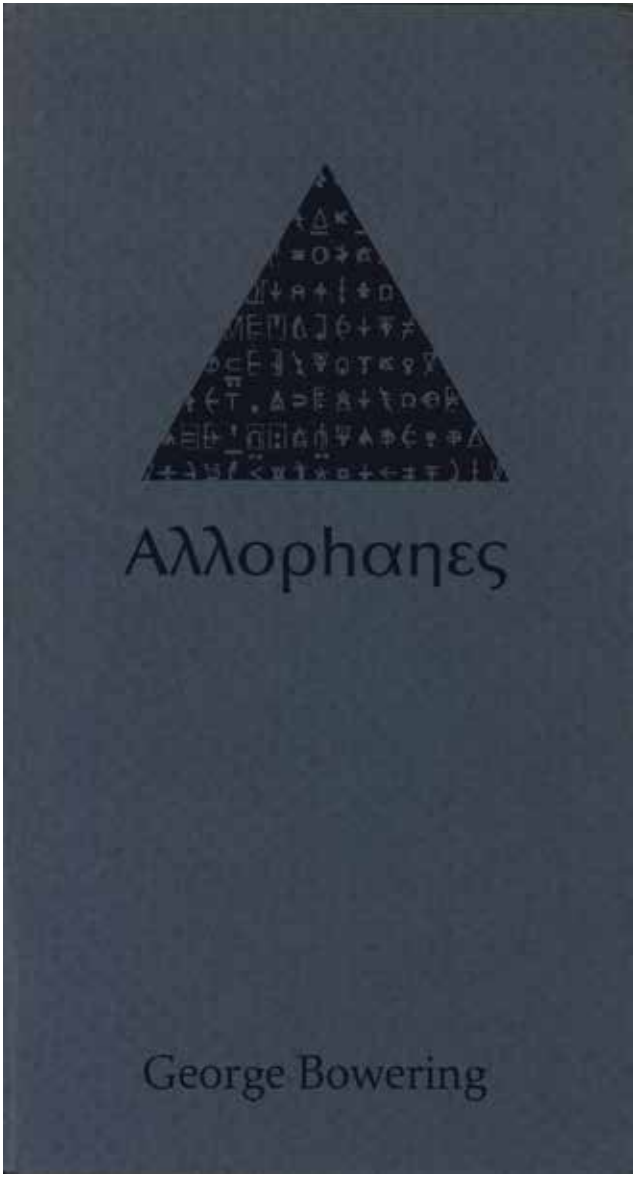
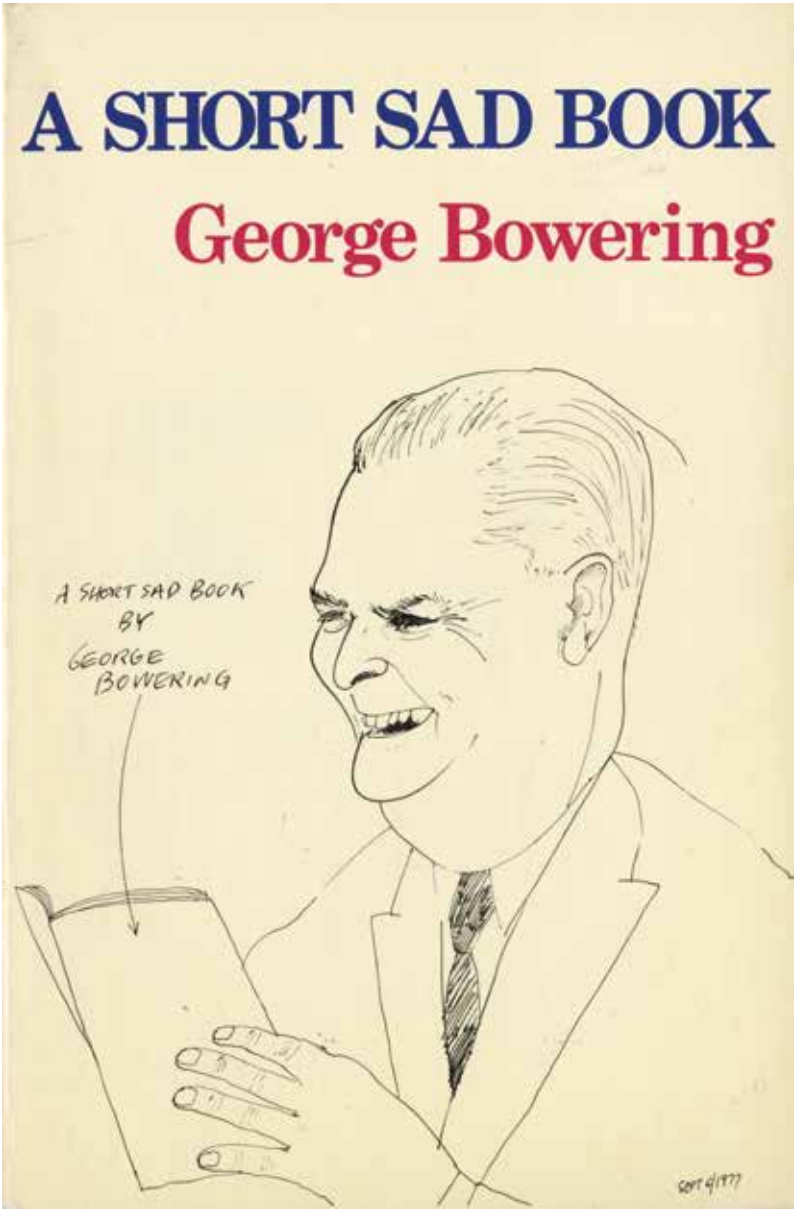
This essay is a shortened and revised version of "Under the Blowpipe: George Bowering's *Αλλοφηηες*," composed in 1986 and published in *North of Intention: Critical Writings, 1973-1986*.

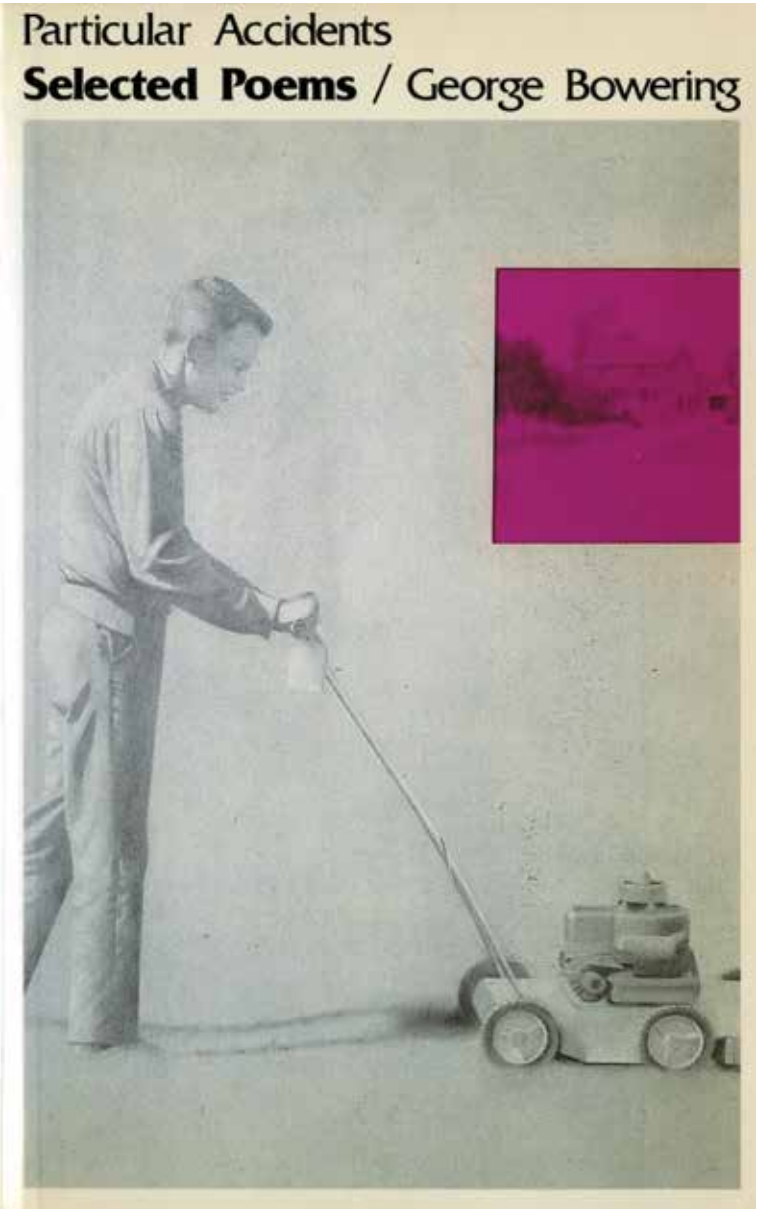


Allophanes (Toronto, Coach House, 1976).
Dedication: for Robin Blaser.

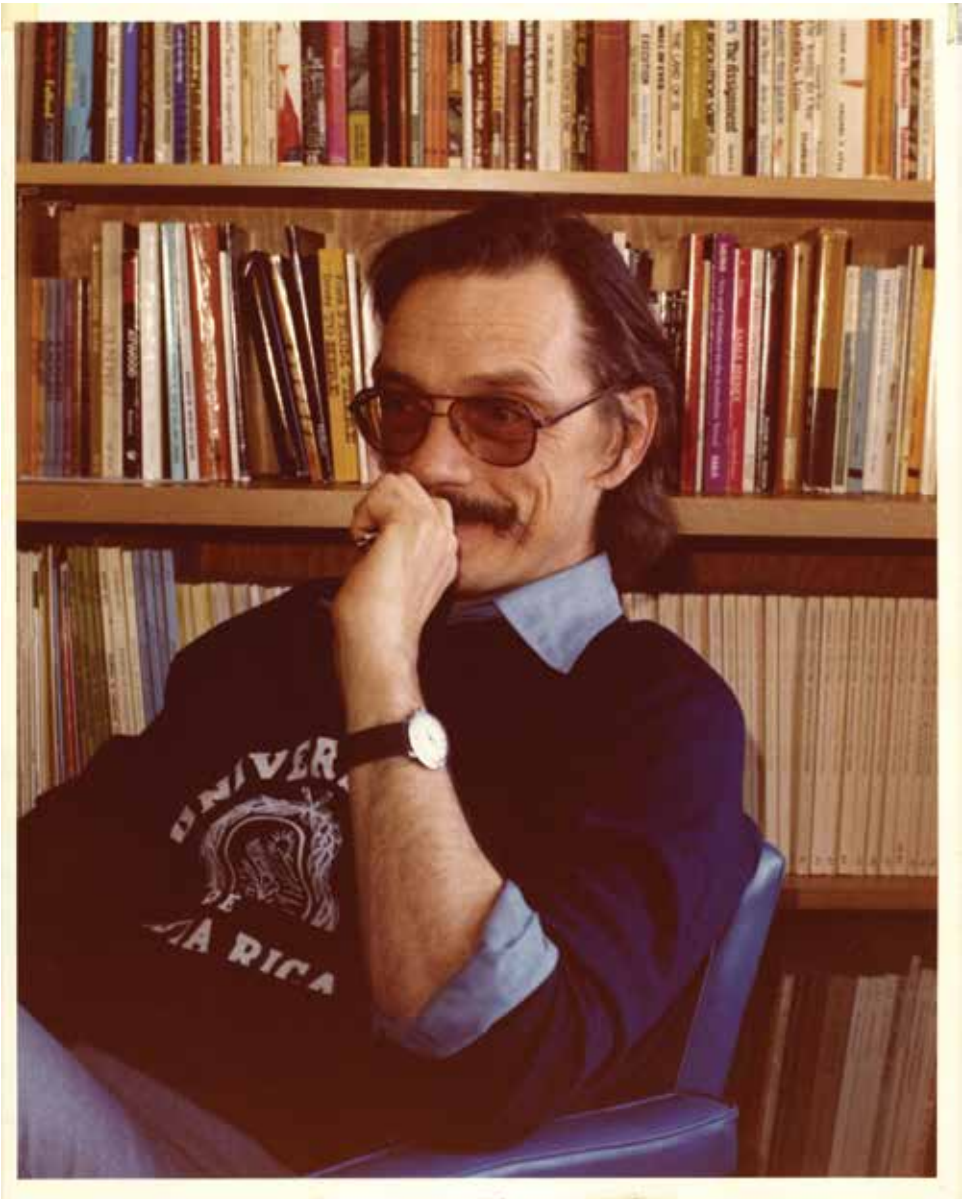
GB composed the text while sitting in on an undergrad course given by Robin Blaser in the fall of 1974 at SFU. "I happened to hear [Spicer's] voice when I was going to a series of lectures that Robin Blaser was giving on Yeats and Joyce, but mainly Yeats. And I heard it while I was sitting there so I started writing. I guess everyone thought I was just taking notes from the lecture. (Miki 46)



A Short Sad Book (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1977).
Cover drawing by Greg Curnoe depicting former premier of BC,
WAC Bennett, laughing while reading *A Short Sad Book*.



Particular Accidents: Selected Poems. Edited by Robin Blaser (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980). The cover image is a detail from a drawing by Jack Chambers, "Grass Box No. 2." Blaser's introductory essay is titled "George Bowering's Plain Song."



George and books; his office at SFU, 1979. Photo used for dust jacket of *Burning Water*.

Lary Timewell / northpaw

"How is one to describe all this?"
—Gertrude Stein in lecture

the more apocryphal the truer I say
ones called Red & Pat & Al seeing

the fiction that it takes a lot of
to separate fact from

the hung-up preposition of start anywhere
again & from where you are & continue

no biblical thumping but in revelation
no ideas but in thanks

•

George. I like his
mugging on camera his
guffaw in public, catcall
from second base no guff
in conversation his
doing as we all have
never &
never done
with it

always resurfacing like a young Peggy in
old b&w Brownie shots a t-shirted man wearing his

heart where his smiling sleeves would have been
ballcap or not, jaunty wide

open to funny papers weekly in
no guns Okanagan

Frank, Stan, Brian, Peggy, Al
& sometimes why

a North Shore bubble called Black
Mountain I see from where I live now

saw from where I lived then & the words
are *it's funnier when it's also true*

look! a large tautology in the middle of
everyone's Dick & Jane Reader road

you'll need more than a short sad book to
get around it, you'll need a post-ancient poem

the question is & the questions are
to ex-Hume or let sleeping dogs lie

or lay down a pun with the worst of them
if not then when will the pen ever prove

meatier than the shard. *Tish are jumpin'*
& the cottonwood's high. Poetry isn't

freedom, I'll grant you that *gratuit*. A poet's
biblical knowledge of trees may be dismissive

of the diaries of Gerry G., but I will forever
disagree. So, I called Jamie R. just to see

if he had a copy of *At War*. Carol was tending
the garden & coddling Molly. Is Jamie handy?

Well, he's not handyman handy but he's
here. Well, hand him over, Carol dear.

•

Consciousness has no seigneurial tithes, no

King George stamps. Just ask Malcolm Lowry,

Al Neil's neighbour in Dollarton, Cuernavaca,
halfway to Deep Cove's (S)HELL torches,

just a fast-pitch away, a *vita brevis* as long-
armed from left, from Peachland to present.

I dreamt of Flying Phil racing up Gaglardi Way
to teach Spicer at SFU, glove compartment full

of unpaid speeding tickets, Laurier LaPierre
in hot bilingual pursuit. I dreamt of James

Fennimore Cooper coming through slaughtered
fauna to trade me his near-new Harmon Killebrew

for my frayed Carl Yastremski. I dreamt of
Gertrude Stein dreaming of Spinoza, "*all things*

are in God" except the Nippon Ham Fighters. George,
find him in the True Fiction section, find him tapping

cleats, taking the *swing away* sign from third,
stepping inside thinking outside the box, finding

feeling the sweet spot that hurts. I can hear
the thunk from my place in the bleachers.

That crack sounds wise.

George and Thea Bowering on Granville Island, 1970s.
Photo credit: Lynn Spink

Thea Bowering / The Daughter Library

As certain as these rows of books
carry me from house to house,

arrange me to their will. I
squat for an hour, eye level

to those books, saying I will
read this, or I will read this,

& this way never succeed
in reading my self…

—George Bowering, "The House"

1.

I got the call nearly eight years ago. My father had taken the first offer. My father had always moved faster than my mother and me: through books, museums, decisions. In two weeks he was emptying out the family home I had grown up in, the house he'd lived in for nearly thirty years with my mother, and I needed to get down there to help him box it up. I stared into the U of A grad-lounge phone receiver. My sleepy west coast roots had become real estate in the blink of a child's eye.

Ours was a turn-of-the-century rather grand corner-lot house that my parents had bought in 1973 for what you would now pay for a nice Honda. It was built by one of Vancouver's first lumber barons; the dark-patina wainscoting was as tall as your forearm and you could see the second-growth trees in it. It sat facing an even grander shingle-roofed Anglican church with real bells. For years I spent summers atop our squat granite gatepost watching the early procession of wedding-goers

followed by the afternoon of mourners. I critiqued their outfits, betted on their chances, and evaluated life success via coffin finishings. Occasionally my father would come see what I was doing. If it were a large wedding party out front, he would coach me to yell: "You'll be soo-rrreey!"

As a child, I had little investment in the procession of life. I was the house's lover. I lay on its warm hardwood foyer floor, both of us sun-worn to the colour of crème caramel. Dust particles glittered and held in the living-room light. Leaf shadows from the surrounding hundred year-old chestnut trees notated a sleepy irregular hymn over us. We did not live in time, in our house.

When I arrived home, my father told me he was allotting two days for the books. The books lined nearly every room of the house. Only the bathrooms, the dining room (lined with LPs), a solarium (lined with plants), and an eating nook off the kitchen had been spared. The books narrowed our long hallways and gothicized the already lofty rooms. Snug against ceilings and running the length of walls, they were as built in as the bookshelves themselves. A home library, I had learned, was not a collection of individual works to be idly titled out and leafed through—in fact, I never did this—books were fortress walls. They did not carry us from house to house. The idea of moving them seemed as ridiculous as dismantling the pyramids or the Parthenon. I grabbed onto a giant Faber and Faber, *T.S. Eliot—The Complete Poems and Plays*. It clung with familiar years to its neighbor. I yanked and Eliot's neat and tidy blue sleeve ripped a little. I felt like a schoolyard bully. Like a Prime Minister or Christian soldier at Alexandria, I would be both custodian and destroyer to decades of accumulated knowledge, turn history to rubble.

What was it like growing up surrounded by all those books? people sometimes ask. How do I know? I always want to answer. I had the opposite question in mind when I visited my friends' houses that were bookless but for an outdated atlas or dusty pun book on the back of a toilet. Booklessness frightened and depressed me. In an early poem, my father wrote, "marriage is a boat." When the seas are rough "we must hold / not one another /but our own positions." For me, rows of books made up the vessel that held our family: each member dreaming in her own room, her position, his fragment of a house.

This does not mean I was always reading. My father noticed a waning when I turned into a teenager. He pulled bricks from the house and laid them on my bursting bookcase of outgrown children's stories: first, Carson McCullars' *The*

Member of the Wedding; then, Hemingway's *The Nick Adams Stories*. They sat lifeless and more dangerous than a bathroom punbook. Pulled from the whole, these solitary paperbacks suggested I had been living, not inside a protective vessel, but amongst a crowd of silent strangers: thousands of discrete, dormant minds waiting to be reanimated in me. Titles blurred into focus, were too many—thick ones: *The Life of the Mind*, *The Odyssey*; ones in difficult shapes, that should be for children but weren't: comics by a bp; multi-coloured box-like flipbooks by a McFadden and Curnoe. I began to envy people who grew up in houses with a reasonable number of regular shaped books in them, who maybe even had to go searching for a book with which to forge their reading pathway.

For years I employed various subconscious strategies to escape Fate—aka, my parents' book empire. I tried not to wake the books. As a child, I walked around the house on tip-toe. This left me with premature arthritis in my toes. Then, I developed a ghoulish fascination with books that weren't books: ones that were secret compartments for old treasures, or swung around to reveal hidden stairwells on *Scoobie Doo*. I gravitated towards stories of dismemberment: Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Poe's *House of Usher*. I huddled in the tepid waters of our claw foot tub while my father sat cross-legged against a stark wall, reading me Helen Adam's long poem *Memory*—the story of a druid tree that convinces the family members living beneath it to kill one another, so it can drink their blood. I was thrilled.

My mother tried to teach me that books were like stars in the universe. There will always be more than you can see: that is the wonderful thing about them, she said. This did not comfort me. My father designed games to deal with the book universe: read twenty-six books by authors whose last names begin with, say, F; then, record them in a school scribbler whose pages are made up of twenty-six lines, one for every letter of the alphabet. When Dad was done, the unlikely Fielding would disappear off the kitchen table and become another brick in the ever-fortifying wall.

I had neither the awe of my mother nor the discipline of my father. My eyes ran across the spines that made up fifty years of my parents' reading life. Ibsen… Olson…Watson…Williams. I had two days. What parts of my parents' conjoined large and curious mind was I keeping? Certainly, I would lobotomize some essential part. I was not trying to salvage family history from a café menu or a farmhouse ledger. I had too much. I wish I could, like my father, narrow my focus. "A…Just A." Then leap off and go.

2.

Eight years later, thirty boxes of books arrive in Edmonton. The first thing I wonder is whether the books are going to kill me. My father has a habit of beginning a book by running his nose up the inside with a loud snoof. In the eighties, people discovered the government-approved insulation west-coasters had lined their attics with was responsible for mouse genocide. Cancer. A loose layer of plastic was taped over our built-ins and the insulation installers ripped out the cancer.

I open books that have not been opened for decades and feel a pang in the chest and find it hard to breathe. What spores have been crouching in the dark, dug-in atop the line: "[w]hen Tess had passed over the crest of the hill he turned to go his own way, and hardly knew that he loved her still?" What risks are we willing to take, what gamble for that Hardy? Physical books are difficult and moody. They cling to the past, do not lend themselves to being cleaned up, wiped fresh like family silver.

"You can't keep all of those," my partner says when he sees the boxes. "Where do you plan to put them all?" He's right, I know, though I'm tempted to mention the band t-shirts taking over the laundry room. Still, what I chose in a blind rush back then confounds me now. Despite my love of contemporary essays, few have made it, while all that's left of Ancient Greece has arrived intact, and three copies of *The Mirror and the Lamp*. My Mid-Master's-degree anxiety has left me with a collection of aging criticism, and books kept for their "One Day" appeal. I will likely never read *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, though I've paid to store it for nearly a decade.

There's also a box dedicated to everything ever said about Dostoyevsky. I pick out a seriously embossed volume: *F.M. Dostoyevsky* by V. Yermilov, MOSCOW. It falls open to a dedication:

> To my beloved Angela
> whom I belove
> 1/12/62
> —G

The letters are fully formed with a straight up-and-down schoolboy correctness. My father claims he drops a letter from his signature every few years. He must do

this with most words, as I barely recognize the legible handwriting. The book was given to my 22-year-old mother on my father's 27th birthday.

I reach back into the Russian box and this time grab The Possessed. Another inscription, and early evidence of a lifelong joke between G. and A.:

To A. Maia (!) Luoma (?)
for Nov/62
from
G. Harry (Ahghh!) Bow—

They shared a hatred of their middle names; and my mother had not given up her maiden one easily. Not only did my father have to court my mother with books she was studying at UBC, he also had to ask several times before she said yes.

My father tries harder. In *The Collected Fiction of Albert Camus* he writes:

This is for
Angela, for
making such
a nice lunch,
etc. . . .
Nov 5/62.

Had he already rifled through William Carlos Williams and come across the cold sweet plums?

Meanwhile, inside *Caligula*, my father rhymes:

Camus to Yus,
George.

Ok, I can understand my mother's cold feet, though she would go on to teach *L'Etranger* the rest of her teaching life.

At the bottom of the box is a little red Penguin Classic. *The Devils*:
MRS. Angela Bowering
For Feb/63.
—G.

Success! No wonder my parents' first dining table had been a wooden door, their first Christmas tree a coat hanger wrapped in green cellophane. It seems between 1962 and '63 whatever money there was, was spent on books.

Amongst my mother's Russian titles is my father's 1971 copy of Viktor Shklovsky's *Zoo or Letters Not About Love*. There is an * at the top of page 80, and below, these underlined words:

> Art, if it can be compared to a window at all,
> is only a sketched window.

In the margin my father has written: *intertextual*.

The books in my father's fragment of a house had taught me about this sketched window. "You are a poet." "That's my house." Words said by me, but not remembered by me—remembered instead by the poem. The daughter, learning to read, views herself through the etched eyes of the house, darkly. Often the window is bright with fatherly love, but I am still slightly terrified that turning the page will bore me back into the House of Books.

> "Life with her
> was always like this"

A broken line is a stick my father held out to teach me to walk, and then let go of, though I kept walking until I noticed his arm not with it, and dropped. How can opening a book be anything but a fall from Grace?

I pull the last book from the box. Inside *Dostoevsky: Twentieth Century Views* my father has written:

> To George (Mrs.) Bowering
> 2 wks prior
> to promulgation
> —from
> (Mr.)

On the facing page, beneath the promise to "present the best in contemporary critical opinion on major authors," my mother rushes in pencil:

> I TOOK THEA FOR
> A PEE, 2:30

I laugh. I came along some time in the decade between this faceoff, and am proof that Dostoevskian angst comes second to getting your kid to the toilet. I feel a sudden lifting of my particular anxiety of influence. The wall of great literature, and my own muse-like sense of responsibility to it, is made manageable by this familial special collection: books baring the marginalia of daily life and the early inscriptions of my father. These inscriptions, on books not written by him, are the unpublished, unpublic lines of young love. They are his early pen marks without death in them, without a separation from the world. In one sense they want to be married to it, and are marks that led to the making of me, the real me, in the world.

Edmonton, 2010

George and Thea Bowering on Granville Island, 1970s.
Photo credit: Lynn Spink

Stan Persky / Home Port

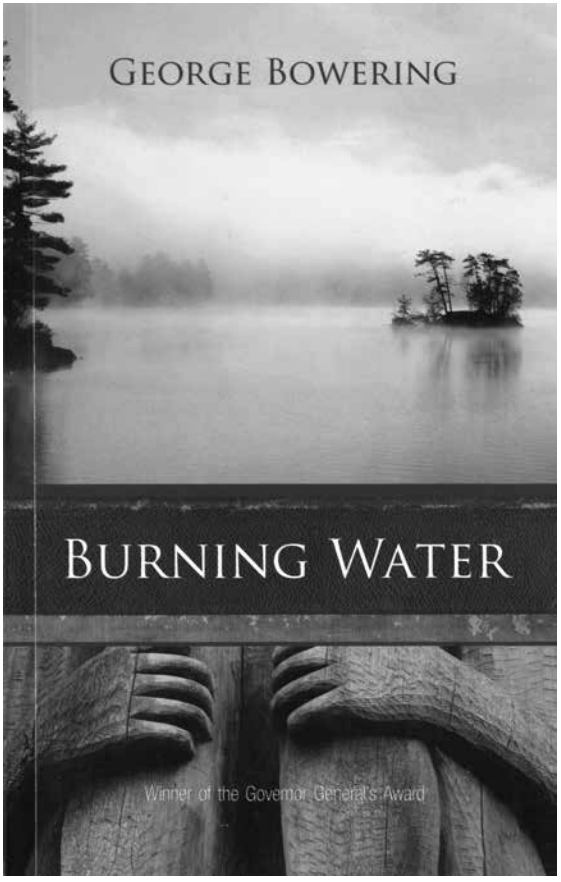
In the late 1970s, the western Canadian poet, novelist, and essayist George Bowering temporarily dropped anchor in the Italian port city of Trieste. Not only is Trieste "my favourite city in the world," as Bowering declares in a volume of autobiographical essays, *A Magpie Life* (2001), it's also a well-known literary harbour that has provided, at various times, writing space for James Joyce, Italo Svevo, and Claudio Magris as well as the occasional wandering Canadian scribbler. Once Bowering was ensconced in that old "Hapsburg spy city of white mountains, red roofs, and blue sea," he began writing an unusual book about the pre-history of his own distant home port, the city of Vancouver.

That book is *Burning Water*, a comic, historical novel first published in 1980 (and most recently re-issued in 2007). The title is borrowed from anthropologist Laurette Sejourne's 1960 book of that name about thought and religion in ancient Mexico. The title phrase derives from the Aztecs and corresponds, roughly speaking, to something like our notion of "imagination." In his book, Bowering imagines the adventures of his partial namesake, Captain George Vancouver, and the English seafarer's voyage in 1792 to the coasts and islands of what would become the Canadian province of British Columbia, including the inlet on whose shores a city bearing Vancouver's name would in due course be established.

Of Bowering's many books, *Burning Water* is one I'm especially attracted to because, among other things, its vision of Burrard Inlet in the 1790s is strikingly similar to my own recurrent fantasy about the city of Vancouver before it became a city.

At the vantage point of First Avenue and Larch Street, looking north down the slope, as I've often done (I lived in a house just a half-block below for several decades), there's a panoramic view of the inlet basin, along with the 400-hectare dark green patch of the trees of Stanley Park, jutting into the water at the end of the downtown peninsula. Looking across the inlet, I periodically gaze at the houses and ridges of the North Shore (blinking windows caught by the sun in West Vancouver), and behind them, the Coast Mountains. Beyond the mountains, more mountains, further and further north. In my vision of it, modern Vancouver disappears and is replaced by the earlier forested slopes, and maybe a native longhouse or fishing

camp down on nearby Kitsilano beach. When the late afternoon sun flashes on the inlet, the water looks like it is "burning."



Burning Water (Vancouver: New Star, 2007)

My recurrent imagined sight is motivated, as is Bowering's book, I think, by the recognition that the existential question, "Where are we?" has a particular urgency in our time. That is, there's a mundane and obvious sense of where we're located at any given moment, but in an era where so many places are designed as franchised replications of elsewhere, so that in the end we're often "nowhere," figuring out where we actually are demands an act of historical and creative imagination.

Bowering's historical concern has two biographical sources. Born in 1935, and raised and educated in the small towns and orchard country of British Columbia's South Okanagan Valley, Bowering became aware, at least retrospectively, that his schooling had offered only minimal attention to the past and present of the place where he was. The absence of the local (and even the nation) was a puzzle that would be subsequently recognized as a political effect of living in a place culturally subservient to several dominant empires.

Later, as a young writer, Bowering imbibed the lessons of the American poet Charles Olson, the author of *The Maximus Poems*. "Olson told us to dig exhaustively into our local concerns," Bowering recalls (again, in *A Magpie Life*). "We began to do so, and the geography, history, and economics of Vancouver became the grid of our poetry." *Burning Water* is one response to Olson's injunction that understanding where we are is inseparable from knowing who and what we are. Further, the investigation of where we are is not a parochial but a cosmopolitan enterprise; we locate ourselves in relation to the world.

Bowering's "swashbuckling" novel, as he's referred to it, begins, as it should, on the pristine wooded slopes of Burrard Inlet, where two native men are talking about "whatever it was, the vision [that] came out of the far fog and sailed right into the sunny weather of the inlet" on a mid-June day in 1792. Rather than reprising the whole, I only want to point to a couple of things that define the book right from the beginning. It is appropriate that the story begins with (and continues to be framed by) the perspective of the native inhabitants who watched Captain George Vancouver's tiny ships sail into these waters. It's here, at the outset, that Bowering makes his first crucial move. Bowering's natives are not the stereotypical aboriginals of Hollywood movies talking a Hollywood Indian patois. Instead, they're witty postmodernist 18th-century *philosophe* natives, and again, appropriately, they are arguing about the distinctions between fact and fancy, just as other contemporary *philosophes* might be doing in the salons of Paris.

The point is, we don't know what the aboriginals said to each other when Vancouver's ships appeared in Burrard Inlet, and we need a storyteller to imagine some sophisticated banter to launch the tale. At the end of the opening chapter, since this is a "reflexive" novel, as Bowering calls it (i.e., one that reveals its making alongside its telling), we are introduced to the author.

> In Trieste, it was raining most of the time, and he would bump other umbrellas with his own on his way down to the piazza, where he would look out at the fog that had drifted in across the northern end of the Adriatic. It was his idea, crazed in all likelihood, that if he was going to write a book about that other coast as it was two hundred years ago, he would be advised to move away in space too.

The "he" in that passage is Bowering himself, and the book he's thinking about is the one we're reading. The literary clowning around immediately marked *Burning Water* as a "postmodern" confection (perhaps Canada's first significant postmodern novel), and it's relevant to note that while Bowering was working in Trieste, his equally playful, older Italian contemporary, Italo Calvino, was down the coast, in Rome, having just published *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979).

The Bowering who's a third-person character in Bowering's novel about George Vancouver—a lonely writer in the dismal drizzle of a faraway city—is, in many ways, as present to me as the Bowering I've known in a casual friendship over some forty years. The Bowering I know is amiable, tall, craggy-faced, and frequently has a mustache. He's, to my mind, quite shy. The shyness accounts, I think, for his manner, which often features the telling of an intentional bad joke (thus making it ironic in its badness), followed by a hee-haw laugh. His friends roll their eyes, and say, "Oh, George," forgiving their gawky pal's foibles.

But behind the cracker-barrel façade, there's a consistently interesting writer, and a man possessed of considerable intellectual courage, in particular an insistence on fashioning his own literary tradition out of a sense of the "west" (in this case, western Canada), and an adherence to poets, such as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Jack Spicer, and Frank O'Hara, who have been important to his own work, rather than accepting an imposed or official heritage. The cheerily vulgate (not vulgar) manner finds expression in his writing in the rhetorical figure of *tapinosis*, "the saying of very serious things in offhand language, in vernacular, even in slang," as Bowering defines that term in *Errata* (1988).

Between the *philosophe* natives and the author in Trieste, which establishes the parameters of *Burning Water*, the rest is a wonderfully-drawn knockabout account of the 35-year-old Vancouver, who had sailed with the late Captain James Cook; his fellow voyagers, principally Archibald Menzies, the Scottish ship's botanist

who is Vancouver's *bete noire*; and the secret hero of the novel, Vancouver's older Peruvian-born Spanish counterpart, the elegant Juan Bodega y Quadra. The "plot" is an often-farcical send-up, but it retains just enough plausibility to entice the reader into wondering about "what really happened."

In the historical reconstruction, Bowering makes his characters "real" people rather than realistic figures, and he reminds us that Vancouver's ship, HMS *Discovery*, is ninety-nine feet and a few inches long, the length of two lifeboats on a modern-day BC Ferry heading to Vancouver Island. The facts of life on a tiny ship carrying a complement of 101 officers and men explain a lot about what follows. The narrative plays with the fuzzy border between myth and history, just as the appearance of Vancouver's ships ply the boundaries between fog and clear air.

At the conclusion of one of his later books, *Bowering's B.C.* (1996), an informal but accurate history of British Columbia, Bowering winkingly notes that not everyone was pleased by *Burning Water*. He cites the well-known Canadian archivist W. Kaye Lamb, who grumbles that Bowering's novel about George Vancouver takes "only scant account of historical facts and good taste . . . he has bespattered his pages with numerous errors of fact that are both pointless and needless . . . without a shred of supporting evidence . . . ." The worthy Lamb obviously didn't fully appreciate the *tapinosis*, or the relation between fact and fancy.

Burning Water, upon its original publication in 1980, was not only favourably "noticed," as they say in the book business, but won the Canadian Governor General's literary award for fiction that year (Bowering had won the GG for poetry in 1969). Bowering soon followed *Burning Water* with two further novels about the "west," *Caprice* and *Shoot!*, and together, the three books can be read as a trilogy.

The reason *Burning Water* has remained in print—beyond the fact that it's a very good novel and fun to read—lies in our understanding of (or insistence on) its place in Canadian writing. For a variety of cultural reasons, the estimation of what books are important in Canadian literary history is underdeveloped. Normal features of other national literatures, such as a rough "canon" and a critical account of modes of writing (such as "realism," "modernism," "postmodernism," and the rest) are, at best, only fitfully delineated in Canada. On this still rough literary frontier, there are few available ways to stake a claim for a book's abiding importance, other than the raw declarative: consider the claim staked.

Meredith Quartermain / On First Looking into *Burning Water*

Burning Water, when I first read it in the early '80s, amazed me with its wit and imagination. That you could weave out of historical fact a story that was both true and fantastically not true at the same time, a swashbuckling tall tale where facts jousted with the heady aura of story-making, a story that discussed fact and fiction making themselves, was full of news for a beginning writer. That this could happen in Canadian fiction was especially exciting. Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies maintained a sort of droll irony in their narrations, but Bowering took the ironic to a whole new level, trumpeting from the roof tops the tallness of his tale, and blatantly interrupting any sense of movie-style realist illusion with asides on his own voyage of discovery as the author of the very text I was reading. And to top it off, here was a book about my very own landscape, a book surrounding me with the lived reality of the men whose names marked my city streets and the channels, islands, harbours, and headlands of my section of North America's coast. Nothing like it had been written in Canadian letters and its Governor General's award was well deserved.

Of course some people didn't share my and the Governor General's enthusiasm. In a 1981 *Globe and Mail* review entitled "Perplexing Pattern in Canada's World of Literary Awards," William French questioned the Governor General's choice, since he found *Burning Water* "a far-fetched recreation of Captain George Vancouver's explorations of the west coast" which he had "yet to see…enthusiastically reviewed," a fact he found totally understandable. In a 1980 *Books in Canada* review, entitled "A bum rap for poor George Vancouver," Chris Scott wrote,

> This is a truly ugly book, ugly in spirit as in appearance (computypeset, in a golden and brown wrapper like a chocolate bar, a blotchy imprint giving off a foul chemical odour), a book possessing no authentic voice, no authentic sense of time or place, a book adrift in the author's fancy (yes, he uses that word), wallowing in post-colonial guilt. "Without a storyteller, George Vancouver is just another dead sailor," avers George Bowering in

> his prologue to *Burning Water*. With that dead sailor, George Bowering is just another deadbeat academic scribbler. (n.p.)

Some readers continue stubbornly in their literalism even when the text clearly signals that literalism is an inappropriate reading style. Scott goes to great lengths, for instance, to excoriate the dialogue in *Burning Water* as ridiculously anachronistic, as if its jarring plays weren't the whole point of the narrative. He was particularly upset by the book's ironic jokes, as though Bowering had offended some absolute duty of a fiction writer to be earnest and serious especially where History with a capital H is concerned, always assuming that there is only one History (the white male settler version). But this of course is precisely what Bowering calls into question.

Scott's outrage about the book's lack of the Authentic was echoed by that of W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion archivist emeritus and past president of the Royal Society of Canada, who called *Burning Water* a "fictional biography" filled with "pointless and needless errors," that takes "scant account of historical facts and good taste" (one guesses he was upset about the gay love affair between George Vancouver and Juan Francisco Quadra) (Quartermain 87). It is curious how something that unabashedly calls itself fiction is nevertheless expected by many to display the qualities of non-fiction, and even curiouser how these "non-fictions" that we cling to are pretty much imagined inventions. Abstract ideas, which, like the Northwest Passage, are quite illusory.

In a *Canadian Literature* review, "Fast-Forward Man," Janet Giltrow found the precise grammatical term—"pronominal confusion"—to describe Bowering's conflation of the three Georges: George Bowering, George Vancouver, and King George III in the word "He." Whenever a chapter or paragraph begins with "He," the reader is not certain which of the three the narrative will focus on. "When the antecedent…turns out to be Bowering rather than Vancouver, the reader is disappointed…and the delays in advancing the story are exasperating," Giltrow complains. "Voyage narrative," she asserts, "is documentary and compellingly linear." "The structural commotion of flashbacks and fast-forward leaps," she argues, makes "the narrative spasmodic just where the logic of travel demands that the story be advanced."

In the view of such readers, History and Voyage Narrative are fixed and stable entities for all time. Yet what are such entities but figments of our imagination (the

very central issue of the novel itself)? What if the voyage you are documenting is the taking apart of cultural narratives that privilege such supposedly stable entities? It is interesting how it is instability that offends these readers the most: instability of pronoun reference, instability of linearity, instability of time in anachronistic dialogue, instability of "historical fact." All of which are precisely what *Burning Water* most crucially and interestingly sets out to investigate:

> So we Georges all felt the same sun, yes. We all live in the same world's sea. We cannot tell a story that leaves us outside, and when I say we, I include you. But in order to include you, I feel that I cannot spend these pages saying *I* to a second person. Therefore let us say *he*, and stand together looking at them. We are making a story, after all, as we always have been, standing and speaking together to make up a history, a real historical fiction. (*Burning Water* prologue)

Reading *Burning Water* again in 2014, I still find it full of news. The whole notion of stretching the narrative *I* into a roomy polysemic locus I find exhilarating. In one fell swoop, Bowering reinvented Authentic Voice. Writers like Gail Scott (*Heroine*; *Obituary*) and Larissa Lai (*Salt Fish Girl*) have extended the notion of multi-voiced narrative into a fully postmodern intersubjectivity.

I found it intriguing to notice how factually accurate Bowering's account is. It follows pretty closely George Vancouver's four-volume record *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World 1791-1795*. Vancouver did indeed dine with Quadra, a lavish host, almost every night, and he did name Vancouver Island "Quadra and Vancouver's Island." Details like the overuse of ammunition in the ceremonial salutes are recorded in Vancouver's journal, as is a clash with First Nations' defender canoes led by older women, as is his fight with Menzies who refused to surrender his journal.

What haunts me after this second reading, too, is the way the novel gets at the loneliness of a captain like Vancouver, who, while mourning the father he'd lost with Cook's murder, had few opportunities on his four-year odyssey for guidance from anyone who might take Cook's place, and who must, nevertheless, as imperial representative, impose his facts not only on the more than 100 men under his command but on a terrain impossible to imagine in terms of the rolling hills, copses, and hedgerows of his flat English countryside. Vancouver was a driven man, driven to transform the zigzagging coast and its hundreds of islands into a

map of depth-soundings so accurate that 200 years later mariners still rely on it. It almost cost him his sanity, and did cost him his life. His health destroyed, he died at the age of 40, three years after his ships limped back to England. The truth of this tall tale lies in the emotional fact of this loneliness.

As well, the novel uses tall-tale humour to deflate settler smugness, so blind to the atrocities committed during European colonization, many of which continue today. *Burning Water*'s characters depict a range of attitudes to unknown First Nations' cultures, from Menzies' scientific curiosity about language to Puget's hostility, pig-headedness, and ignorance to Vancouver's diplomacy. A chorus of First Nations' characters commenting on the antics of the Europeans reveals how ridiculous colonists and their attitudes look from a position outside the "reality" they take for granted. The search for "Indians," Bowering wittily reminds us, was just as misguided as the search for the Northwest Passage.

On the other hand, the representation of First Nations characters leaves me uncomfortable where the novel skates very close to simply repeating damaging stereotypes. The problem has been clearly articulated by Tsimshian/Haida critic Marcia Crosby:

> The stereotypical Indian woman in Bowering's *Burning Water* has "greasy" hair and a "hot brown stare"; she lives in a building that the white male character is happy to leave "to escape that odour"; she is "savage" and "smells like a dolphin" and "work[s] for fun as she slop[s] up and down on his roger," while he sits, "settle[d] back on a rock." The reader who is informed about postmodernism might greet such passages with comfortable recognition and knowing approval of what might be described as a critique of the "master narrative." For the uninformed reader who does not understand the theoretical intention behind Bowering's work, there is the comforting recognition of the drunken, dirty, promiscuous, yet "natural" Indian. For the First Nations reader, there is the uncomfortable recognition of the dominant culture once again engaged in a conversation with itself, using First Nations people to measure itself, to define who it is or is not. (281)

Bowering's attempt to acknowledge historical atrocity and continued unequal power relations indeed participates in a conversation about the dominant culture. He does not paint a pretty picture, and he leaves me wondering how aware he was of how this depiction of a First Nations woman might strike First Nations women

readers. On the other hand, it may be well nigh impossible for Euro-Canadian settlers and their descendants to critically represent or parody such power relations without being agents of the dominant culture having a conversation about itself. It is an ongoing conversation which the dominant culture needs to continue thoughtfully and respectfully through the active participation of as many voices as possible.

The effect of love in human relations is one of the big issues that *Burning Water* admirably addresses—the possibility of love between men (in groups or as individuals), for instance, with Menzies' openness and curiosity as opposed to Puget's preference for conquering and suppressing savages. The novel shows how very different are the "knowledge" and "facts" produced by these different attitudes, a thread that is echoed in the contrast between Quadra and Vancouver's love affair and the sodomy of a First Nations' man committed by one of Puget's crew. In a culture that reviles sodomy and forbids love between men, only violence and bestiality appear. Moreover, love (between men or between men and women) takes very different forms depending on the cultural attitudes and power relations of the parties involved.

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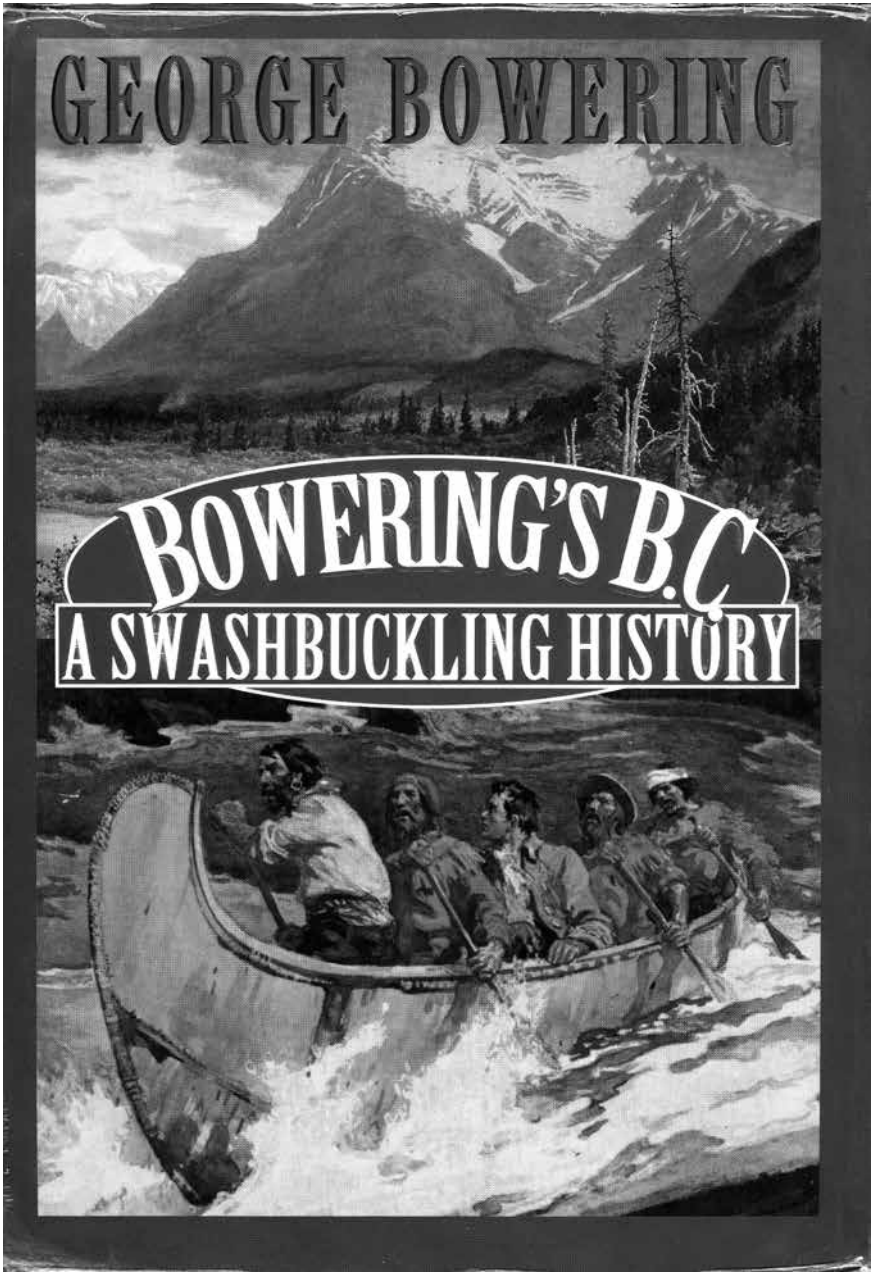

Bowering's B.C. (Toronto: Viking, 1996; Penguin, 1997)

"In *Bowering's B.C.*, Bowering's tale is anything but conventional…[He] has produced a riveting retelling of events with all the racism, hypocrisies, lunatics, and charlatans left in." (*MacLean's*)

Jessica Langston / George Bowering's British Columbia, Postmodern and Post-colonial

In her article "Circling the Downspout of Empire," Linda Hutcheon distinguishes postmodernism from post-colonialism by the criterion of postmodernism's relative political ambivalence (72). Diana Brydon pushes Hutcheon's distinction further, arguing that, due to this ambivalence, a postmodernist text takes on the "personality" of its author and that it "seem[s] to suggest that action is futile," as compared to a text inflected by post-colonialism which, through "foreground[ing] the political," seems to offer the reader some kind of agency (95). Critics continue to debate this question of the nature of the relation between postmodernism and post-colonialism. If the two can in no way be equated, neither is it clear that they are mutually exclusive; in fact, post-colonial texts often employ postmodernist strategies to make their point. Moreover, many authors such as Fred Wah and Roy Miki, have often been described as both. That said, there are key differences between these two approaches. Where postmodernism has been broadly associated with an interrogation of grand meta-narratives and a network of self-referential and ironic formal characteristics that privilege *jouissance* or the irreducible playfulness that we have come to know as textuality, post-colonialism has emphasized the question of the power relations and the ethical dimension of identity formations that constitute the legacy of imperialism.

This article takes as its focus two of George Bowering's British Columbia books—*Burning Water* (1980) and *Bowering's B.C.: A Swashbuckling History* (1996). Separated by almost two decades, *Burning Water* and *B.C.* represent a shift in Bowering's approach to history. In *Burning Water*, Bowering adopts a radical deconstructive approach to narrative, ultimately creating a retelling of history that is discontinuous and elusive—a critique of not just official, capital-H History, but of the entire concept of historiography generally. What Bowering's magical-realist novel argues is that the past is entirely unknowable. Not so in *B.C.* For one thing, this more recent narration of the history of Bowering's province is not historical fiction, but, rather, a traditional, if playful, History book. Here Bowering tells the story of BC in a chronological fashion rooted in recognizable tropes of History,

such as causation and even progress. If *Burning Water* represents the past as unrepresentable, then *B.C.* attempts to recreate it as a lived and material reality.

The distinction between the two books nicely demonstrates the distinction made above between postmodernism and post-colonialism. Bowering's earlier text speaks to the futility of any attempt at accessing the past (and hence the impossibility of any action in the present), whereas his later return to BC's history suggests the importance and possibility of historical knowledge, which ultimately suggests the potential of political agency in the face of such knowledge. This difference in approaches is particularly significant when considering how it impacts Bowering's representation of BC's First Nations population. Bowering's distinct textual modalities in *Burning Water* and *B.C.* create distinct possibilities for the writing of Canada's First Peoples.

In *Burning Water*, Bowering uses of a number of postmodern ideas and strategies: the confusion of past and present, subject and object; the rejection of closed historical or narrative meaning; and the disruption of the historical document's authority or truth value in favour of a leveling of fact and fiction, of history and story through the recognition of the discursive nature of historiography. While this approach certainly inspires a questioning of nationalist historical narratives, it also potentially precludes any rethinking of colonial relations, since in *Burning Water* Bowering is primarily interested in playing with historical truth-claims rather than offering any potential for an alternative. Given his choice of subject matter, one might question Bowering's take on imperial politics and the violence and exploitation at the root of Canada's "discovery." It is not that Bowering ignores these issues, but, rather, that because the novel's focus is the instability of narrative and the impossibility of ever representing truth, things like Peter Puget's shooting a Nootka in the face or the sodomizing of this Nootka by a marine (two obvious metaphors for first contact) are equally destabilized. If this is just a version and no version is ever true, then with how much gravity will or can the reader treat these moments of damage in Canada's national history?

On several occasions Bowering imagines conversations between his "Indian" characters. These First Nations are not individuals; instead they are referred to as "first Indian," "second Indian," etc. Although Bowering is undoubtedly trying to mimic the perception of the explorers, poking fun at their Eurocentric worldview, the First Nations characters in this book remain tools, useful only in what they

reveal about the explorers and about Bowering himself. Furthermore, these "Indian" characters invariably speak in contemporary language, using Anglo-Canadian slang terms and speech patterns. For instance, the opening scene of the novel has two Indians watching the boats of Vancouver approaching their coastline. We are privy to their dialogue and to their inner thoughts about each other, and Bowering has them using words and phrases such as "lifeguard" and "[l]ittle prick" (16). Clearly by having these Indians speak and think in the modern, White idiom, Bowering is trying to signal the forced assimilation of these people that follows the invasion of these Europeans. The other argument Bowering is making is in line with Terry Goldie's in *Fear and Temptation*. Bowering, himself a White writer, is explicitly acknowledging the fact that White culture has and probably always will recreate the Aboriginal in its own image. There can never be a true representation of the Aboriginal, Bowering seems to be suggesting, so why try? This disavowal of not just history but materiality in general is part of Bowering's overarching disruptive treatment of imperial/colonial ideology, which, by signaling the impossibility of ever getting at the truth of the First Nations historical experience and contemporary existence, ends up muddying the post-colonial message implicit in both the Indians' language and in what they are saying.

While throughout *Burning Water* Bowering seems to be able to conjure his version of Vancouver through the records Vancouver has left behind, the Nootka are always already invisible. As we are told when Menzies, the ship's botanist, turns to gain a final glimpse of the Indians, "They were gone from his sight, and so why think about them more" (113). The observation that links this invisibility of the First Nations with the decision to not think about them could be read as Bowering's comment on the general treatment of these people throughout history. However, he does little himself to rectify this situation; there is no sustained attempt to demythologize the First Nations people through depicting them as individuals. Bowering, in fact, continually seems to suggest that it's a hopeless task both in his labeling of the Nootka peoples as simply "first Indian," "second Indian," etc. and in his allusion to the impossibility of these "Indians" accessing the Europeans—first Indian remarks that they can't know who these "Mamathni" are when they leave the Nootka's sight (199)—and, thus, the implicit impossibility of a White person ever accessing the truth about the First Nations.

Because Bowering has been so playfully meta-textual throughout the novel, readers end up in a double-bind. If we can only see Aboriginal people through the

lens of our own ideology, then the postmodern treatment of history and nation in the text acts as another instance of this. The First Nations characters in *Burning Water* are not representative of any material history; as Diana Brydon underlines about postmodernism generally, they are receptacles of Bowering's own voice and his European, post-structuralist-based perspective of history.

The erasure that Bowering's meta-fictive approach seems to perform on his "Indian" characters in *Burning Water* is counterbalanced by an approach that is grounded in materiality and presence in *B.C.* For one thing, Bowering never attempts to speak for the First Peoples in his more recent text.[1] This narrative decision is noticeable especially because Bowering does imagine the thoughts and conversations of the White explorers and settlers of the region. There is a post-colonialist's sensitivity in this careful avoidance of voice appropriation and assumption of knowledge. Moreover, unlike in *Burning Water*, which at times suggested a pan-Indianism approach, *B.C.* recognizes the myriad separate nations living in the province, both along the Coast and in the Interior: "Tlingits and Kootenays are as different as Vikings and Greeks" (9).

In *B.C.* Canada's First Peoples are far from silenced. Bowering ensures that their lived reality (or what we can know of it) is given a space within the overarching narrative of the province. For example, he provides details about the economic systems of various nations, such as the wealthier Coastal nations like the Salish and Haida versus the resource-poor peoples living in the Interior. Such information helps underscore the material impact of colonialism as the scramble for resources by White colonizers diminished the supply for First Peoples:

> In 1859 the Thompson fishermen took up their traditional posts and waited in vain for the salmon run.... White fishermen had stretched a net across the Fraser downstream. Commerce had come to the water. It would get worse every year.... The Native peoples of the Interior and the Coast were salmon people. The yearly salmon run was their life, literally, and the basis of their religion. Now in the nineteenth century...the whites were looking at the pink flesh...as a money-making proposition. (125)

Bowering is also careful to distinguish the cultural practices of the nations, noting that the potlatch ceremony was not largely practiced by nations living in the Interior

1 Aside from one brief instance, tellingly in the section of the book about George Vancouver (59).

of BC. Again, this type of concrete knowledge assists the reader's understanding of how Christianity and capitalism negatively affected the long-held traditions and beliefs of BC's First Peoples. The potlatch, for instance, was banned in the Indian Act of 1884 because "the Christians did not like the idea of people giving away the fruits of their labour or business sense. And the governments wanted some kind of governable order they could understand" (15).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Bowering does not represent BC's First Peoples population as extinct. While *Burning Water* seems to write the Native out of history through its meta-fictive strategies, in *B.C.* Bowering concludes with a discussion of previous and ongoing land claims as well as with a discussion of "En-owkin," the notion of consultation or exchange of views that is held in great regard by the Okanagan nation. In the book's last paragraph, Bowering refers back to the opening chapter where he introduced Native mythology and tradition in the form of the character of Coyote. Closing the book with a discussion of people in Vancouver who "were alarmed by the presence of coyotes" in their neighbourhoods and backyards, Bowering writes that when they asked what could be done about these animals, experts replied "[g]et used to them" (394). The coyote and the land and First Peoples—all here before the settlement of Canada by Europeans—were here first, and they are not going anywhere. In the end, Bowering's approach to Western Canada's history and to the representation of First Peoples in *B.C.* is post-colonial in its suggestion that certain colonizing practices can be known and can be judged unethical and that political action can be taken in the present in reaction to current and past injustices towards BC's first population.

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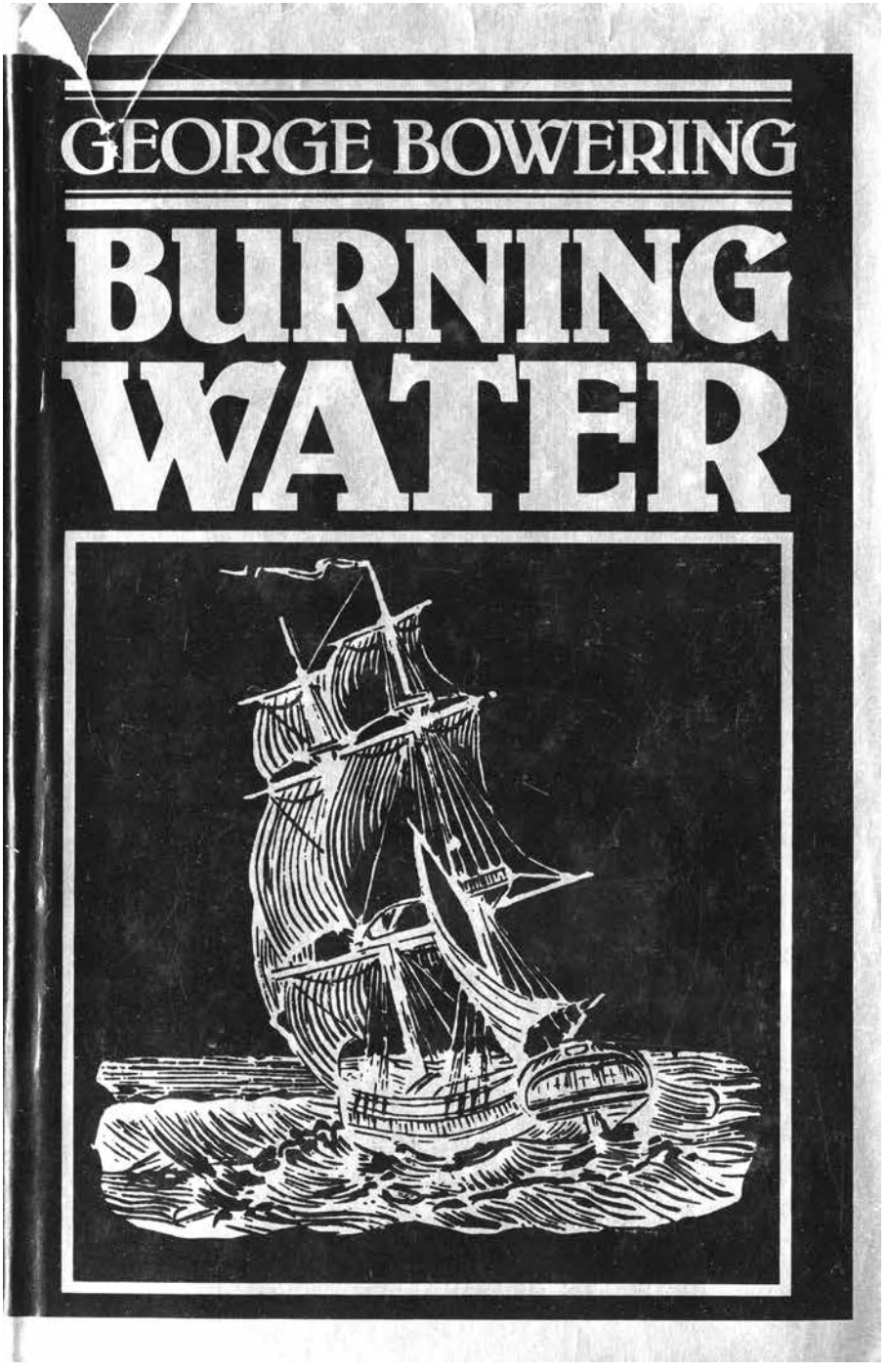

Burning Water (Don Mills: Musson, 1980). Black and gold dust jacket with title, author's name, and image of sailing ship in gold.

Jordan Abel / Burning Water (Indian, Indians)

for George Bowering

The two men were Indians, and they knew enough to blend in with the rocks and trees, for the time being at least.

"It is the first time in my life that I have seen a vision," said the first Indian.

"A vision?" said the second Indian.

The second Indian, who was about ten years older, a world-weary man with scars here and there, sighed. The second Indian looked over at his companion, who was now leaning back on a bare patch of striped granite, idly picking at his navel.

The first Indian looked from his companion to the contraptions and back again. He turned full around, and looked at the second Indian as suddenly as he could, fishing for a truth perhaps swimming in the shadow of a rock.

The first Indian looked with his very good eyes.

The second Indian squeezed tight on his shoulder.

They were standing in the dull light in front of the Indians' long houses.

While he was ensconced there, repairing his gear and doing a little fishing, he managed also to do quite a bit of talking with the Coastal Indians. It was one of the few pieces, perhaps the only piece, of Indian elephant in his village.

"It is my belief," said the first Indian to the third Indian, "that these persons may be gods and they may be men, but that in either case they came to us from the sun."

"That would explain why the canoes you saw were wearing wings," suggested the third Indian.

The third Indian's efforts to be creative were noted by his friend with approval. A lot of people think that Indians are just naturally patient, but that's not true. Before the white "settlers" arrived there were lots of impatient Indians. It's only in the last two hundred years that Indians have been looking patient whenever there were any white men around.

"I would be looking for Indians."

"And what if there were no Indians?"

Suppose you were from the sun, and you have come all the way and now you were in our harbour and you didn't see any Indians.

The third Indian thought about it for a while. The first Indian watched him thinking. He saw the third Indian's eyes light up as imagination hit home.

"Clams!" shouted the happy third Indian. But the third Indian was lost in thought. The first Indian was impatient with him, but he knew his friend's reputation for the overlooked possibility.

"I am thinking about it, and I am imagining that I am one of the people from the sun," said the third Indian sadly.

"I was born to see visions," replied the first Indian. "Instruct a poor Indian."

The third Indian shifted uncomfortably, despite all the people who think Indians are always fully comfortable in their natural environment.

"Until the Great Uprising of the People," put in the first Indian.

"And we will then become the Indians with nothing," said the first Indian, picturing their fate mainly in terms of his wife and children.

"There is an old Haida saying I have heard," said the third Indian, "that says history will repeat its unhappiest hours upon those who do not remember what happened the first time."

It reminded the first Indian of something.

"At last we were become so scare of ammunition to defend ourselves from the treacherous Indians," wrote Menzies, "that we were obliged to get supplies of Powder from both the Spaniards and Traders before we left the Coast.

On the shoulder where the bay met the Chimacum River, they found the settled and peaceful remains of an Indian village. He didn't like to be around the Indians.

"I have never eaten a person," said the first Indian.

"I am also innocent of eating any person," said the second Indian.

"It seems as if I did hear something once about our forefathers eating people long ago before the time of the Great Flood," offered the first Indian.

"You were fortunate perhaps to find one of their camps," said the first Indian.

"We will see you again soon," suggested the first Indian, betraying a little of that impatience the Red Man had before the coming of the Europeans.

"We will do our best to supply an answer," said the first Indian. Now they stopped, the signal that this was as far as the two Indians would be accompanied. The second Indian just plainly looked away into the forest, while the first Indian tested one of the steel blades against the bark of a fir trunk.

The first trouble with the Indians came while Peter Puget was surveying the complicated sound that would be named after him. One morning as they filled the boats and prepared to go ashore for firewood, they espied thirty quiet Indians along the edge of the land, bows in the hands they carried by their sides. Now he wanted to hear the Indians say it, or something equivalent.

When he did that the thirty Indians fitted their very long bows with very long arrows, and pointed them at the mariners. The Indians let the strings of their bows back gently, and accepted the worthless trash from the landing party that included a contingent of marines with muskets.

Worse was his derangement, as neither he nor the witnesses could swear to whether he was violating a wounded and dying Indian, or a corpse.

Plus this fact: the Indians were not all the same Indians.

But the shores here were so pleasant, and the Capilano Indians so gentle, that it was no disappointment, Burrard Inlet.

The first Indian's eyes opened wide.

The second Indian, understanding that the imprecation was an essential part of a ceremony having to do with assuring the Great Spirit that one was thankful for His care despite a disappointment this time, shouted louder than anyone thus far.

All the Capilanos, about fifty of them, stood up in their dugout canoes as only they could do and shouted in unison, so that their deep Indian voices resounded from a curved rockface a mile away:

"Aeh, shitt!"

The Indians sat back down in their canoes and laughed.

The Englishmen ate the Indian salmon, and the Capilanos drank the English rum, and everyone got happy and sleepy, and it was one of the best ever Friday nights enjoyed there.

This is something the Indians showed me.

So there were always Indians around, asking permission to try their hands at the European oars, belaying pins, sextants, and coffee cups. The Indians were always doing that to white men.

One of them said something loudly in Indian, and one held his arms in front of him and said, "Poo, poo!" They jostled and leaned backward and stepped up and down, and finally the first Indian felt himself pushed out in front of his fellows.

"*Aeh, shitt*!" hollered the Indians.

A day after the Indian shot Puget's map table to kindling, the two ships were sailing through a bit of a storm into another waterway a few miles north.

"I could think of a good use for a shovel right now," whispered the first Indian.

That is, he was seen by some of the white men and all of the Indians. These the Indians were supposed to look at.

"It is a relative question," said the first Indian.

Vancouver did not realize that he was twisting the strip of sea otter skin in his hands, though all the Indians had seen it. The second Indian nodded his head in the white man's fashion.

"Oh yes," said the second Indian. The first Indian remained impassive, the way Indians liked to do in front of white men, to suggest that they were patient.

"We have," said the second Indian.

"It is as many suns as we all have fingers on our hands," said the second Indian, looking about as if to count by fives. The first Indian waited till they had walked some distance from the group who were trying on the Irish linen.

Did you notice something odd about the *Mamathni*?" asked the first Indian the next day. The Indians plied canoes just about as long as the *Chatham* but they have never conceived the notion of placing chairs and tables and beds in them.

"Of course," replied the second Indian now.

All the while these words were being said, the first Indian was fidgeting, his fingers and toes moving out of sequence, and his mouth slightly open. The second Indian loved being middle-aged.

"What I would like to point out, if it has to be left to me," said the first Indian, "is that the *Mamathni* are all male."

The second Indian was really taken aback.

"How do they make more of themselves, then?" asked the first Indian, as they sat on the rocks looking toward the cove where the buttoned people had last been seen.

"Perhaps they fall from the sky with the rain, as frogs do," said the second Indian. The second Indian was a little bashful for some reason, but he continued. The first Indian was playing with the scissors that had been part of the deal for the dream of the large eastern sea.

There they met the East Indian fur trader *Venus*, that had come over the foam from Nootka, with a litter for George Vancouver. They told each other tales of the sea, and compared their disdains for French sailors, Chinese and Indian food, and Yankee traders. He was also proud, and as far as the whites were concerned, pride was a very important quality in the Indian.

He had trouble understanding what the English officers said, so it is no wonder that all he perceived was a sort of fat Indian saying something like, "*Euclatle muh Maquinna, kimscutla naw kimscutla, neah kyumkhwaltek Nootka skaw kimscutla koakoax*."

In the Americas the Indians would have begun to do that, but they were interrupted, so they said in their new language, Ah shit!

With the exception of Captain Vancouver, Mudge may have been the only man aboard the *Discovery* who did not have sex with the Tahitians and Indians. The Indian houses at Friendly Cove settled back into obscurity as part of the low land mass.

The Indians, unlike the fishermen and boat makers and house builders of the bracing north, were satisfied to sit around in the dirt with colourful though soiled cloth over their knees, and their hands out. The soldiers and sailors of the distant Spanish nation had made it all the way from the tropics to here, with the prime purpose of making Christians of the Indians. For hundreds of years the Spanish had been grabbing gold out of the Indians' hands, and giving them wooden crosses in return.

The Spanish gave the Indians wooden crosses.

He got as far south as he was going to go that winter—the National Museum of Costa Rica, which is all about Indians and Spaniards and the great question of religion—before Vancouver did, or before he allowed him to.

The two Indians were cleaning their fish and spreading them open on the racks leaning over the smoky fire. "Cutting fish open is not as much an interesting occupation as is waiting for the nets to fill," said the first Indian.

"Oh, there are worse jobs," said the second Indian. "I mean there are fewer and fewer pleasures for us older Indians, and one of them is the opportunity to poke fun at you young fellows."

The first Indian ran the point of his steel knife briskly along a silver belly and flipped the floater and the rest into the creek, all the while leering at his teacher. "But as I was saying," continued the first Indian, "they seemed to be men while they were here, but who knows that they were not sent by gods from another land?"

"What is this 'How'?" asked the first Indian of his companion.

"Search me," said the second Indian.

"No thanks," said the second Indian in his own language.

"I wouldn't mind having one of those mirrors," said the first Indian to the second Indian.

"Offer him a fish," said the second Indian.

He is the king of those Red Indians out there.

"How about some interestin' Indian trinkets?" said Magee, opening a box and extracting several leathern sacks depending from cords made of beaded hide. There are hardly any Indians, but the ones who plied boats about this coast a few hundred years ago had a language that depended a lot on dreams.

The Indians, without any address to the white men, started to pick things up, not even bothering to smile at the owners. The Indians dropped the stuff and let their canoes drift back a piece. The officers and men filled the air with smoke and sound, the Indians threw their spears, grabbed what they could, and scattered into the fading twilight.

When it was all over there were two wounded sailors, and eight dead Indians, some of them probably sons of the gang's leader. The last dying Indian was brought to him and dumped at his feet.

The civilian officers were interested to hear of Vancouver's work, and they were especially animated upon hearing of his recent run-in with the old Indian women and her gang. On conversing with these paddlers we heard them claim that they had proceeded eastward a month to barter with an Indian people completely alien to them.

But now he remembered that when the Indian pointed the barrel at his chest he could have moved, he could even have dived into the water. But in fact, the farther north they travelled the more intransigent did the Indian tribes become.

The unfriendly Indians were shouting and waving their weapons.

"In fact I think I liked him best of all the *Mamathni*," said the first Indian.

"A full man of the tribe," said the second Indian.

"I liked the man who drew images of the plants," said the second Indian.

"I thought you were an artist," said the second Indian.

Note

"Burning Water (Indian, Indians)" was composed entirely from sentences in George Bowering's novel *Burning Water* that contained either the word "Indian" or the word "Indians." I was interested in exploring this text sentence by sentence. What surrounded the word "Indian"? What surrounded the word "Indians?" What happened when these sentences were placed side by side? What narrative sifted through? What did that narrative say about Indigenous peoples? What did this study in context say about George Bowering's writing? What did it say about me?

Miriam Nichols / George Bowering and the New American Poetry: A Conversation

The excerpts below come from an April 16, 2014 interview with George Bowering that I conducted for my current project, a biography of Robin Blaser. I wanted to get a sense of how Bowering perceived the New American poetry as it developed in the 1950s and '60s and how he positioned Blaser among the diverse energies of that generation of writers. These brief excerpts seem relevant to Bowering's poetic practice as well as to Blaser's.

Miriam Nichols: Was it in Warren [Tallman's] class that you were first introduced to the New American poetry?

George Bowering: For some people it was. For other people—see, before the *New American Poetry* anthology came out there were plenty of books that we were getting somehow. In those days you could get books. So around 1957, there were lots and lots of interesting books coming out by people like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and Michael McClure. There was all kinds of stuff, but when the *New American Poetry* anthology came out in 1960, it wasn't a sudden nova. It was, Oh! here's all these guys that we like gathered in one volume.

MN: What about Charles Olson? Did you meet Olson in print before the anthology came out?

GB: Oh yeah. But it was close to when one got to read all these people. For instance, people were reading *Origin* magazine.

MN: So *Origin* made its way to UBC. Was that courtesy of the Tallmans?

GB: I don't know. I was keeping track for myself. It was different for different people. I was keeping track of things going on in the States and what publishers there were. I remember when Charles Watts was doing stuff for the SFU library, I was incredibly impressed by the range of knowledge he had about where things were being published. But that's the sort of thing I aspired to. So I was ordering

books from American bookstores—one in Ohio and another one in California and one in New York. And in those days, it didn't cost that much to mail those things.

MN: Don Allen did an anthology before the *New American Poetry*. It was the San Francisco issue of *Evergreen Review*?

GB: Yeah, No. 2, which I still have a copy of, of course.

MN: You got *Measure* as well from John Wieners?

GB: Yeah, I got *Measure* and the one that LeRoi Jones did…*Yugen*.

MN: And Diane DiPrima did *The Floating Bear*.

GB: Yeah. That's who *TISH* got our mailing list from. We wrote away to them, and then years later the guys at the Artists' Workshop in Detroit—I used to go down there all the time when I was in London, Ontario—John Sinclair and all those guys, wrote us and asked us for our mailing list. So things get played around, right?

MN: So—you were in Warren's class at UBC?

GB: No, I sat in, maybe three times, maybe four. Fred Wah was in the class, I'm pretty sure. Everybody else was in his class. I don't know why I wasn't. I think it may have been because I had a whole pile of courses. You see I did my BA in History, so I had a whole pile of English courses to make up and they would be in certain areas and I had done a lot of English courses before that but they hadn't been in [the required] areas. So I was never officially in his class, just as I was never officially in Earle Birney's writing class, but I attended.

MN: Were you there in '63 for the Vancouver Poetry Conference?

GB: Oh yeah. The only one of us that wasn't there was—well, Frank Davey now claims that he was there for a couple of meetings but he had to work. Everyone thought, oh Frank isn't here, I wonder why that is.

MN: I think you also made a trip to San Francisco in '62, did you not?

GB: Yeah, that's where I first met people like Stan Persky and so on. That's where I went over to Robin's place and the guy he was living with, Jim Felts. They had a great seafood dinner. In those days I didn't eat any seafood at all, but I didn't tell

them. I just sat down and ate everything I got. On the same trip, Robert Duncan showed me how to eat an artichoke. That was really a food summer, because there was a place in North Beach—it was kind of a bakery but it was also kind of a deli and you could go and get one of those little loaves of bread, like a really small, European loaf of bread and fill it up with slices of luncheon meat and that would be your food for the whole day—because I was not well off. I had a Canadian $20 bill in my wallet and I'd go to a movie and say this is all I've got and they'd say oh, go in.

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MN: I've been curious for quite a long time about who, at that time when you were starting out as a writer, you favoured of the New Americans. Was it Allen Ginsberg or Duncan or Olson or…?

GB: It would change a little I think. You see it was pretty well San Francisco oriented for most of us, for our crowd, because of Ellen and the people coming up from San Francisco. Olson was obviously a big deal. For Gladys it was Jack Kerouac. And I think for Daphne—Daphne's big river poem is so Olson, you know. It was before she aimed her attention toward women writers. But her approach there was so Olson, especially the thing about the body, proprioception and all that stuff. Standing on logs and mixing that sense of the personal body in that context with that whole mapping thing that everybody was crazy about in those days. Everybody was putting it on the covers of their magazines.

MN: What about *Autobiology*?

GB: Nah, that's Gertrude Stein. I remember Duncan doing Stein imitations and so we all—well not all—imitated Stein. After I wrote that book then a couple of other people wrote books that were influenced by it.

MN: But the whole idea of "autobiology" is quite Olsonian isn't it?

GB: Did I make up the term, biotext? Did I use it to talk about Fred's poetry at one point? I was trying to remember that the other day. Somebody told me it was, but I can't remember. I was big on Kerouac myself, because I was a prose writer, and certainly I think Creeley, a really big deal. Okay, it's obviously going to be Creeley and Duncan. It became Spicer later. But Creeley, Duncan, and Olson. And then each of us would go for the next group of people. Jamie Reid was interested in

19th-century French poetry. And he was a little bit Gregory Corso-ish. And another thing I was reading a lot of was 20th-century French fiction and a lot of that was being published by Evergreen in translation. I wasn't reading it in French.

MN: This is not fiction, but did you read Antonin Artaud?

GB: Yeah, for sure, and Henri Michaux. I had a picture of Artaud on my long, long wall in Montreal. He was so beautiful. He was incredibly hideously ugly when he was old, but when he was a young actor he was unbelievably beautiful. So you haven't mentioned many women's names outside of Gertrude Stein. I got onto H.D. young. It was a fluke for me. I got onto H.D. in high school.

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MN: I was trying to work around through this material to Robin, because my feeling is that you got to know Robin a little bit *after* the early '60s.

GB: I met him then and talked to him a little bit, but the thing that you might not know is that for a while I was going to be the publisher of *The Moth Poem*. I was corresponding with Stan. Then I realized, no, the way I can produce magazines and books, they look ugly.

MN: This was connected with *TISH* production?

GB: No, no, this was my magazine, *Imago*, and the little things I did along with it. This would be in 1963 or '64. I think I started it in the fall of '63 or spring of '64. I moved to Calgary, it may have been '64, and Stan—there was correspondence going on that had to do, some of it, with White Rabbit and some of it with *Open Space*. It was around that time and I was going to do it. There was a lot of Blaser stuff and it wasn't getting published. I guess Stan had sent me *The Moth Poem* and I wanted to do it.

MN: So that was the first poem of his you'd seen?

GB: No, because there was the Boston stuff[1] in the *New American Poetry*. And there must have been a few things here and there. But *The Moth Poem* just struck

1 "The Boston stuff" in *The New American Poetry*: "Poem by the Charles River," "A 4 Part Geometry Lesson," "Herons," and two pieces titled "Poem" (138-41). These pieces were written during Blaser's four-year stay in Boston where he worked as a librarian at the Widener Library, Harvard.

me. I started the magazine for long poems and here was this perfect thing. But then I thought no, it just won't look good enough. I was always embarrassed about that and sad and so forth, but I just couldn't do it.

MN: Well, you know Open Space [as chapbook publishers] brought it out.

GB: Yes, and it looks really nice.

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MN: This is a poetics question. Where would you position Robin among his peers? Spicer and Duncan and Olson. What I'm trying to get at is the difference, right? So for you, as a writer—you read all kinds of other people's work and you took this and that, liked this and didn't like that. What's the Blaser difference?

GB: I'm sure that, and you probably are too, that Duncan and Spicer thought of him as the younger, more lightweight.

MN: Yeah.

GB: I grew up reading, first of all, Duncan a lot and then Spicer—I was suspicious of Spicer. I was suspicious of that prose line, I was suspicious of the surrealism. I reviewed one of his books and suggested my suspicion even in that and it took me a long time to get around—I think maybe his lectures got me turned around a little bit. But I'd been turned around before by Ginsberg. Earlier I'd said, with the Pound line, that the romantics were slushy. At the '63 Poetry Conference Ginsberg recited *Adonais* by heart somewhere outside. And I thought, "holy shit." Then he also did *Mont Blanc*, probably the most difficult and best poem of all time. And I was just, "Oh my God! I think maybe Ezra Pound was a cranky old guy." So I started reading and became a Shelley guy.

Now Blaser, I never needed to get turned around on Blaser. You didn't see as much Blaser stuff. You didn't see the books. That was true of Jack as well. It took a long time to get the books out. Every book of Blaser's was really good. So as the years went by, I began to think, well, maybe Duncan wasn't the centre of that whole thing. Maybe he wasn't the most important, learned—maybe you can see certain things he didn't know that you know and so forth.

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MN: Are there things that you found useful in Robin's work [for your own writing]? Is there any one of his poems or serials that has been of particular importance to you?

GB: Well, every once in a while when I needed to unclog myself, I would sit down and read his poems out loud and they are so *there*. Putting an ice cube on your forehead when you have a headache and are all stressed out is not unimportant. He's a great poet and I was responsible for him getting the Griffin Award. I was really proud of that. And I was there that night to see him accept it. As to poems that were important to me: those early sequences, "Cups" and "The Moth Poem," in the '60s. "Cups" was eventually published in Don Allen's wonderful *Writing* series, but it took us a whole decade to get that little fish in our hands. These poems are so damned lovely in their exact music, exact within the context of free—isn't that a wonderful thing? It is such a privilege to read those poems aloud, to feel and hear the lines in their precise music.

MN: Robin edited your selected poems for Talonbooks in 1980: *Particular Accidents*. You and he must have worked together pretty closely on that?

GB: Yeah. But see I've always been partly shy to go over to somebody's place and also partly oh, I don't want to disturb—he's got enough people disturbing him. So I didn't go over nearly as often as I could have, while all these other young punks were over there all the time. So I was really touched and pleased by what he did.

MN: Well, he brings you into an idea of form that is processive as opposed to fixed and I think that was an important statement.

GB: He was also aware of all that nonsense and horseshit going on that was opposing what I was doing, so he wanted to clear that away. I was really pleased.

MN: What about the process of selecting the poems for *Particular Accidents*? Did you and Blaser collaborate on that?

GB: I think that the choice and order was all Robin's, and once in a while he might ask me something, but in all such cases I have preferred to see what the other person does.

MN: In his introductory essay, Blaser remarks on your "extraordinary sense of language"—the "authentic" versus the "conventions"—and he cites a comment of

yours he dates from 1976, "'The language is burning'" (11). Do you recall what you might have meant by that comment? Has your sense of language in poetry shifted?

GB: Here's how I currently interpret my remark of way back when: that language is closer to energy than it is to matter, or put better, if it resembles any of the four elements, it is fire.

MN: What about the context Blaser sets up for your work in his introduction to *Particular Accidents*? I'm thinking of the division in the genealogy of Canadian writing that literary critics used to make at mid-20th century, between an art that responds to literary convention and another than responds to lived circumstance (18-19). Blaser situates you with the latter, citing Frank Davey on the *TISH* poets as closer to "'the 'universist' line of Lampman, Carman, W.W.E. Ross, Klein, Souster, Layton, and Purdy rather than to the humanist and rationalist one of Goldsmith, Sangster, Pratt, Smith, F.R. Scott, Finch, LePan, Reaney, Mandel and Gustafson'" (19). What do you think of these divisions now that the line-up of poets has changed so much. How does "then" look in the light of "now"?

GB: I think we were right then, but now is not then. And one thing some of the few remaining critics have pointed out about my writing is that so much of it takes its first foothold in previous writing, that I revise, imitate, contradict, embrace, renew earlier writing by people such as Shelley, Keats, Williams. I don't want to be traditional; I want to be in the tradition.

MN: What about current literary communities? Are there new writers you find particularly engaging? Who are you reading now?

GB: For me, "new" writers can be 55 years old. Erín Moure is my great hope. She followed my *Curious* with her *Furious*, and has kept getting better and better while losing her early lyric audience. Hooray for her! Lisa Robertson was my student and now I am hers, in another way. But this question is often asked of writers, and it is uncomfortable, because you will forget to mention someone. I do correspond with a lot of writers who are in their thirties and early forties, and have collaborated with two of them, Ryan Knighton and Charles Demers. Soon I will be sucking up to the twenties crowd.

Alessandra Capperdoni / George Bowering's Poetry as Cultural Poetics

My current reading of George Bowering's poetry situates his writing in relation to the discourse of neoliberalism that governs our era and the "nationalist politics" that permeated the inception of CanLit. George Bowering's poetics offers a critical analysis of the insidious ways in which neoliberal ideology has entered Canada's social and political stage through a "politics of space" that relies upon, rather than disintegrates, the "absolute space" produced by nationalist politics (Smith and Katz). This critical interrogation is particularly significant in the context of the history and institutionalization of Canadian literature that privileged a national framework for the reading of culture. It is in response to this nationalist model that the poetic experimentations of postmodern poetries emerging from the cultural scene of Vancouver and the West Coast in the 1960s, of which Bowering was a central figure, articulated an important contestatory practice by working through the Olsonian notion of "locus." But as the language of economic globalization made its way into the cultural logic of the 1980s, and locality was increasingly co-opted as a tool of social fragmentation in the service of increasingly aggressive neoliberal politics, one faces the question of how effective was the postmodern turn to "locus" and what these poetics can offer us for the present moment.

I would like to consider Bowering's poetry as the articulation of a cultural poetics exposing—and taking to task—the conceptual space-time fixity of the nation-state produced by neoliberal ideology *before* neoliberalism became part of mainstream discourse in Canada. In the spirit of the *avant*-garde (though Bowering himself has often distanced himself from the term), Bowering's poetics exceeds the celebration of locality which many postmodern critics have identified as a central preoccupation of his work. I want to look in particular at two works, *Rocky Mountain Foot* and *Kerrisdale Elegies*, written at two key moments in Canada's history: the buoyant (nationalist) 1960s of *Rocky Mountain Foot*, published in 1968, and the free-trade-inflected 1980s of *Kerrisdale Elegies*, published in 1984. Both poems re-politicize time and space against the closed histories and geographies produced by nationalist and neoliberal ideology. The texts show the way in which

the nation, rather than a "container of identities," is a scale at which capital and the State operate. Predating the theoretical inquiries of cultural theorists and geographers, Bowering shows how neoliberal ideologies need more than ever the complicit action of the State to forcibly open new markets, guarantee the operations of capital and, simultaneously, harden national borders against disruptive social forces. That both poems are texts grounded in "the city" is also a marker of Bowering's attentiveness to a specific shift in scale in the operations of capital—from "nation" to "city"—taking place at the time under scrutiny. R*ocky Mountain Foot* and *Kerrisdale Elegies* focus on urban space as increasingly defined by economics and the structures of feelings that economics harnesses to the formation of social identities—the hopes, buoyancy, euphoria (Derksen), as well as insecurity generated by the discourse of "crisis' that neoliberal ideology generates in order to produce complacent subjectivities.

Playing with the lyric mode of poetic vision and the serial structure of postmodern poetry à la Spicer, the poetic sequence *Rocky Mountain Foot* disassembles the landscape machine of the picturesque and the sublime of nationalist poetry by showing their imperial logic. But it also unhinges the "local pride" of Albertan and Calgarian subjectivities from a naturalized notion of "emotions" to show how structures of feelings can also be retooled in the service of the cultural dominance of capital. In the poem "The Oil," the prairie is the site of energy sources available for exploitation—the straight line of highways, wheat elevators, oil derricks, and train tracks pointing to a mechanization process and expanding industrialization. At the same time, buffalo and Indian fields are reminders of a different, pre-existing, and now displaced economy making visible processes of territorialisation:

> Alberta
> floats on a pool of natural gas
> The Peigans knew nothing of
> in their fright
> in their flight
> to the mountains.
> We owe them that. (29)

The near extermination of the buffalo, co-terminous with indigenous economy, has paved the way for the defacement of the land, now turned into energy reservoir for Canada's (and increasingly North America's) industrialization engine. The displacement of the Peigans is brought to a halt in the assonant coupling of "fright" and "flight," charged with the affective intensities that geographical and cultural uprooting produce. The ambiguity of the line, "We owe them that" reminds readers not only of the systemic dispossession that makes 'development' and 'progress' possible, but the ongoing debt that the nation-state owes Native people. In light of the grievances of Aboriginal peoples and the *ressentiment* voiced through increasing political action at the present time (Coultard), this debt begs for something more than an empty gesture of reconciliation or healing: Are we willing to return the land to its original inhabitants? Which measures are we willing to adopt to redress historical injustices? Meanwhile, the poetic eye can only witness and document the ongoing transformation of land and place into a space for consumption:

Now a
Cadillac, I see a
nother Cadillac, & there
is the black straight road, &
a Cadillac,
two Cadillacs
on the road, racing, North,
the mountains to the left
blurred by a passing
Cadillac. (30)

It is in the city poems that these contradictions become even more apparent and show the way in which the nation-state is in fact operating as imperial State. Capital is not an outside force or a challenge to the nation but, fully incorporated into State politics, activates different interests and emotions. In "Above Calgary," for example, the aerial photo of the city shows the homogenization of land and people in line with the dream of a national, city-based, unified subjectivity. But the illusionary potential of 'local pride' is immediately undercut by the underlying economic interests determining city dwelling, as apartment blocks and houses appear like boxes "arranged / in squares by contractors" (42) and interests only

apparently mutually exclusive—politics, petty interests, and religious discourse—are shown to be fully imbricated with the logic of capital ("crops and the flag / built on the new testament" 26).

It is in this light that we can read *Kerrisdale Elegies*, published at a time of intense capital investment in Vancouver shortly before the signing of the NAFTA agreement in 1987, as a long poem that brings into visibility what Wilson and Dissanayake have called the spatial realization of socio-political contradictions. This city-text grounds Kerrisdale materially in its social and political context (the neighbourhood as dynamically participant in the contested meanings of political and economic space). But while Kerrisdale is being re-shaped by the interests of national and global capitalism under the "aesthetic of economic change" (Mitchell 232)—the goal being the integration of Vancouver, Canada's gateway to the Pacific Rim, into the global economy—the neighbourhood is never a static, inert space. To the free flow of capital through the city it opposes an urban text dwelling on the particular and the estranged.

The poems refrain from adopting a purely descriptive stance but turn the feelings produced by neoliberal discourse into the object of analysis. The gentrification of Kerrisdale is in fact a shop-window of consumerist desires constructing new social subjectivities:

> The alleged world outside fades before our eyes.
>
> Remember that big house at 38th and Larch?
> Look now:
> a translucent spectre rises there,
> comfortable
> as the notion of home still building in your brain.
>
> So all your neighbours have built this city block,
> ethereal as their own passing conversations.
>
> They
> would put leaves on their naked pear trees.

They build a stadium of the heart downtown,
and will never find their way to the game. (Elegy 9, 99)

Anticipating the notion of the "city of glass" (but in less euphoric and more critical terms than Douglas Coupland's about its effects) the poem plays with the obvious desires that the "new economy" is producing in the subject. Less a citizen than a consumer, the city-dweller brushes against the imaginary possibilities emerging from the seductive discourse of new belongings (the "comfortable" home of the condo in the translucent high rise as a sign of middle-upper class status) and his stroll to the Stadium which a maze of desires (as in a play of mirrors) will prevent them from reaching. The much celebrated fluidity of identity of postmodern cultural logic seems to achieve its culmination, while the "ethereal" imaging of the city block points to the dematerialization of class (and race) politics. The citizen-consumers can hardly be imagined as active members of the polis. No civic action is possible when the endgame can only be the (literal) match at the Stadium (completed in 1983 in preparation for Expo 1986) which, paradoxically, they will hardly be able to find in their dream-like state of consumerist bliss. Yet, the poem does not adopt a defeatist stance: dreams can be broken and the ghosts of the past may still be haunting a defaced present.

Against the flatness of the imagined national space, *Kerrisdale Elegies* re-situates locality as a poetic act and poesis as life: writing as the measure of temporal and spatial difference. Capital circulation is not semantically excluded, yet the form does not allow for the erasure of the contingencies of the lived at the hand of economic transaction. Excess is not the effect of money exchange (the illusion produced by capitalist ideology) but the insertion of difference in the presentness of the here:

This is not
poetry,
neither is it play;
it is life
whether you like it or not,
money
changes hands,
the sun goes purple and gold
behind the trees,

the lights come on bright,
the ball is white,
and someone
has to pay for it. (Elegy 5, 74)

But, in fact, this *is* poetry. What Bowering's cultural poetics shows is culture that moves beyond its documentary (or reflexive) aspect and, rather, generates a *mode of analysis* (Derksen 2014) which can actively intervene into, and productively change, the current imperatives produced in affective terms by neoliberal discourse through a politics of space.

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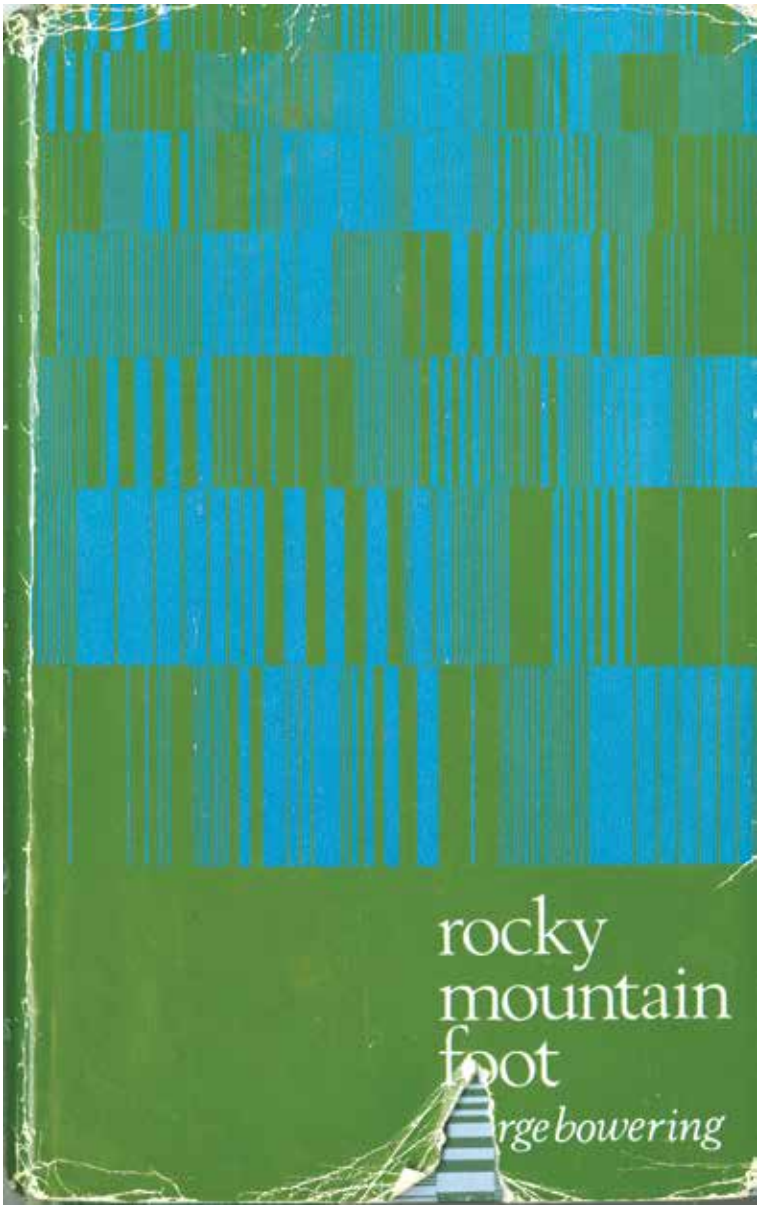
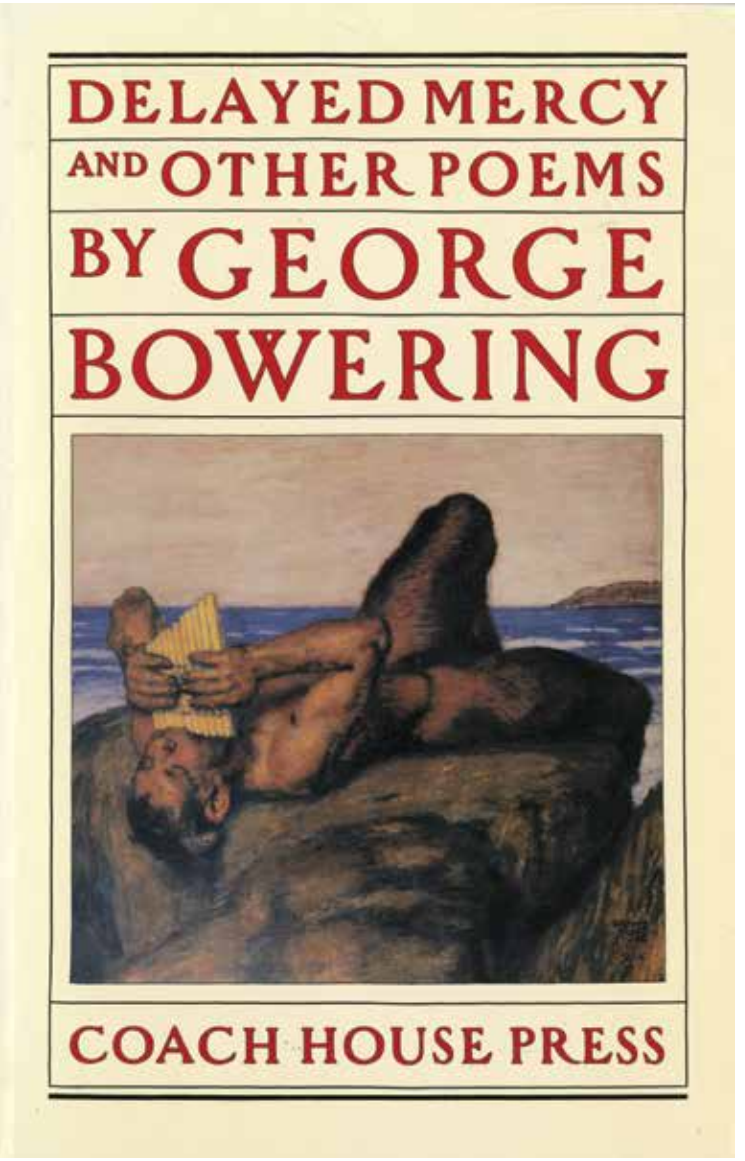


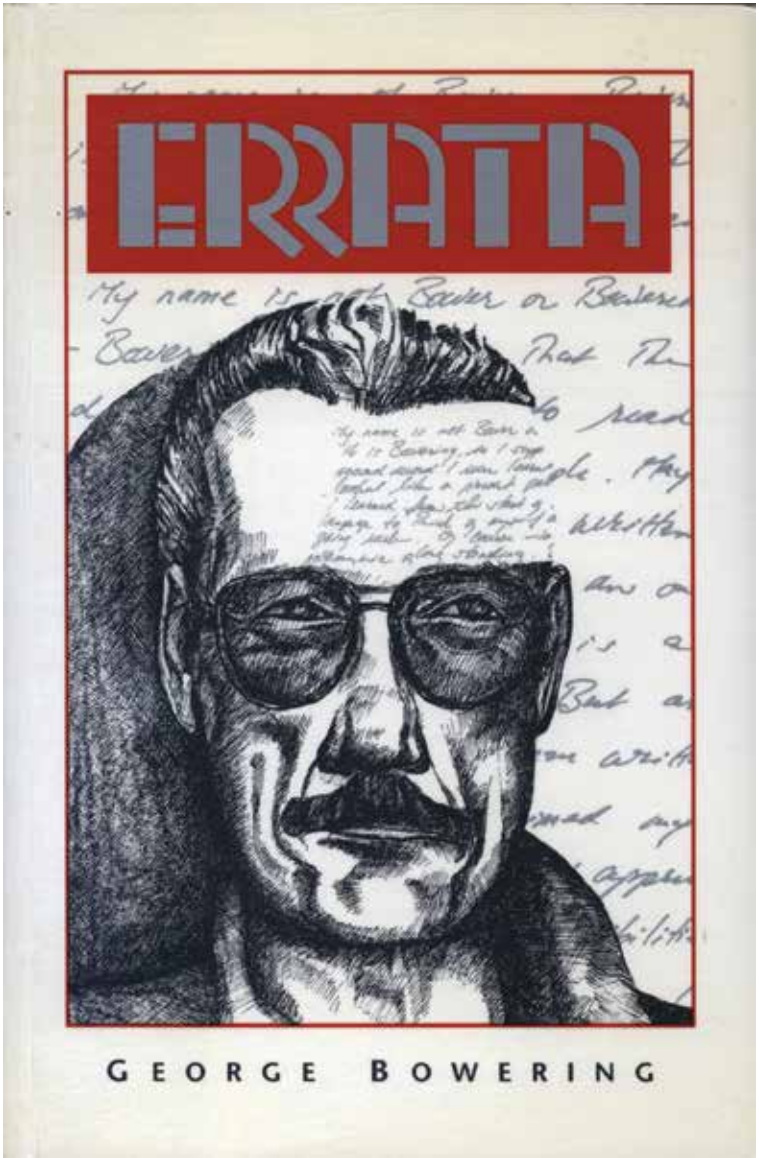
Rocky Mountain Foot (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969)

Dedication: *no dedication is necessary,* | *but I would like to say hello to:* | Chief Walking Eagle | Bob Edwards | Sitting Bull | Jabez Harry Bowering | (*They were all there*)

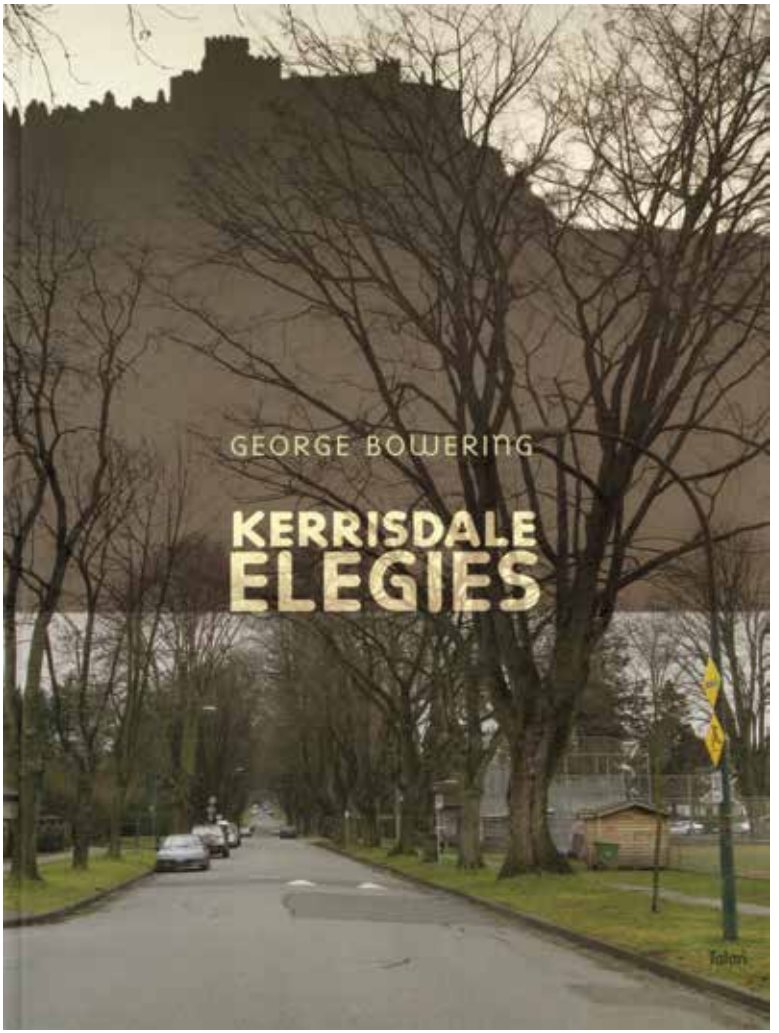


Delayed Mercy and Other Poems (Toronto: Coach House, 1987).
Cover painting by Franz Von Stuck, *Syrinx blasender Faun am Meer.*

"Irene Niechoda took a photograph of that painting in the Von Stuck house in Germany and gave it to me, and I thought wonderful, that'll be the cover of my book" (GB to Roy Miki, 81). The serial poem "Delayed Mercy" was written late at night, one poem per night, incorporating a line from a book read during the day. "Irritable Reaching" is a series of acrostics for writers and artists from Atwood to Zonko. The phrase "irritable reaching" is from Keats: "I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Miki 84).



Errata (Red Deer: RDC Press, 1988). Dedication: For Shirley Neuman, Smaro Kamboureli | and Linda Hutcheon.



Kerrisdale Elegies (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008), a reprint of the 1984 edition published by Coach House.

Epigraph: Here a star, and there a star, | Some lose their way! | Here a mist — and there a mist — | Afterwards — day! | Emily Dickinson

"—a poem set in Kerrisdale . . . to write a poem about Kerrisdale, to prove that you could even write a poem about Kerrisdale." (GB to Roy Miki, 75-76)

Karl Siegler / Rummaging Through the Lost and Found of *Kerrisdale Elegies*

George Bowering tells us in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* (itself a hint about all that French in them) what motivated him to write the *Kerrisdale Elegies*: "In the Seventies and early Eighties, it seemed as if everyone I knew in Vancouver was interested in Rainer Maria Rilke." He also tells us how he managed to translate Rilke's *Duino Elegies* for his project without being fluent in German: he translated the first page on a trip to Dallas without any lexicographical assistance; crossed off every word he'd written on his subsequent flight out of town; then got himself several other English translations he used to help him create his own.

In composing *Kerrisdale Elegies*, which Bowering maintains "resembles *Duino Elegies* in overall structure," he was heeding Ezra Pound's dictum on the kultural obligation of translators: to "make [whatever is being translated] new," and by "new" Pound meant both in the translator's language and time—what Rilke himself referred to as the "Zeitgeist." Of course, while executing Pound's dictum, Bowering also followed the dicta of his mentors Gertrude Stein who had observed that the only authentic task for a writer is to write writing; T.S. Eliot who had pronounced on *Tradition and the Individual Talent*[1]; and William Carlos Williams (who had admonished poets to have "no ideas but in things")—but he certainly didn't mean abstract things—like angels, for example.

Lost

The first and by far the most important things that get lost in *Kerrisdale Elegies* are angels ["Engel"] and the intensity of the ideas that these beings evoke in Rilke's German diction. In Bowering's defense, this loss occurs primarily because in German, the infinitive "Sein" is a noun, whereas in English it is a verb or an action of a subject or an agent: "[to] be." That's why Prince Hamlet could have such fun with his wordplay on "to be" at the expense of his friend poor Yorick.

1 "Let us go then, / heart and eye," *Kerrisdale Elegies* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008), 99.

What this means is that, linguistically, in German, "Sein" is a concrete thing, whereas in English, "being" is an abstract idea. Now in Plato's theory of forms, ideas of things rather than the things themselves, are the true measures of the world. The opposite is true in Dr. Williams' philosophical materialism. With this in mind, one can begin to see rather clearly how things (and the ideas they engender) get lost in translation.

The *Duino Elegies* are "about" three interrelated states or orders of being ("Sein") and how we experience them within time ("Zeit"). The first of these is "Hiersein" of which we partake in the here-and-now of the (ever) present moment—a state of being that Rilke characterizes as animal. The second is "Dasein" of which we partake because we are able to imagine things other than the self both within and outside of the present moment—a state of being that he characterizes as human. The third is "Sein" of which we partake because we are aware of time ("Zeit") as something that precedes our birth, gives shape to our "Dasein" (our being-in-the-world), and continues after our death—a state of being he characterizes as angelic.

These three states or orders of being need not be described in religious terms. Other poets, like Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, for example, apprehended the mystical interrelationship between them without resorting to religious iconography when they said things like: "time is the life of space."

Found

Rilke didn't know anything about baseball, so you'll find no mention of it in his fifth Duino Elegy (a meditation on Picasso's painting *Les Saltimbanques*), but George Bowering sure does. You find a lot of it in his fifth Kerrisdale Elegy, in which he ascribes to baseball the same immortal nature as that of Rilke's angelic orders, and in which, just in case the reader is about to miss the point, we also find the sole appearance of an angel: "Baseball angel, / it's early summer, / accept him, / lighten the air, / open the infield, / give him / one white rainbow today, / set him on second, / the lovely red dirt all over his flannel. / Extra / basis."

Rilke's angels can also be found as "spooks" in *Kerrisdale Elegies*. Not even the putatively lost souls of the Beat Generation could deny that the brilliantly radiant last page of Bowering's Fifth Elegy celebrates all that is immortal about our being-in-the-world: "cast blossoms of immortality over nine heads, / bring at

last a satisfied smile to the face / between these shoulders here on earth, / on the road, / in last place."

Baseball as a metaphor for the immortal (which is what angels are for Rilke) has become almost a cliché for any student of "Modern North American Poetry" but it's useful in this context to revisit the question of why it might have become so. Key to engaging that question are two things that happened in 1845.

In that year, Alexander Cartwright wrote down what were to become (and remain, with subsequent additions and amendments) the rules of the game for a New York City ball club called the "Knickerbockers" who were using a park in Hoboken called the Elysian Fields to play "baseball" because Manhattan had run out of soft fields—the island had been paved.[2]

In that same year, Karl Marx wrote *The German Ideology*, in which he first insisted that materialism was the sole motive force in history, and then rejected all of what he and Engels considered to be the "false idealism" of the socialist movement.

William Carlos Williams is as helpful as the ancient Greeks here in our attempt to formulate some idea about how these two things might be related to each other—in *Spring and All* the good doctor writes of a dying woman's "elysian slobber / upon / the folded handkerchief." How ironic that the birth of Marx's historical materialism occurred in the very same year the rules for baseball were born!

In the Batter's Box

Rainer Maria Rilke began his *Duino Elegies* as a guest of Princess Marie von Turn und Taxis in Trieste, Friul-Venezia Giulia, Italy, in 1912. Three score and ten years later, George Bowering began his *Kerrisdale Elegies* as a guest of the Canadian consulate in Dallas, Texas, USA—in 1982.

2 In Greek myth, the Elysian Fields consisted of a beautiful meadow in which Homer says the heroic and virtuous favoured by Zeus could enjoy perfect happiness. Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, locates them at the edge of the earth beyond the western ocean (i.e. in the Americas). Pindar describes Elysium in his Odes as a land of shady parks whose residents spend their time pursuing whatever employment they had enjoyed in life, along with their athletic and musical pastimes. Both Pindar and Hesiod claim Elysium is ruled by Cronos, father of the Olympian Gods, and Hesiod very specifically locates it "far from the deathless gods." That's pretty much how George Bowering imagines a baseball park on the first page of his Fifth Elegy.

It is extraordinary that one can take the measure of how radically cultural sensibilities can change in the course of a biblical lifetime by a careful reading of only these two texts. Rilke's *Duino Elegies* were written over the ten-year period between 1912 and 1922. The delays in their completion were caused, in the main, by the severe and recurring bouts of depression Rilke suffered as a result of being briefly conscripted into military service (for six months at the war records office in 1916). It's not at all strange then that, like Ezra Pound, he saw hope for a renewed, utopian civilization after this "war to end all wars" in Mussolini's fascist movement.

On the other hand, George Bowering's brilliant response to Rilke's call, the *Kerrisdale Elegies* were composed in roughly one year near the end of the Cold War, an historical period for which baseball was to become as perfect a metaphor as it had become for the immortal orders of the Cosmos. During the nine "innings" of the game, each of the two teams takes turns playing at bourgeois individualism (batting) on the one hand, and collective action (fielding) on the other. Players on either side make "errors"—i.e. cause material imperfections in the perfect fabric of the game. These opposing gestures of play, enacted on an idealized, diamond-shaped field of green, represent the abstract contending social ideologies defining the political dialectic—the "Zeitgeist"—of the age: capitalism *vs.* communism.[3]

So clearly did the counter-culture adherents to the mid-century modernism of North American civics recognize this divine symmetry between the "never-dying game" and the temporal orders of their everyday, that Bowering, along with numerous other artists, musicians, intellectuals and cultural workers, extended the reach of the Elysian fields of the game beyond the domain of professional actor/entertainers in the North American "World Series" to the all-encompassing Kosmic League of the average Joe and Jill.

Rilke's poem begins with a traditional evocation of the transcendent. It opens with: "Who, if I were to cry out, would even hear me, among the *angelic* orders?" and ends with a nostalgic evocation of the muse of grief attendant at the spectacle of the beauty and promise of all young life born to its certain death; "we who aspire to an *ascendant* fortune, are overcome by astonishment at the fortunate's *fall*."[4]

Hold this up to Bowering's poem, which begins with a modernist evocation of the human condition: "If I did complain, who among my friends would hear?" and

3 Rilke "ha[d] not the advantage" of participating in that "Zeitgeist:" the first communist state, the USSR, was created the year he completed his *Duino Elegies*.

4 The italics are Rilke's; the translation, mine.

ends with the spectacle of the end of History; "The single events that raise our eyes and stop our time are saying goodbye, lover, goodbye."

Out of the Park

Having said the above, as a native speaker of German and a published translator of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* in my second language, English, I'm able to share with the reader five of Bowering's base hits in his *Kerrisdale Elegies*, where "[the ball] leaves the bat faster / than it came to the plate" (11)—passages where he replicates Rilke's voice perfectly in English, even though Rilke never uttered those words in German in exactly that way[5]:

> Beauty is the first prod of fear, / we must / live our lives in (5).
>
> He / is among the dreadful ancestors he knew / before you felt him kick inside your womb (37).
>
> But each step he takes before he thinks of walking / is a step toward the grave, / a step down / into the earth (52).
>
> His first miracle / was his escape from your dark embrace / into this awful longing (75).
>
> each quick appearance is a farewell (127).

And one home-run, with bases loaded, out of the park—into Rilke's angelic orders:

> The earth, / how it requires us to live, / how it / desires to become us (109).

5 All citations are from George Bowering, *Kerrisdale Elegies*, Revised edition, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008.

Erín Moure / NINE TERCETS BY DANTE USING FIRST LINES OF BOWERING'S *IRRITABLE REACHING* (1986) READ BACKWARD AND MAINTAINING THE ONE TYPO (THE TERCET BEING THREE-LEGGED LIKE A MILKSTOOL IT IS A STABLE FORM AND ALLOWS US TO REGARD MEANING'S EMERGENCE OUT OF LANGUAGE AND THE CIRCUITS OF THE BRAIN) AS PERFORMED BY ELISA SAMPEDRÍN

1
Zeal in the defence against liberty
Dancing bones on reason's day,
He said face that problem

2
Pastoral music seems like home now,
Just as we lose at last
The eye in hiding lies

3
Monsieur has made a country our of femmes
Just five old men are shaping all our graces
Ground and sky, water and leaf

4
Press it perfect
Bones along her body show
Tearing off the shrouds of night,

5
Cool streets sound like home now, insects
Relief shows above the surface,
Detachment from self is authentic love

6
Ready to snap, he focuses
Grace requires age in this diffident land —
Taking ink from his heart,

7
Phones ring out in open air
Just as we lose the last of innocence
Brain that vanishes among its traces,

8
Man or beast is not
Falling thru a medium that holds
Valour calls a man to place

9
Cool streets sound like home now, insects
Mirrors show up empty, window turn black,
( )

Douglas Barbour / Errata-tat-tat

(in order, one sentence from each section)

Now, what about readers of literature? There is no audience, but there is the text; one is alone except for the text. Of course, any text is an intertext. The art in fiction, as in poetry, is that part of language that is not communication. Here is the difference between the serious artist and, say, the politician, the businessman, or the social scientist: the more the serious artist gets to know about people, the less able he is to manipulate them. This is how intertextuality works best, as a series that looks accidental, that makes an order by apparent coincidence, synchronicity, let us say. In the latter days of realism too many authors quit paying attention to writing as they attended to the world as referent. Maybe you can get the world right in your book for one sentence, and (but) then the world changes sentence by sentence because now your sentences are in it. Book as intricate know rather than blacktop driving. The next sentence is the next sentence to read, continuity, conjunction, narrative. The story proposes destinations but nobody gets to them. Any stray material, once absorbed, becomes part of the solution. In the event of a poem the time is determined and the space varies; in the event of a novel, the opposite is our experience. The enemies of 'self-indulgent' writing favour standard practices, including things like description. We always have to put up with the social responsibility of the terms—how they would sneer when they assigned you to the 'avant-garde,' or the 'experimental.' It seemed the logical way to escape common thought, which must be not good enough, and it was an instinct. That's thinking, not thinking about. Realism is a belief as well as a practice, and reality is aware by now of how it approaches, and thus where to go and hide. We now choose our traditions. An experiment proceeds from a theoretical position, and results most often in a mental product to be discarded or amended. Socially and politically I believe that I am a romantic leftist; but when it comes to the composition of literature I am an elitist. There are many readers who are made anxious by writing that is open. Some of them say that any text is defiled as soon as it is written down; that is a credo for some people. They looked forward to our dispensing with the page, to the time when we would sit and think, and be regular writers. That is a great story. Writing can be so nice when it is a snap. It just goes to show how easy description is when you've got a prairie. Not to get somewhere, let us say, but to be

getting there. Robert Kroetsch said, 'The minute you ask answerable questions, you're beat as a novelist." What a strange and problematic position to be in! So I believed it. A gift from the gods is not a license to rule. The problem with the historians, or let us say the way they chose to work, is this: they did not study what people are, but what they did. We tried history, and it beat us; that's why we came here. The best poetry is written in fear. Most of what we might discover is bypassed when we treat human sentences as message-bearers, dispensable when they reach their target. The writer's words call the fictional place into being. Nature is not a teacher. That's probably true. Read on. There is something interesting about literary history as opposed to normal history. I am interested in forgetting. But of course the whole book, written after that walk, is made of looking back. In these days people call that "signature." Margaret Laurence loved attaching other people's words to her books. Mother Earth or mother tongue. Here is the anti-teleological anarchism the nationalists and other totalitarians hate. Obvious symbolism, for example—overly muscular workers, flags carried into the wind—promotes the arrival of cynicism with the advent of maturity, an unfortunate coincidence. We are probably saying that in our century, since the advent of aerial bombardment and International Modernism, inherited literary tradition has gone the way of inherited rule. In doing all this, we probably become educated, in a way. We no longer read the metanarrative of the gods, nor even of the modernist substitution, the authority of art. Often, I think, the serious writer must ask himself whether writing is a useful way to spend his time. He is never there any more. *The Martyrology* is a shipment that will never get here from headquarters. In fiction, narrative is produced by the turning of the page, which is an option every time. It frightens them. I remember that in American war movies the G.I.s were always saying they had just gone through hell, whereas in a British one Jack Hawkins would emerge from a collapsed and flaming field hospital and murmur, 'Gerry's a little restless tonight; bit of a rum go, wot?' But what would you do if you turned to a page, and it was a mirror? That is to say, the writer laid down those sentences, those lines, and now the reader picks them up from their surface. Storytellers said 'Once upon a time' to put listeners into hypnotic alpha-rhythms, and 'they lived happily ever after' to ease them out. In moments such as that, literate people start to look for meaning. Yes, there is a type of chic cynicism there, but also a modesty that becomes the serious poet. This is the meaning of a life-poem, that each moment is a reading in all directions, that you cannot outlive the closure. In

Lawren Harris's paintings we knew we were not looking at what the land looked like—we were looking at what painting looked like if one did it without interruption of sentimental attachment. Now consider fiction. Growing up when I did and where I did, I had the hunger for the sure hand of the realist text. I cannot shake the notion that there are essentially two views of poetry. A snow carnival and a prohibition carnival—very Canadian paradoxes. That is why authors have always said that they do not fully understand their own works. It may be related to the fact that when you read a book, narration is made by exercising the option of turning the page, every time. Here is the trouble with confessional poetry: the confessional poet replaces poetry's past with his own. When you are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of your parent or your spouse, that person will often refer to your invention as a 'likely story.' Speaking of marriage, as he always was doing, he said that love and strife kept things in balance. I am presented a choice. But I have to say this. To me it means more than it means anything. The trees in Northern Ontario (it is western Ontario, but that name is saved for southern Ontario) are pretty small. I will remind myself to write local histories for foreigners. So we can read them, of course, before it is too late. I just loved the rare crisp new textbooks, any subject. One loves only form, said Olson, and form comes into being when the thing is born. I am a west coast member of Oulipo. The Open Road is still free from the friendly squares. Some writers are very good with titles. What would I rename *The Dead Sailors*? Well, Toronto's official art believes itself to be Canada's official art. The tracker, with an occluded wisdom, can read something that is invisible to the rest of us. And there are so many more books, already in one's rooms, or within walking distance. It was a fine romance, the affair between the reference and the designated world. What are you looking at, they will ask you in college, and you will say that you can supply only the name of something you think you are looking at. You do not need a reference to nature to create non-nature, or art. The tradition is formed from an accretion of the avant-garde. Ezra Pound's translations, as much as his poems, work to make ground for subsequent artists to work upon as do his essays—a plan, a project). Pound is apart (and consequently beyond), one of the few titans who stand astride all the rest of the work being done in this age. Ezra Pound once said to his daughter Mary: 'I don't want you to understand; I want you to learn the damn thing!' What of a writer who delays closure?

Hey George, always shooting as the hippest.

Tom Hawthorn / Bowering on-deck

You hear the voice before you see the man. A booming, brassy sound with a hint of grade school wiseacre, it is a noise unavoidable at any baseball park in which George Bowering has purchased a ticket. It can be directed at the umpire, the batter, the pitcher, the vendor, or some hapless fan in the stands. Bowering is a fan in the original sense. The word *fan* began appearing in newspapers in the late nineteenth-century as a shorthand neologism to describe baseball fanatics.[1] (The origins live on today in the smart-alec Muppet-like mascot from Philadelphia known as the Philly Phanatic.) Bowering has received official approval from the Vancouver Canadians, a minor-league team, which declared him their "Official Loudmouth Fan." They issued him business cards stating the same.

To sit with Bowering at a ball park, as I have done in Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Havana, and lesser Cuban cities, is to be sore-eared sidekick to Foghorn Leghorn. His voice has an umpire's command, able to cut through the hubbub of today's ball parks, where the action (such as it is) on the field is secondary to contests, promotions, and scoreboard exhortations, not to mention the purchase of foodstuffs and beverages. Whether sitting in the lower box seats at bucolic Nat Bailey Stadium in Vancouver (where his heckling can be heard by players), or in the upper deck at monumental Safeco Field in Seattle (where his quips amuse fellow nosebleed habitués high above home plate in Section 334), or in the hard concrete terrace of Estadio Capitán San Luis in Pinar del Rio, Cuba (where his shouted *bon mots* are lost for not being in translation), Bowering cannot help but deliver a loud, aural verdict on the play before him.

It is not a rare thing for a writer to be enamoured of baseball. The rule in sports writing is the slower the sport, the better the writing. Golf has a literature. Cricket has a literature. Hockey? Too frenetic. Baseball is so slow, the action so deliberate, every single pitch can be recorded, which was the case long before the advent of computers. (Baseball has a lot of pitches—more than 200 in a nine-inning game, 162 of which are played every season by the major leagues' thirty teams.) Baseball

1 The etymology of *fan* in sports is in dispute, some sources citing the word as a contraction of *the fancy*, or the group who cheers for a particular corner, especially in prize fighting, *the fancy* stemming from *fantasy* in the sense of desire.

offers more than a century of games in which the circumstances of most every at-bat can be recreated.

Nevertheless, save for Michael Lewis's *Moneyball*, a lone example of statistical literature, most serious baseball books indulge a historic—leaning towards nostalgic—look at a sport whose origins harken to a rural pastoral time.

Baseball fiction tends towards the mystic mumbo-jumbo of W.P. Kinsella and his field of dreams from the novel *Shoeless Joe*, or Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* about a fallen prodigy and his magical bat, Wonderboy. The difference in Bowering's writing is baseball is never an affectation, or a marketing come-on, or a mere stage. It is elemental, as much a part of everyday life as food and sex, and nearly as much fun. His baseball writing has infield dirt on the sani-socks (preferably worn high, with stirrups showing) and sweat on the inner brow of a cap. It is not a stretch to imagine Bowering enjoying the crisp crack of bat striking ball.

Bowering looks like a ball player. He has a large head (cap size 7 7/8), a square jaw, and, when younger, the lean, fluid motion you'd expect of an infielder, though his running style has been compared to that of a bobbin on a sewing machine. Given his opinionated nature, it is not a surprise to know he has pronounced rules on heckling umpires ("avoid obvious jokes about sightlessness") and the wearing of ball caps (never backwards, unless you're a catcher). He considers the New York Yankees to be Satan's servants disguised in pinstripes. He remains a purist as a fan, preferring the distractions of venerable baseball discussion over the ceaseless noise that passes for entertainment in today's ball parks. Earlier this year, the Canadians' in-stadium DJ placed a call for requests on Twitter during a game. The club's Official Loudmouth Fan replied: "I have one. Turn down the sound."

Bowering grew up playing sandlot ball on hard dirt fields under the baking Okanagan sun in Oliver. "We didn't have hockey because there was no ice," he told me. "We didn't have football because there was no money." Baseball was more a dusty, primal struggle than the mythology of farmers leaving their fields on the Sabbath to frolic on the greensward. He remembers watching his father's great exertions as he ran the bases in some forgotten amateur game, recollected in the poem "Desert Elm":

> Rounding the bases his neck became red as
> a turkey's but it was a home run, every
> one like me has to see his father do that

once, fearing his father is like him, not
as good.

Red as a turkey neck, his eyes bulging,
his heart already something to frighten
the young boy, was it something she said
as this other says now to me playing my
guerrilla ball. I dont want you collapsing
& dying on the field. It is a playing field,
I say, I can feel my blood running red
under the skin.

Later, as an adult visiting a cavernous stadium in Cleveland, which was home to the team for which his father cheered "for no known reason," Bowering reflects on his place as a Canadian outsider in "Municipal Stadium 1988":

My companions were born to this;
I had to earn it, a boy in Okanagan sand,
now sitting in baseball's biggest park,

old as the century, old as the league, old
as Hart Crane, throw me a lifesaver.

Bowering's poetry is littered with baseball; it is everyday, common, part of the pattern of life. This reflects baseball in his own life.

As a boy, he studied the newspaper sports pages as though they were holy text. He wrote letters to the players whose exploits were described in *Baseball Digest*. (The great Ralph Kiner replied, "I am pleased that you chose to write to a Pirate even though your favorites are the Dodgers and Red Sox." These letters have been pasted into a scrapbook, which Bowering still has.) As a young father, he took to the field with the poets and painters of the Granville Grange Zephyrs in Vancouver's legendary Kosmic League, where grass could be found in the dugout as well as on the field and a batter hitting a likely triple or double may cease running at first base should that be where a toke was on offer. In middle age, he was still patrolling third base for a Twilight League team on the sandlots of East Vancouver, his most potent weapon a needling patter in which he would cajole younger (and, sometimes,

drunk) opponents to make bonehead plays. (In baseball parlance, Bowering was a bench jockey, and a good one.) A couple of line drives to the face and a broken hip convinced him to hang up his leather glove, bringing what he would insist was a premature end to his playing days.

Freed from a weekly schedule of games that had tethered him to the city, Bowering embarked on baseball road trips, taking in big-league stadiums and minor-league parks dotting the North American landscape. He also witnessed baseball in Latin America, where the game is a bigger religion than Communism in Cuba. The road trips with Jean Baird and an account of his own playing career are detailed in *Baseball Love* (Talonbooks 2006). A memoir and travelogue, the chatty book reads as though Bowering were an especially erudite seatmate sharing stories while watching a slow-moving game. The countless asides are amusing, such as Bowering coming up with a nickname for West Coast painter Gordon Payne, a fireball-throwing right-hander. He settled on Excruciating Payne. Another teammate was known as Engledink Birdhumper. At home, Bowering maintains diaries from his playing days, describing quips and incidents from games long purged from everyone else's memory. He was scouting his own games.

Nabakov had his butterflies; Bowering has baseball, from Frank Smith, an amateur player, in the historical novel *Caprice* to countless poems employing baseball imagery, or describing a player from fact or fiction. (Fact: Ted Williams, aka the Splendid Splinter, aka The Kid, aka The Thumper, aka Teddy Ballgame, aka The Greatest Hitter Who Ever lived, is Bowering's favourite all-time player.) His two poetry collections about baseball are *Poem and Other Baseballs* and *Baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number 9*, the latter a pennant-shaped volume originally issued in 1967 with a felt cover. He has edited a collection of short baseball stories (*Taking the Field*). In 2011, he went deep into his depth chart to complete *The Diamond Alphabet: Baseball in Short*, which includes five stories for each of the twenty-six letters. (Each section is decorated by the image of a baseball cap sporting the appropriate letter, from the Almendares Alacranes to the New Orleans Zephyrs.) The U section includes entries on Umpires, Uniform, Up (as in "being up at the plate"), Utica (where the team is known as the Blue Sox) and Uzbekistan, which allows Bowering to survey the state of baseball in other U places such as Uruguay, Ulan Bator, and Upper Volta. Not much baseball is played in U places.

As described in the baseball memoir, Bowering and Baird were driving across the prairie in a Volvo when they crossed the frontier southeast of Estevan,

Saskatchewan, where they were greeted by an American border guard in aviator glasses and a sidearm. Bowering was asked his occupation. Just this once, he thought to himself:

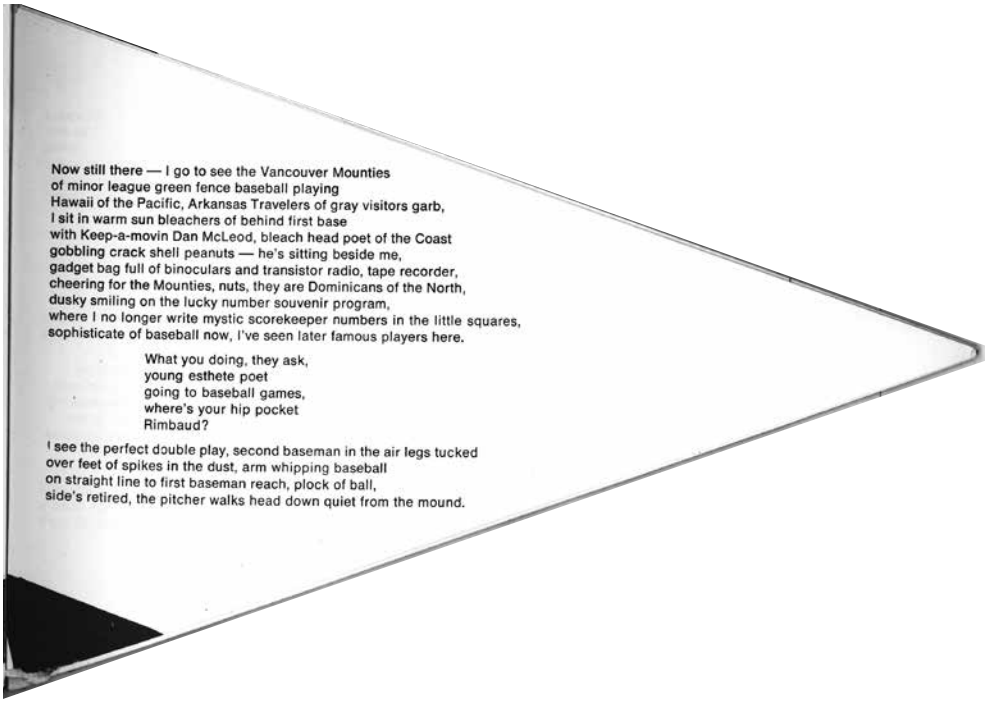
"I'm the Parliamentary Poet Laureate of Canada," he announced.

The guard had him step from the car and open the trunk, which held a box filled with books trimmed to a triangular shape. These were fresh-off-the-press copies of the Coach House reissue of *Baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number 9*. With pride, Bowering informed the guard he was holding a copy of his latest book.

The guard turned the oddly-shaped, thin, 24-page book over in his hands,

"You call that a book?

Everyone's a critic.


Now still there — I go to see the Vancouver Mounties
of minor league green fence baseball playing
Hawaii of the Pacific, Arkansas Travelers of gray visitors garb,
I sit in warm sun bleachers of behind first base
with Keep-a-movin Dan McLeod, bleach head poet of the Coast
gobbling crack shell peanuts — he's sitting beside me,
gadget bag full of binoculars and transistor radio, tape recorder,
cheering for the Mounties, nuts, they are Dominicans of the North,
dusky smiling on the lucky number souvenir program,
where I no longer write mystic scorekeeper numbers in the little squares,
sophisticate of baseball now, I've seen later famous players here.

What you doing, they ask,
young esthete poet
going to baseball games,
where's your hip pocket
Rimbaud?

I see the perfect double play, second baseman in the air legs tucked
over feet of spikes in the dust, arm whipping baseball
on straight line to first baseman reach, plock of ball,
side's retired, the pitcher walks head down quiet from the mound.

from *Baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number 9* (Toronto: Coach House, 1967, 2003)

Kevin Killian / Bowering's Fragments

You'd have to have a heart of stone to resist the amorous appeal of George Bowering's 1990 novel *Harry's Fragments*. An accomplished storyteller, Bowering surprised us yet again with this enigmatic, genre-bending blend of thriller and *nouvelle vague*. Throughout he plays the showman's ancient trick of never letting us see him sweat, combining a complex plot with a throwaway style, while finding room in the slim volume to evoke dozens of far-flung locations and many, many sexy women.

What's that Bond movie with the most Bond girls in it? *Harry's Fragments* makes that one look like a sexless sort of William Wellman actioner. (*Goldfinger* and *Thunderball* tie with five apiece, but in comparison *Harry's Fragments* makes them seem like chaste all-male retreats set in Mount Athos in northern Greece.)

The surplus of women in *Harry's Fragments* is perhaps a tip of the hat to Bond, or to Len Deighton's spy hero, Harry Palmer. Perhaps Harry Palmer or Harry Lime inspired the creation of Bowering's Harry, this mysterious traveler. I keep thinking he's Canadian, he's so critical of other nations, but I find that nowhere does the text actually say that Harry's a Canadian, though he lives in Vancouver certainly. No wait, in the last fifth of the book we are told that he is a "Canadian in a manner of speaking." His profession is similarly unclear, but we are told again and again he is neither a spy nor a writer, at least, not by nature. He's 49 and he's a white man. He's a cabdriver "for the moment" but also a merchant who spends a few days selling things he's bought and buying new things to sell later, but he takes to the life of accidental secret agent with a certain savoir-faire. His new handlers book him at a moment's notice on voyages to faraway lands so we get the impression that money isn't his big problem. As I see it, he's working out a midlife crisis, and it's taking him in the directions Jack Nicholson used to follow, dazed, hollowed out, in Jack's long-ago Antonioni/Polanski phase. He's not himself, and that's the point.

Harry's journey begins in Toronto, where a strange woman attracts him, and when he sees the same woman later in a dreary restaurant in Seattle he begins to think she's trying to get a message to him. And soon he is told to attend a cultural festival in Perth, and he goes. Like most novels of espionage and adventure, *Harry's Fragments* begins as an investigation into phenomenology and then devolves into sexual ritual.

He also plays a complicated symbolic role in Bowering's portrait of men under siege from an international regiment of women—of adepts, really. A beautiful, graying Englishwoman (or perhaps she's Canadian, like Alice Munro?) is being held hostage behind the Berlin Wall and it is up to Harry, as the agent for mysterious women of all nations, to rescue her so she can continue to write her famous short stories. Like the god Osiris, Harry allows himself to be torn to pieces, as his travels take him from Perth to Berlin to Rome, as he meets more mysterious women who know more than he, about his mission, about the world, about what he is all about at his sexual core. A "goddess of nightdisease" inspires these women to fuck Harry in ways that cause him increasing pain, but he continues to surrender, presumably to attain more meaning, perhaps to keep his sanity. When he awakes from one encounter he finds "specks of dried blood on the twisted sheets—not from her, but from the scratches she had made on him, when she had almost made him quit but forced him to go on, to proceed, he thought he remembered her saying, forced him partly with her filthy language, her brutal threats and vulgarities." As he travels from country to country, his cock is almost always sore, raw, because the women are so rough with him.

"The pain was excruciating, but he dare not tell her so, tell her to stop. She stopped when she forced an ambiguous climax from him."

Harry begins to wonder what has caused this strange sequence of events. He begins to suspect that at least one of these women was a boy or man to begin with, and has emerged from a Leipzig clinic. "Had the boy died then, when the woman was born, in that clinic in Leipzig?" I hesitate to ascribe the multiple genders Harry discerns to European decadence; perhaps they come from the fantasia of the cruel woman, like the bordello scenes in *Ulysses* in which the shadows leap back and forth from male to female, then back again, as Bloom grows more excited? Brian Busby's 2011 life of John Glassco (*A Gentleman of Pleasure*) reveals that Bowering and his first wife, Angela, knew Glassco at least casually, and I began to wonder if *Harry's Fragments* might not represent Bowering's tip of the hat to/ reboot of the elder poet's Sadeian softcore porn, his *Harriet Marwood, Governess*. This part of *Harry's Fragments* grows murky, and soon, like the recent Steve McQueen film *Shame*, he's finding a man's tough, hairy hand poking around in his underwear, while he's wearing it. I forgot to say that *Harry's Fragments* is set some time before 1990, the Wall is still up, and like most novels laid in this particular period, one

must resist on every page, "Jeez, Harry, turn on your cell phone," or "Google maps could have solved this in a minute." But perhaps what we have gained in speed we have lost in Catherine-Robbe-Grillet sexual enslavement and suspense.

It is a world ripe with competing nationalisms, and on every page a horrid American poisons life for decent Canadians. No matter where they turn up, Americans are cowardly, fat, pasty, ignorant no-necks, hooked on religious radio and bad faith, who go to Vancouver and ask where they can buy "seeds for a totem-pole tree." Germans are nearly as bad, with their godforsaken language, a conglomeration of broken fricatives adding up to verbal violence. "Germans! He wanted to shout. Fucking Germans!" At one point Harry asks Annalise, perhaps "*The* Woman" in his perplexing, Swinburnean spy ring, what he will have gained from partaking in this global chase. "You will be an initiate, she had said. Initiates are wiser, she had said. Wise people are those who have gone deeper into the mystery.... If the mystery truly exists, then death does not, she had said."

As Harry submits to sex pleasures that incorporate more penetration, more subjugation, Bowering's readers will start to worry for him. "She would not let him rest, but threw him onto the floor, grabbed at his buttocks with her large hands. She bit him and wiped drool over his shoulder." In the push and pull between sensation and meaning, my dear old Dad, a Jesuitical American, used to get all Socratic on me. He would pause, nod, rub his whiskers. "Ah I see, Kevin," he'd aver. "But we always must ask ourselves, is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

Ian Rae / The Art of (Re)collecting: Bowering and the London Scene

> I remember that Greg Curnoe was a great collector. I have always liked collectors, and I understand collecting. (Bowering *Moustache* 79)

Most scholars agree that Bowering's involvement with the *TISH* collective at the University of British Columbia in the early 1960s helped him to formulate a poetics that he has elaborated, revised, and memorialized but never abandoned. *TISH* arose from a study group on Charles Olson's 1950 essay, "Projective Verse," and evolved into collective publishing ventures, such as the *TISH* poetry newsletter (1961-1966), as well as journals that combined creative and critical dialogue, such as Bowering's *Imago* (1964-74) and Frank Davey's *Open Letter* (1965-2013). However, in every phase of Bowering's career, he has simultaneously involved himself with other art scenes outside of Vancouver. For example, Jason Wiens has demonstrated that Bowering committed himself to developing an Okanagan aesthetic before, during, and after *TISH*. Between 1963 and 1972, Bowering pursued teaching and writing opportunities outside of British Columbia and he quickly developed a knack for choosing cities at the height of their creative ferment, insinuating himself into the company of the city's leading artists. For example, he began a PhD in London, Ontario, at the zenith of the city's art scene in 1966 and then landed a writer-in-residence position in Montreal in time for Expo '67. I edited *George Bowering: Bridges to Elsewhere*, a special issue of *Open Letter* (2010), to call attention to the range of these connections to writers, historians, and visual artists across Canada.

However, a gap in this special issue concerns the influence of London poets and painters on Bowering. The most comprehensive survey of this interface is the chapter on "Bowering and the London Scene" in Eva-Marie Kröller's *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour* (1992), where she explores "interdependencies" between Bowering and Canadian visual artists (11). However, Kröller's book appeared too soon to address a key document in this interface, Bowering's *The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (1993), which eulogized the painter, sculptor, and occasional poet after his sudden death in a cycling accident in November,

1992. My article here will demonstrate how Bowering uses mimicry and homage in *The Moustache* as part of his career-long attempt to find commonalities between the *TISH* aesthetics of composition by field and the regionalist aesthetics of the London scene.

In the 1960s, London attracted national and international attention for "the extraordinary vitality of the contemporary art scene" (Théberge 160), which spanned the visual arts (Jack Chambers, Greg Curnoe, Bernice Vincent, Murray Favro, Tony Urquhart, Robert Fones, Kim Ondaatje), film (Chambers, Keewatin Dewdney), poetry (James Reaney, Colleen Thibaudeau, Michael Ondaatje), theatre (Rae Davies, Reaney), and criticism (Curnoe's journal *Region*, Reaney's journal *Alphabet*). Most of these artists congregated in a historic but dilapidated section of the downtown that became synonymous with their work, as Robert Fones recalls:

> What is hard to imagine now is how compact the London art scene of the 1960s was. Most of the artists' studios, art galleries, art centres and stores where artists could buy supplies were located within eight city blocks bounded by Queen's Avenue on the north and King Street on the south, Ridout Street on the west and Wellington Street on the east.... The city seemed continually animated by exhibitions, poetry readings, films and musical performances at 20/20 Gallery, plays at Alpha Centre, films at the London Public Library, new issues of *20 Cents Magazine*, drugs, Love-Ins, concerts, The Nihilist Spasm Band at the York Hotel, and the latest albums from British groups like the Beatles and The Rolling Stones at Bluebird Music.... Artists frequently visited each other's studios to talk about art and to keep in touch with what everyone was doing in their work. ("London" 36)

This scene was also circumscribed temporally because it struggled to survive the destruction of the artists' neighbourhood by the corporate and government monoliths that now dominate the downtown: "This close-knit community remained intact until the city launched a process of so-called Urban Renewal in 1971.... Curnoe prophetically asked in his 1969 São Paulo catalogue: 'Can one's sense of place survive the physical destruction of that place[?]'" (Fones, "London" 36-37). The spirit of this arts community lives on in the Forest City Gallery

(1973-), now located south of the downtown and one of the oldest artist-run galleries in Canada ("FCG"). However, urban "renewal" dispersed the arts scene that the National Gallery of Canada once celebrated with the exhibition *The Heart of London* in 1968. The destruction of the artists' studios also made prophetic the allegorical dimension of Chambers' film, *The Hart of London* (1968), which comments on the fate of the artist in a puritan society through a montage of footage of a stray deer hunted down by police. In this sense, Bowering's sojourn in London was timely because it brought him into contact with a group of artists in the midst of a passionate debate about the role of the arts in society. Although Bowering felt radically out of place in the cultural and physical geography of Southwestern Ontario, his experiences in London made him reflect on *TISH* and the different means of producing community through art: "I do remember the eager hubbub of those London, Ontario regionalists, their homemade art galleries, ironic picnics, theatre workshops, their gladsome business. They *gathered*. What are you doing, I kept thinking all the year I was among them" (Bowering "Reaney's" 52). Bowering struggled to write poetry in 1966 because most of his early writing evokes a sense of place, but after 1966 his writing begins to reflect the historical, material, and genealogical concerns of the London artists, especially in book-length works such as *Autobiology* (1972) and *A Short Sad Book* (1977; see Kröller).

Residual evidence of Bowering's London experience can be found in the cover images of his books, such as *Particular Accidents* (1977), which uses a detail of a painting by Chambers, and *A Short Sad Book*, which features a drawing by Curnoe. Bowering also makes the London influence explicit in the dedications of poems such as "In the Heart of Jewish Montreal (for Curnoe etc)" from *The Concrete Island* (1977), while Curnoe's visit to the Bowerings in Montreal yielded a series of collages with names such as *Bowering Westmount #5* (Milroy 40-41). These artworks are gestures of friendship, an artistic gift exchange, and not simply attempts by an emerging artist (Bowering) to acquire cultural capital by connecting his name to more established ones (Curnoe, Chambers), although that is part of Bowering's name-dropping strategy. Bowering's long poem *Curious* (1973)—which consists of a series of poetic homages to authors Bowering has known in a style that parodies the authors' works—demonstrates that his social networking is partly an ongoing study in literary composition and in the formation of artistic communities. The homages in *Curious* include an element of criticism that helps Bowering to

differentiate his work from that of his peers. Hence the poem "James Reaney" in *Curious* belongs to a series of critical meditations on Reaney and the aesthetics of "the local" that extends from "Why James Reaney is a Better Poet: (I) than any Northrop Frye poet, (2) than he used to be" (1968) to "Reaney's Region" (1982) to "Off Their Map" (2005). In short, Reaney's regionalism became a touchstone in Bowering's ongoing definition of his own sense of place.

The most profound London influence on Bowering is the regionalist art of Greg Curnoe whose "conception of regionalism, the notion of making art out of a passionate loyalty to one's immediate surroundings and community and not in slavish imitation of international styles, would be his most enduring legacy to Canadian art. By staying close to the nitty-gritty particulars of everyday life, you could develop an art of enduring significance" (Milroy 34). Bowering initially rejected the regionalism of the London artists, which he considered "the performance of a social conscience" ("Reaney" 40) that restricted individual expression because "loyalty" to one's surroundings implied subservience to the power structures that gave rise to local traditions (see also Davey). However Curnoe, as co-founder of the Nihilist Party of Canada as well as *Region* magazine (1961-90) and the Region Gallery (1962-63), had a much more anarchic take on local, regional, and national aesthetics than Reaney did, and Curnoe's challenges to artistic and political convention offset his devotion to place in a manner that appealed to Bowering.

Appropriately, *The Moustache* is a mixture of elegy and satire, regionalist recollections and *TISH*-inspired teasing, that reflects the mixed experiences of Bowering's life but offers no solutions to the ideological questions that preoccupy him. Bowering recalls in his preface to *The Moustache* that "[t]he day after Greg's death, sitting in Frank Davey's house in London, ON, before I knew what I was doing, I wrote the first entry in this 'I Remember book'" (n.p.). *The Moustache* consists of a series of discrete recollections about Curnoe, each beginning with the phrase "I remember," isolated on individual pages without transitional material. Bowering explains in his preface that *The Moustache* takes as its model Curnoe's *Drawer Full of Stuff* (Bowering, "Preface" n.p.). This 1961 sculpture from Curnoe's Dada-inspired work was the piece chosen in the "catalogue for the 1982 Curnoe retrospective at the National Gallery…as an emblem of Curnoe's work as a whole…. The items collected in the drawer—bus tickets, a dinky toy, a table

spoon, Sunlight soap, a double socket with plug, a bicycle chain, and others—are fragments of everyday life, but, assembled in a frame, they are granted exceptional status" (Kröller 55). These items are the detritus of crucial phases and places in Curnoe's life, as Milroy observes: "At twenty-five, Curnoe was attempting a radical rethinking of self-portraiture, creating a systematic sampler of all the places that had shaped him, a kind of sculptural compost of his material world. True to form, he included a numbered index of the drawer's contents, fastidiously itemizing each object and its highly personal provenance" (28). Bowering mimics Curnoe's "sculptural compost" in his writing and the poet creates a portrait of Curnoe through a series of discrete recollections about seemingly inconsequential moments. Bowering's portrait of Curnoe, made of ephemera in the face of oblivion, thus complements the painted self-portrait by Curnoe on the front cover of *The Moustache*, the photograph of Bowering and Curnoe on the back cover, and the snapshots interspersed throughout the book.

Less explicitly, Bowering's choice of title and his recollection concerning "Greg's face collages" (*Moustache* 65) allude to a series of collages that Curnoe produced in the mid- to late-sixties (Portis 30-3), which used a "cutout" frame in the shape of a giant moustache. The moustaches could be combined with other cutouts of eyes, noses, ears, penises, and ties to create a portrait of an artist "whose own moustache was his signature feature" (Fones "Suspended" 54; Portis 56). Inside these cutouts are non-figurative collages made from paper ephemera that Curnoe collected from garbage bins, pockets, and other corners of his quotidian life, such that his self-portrait arose from the material culture that supported him, in particular the paper labels of local merchandise that was being replaced in the 1960s by the plastic wrapping of mass-produced products from malls and supermarkets (Fones "London" 37). By treating memories like objects on display and creating a portrait of Curnoe from seemingly insignificant details, Bowering pays homage to Curnoe in the artist's own style while highlighting the intersection of print culture and the visual arts in both artists' work. Bowering's recollections in *The Moustache* thus underscore how collectives and artistic forms of collecting have played crucial roles in his formation as a writer.

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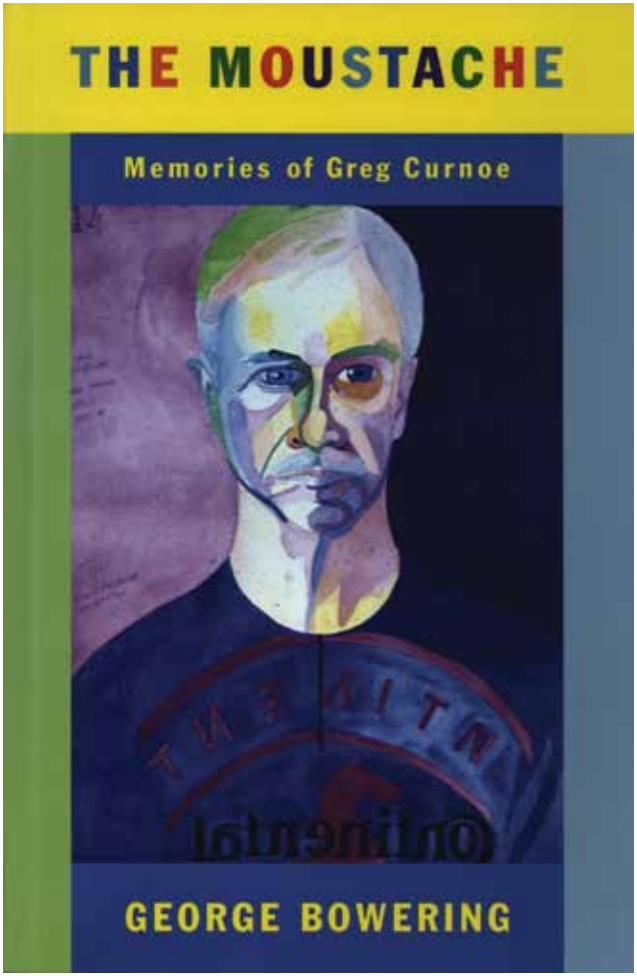
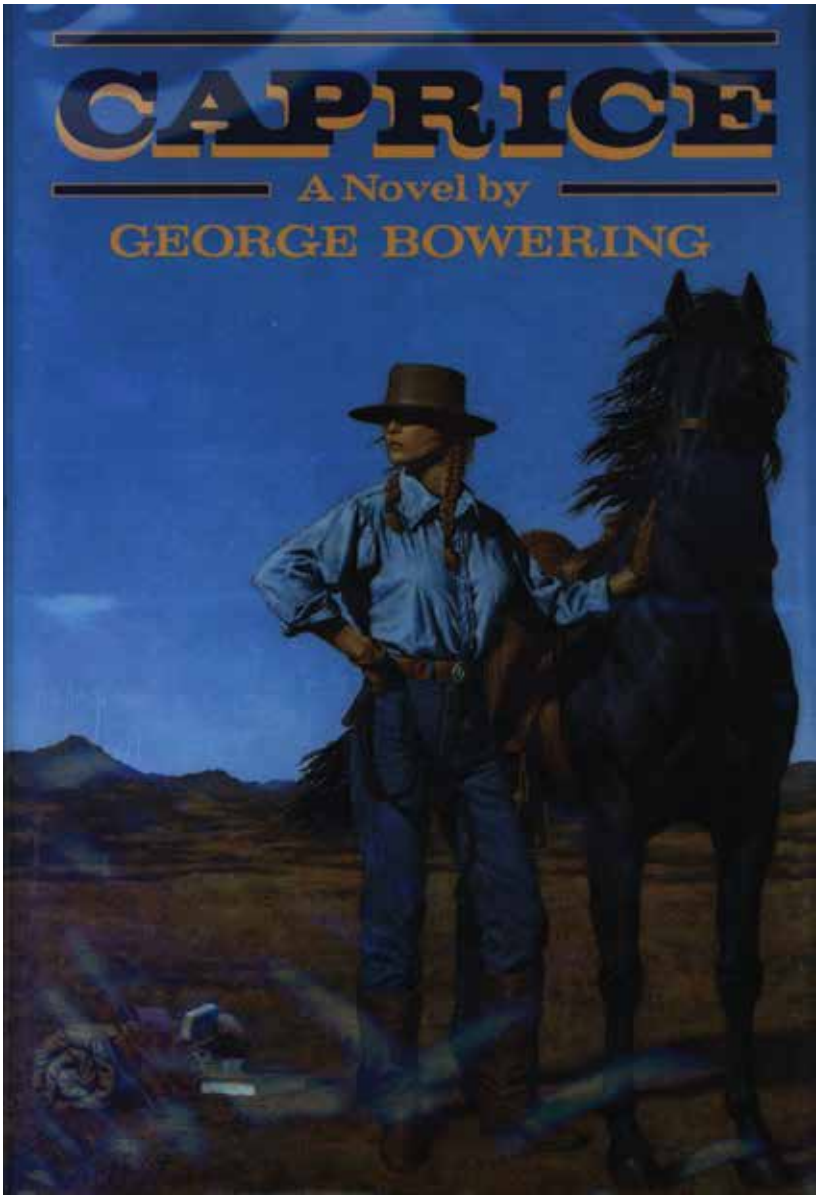


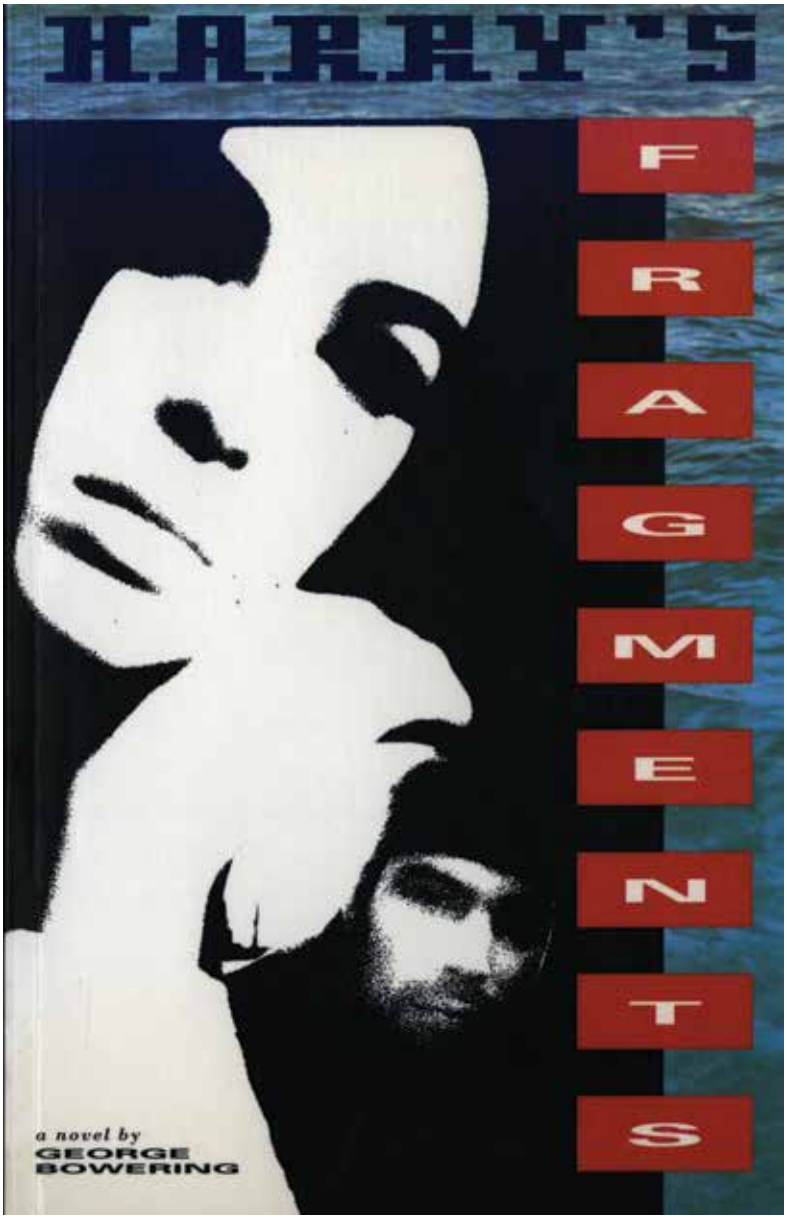
The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe
(Toronto: Coach House, 1993)

"This is Canadian poet and author George Bowering's memoir of his friend and compatriot, the painter Greg Curnoe, who died in a road accident in 1992. The two were friends for almost 30 years. Until 24 hours ago, I had heard of neither. I picked this book up for a few pennies at the literary equivalent of the last chance saloon—a vast line of shelves outside a second hand bookshop in Hay-on-Wye on the England-Wales border. Having read a quarter of it before even paying, I went back to my car, mesmerised, and finished the book before driving home. I now want to read as much as I can by this author and to see the works of his subject. Bowering chooses not to give us the written equivalent of a photograph, but rather that of a briefly and deftly-made sketch—a sketch which is all the more effective because of precisely that brevity and deftness. Each page contains a single memory. It might be a memory of an art installation, a poetry reading, a strange dream, a meal, a car journey, a television appearance, the two men and their families going on a day trip, or whatever…From what I can tell by browsing Amazon, Bowering is as deservedly well-known in his native land and the United States as he is undeservedly unknown here, even if this book is currently out of print on your side of the Atlantic. *The Moustache* is one of those pieces a person discovers and then feels the need to evangelize about. Which I suppose I just have" (Barrie Hudson, "a chance find which stunned me," Amazon.ca, July 26, 2000).



Caprice (Toronto and New York: Viking/Penguin, 1987, 1988)

"In order to create a Canadian western you had to do something that was not an American western. I had to have all the signs of an American western but there had to be irony—you had to turn them upside down. It's filled with signs, but it's filled with difference" (Miki 85).



Harry's Fragments: A Novel of International Puzzlement
(Toronto: Coach House, 1990)

"If you ask a novelist what is his favourite novel among those he has written and/or published, he will usually pick one that has pretty well eluded the notice of readers and/or critics. For me that novel would be either *A Short Sad Book* or, more likely, *Harry's Fragments*.... *Harry's Fragments* was composed with more constraints than any other writing I have done" (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 118).

Bowering in his study with the film crew for "George Bowering," *Canadian Literature (Author) Series*. Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, 1985.

Aaron Peck / On Nuts and Other Editions: The Books in George Bowering's Study

"Books wait. It's one of their biggest virtues.
They always wait for you." —Javier Marias

My initial encounters with George Bowering involved books: not those written by him, but physical books, objects that had passed through his hands.

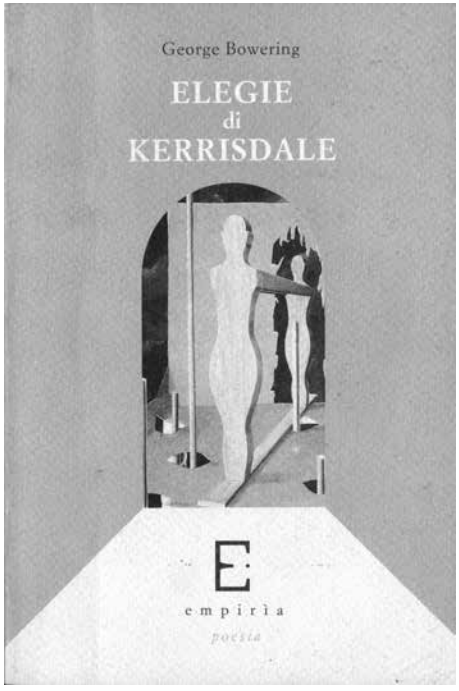
The first, even before I'd met him: my hardcover copy of Louis Zukofsky's *Complete Short Poetry*, which I was carrying with me when I attended the IntraNation conference at what was then called Emily Carr Institute. A row in front of me, George, almost instinctively, turned around and snatched the book from my hands. "Hey," he shouted, "I have this book!"

Next, at MacLeod's Books, a book from his former library: avant-garde Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's *Stream of Life*. I assume he must have sold it when he moved out of the Kerrisdale address on the sticker inside—"George Bowering / 2499 W 37 Ave. / Vancouver, BC V6M 1P4." The address, no doubt, was the one at which he wrote *Kerrisdale Elegies*. I paid eight dollars for *Stream of Life*. The book was in good condition, with a few marginal notes, which I scrutinized. In the forward, written by Hélène Cixous, Bowering has underlined seven lines of text that end with the phrase "language has *already said* everything." The same phrase is handwritten in the top right hand of the margin. Into the novel and alongside a paragraph that ends with, "He thought it was his mother calling him and he answered, 'I'm coming.' He went upstairs but found his mother and father fast asleep," he writes, "a common occurrence."

In November 2013, George invited me to his house in West Point Grey to talk about his books—*TCR* had asked me to write about the design of the prize-winning editions. We met in his office, where he keeps all editions of the books he has written. When I told him about my—or *his*—copy of Lispector, how it had his former address and marginalia in it, he chuckled, telling me tales about his old house. He seemed far less unnerved by having his marginalia out in the world than I would be.

In his office, a closet full of bookshelves functions as an archive of his published materials. He keeps two copies of every edition. His wife, Jean Baird, says that at least twenty books have a photograph of him on the cover—*Autobiology* being the first time his image appears—a claim that George does not deny. But he also tells me to notice the artists, most of them friends, who have made work, or whose work George has used, for covers. I counted over twenty-five: *Particular Accidents* has a Jack Chambers image on it; *Flycatcher* a General Idea; and seven books have works by Greg Curnoe, including *At War with the U.S.* with illustrations made specifically for it. Brian Fisher designed the cover for George's 2008 chapbook *Shall I Compare?* only a few years before the artist died. All of these covers indicate, or are extensions of, the close relationships George had with many Canadian artists, both as critic and friend.

George also collects his foreign-language editions. There's a Chinese-language edition of *Burning Water*. This, he says, was an authorized edition; however, somebody (he couldn't recall who) found out about an unauthorized series of Canadian classics published in China, also including Margaret Atwood's *Survival* and *Surfacing*. Of official foreign-language editions, however, George is eager to show me an Italian *Elegie di Kerrisdale*, which he went to Rome to launch.



Elegie di Kerrisdale (Rome: Edizioni Empiria, 1996), trans. Annalisa Goldoni.

George has sent his mother, now in her late nineties, a copy of every one of his books. He mischievously tells me how his mother lent his first book to a friend of hers who ran it over. Although it was purportedly accidental, you never know what form criticism might take. More recently, Mrs. Bowering's collection has been sold to the Beinecke, but George didn't mention whether that tire-marked copy made it to Yale.

Among special editions, each book that has won a major award is rebound. George has won the Governor General's award three times: once in 1981 for fiction with *Burning Water*; and twice in the same year, 1969, for poetry with *Rocky Mountain Foot* and *Gangs of Kosmos*. (Was there another time when someone won two awards for two books in the same category in the same year? In today's literary culture, even the suggestion feels scandalous.) I was surprised at how slap-dash and ugly the Governor General Award-winning editions are: the original first edition was rebound in cloth covers, almost indistinguishable from the rebinding that happens at any public library, except for marbled end-sheets. And to be fair: *Burning Water* also has a large nautical wheel affixed to the cover, although the rest of its rebind is in keeping with a kind of drab library quality—in other words, archival but inelegant. Compared to the Governor General Award-winning editions, however, the rebind of *Changing on the Fly*, nominated for the Griffin in 2005, has better binding and was constructed of finer materials. And only for a nominated book! All four of those award-winning or -nominated editions are shelved next to the two copies of their commercial counterparts.

The shelves in the closet also include books that have a Bowering introduction or afterword. There were, to my count, four copies of the 1990 edition of *Swamp Angel* by Ethel Wilson that includes his afterword. When I mentioned the novel, George told me that the cabins outside of Kamloops, on which Wilson based hers in the story, are still there.

George and I both grew up in the Okanagan Valley, at a difference of forty years. He once told me that a diner in Penticton called the Elite, which is known for its hot sauce and pies, is properly pronounced *ee-lite*, not *e-leet*. I thought he was joking, trying to trick me into sounding like a goof. The Elite is a few doors down from one of British Columbia's best used bookstores, The Book Shop. Last time I was in Penticton, after book shopping, I went over to the Elite, ordered a pie, and did some recon. I asked the manager of the Elite about the pronunciation of the name. He said, bluntly, "A few of the old-timers still call it that."

In his study, after finishing the tour of his own titles, George is quick to note other books, those not written by him, stored on the shelves nearest to his desk, all fiction and poetry, such as the novels of Daniel Pinkwater, a children's author he admires. He then diverts my attention to his collection of James Dean magazines, although my eye wanders back to those shelves with an impressive and nearly exhaustive collection of Canadian, American, and European modernist literature. On these, I notice translations of the novels of Nathalie Sarraute, and I ask him about her work. He tells me how, in the 1960s, he was reading a lot of French modernism, her books among others.

Like most libraries, amid the books are collectables, portraits, and mementos. For George, this includes pictures of his family (his father, his mother, his daughter) and of his two heroes (Charles Olson and Shelley), as well as three Hello Kitty dolls, which he pointed out with some glee. In typical Bowering fashion, the *objets d'art* in his library—Hello Kitty dolls—invert the pretention of a guy from the southern interior of British Columbia even having objects in his collection that require such a fancy French loanword. A few shelves over, however, he shows me a eucalyptus nut found in Rapallo, near Ezra Pound's former house.

George claims he has kept track of every book he has read since he was fourteen in notebooks or "scribblers." As of 2 November 2013, when I interviewed him, he had 5,536 entries (the first date, 7/7/59, appears forty-one pages into the first scribbler, with the entry number 955, *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury). He has also published over a hundred titles of his own, depending how you classify some of the chapbooks.

I look around at all of the books in his study, those written by him and those not. One of the fundamental qualities of the book as a physical object is its contingency: you never know where it will end up or how, once there, it will cohere into a collection, into a life; or then what will happen when it is sold or given away. I still have *my* Zukofsky, and *his* Lispector.

While I was visiting, George received an email from the poet Ron Padgett with news of the poet's *Collected Poems*. "Read 'em and weep!" his friend wrote. Padgett's tome is longer than eight hundred pages; George laughs and says that he is one of his favorite American poets. That *Collected* Padget was already on one of the many piles of books on the floor waiting to be read.

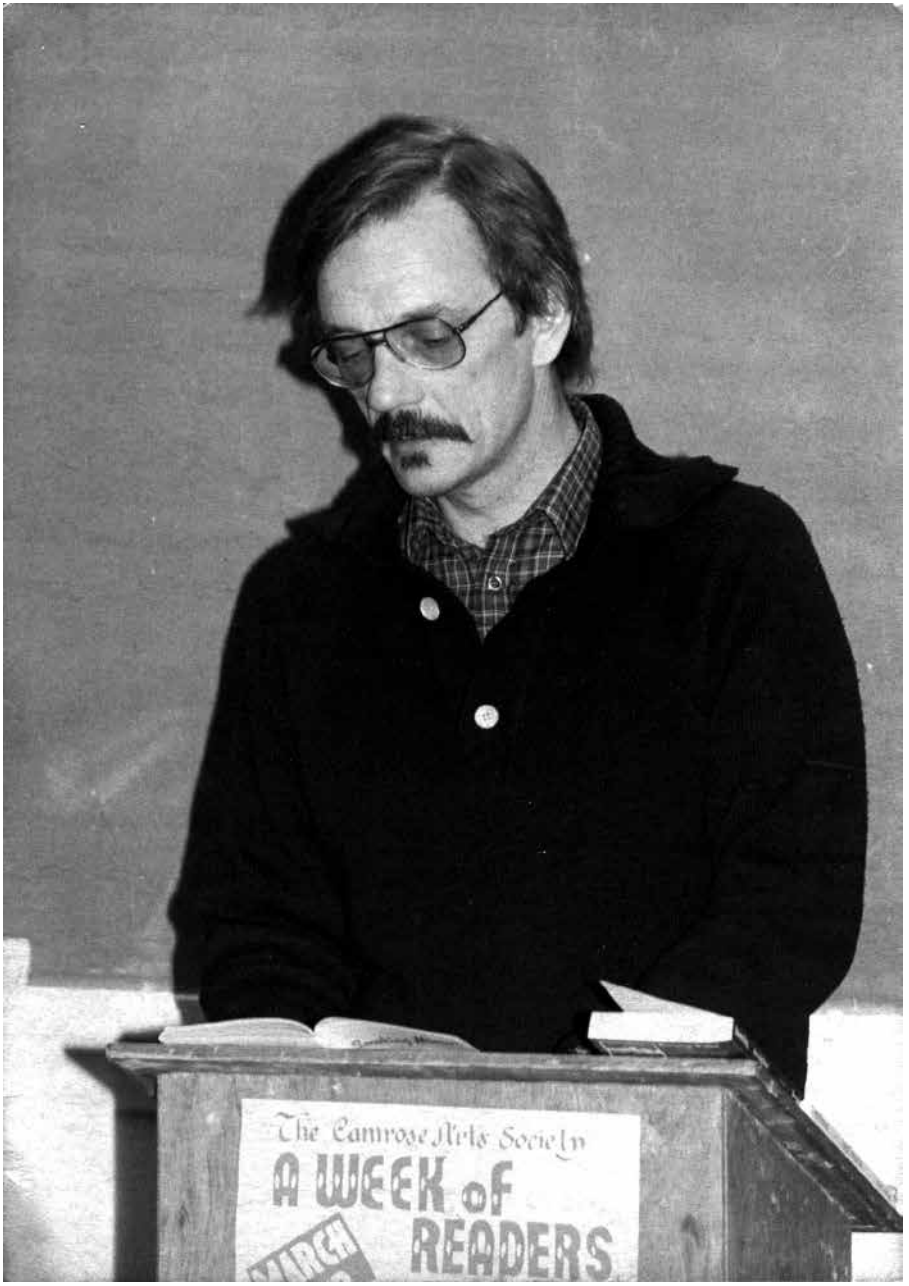
And then he tells me he must get on to reading it.

Deanna Fong / George Bowering in Performance: Three Constellations

This summer, I spent several weeks hunting down, digitizing, transcribing, and annotating the audio and video recordings that document over fifty years of George Bowering's prolific work as performer. Archives and institutions across the country hold more than 100 unique performances, inscribed on reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes and mini-cassettes, Beta and ¾-inch U-matic videotapes. These recordings sound out the contemporary social space in which his work circulates—the contingent and shifting assemblies of author, community, and place.

The three textual "constellations" that follow are distilled from a set of ten recordings made between 1967 and 1988—among them, readings at Capilano College, Western Front, Vanier College, and Sir George Williams University. I limited my data set to solo performances in which Bowering read and commented extensively on his own writing. For each recording, I transcribed all extrapoetic speech: anything that wasn't a performed written work, such as introductions, interjections, and banter with the audience. The results were then analyzed according to three criteria: "words" is a curated list of the most frequent words that appear in Bowering's introductions to his own work, based on my collated transcriptions. I used Voyant, an online text analysis tool, to determine word frequency, omitting commonplace words such as articles and pronouns. The result is a lexical field of Bowering's recorded speech, revealing recurring themes and semantic clusters. This list appears in descending order from the highest to lowest frequency. "People" is a list of every person that Bowering mentions in his performances outside of the poems themselves. It intersects with printed texts like *Curious*, which focus on Bowering's relationships with different writers, but also speaks to longstanding and passing connections that, in aggregate, define a field of tradition, influence, and taste. "Places" lists all the locations that Bowering mentions in his introductions, whether specific, general, or ideational. This list is presented in chronological order as they occur in his readings, charting a spatial map of his written work, as well his memories and movements across time.

Thanks to Special Collections at Simon Fraser University, the Concordia University Archives and the SpokenWeb Project, the CBC Archives, Library and Archives Canada, and the Western Front.



A reading in the late 1970s hosted by the Camrose Arts Society.
Photo credit unknown.

CALLED READ ABOUT BOOK POEM GOING KNOW FIRST THEM READING RIGHT POETS THINGS COUPLE PEOPLE VANCOUVER YEARS LAST BACK NOW OTHER TIME ALWAYS MORE SHE WAY WHERE MADE SEE WRITING WROTE EVERYBODY POET STORY WRITTEN BEFORE END GUESS LITTLE LONG NEVER ONE PIECE BIG CANADA CHAPTER PROBABLY WANT ANYWAY COMING MAGAZINE WE CANADIAN GO CURIOUS HER HOUSE MAYBE PERSON PUBLISHED SAYS SHORT SKIP TODAY BEGINNING EAST LIFE LIVED THOUGHT TOOK AMERICAN BODY DAY DOING EXCEPT [WORDS] HAPPENS KIND LOVE MINUTES OVER PLACE SECTION SONNET TALKING TRUE RIGHT AUDIENCE AWAY BEAUTIFUL COAST DAYS EVERYTHING FINISHED FRIENDS GUY NEXT NOVEL PROSE REMEMBER SMALL SOMEBODY SPANISH BASEBALL BIRTH CAUSE CHANCE DECIDED ERRATUM FAVORITE FINISH FLESH IMAGINE LIST INTRODUCTION SAD SOUTH BOTTOM CHANGED CORNER COWBOYS DIED DURING FACT FATHER FEELING FIGURE FORTH FOUND HAT HEARD HEART HELL LATE LEAGUES LITERATURE LIVING MEMBER MILES MOTHER MOUNTAIN NAME NEED OFTEN OLD PAGES PROVE RIVER SENSE SOUND TITLE WAR WATER WOMAN WORLD

ROBERT DUNCAN ROBERT CREELEY FRED WAH
YOSHIRO TSUBAKI JACK SPICER SUZUKI ROSHI
ROY KIYOOKA WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS
MARGARET ATWOOD BPNICHOL ED DORN
CHARLES OLSON WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
ALLEN GINSBERG VICTOR COLEMAN
RAYMOND SOUSTER HD BILL BISSETT
RICHARD NIXON JOHN COLTRANE AL PURDY
STEPHEN SPENDER JUDITH COPITHORNE
ARTIE GOLD DONALD HALL ROBIN BLASER
MARGARET RANDALL DWIGHT GARDINER
JAMIE REID LIONEL KEARNS STAN PERSKY
FRANK DAVEY LEW WELCH LEROI JONES
GERRY GILBERT [PEOPLE] DAVID MCFADDEN
BPNICHOL ALICE MUNRO WARREN TALLMAN
GEORGE STANLEY GLADYS HINDMARCH
GREG CURNOE ALDEN NOWLAN HUGH HOOD
GERTRUDE STEIN HERNANDO DE SOTO
ELI MANDEL KENNETH HARTMAN
DAPHNE MARLATT CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
JOHN MILTON ROY ROGERS ROBIN MATHEWS
AUDREY THOMAS TED BERRIGAN
TOM CLARKE TOM RAWORTH BRIAN FAWCETT
JAMES SCHUYLER GEORGE ECONOMOU
ANSELM HOLLO CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY
LOUIS ZUKOFSKY SAMUEL BECKETT
CHARLES REZNIKOFF HERMAN MELVILLE
ROBERT KROETSCH WALLACE STEVENS
ANGELA BOWERING JOHN NEWLOVE

WESTERN CANADA EASTERN CANADA CALIFORNIA OREGON COAST VANCOUVER MEXICO EDMONTON CALGARY ALBERTA PRINCE GEORGE OKLAHOMA MEXICO CITY TEXAS SAN JUAN DEL RÍO VERACRUZ CUBA NEW YORK OLIVER PEACHLAND TUNNEL MOUNTAIN MOUNT NORQUAY HIGH RIVER COURTENAY MONTANA DETROIT SOUTH SLOCAN DALLAS BUFFALO MINNESOTA LONDON ONTARIO YORK STREET WESTMOUNT KITSILANO QUEBEC MONTREAL CAMPBELL RIVER ATHENS LINCOLN COUNTY NEW COLD MOUNTAIN [PLACES] GENEVA DETROIT MEXICO JAPAN HIROSHIMA SAN FRANCISCO SAN DIEGO BUFFALO BEMIDJI MARSEILLES WEST COAST OHIO ILLINOIS TORONTO OKANAGAN ORANGEVILLE HAMILTON HALIFAX INUVIK LAWRENCE PENTICTION OSOYOOS NEWFOUNDLAND MISSISSIPPI KOOTENAYS OMAK SEATTLE WENATCHEE WASHINGTON LOCARNO BEACH LOS ANGELES FREDERICTON APPLE VALLEY MANDALAY TULSA SASKATCHEWAN MISSOURI SUMMERLAND COLLINGWOOD PORTUGAL VICTORIA NANAIMO ST LOUIS HUDSON BAY

Rob Taylor / His Life: A Poem

Spring 1987. Vancouver

In shirtsleeves at last and
        standing in right field late
in practice he said it is
        this day that makes you glad
you didn't kill yourself
        in December.

The poet Brian Fawcett bent over
        the plate, finished his thought
with an awkward swing, uttered
        a nasty disappointed word
the man in right field
        handled with ease. (116)

The first thing *His Life: A Poem* teaches you is to refer to your past self in the third-person. Okay, I see him twelve years ago—my god, *eighteen years old*—hunched in front of the dozen or so titles arranged on the butt-end of a single shelving unit at the SFU bookstore. He knows the stacks at the library across the concourse are crammed with poetry books, but he is both suspicious of academia and attracted to the serendipity of uncurated grazing. It's Spring 2002, and the latest arrival on the island of damned books (he's the only one, he's convinced, who ever buys anything from this poetry section) is by George Bowering. He hesitates to even pick it up, considering the number of times he's been told to read *Kerrisdale Elegies*. But at least it's not *Kerrisdale Elegies*, it's some book he's never heard of (which years later he learns, to his chagrin, was short-listed for a GG). So he buys it, and George Bowering and his books slip into his life.

What a difference it makes to call your past self "he"—such a generous distance. I can almost love the fool that I was, love his stubbornness and scattershot passions.

As I reread *His Life*, Bowering's book of poems written in response to thirty years of diary entries (1958-88, four per year, one for each equinox and solstice), I feel as though I am reading my own journal, which happens to have been written by someone else. Not because our lives overlap, but because keystone books and poems—those works which shape a writer and a person, whether or not you know it at the time—become personal mementos, imbued as much with your own life as the author's. *His Life*, and "Spring 1987. Vancouver" in particular, represent a time in my life when poetry was new to me, and peripheral—a pleasurable secret, a hobby. A rescue from my life and not the centre of it. A time when poetry was all Spring and *shirtsleeves* at last.

His Life taught me just that, that poetry could be pleasurable—could socialize and play. Here were horses (early on), and baseball (increasingly, later), and hockey ("facing the real / forest or the Washington Capitals" 72). Here were bowling and golf and CFL football, and every poet you could imagine arguing and pronouncing and *handling flyballs with ease*. Poets everywhere, McFadden and Nichol most of all (I counted) and Birney, Creeley, Duncan, Fawcett, Kroetsch, Purdy, et al. in there too. Part way through *His Life* I began to think that Bowering played baseball with poets just so he could send a few of them into the outfield and gain a bit of distance.

His Life also taught me to be unafraid of jokes ("It was warm, or // what they call here / in the South Okanagan / cold," 28) and probable-jokes:

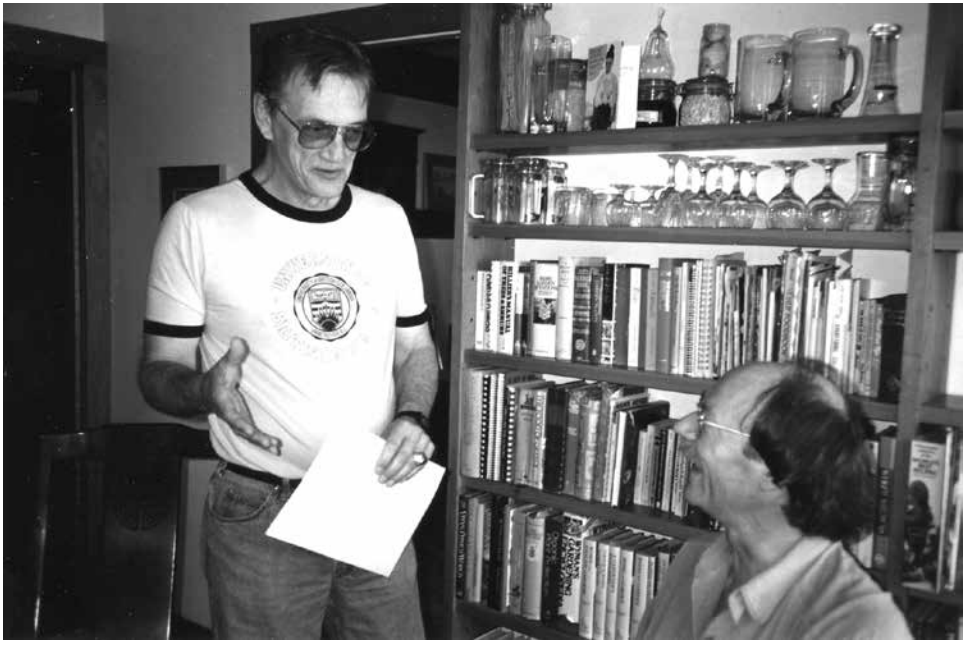
> More and more the poets
> get their pictures in the papers.
>
> He doesn't know whether that means our world
> is getting better
>
> or falling apart. (35)

and writing about things like sticky pants (more than once) and Flying Dildos (a baseball team, I hope).

His Life taught me that a poet could communicate depth of intimacy through length of name alone: full names, first names, single letters. All the things not talked about when talking about baseball. And the power generated when suddenly the conversation swings, and there's a well-loved single letter staring you in the eye.

His Life taught me that every poem doesn't have to be an isolated moonshot, that meaning can accrue. In *His Life*, lines like "it'll be ghastly at the end" and "classical relation makes a family of us all" and "widening circle of word" and "dwell in my own house" and "tender stinking wings" and "half-crazed anarchist loggers" repeat throughout the book—keystone phrases, some (it's implied) pulled directly from Bowering's journals. These lines function in *His Life* as the poems in *His Life* function in mine—they return and return, become richer with each utterance, heavy with meaning or humour. They contain more than they ought to.

His Life contains more than it ought to. Random selections from a diary, drawn out. Some trivial, some dull. Made rich by giving them time and attention, by writing the damn thing out. *Write the damn thing out* was what he learned in the bookstore that day. Stop hesitating, stop waiting. Don't worry which page turns up, just write it out and out and out. And in it you will see a life. Yours. His.



George and Dwight Gardiner at 2499 West 37th, 1983.
Photo credit unknown.

Dwight Gardiner / My New Jodorowsky Script

Honouring *Bowering's B.C.*

"Phornthip come and sit at the table. I want to tell you a story." First I need to explain Old-One to a Buddhist.

"Do you know where we come from?" Phornthip looks at me.

"Where do we come from?" She cautiously replies "Vancouver?"

"No! Where do our spirits come from?"

"Thailand?"

"No!" Gongs are banging. Monks are chanting Pali from the voiceboxes of ghosts. *Ghosts and Spirits*. Spirit houses are crumbling and being taken to the land of broken spirit houses.

"The night & day will pass away but love will always win."

I Ghosts: First Variation

Old-One was dreaming when somebody brought the light. He opened his eyes and the world was a mess. A burnt out old sidehill with cranes falling off cliffs into circles of alkali. Old-One saw Indian doctors with weasel tails and five-toed salamander bones torturing lame deer & calling to the dead to be their lovers. Giant maggots were waving rattlesnake bones and riding pink and green sea serpents. Old-One screamed "Ogopogo!"

Old-One stuck pitch in his eyes and went back to dreaming. He dreamt that four brown bears would come and fix the world. They will put the world in order he thought. Old-One dreamed a long time. Then he dug the pitch out of his eyes and saw a gigantic lake shaped like a dog. "I will name this lake *sqexe*." Four brown bears were traveling in a canoe toward the falls they call *okanaqin*, where beautiful princesses were pulling salmon up from below the falls in birchbark baskets.

II The Wizard

There was Wiley-One. He was juggling his eyes and sticking them back in their sockets. "*xexeli*, *xexeleq*."

Old-One looked at the brown bears paddling the canoe. He counted four. This was the magic number. Then he looked at Wiley-One. This was not the magic number.

Old-One said "You are the trickster. You can be my helper." Trickster juggled his eyes. "*xexeli*, *xexeleq*."

III Spirits

It takes a long time to trick people. Then there was another one. He was a tall gangly kid from Honest John. He wore crystals over his eyes and had a crumpled old cowboy hat. Old-One says to trickster "He is your brother."

Tall gangly one from Honest John says "I am a poet. Someday they will name a wine after me."

Trickster says "My name *senk'lip* rhymes with the wine they call *nk'mip*."

IV Ghosts: Second Variation

Tall gangly one says "We will start a baseball team. We will play Nine-Easy Pieces. You can juggle your eyes. You can be our centre fielder."

Trickster juggles his eyes and says "I don't play positions. I don't chase balls. I chase chickens across endless hayfields."

Then trickster and tall gangly one go to the Three Arches Hotel and play the juke box. It is playing *Ghosts and Spirits* over and over. Someday it will burn down and the music will stop.

"The night & day will pass away but love will always win."

In the sixth volume of his lifelong poem *The Martyrology*, the poet bpNichol included a piece entitled "Briefly." It begins

> the heart does break
> the aching muscle in the chest
> carries more than the weight hangs from the body
> from the barely perceiving brain
> buried under the weight of loss
>
> of grief

Nichol is writing about his grief for his stillborn son and his fear that his wife will die from her grief. As a poet he is sensitive to the rhyme we feel in the words "brief" and "grief." As a Canadian writer he created something rare in this country: a piece of literary writing about the experience of grieving.

In 2004 George Bowering and I moved from southern Ontario to Vancouver. My son came with us but my 21-year-old daughter had a job and boyfriend in St. Catharines, so she stayed in Ontario. During our phone conversation of March 2006, Bronwyn confessed that she had an eating disorder. The phone calls got longer. I read everything I could find and talked to experts and counsellors. I felt a parent's long-distance powerlessness, frustration, and fear as my daughter's life spiralled. There were many moments of hope, but the recovery path was difficult. She had to quit her job; she broke up with her boyfriend. The telephone woke us up early in the morning of October 3, 2006. The caller was my good friend and Bronwyn's aunt with the news that Bronwyn had been killed in a single-car accident earlier that morning off a road near St. Catharines.

•

An important part of my grieving process has been reading. In the months after Bronwyn's death I read everything I could find on grief and mourning. People sent me titles from all over. Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* was the

most often recommended, and for good reason. C.S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed* is a masterful study in the context of faith. Katherine Ashenburg's book *The Mourner's Dance: What We Do When People Die* confirmed my feeling that our society does not provide what it takes to handle grieving. Thomas Lynch's *The Undertaking* is a gutsy and powerful view of grief by a poet/funeral director. As the months went by and the books piled up on the bedside table, I began to realize that although the books by counsellors, psychologists, Buddhists, and self-help gurus were of interest and perhaps of some help, it was the work by creative writers that consistently reached me and provided some comfort.

George and I talked about this experience and noticed two patterns. The creative writers were generally from the UK or the US. Among the works of Canadian authors there are many elegies and tributes, but those tend to be about the persons who have died, not about the mourning of the person left to grieve. There are books such as Matt Cohen's mournful *Last Seen* (1997) in which real deaths are transformed into fiction. But to date there had been no collection of non-fiction pieces about the grieving process as told by Canadian literary writers. I wrote to Katherine Ashenburg and suggested a commissioned anthology by Canadian writers. She loved the idea but was deep into another project. Instead she suggested that George and I take on the anthology ourselves.[1] We decided to put out some feelers and see if there was any interest.

We weren't sure how writers would respond. After all, we'd be asking them to write about their hardest moments, to write about their grief. The majority we approached responded in the same fashion: a great idea for an anthology; I haven't written about that topic and I see why I should. Some tried to write an essay only to discover that what they had to say had already been written in a novel (Bernice Morgan, Anita Badami) or in poetry (Margaret Atwood, Stephen Scobie). Two writers declined. Even years afterward it is difficult to write about suicide and there are other people to consider. One writer's daughter was facing a court case for a hit and run accident that had killed her son—it was too soon to write about the family's grief.

The essays started arriving. Each time I would read a few pages and find myself in tears. I would make a cup of tea, take a small break, and tell myself to "Take off

1 *The Heart Does Break* (Toronto: Random House, 2009).

the mummy hat and put on the editor hat." At some point in reading each essay I would have the reaction, "Yes, that's exactly it." Each writer had articulated some aspect of grief in a way that made sense to me. The anthology was taking shape. It was the book I had wanted. Bronwyn's book.

•

Working with George and the writers to edit the essays was a fascinating experience. George insists on absolute precision but he is gentle, encouraging, and playful when needed. Renee Rodin struggled to get the language absolutely right. It was a challenge since she was writing about a murder, and no charges had been laid. The essay had to go to the legal department.

We thought that one section of Steven Reid's essay about the death of his mother and father while he was in prison went over the top. Steven said that it was hard for him to tell since he'd lived most of his life over the top. The revisions were clean and removed any sentimentality.

Discussions that George and I had during this stage were often about grammar, punctuation, and the accuracy of language. We would sometimes work for thirty minutes on one sentence. I was prepared to let it go—close enough, I see what he means. But, George would say, it isn't what he *says*. And we could not leave that sentence until it had satisfactorily passed Bowering's insistence on accuracy and respect for the language. Regardless of whether the writer was a long-time friend, an award-winning best selling author, or a writer we had met through this project, everyone received the same scrutiny.

Most of us make little leaps with language. George doesn't. What I have learned is that it is not that he won't but that he *can't*. I spend a lot of time explaining signs and televisions commercials to George. Sometimes George's response to signs has to do with his life-long role of class clown. We drive by a sign in the Okanagan that says "Fruit stands." George remarks, "Some do; some don't." On highway 97 near the turnoff that heads toward Vancouver is a sign that reads, "Use both lanes." If George is at the wheel, he always straddles both lanes. That one has been driving his daughter Thea nuts for years.

That constant awareness of and playfulness with language can mask those times when George is truly confused. This week he was puzzling over a photo caption in the *Globe and Mail*. It said that the couple in the photo had been married

under the shadow of Casa Loma. You can't be under a shadow, he complained. You can stand on a shadow. You can be under a cloud but you can't be under a shadow. What do they mean?

Not too long ago George got himself in a bit of a pickle on Facebook. A friend alerted me. I looked up the string and realized immediately what had happened. George had made a comment in his always-precise way. Others reading the comment had made that leap that George doesn't do and thought he was making a denigrating comment about a recently dead writer. Not so, he was only asking for clarification of the language in someone else's post. A long-time friend and fellow writer commented on the Facebook bashing, "But one thing about this Bowering George is that he has a heart better than generally realized, and a kind of idiot-savant simplicity of mind often obscured by his Derrida-esque contortions of thought."

•

After the manuscript was submitted the dance with the publisher and editors began. Bill Whitehead's essay about life without Timothy Findley was written in a style that was, in part, an homage to Findley's style. The copy editor rearranged the paragraph structure to conform to the house style. Well, no, said George. You can't do that. Put it back the way it was. This anthology is not about conformity of style. He won that one. The publisher thought that Brian Fawcett's eloquent piece about his father was too long. But, said George, what could you possibly cut? Fawcett's essay remained long. Another debate was over Stephen Collis' essay about the death of his sister. Stephen doesn't use much punctuation. The publisher wanted every period and semi-colon. In the end George argued and won on a compromise position. That essay might have the least punctuation of any Random House publication in recent history. Then the designer got hold of the book. No, said George, you can't treat poetry as a design tool. The line breaks must remain true. And while you're at it, change the font.

•

My daughter died less than two months after George and I were married. I am told that a death can be a real test of a relationship. During the early days and months

George was my rock. Working on the anthology forged an even deeper bond. George helped me turn my grief into something that helped me—and others.

When it comes to editing George is a real stickler. He won't order Caesar salad in a restaurant if it is misspelled on the menu. Nothing slips past him. It was an interesting process watching him, with great care and courtesy, work with the writers to improve each essay. It also made me realize that one of the many reasons why George is so prolific—there are nine manuscripts currently with publishers or in the works—is that he is so precise in the first draft. There's little need for editing of spelling or grammar with this guy.

Two mottos inform George's life:

Jokes to the end.
Always respect the language.

George and Jean at the Elks Stadium in Kelowna, 2014.
Photo credit: a Falcons fan

J Marc Côté / Editing with George

George Bowering loves to joke around and kid; he's a past-master at teasing or what might be called frat house humour. Ever since I was eighteen, he's been asking me about the spot on my shirt, just beneath my chin. When I look down, he raises his finger and catches my nose with his knuckle. This started thirty-six years ago. I don't fall for the joke anymore, but I did, on occasion, over the span of thirty years and three thousand miles of geography. His finger pointing to my chest is the physical, real-world analogue for the intellectual play he loves in conversation and in writing. George's revised version of this practical joke now is to ask me why I published *Pinboy* as a memoir and not a novel. "It's a novel," he likes to say. "Didn't you realise that?"

Pinboy—which was nominated for the BC National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction, and was chosen as one of the *Globe and Mail*'s Top Five of 2012—was received by reviewers and fans alike as a memoir. As such, it falls into the broad category of literary non-fiction. This doesn't mean that it doesn't have the structure of a novel—it does—but it does mean that it isn't fiction. Truman Capote described *In Cold Blood*, an astonishing literary achievement completely devoid of the bathos Bowering is able to bring to his work, as a "non-fiction novel." But George would not say *Pinboy* is a non-fiction novel; he much prefers to attempt to unsettle his publisher and his readers by implying that the book, *Pinboy*, packaged, marketed, reviewed, and critically acclaimed as a memoir is really a novel, is really fiction.

This attempt to unsettle his publisher and his readers isn't meanness or a frat-house prank, though; it's actually a very serious way of provoking a thoughtful response. George is really asking, What's memoir? What's fiction? Is fiction made up of an amalgam of imagination and memories? Is memoir a less imaginative form of fiction? Bringing the discussion back to the book itself: Did Miss Verge, a teacher in the school he attended and where his father taught, really introduce the naïve teenage Bowering to the earthly delights of oral gratification? Or did the young Bowering merely imagine it, wish it? Or does the older and wiser Bowering want to relive a past he didn't actually experience? I don't know. Nor will the best reader. And it doesn't matter. Because what matters is that there once was a

young George Bowering, growing up in Oliver, BC, who had boundless physical and intellectual energy. The interior of BC was his playground and became, after years away and much education, the canvas for his work. This young man, over the period of just less than one year, discovered women. But he did not discover "women" as in he formed a crush on a girl or dated one. He discovered that women come in different circumstances, relationships, and roles—and that some of these roles were far more complex than his younger self had understood a mere one year earlier.

To put it most succinctly, I'll quote the novelist Michael V. Smith, who wrote: "the things we longed for in our first fumbled moments of sexual awakening and practice are those that we fumble towards in our adult lives." Does *Pinboy* contain those first and awkward moments of sexual awakening, but re-imagined and re-lived in a way that is much more satisfying? Does this make it any less real? Or does it make it more so.

How does George Bowering play with his reader? There are many examples, but two serve my purpose. About a third of the way into the book, Bowering writes "I never bought into the myth that you were supposed to dislike school. I liked it a lot." Well, of course the young man liked school a lot—he had a teacher who was giving him blow jobs. That's a simple answer and one that might be too common for the tastes of the more refined reader. But it's accurate. The older Bowering knows that many of his readers will get a chuckle out of this.

In another part of the memoir, Bowering draws the reader's attention to the question he likes to tease his publisher with: "I hope you realize that while these alarming occurrences did happen, the scraps of dialogue you find here could not be verbatim. In offering the dialogue I am trying to remember and present the spirit of the events. It will be as if I were writing something like a novel about actual events." *A novel about actual events*. So what's the difference between a memoir and such a novel? Truman Capote would probably say elevated language and structure. But why can't a memoir have elevated language and structure? Do we reserve these for fiction only?

The real question, which George would never deign to ask because he would consider it too obvious, is this: do we create "fiction" out of our memories to understand them better? Do we construct stories—eventually, personal myths—to incorporate lived experience in such a way as to control it, and not have the

experience control us? These are psychological questions that I think Bowering would dismiss—he's not a fan of Freud and company—but these questions arise from a close reading of *Pinboy* and they do so for a reason. Is the older Bowering trying to understand how he came to relate to women?

If *Pinboy* is George Bowering's attempt to figure out the roles women have played in his life, then for sure it's not fiction. It's a thoughtful memoir, which plays with the reader and demands that the reader not take it too seriously at all—which, for those of you who've read a lot of Bowering, means we need to take him very seriously.

So what's fact? What's fiction? Is time past really past, or is it part of an accumulating ever-present present? When we read *Pinboy* are we reading about the young George Bowering, or are we reading the present George Bowering, or both? At what point does fact break down and become fiction—what is the half-life of fact?

One of the problems for fiction is verisimilitude; the writer must create the world anew on the page to the degree that his readers believe it unquestionably. Non-fiction writers are not tasked with the same technical challenge, as verisimilitude is unnecessary to establish in a memoir. Or is it? Is this perhaps why Bowering draws our attention to the idea of *a novel about actual events*?

Bowering the writer never takes anything for granted in his work, the least of which is his reader. He plays with his reader, just as he plays with his publisher, because he wants to achieve a degree of engagement that isn't just the simple, straight-forward writer-talking-to-reader. He wants the reader to be on high alert. It's another form of "Hey, what's that spot on your shirt?" It's playful, it's fun, and it requires active involvement, not a passive inaction. It's a rewarding relationship and it's a lasting one. One reading of *Pinboy*—my first—played in my mind, shimmering like a pointillist painting. It doesn't stay flat and still, it's not fixed in amber, as memories often are. It continues to fascinate me, questioning me about my preconceptions about its content and its form.

So why did Cormorant Books publish *Pinboy* as a memoir, a work of non-fiction, and not a novel? Because it is a memoir and to have called it "fiction" would have been to dishonour the life and work that went into its making.

There's no spot on my shirt, even though I ate a hot dog in the process of writing this.

George Stanley / The Other Side of Being Red

There's a particular kind of George Bowering poem where he takes us on a trip. "I Like Summer," the first poem in his 2013 collection, *Teeth*, is a good example. Like a trip, it goes somewhere. It goes more than one place, it seems to want to go places.

It starts in a kind of field, where there are rocks and shadows. A reference to Mars leads to an imaginary voyage there, and then to boys who might imagine such a trip, but who also "knew no better than to favour the New York Yankees." Next come Japanese tourists whose blond-dyed hair looks orange, and where do we end up? In 1947, sharing a meal of scrapple with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

Now your ordinary anecdotal, philosophical, or anecdoto-philosophical poem, the kind late modernists tend to write (yes, I said modernists, there are still a few of us around) doesn't depart so far as Bowering's poem does from that field with rocks and shadows in it. The ordinary poem tends to first let you know what it's about, and it goes no more than one other place before it starts telling you *about* what it's about, looking back on it, reflecting. Bowering, in this trippy mood at least, will have none of that. Go here, go there, go somewhere else. Never look back.

The title poem, "Teeth," is a helter-skelter catalogue of the activities of the hard bony body parts referred to in its title. What those teeth are doing is "eating, eating." One of the first edibles listed is "faces" (but it appears faces can eat, as well as be eaten, since almost immediately there are "faces buried in troughs"). Then insects eat a corpse (maybe an unintended foreshadowing of more corpses to come later in the collection). Other shameless devourers are "your mother secretly finishing the stew after dark," "the whole skin of the planet," worms, and ourselves, enjoying the lamb souvlaki at Olympia or at Kits Beach "shoving" doughnuts in our mouths. Finally someone named "I" takes what's left home to consume later.

The ordinary (anecdotal, philosophical) poem ordinarily bears on serious (romantic) topics like love or death. "Teeth" is about eating. I think part of Bowering's intention here is to say that what's serious depends on where you see it from. Life is a serious subject; yet, biologically, life is eating. The unsentimental

voice of "Teeth" is in a way predictive of "Guillevic at Sea," the long poetic sequence that ends the collection, which will suggest another view of life that might be as significant, or more significant, than our habitual ways, though lacking all romantic sentiment.

Another kind of poem in *Teeth* is tributes to other poets (I call them tributes because that relates to *tribe*—the subjects are Bowering's tribesmen). A poem can begin with an apparently random yet sharply detailed recollection:

> What a stupid thrill it was, sailing Thelonius Monk LP's off Jamie's balcony
> onto the train tracks, maybe over. ("Play Like Bud")

These poems consist mainly of flash-visions of the poet-subject in exemplary moments, with commentary, biographical and other, by GB (Artie Gold, he tells us, was the first to call him that) and affectionate asides: Billy Little's tie "looked like the sky just before it's going to rain on some foreign planet yesterday afternoon" ("No, Not Those Trousers"); Robin Blaser "shared a cigarette with Pindar" ("The Company of Poets"); David McFadden "has won every book prize ever lodged in a secret corner of everyone's heart" ("A Step This Side of Salvation").

"Open Mind Blues" is a poem of deceptive simplicity. Its structure is roughly suggestive of blues lyrics: sets of three couplets with their second lines rhyming, separated by "[instrumental]" breaks. The mood is casual, almost blithe. But read more closely: the poem is about God, and how you can't count on his love. No matter what God may do, the poet remains unfazed, stoical; he keeps "an open mind," every bit God's equal in this staring contest.

I love the lazy river of a poem called "Gran." The lady of the title is a tutelary presence throughout the poem, while her grandson tells jokes, makes outrageous puns, like

> You are the Witch of And/Or.
> That iamb,
> she said the day I told her that

and writes lines that, just momentarily, get by (at least this) reader:

> I admire the leaves, my grandmother said
> even when they do.

He quotes Gran:

> She said
> there is more about you
> that you don't know
> than there is about you
> that you do know

which made me think of Margaret Laurence: "There are things you know that you don't know you know."

•

The genial mood of *Teeth* ends abruptly when we reach the final sequence of poems, "Guillevic at Sea." Bowering, actually at sea while writing these poems (on a cruise, with Jean Baird, from Athens to Singapore), takes on a doppelganger, the French poet Guillevic (one name only). Or to state that more fully, Guillevic *at sea*.

I don't entirely understand the relation between the two. It may be that their association is meant to partly depersonalize the poems, so that the *uncanny* quality of the voice is heard as coming from "poetry" or language. Or is it that Bowering, being himself *at sea* (figuratively), "without landmarks for guidance" [Webster's 3rd International Dictionary]—though most of the part-titles of the poems are the names of landmarks—wants a second self—a shipmate—to commune with?

As far as I know, in real life Guillevic was never (literally) at sea. Though born in Brittany, a seafaring country, when Guillevic was twelve his family moved to Alsace (an agricultural, wine-producing region—like the Okanagan)—where he began to read, and write, poetry. From reading his *Selected Poems*,[1] Guillevic seems to me a profoundly *earthbound* poet:

> The earth is heavy, it will take me.
> Meanwhile it is in me. ("Companion" 65)

I only found one poem of Guillevic's that referred to the sea, that one from the point of view of gulls, who

1 *Guillevic: Selected Poems*, trans. Denise Levertov (New York: New Directions, 1968).

curse the sea
that will not set bounds
to space and hunger. (“Gulls,” 59)

The poem “Guillevic at Sea” (and I do think of it, now, as a single poem—like Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*) is inhabited by corpses, monsters, and blood. The corpses and monsters I see as stage properties; the blood, though, is another matter (see below). For me, the strangeness of the poem’s voice is felt more between the lines, in discontinuities (that seem like sea-swells) like

A corpse full of pain
walking in the scrawny green park?

You bet, the world’s
great in summer, people love it. (“Athens”)

or

Fancy clothes made of second-hand lace
white as the waves below Arabia,
you are newcomers
among us.

We have enough layers
of time hanging here. (“Arabian Peninsula”)

(Who are the referents of these pronouns? I can imagine the source speaking of itself as “us.”)

or in references that seem specific but are unidentifiable:

this land without breeze
without music of survival (“Arabian Sea”)

a line that rings more of Jack Spicer than Guillevic (and I think Spicer is a major influence on this poem).

Blood flows in poem after poem. "The Red Sea" begins, "It's out of meat that blood pours." In "Gulf of Oman" the subject of the poem is "our blood," and though "the blood of a car-crash youth" is not the same as "the blood of a youth who died for liberty," they are each "the other side of being red." The blood "glistening on the pavement" is *the other side of being red*—of us—alive—and "weeping." Blood is life and also the marker of death.

The vision of our life as blood is not disconnected from our more landward concerns. "The Arabian Sea" begins in a domestic interior:

> All this furniture we don't want
> hulks in our bedroom

The poem is invaded by "the wild dog of the Arabian Sea"—a magic dog—but now the poem begins to waver between two realities, for this dog who is

> the beast of highways,
> beast of danger, beast of battles…
>
> who knows he is stronger

also lets us feed him and is our "companion." The poem ends in a terrifying image

> night and blood leaning
> against the human

but this is also ambiguous—for all the terror of whatever this thing is, it is *leaning* against us. Is that menacing? Or are we its support?

The simplest statement the poet makes about the new knowledge imparted by this poem is

> Simply enough,
> it will go on being difficult
> to live simply. ("Bombay")

"Guillevic at Sea" is dictation from an oracular source that shows little affection for us, at least in the ways we ordinarily imagine ourselves. (Far beyond little God who can't decide if he likes us, even.) Bowering—or rather, Guillevic/Bowering—at sea, had the heart to keep listening.

Andrew Zuliani / Untitled Excel Spreadsheet: An Acrostic for George Bowering

The following poem is composed through an analysis of George Bowering's prodigious literary output. The list of his published works from the start of his writing career to the present was laid out in a spreadsheet, ordered chronologically. Taking the first letter from each of these works' titles generated a list of letters from which to build an acrostic poem.

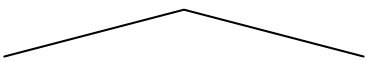
The resulting poem is, I think, as fitting a testament to the writer's fecundity as any more literal survey of his oeuvre. Each of the poem's many words represents individual works by Bowering, themselves composed out of many words—an exponential stacking that gestures at the sheer mass of Bowering's contribution to literature.

holy soil.
perennial master,
“so what, buddy?”
heck, “master.” really.

right, then, george.
so: granted, a good’un,
ringing towards a green sun.
found something, like clarity,
felt it almost, pressing.

a pretty clear – chaos? ‘choate?
is something pressurized, and
tuned, inexhaustibly bearing.
‘till even wit stands, wondering.
pressure makes *kosmos*,
slips closed, shut,
mon dieu, croyant,

c’est impossible! even
george, say, how
query ur dread size
god, man, sisyphus
runs the score.

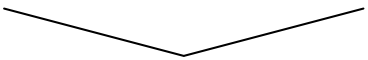


“Entering Bowering’s books, phew, a damn procedure. Eight hour’s sitting, staring, man, just counting, unreal.”

“*Enumerating bibliography. Building profile. Adding data. Processing entries: hundred-nine. Series selected. Merging joint cells. Unformatting”*

“So let some constraint lead. Right, very kitsch. Be covert, maybe. *Untitled Excel Spreadsheet. Hundred-ten kilobytes.* Titles – acrostic, then. Very french. And – sent. “

“*Setting length. Calculating list. Registry, verified. Keywords: Bowering, CanLit, manuscripts, [unknown]. Entry status: held. Keep template. Accumulating titles: volume filled. Allocating space.”*



bowering,
let’s have
more,
hey?

NIKKI REIMER: Finding the world: George Stanley's *North of California St.*

George Stanley's *North of California St.: Selected Poems 1975 – 1999* is a selection from the four books Stanley wrote as he moved from San Francisco to Vancouver in 1971, Vancouver to Terrace, BC, in 1976, and during trips to Ireland, his ancestral home.

Covering a twenty-four year period in Stanley's writing life, *North of California St.* is suffused with a pervasive sense of loss: parents die, friends die, cities are left in the past. In Ireland he finds "[t]houghts of death walking through old oak wood" (168). An earlier poem, memorializing Catherine Hennessey (Sister Maureen), speaks of people "still alive…in San Jose (& they are dead & live in this poem)" (31). This seeming paradox recurs throughout the book: death and life side by side, funeral mass next to verdant orchards.

Each poem grapples with local history, politics, and relationships. As Sharon Thesen writes in "George Stanley's North," the book's introductory essay, Stanley is concerned with the poetics of "Aboutism." I would further suggest that this volume encapsulates the "Affect of Aboutism" or the affect that is produced by the layers of ruminative discourse in Stanley's essay-poems. His narrative meanderings mimic the melancholia of the British Columbia landscape: "[g]laciers in the arms of trees" (92). In fact, the recurrent tone in the volume is on the depressive end of the scale: "Vancouver in April" is "shitty…heart too bleak for self pity" (50). In "My New Past," the speaker laments the slip of memory, mental snapshots of places which are now themselves "gone." "Where is North Central B.C., / August, 1982, at this hour?" (116). Elsewhere he writes "[i]f this is the world, then where am I, / what is this loneliness, this outpost?" (69).

There are echoes of Duncan and Spicer throughout the collection, especially in the earlier works, drawn from Stanley's time with the San Francisco Renaissance poets. Later, a very British Columbian concern with labour politics comes to the fore. "The Set" memorializes the crew on a typesetting gig, "we were for real—& we were dirty" (57).

In each volume of *North of California St.*, Stanley writes a poetry of place. He writes the isolation of the north, where to the literati the word "Terrace" denotes "marginal." How does one find "world & meaning / outside your mind?" (58) *North of California St.* is a record of Stanley's lifelong poetic engagement with these concerns, as he records a poet's daily life, his search for meaning that is internal as well as external. He writes what he sees, what he thinks about it, how he feels. He meditates, he contemplates, he grumbles. His poems are melancholy, wry, rueful, stout, and fierce. They inhabit the world. "Poem goes on, world goes on" (74).

MONROE LAWRENCE: I Know It's Hard To Understand

When I first encountered Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* a few terms into the undergraduate degree I am currently months from finishing, I remember asking myself, of the intimate readerly address which also closes Ben Lerner's second novel *10:04*: Why haven't I seen more writers doing this?

> It avails not, neither time or place—distance avails not;
> I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many
> generations hence;
> I project myself—also I return—I am with you, and I know how it is.

The speech act was so earnest (Whitman's total belief in his ability to address us from beyond his life) that I couldn't help feeling moved by the intensity of having been implicated in those pronouns: You feel, impossibly, as if *you are that you*. But surely we don't encounter this intimacy very often because it is, you know, rather difficult to pull off. What is powerful about the above passage is not the mere notion that a poet would endeavour to speak beyond his death—poetry often describes itself as this endeavour. Instead, the passage works because Whitman was a student of poetic form, a craftsman whose prosody would spawn half of American letters. Much of *10:04* feels this way—as if it shouldn't work, but does—and due to this incongruence I have no interest in describing its plot to you. In fact, I can't help wishing this review could hold the symbolic weight of having been written by someone of great stature, so I could simply say that *10:04* is gorgeous, hilarious, a technology of unparaphraseable solace. Over and against this century's

short-term and Netflixish escapisms, *10:04* was genuinely consoling to me regarding issues which occur every day, phenomena which until *10:04* struck me as my own private damage. I don't care if you "can't stand metafiction," another white girl resenting another white man. Lerner is not some oblique poet-critic deploying updated academic postmodernisms—he is an immensely compassionate artist working very hard in order to communicate with you. I'm not sure why we are still hearing phrases like "a work of endless relevance" from Rachel Kushner, regarding Lerner or anyone's book. After Kushner, Lerner is the most important working American novelist, a poet whose formal ambition and rigorous commitment to the arts permit him to confront our generation's manifest complexities with the tremendous attention they entail. The last ten pages of *10:04* conjured for me the 'welling' sensation I generally attribute to music, a tingling in those rhythms as they moved in something's direction. "Reader, we walked on," Lerner writes, and it doesn't feel silly; it feels like Whitman, like singing. "I know it's hard to understand," but by the time *10:04* is over, its final iambs feel charged, the novel up to now performing testimony to their accuracy: "I am with you, and I know how it is." Can I make this any clearer? I believe Lerner actually achieves the intimacy of Whitman's address. Think of the news anchors who are constantly mentioning us 'viewers at home'—it always feels like they are talking about someone else. Well, *10:04* isn't "about" anything. But I swear I felt it was talking to me.

Ben Lerner, *10:04* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2014).

CHELSEA ROONEY: Margaux Williamson: I Could See Everything

The title alone—*I Could See Everything*—evokes a sense of wonder. Imagine, what you would see, if you could see everything. As teachers, we ask students to use the conditional with caution. The reader must know whether you speak in fact or in the hypothetical. Watch for the gap, we warn, between what you *could* see and what you *did* see.

In good faith, we do not ask the same of artists. We maintain that gap for works like *I Could See Everything*. A fictional art gallery (The Road at the Top of the World Museum) and its able curator (AGO's Ann Marie Peña) exhibit forty-six

new paintings by Margaux Williamson. Docent Mark Greif guides us through each gallery. Critics provide reviews. The artist gives an interview and, finally, in the last section, we can ferret her source materials, sketches, and text sketches. The book is an exhibition, reception, and retrospective in one. We can see everything.

The book jacket (a detail from *At night I painted in the kitchen*) hints that perhaps everything is not all it's cracked up to be. Williamson's everything might be drab. Quotidian and aging. Broad brushstrokes give a thumbed, illegible newspaper. Bananas past their prime. Empty beer bottles. Is this everything?

In the book's interview between Williamson and Chris Kraus, the artist talks about Nietzsche's principle of Eternal Return: the idea that though time is infinite, events are not. Combinations occur and repeat forever. "I was looking around at what I could see from where I was standing—the banality, the meaning or meaninglessness of everything." Later, in a text sketch, she writes by hand: "Marcel Duchamp 'Whether you paint or not it is the same thing.'"

The Eternal Return terrified Nietzsche. It drove him to outdo morality in a sort of hero's quest for wholeness. For Williamson, her consideration of the Eternal Return may have the converse effect. Her paintings show a sedulous contemplation of morality, and they do so through the fragmentation of bodies. A continual reoccurring of limbs, torsos, hands, and heads.

In the stark and pretty *We died young*, white space gives shape to two sets of legs in a swimming pool. Who died young? Only the good. In *I healed the little animals*, the bright side of dark hands clumsily truss together cat and bird, predator and prey. The fingers try, and probably fail, to help. With *We had to become monsters to save the world (Sheila in a Batman costume)*, a cropped torso and missing arms dressed in black and grey, Williamson's conflict, whether hero's or monster's, is clear. We are good and bad; we are good and therefore bad. Her notes from another text sketch, "Dante's *Inferno* outlines a theory that all sin arises from love…The disordered love of good things."

In the last painting, *We saw the racism carved in stone*, she gives no body parts for us to contextualize our own bigotry. Instead, she paints one of racism's most effective structures, a cluster of ghettoized buildings, in browns and camo greens, teetering and sinking into mud. Perhaps Nietzsche, in the late nineteenth century, could maintain the privileged fallacy that we cannot know the consequences of our actions. Williamson, of the twenty-first century, can, and does, see everything.

ALEKSANDRA KAMINSKA & SARAH BLACKER: A PUBLIC Retreat

Building on the simple question *what is happening to public space?* the Toronto-based collective *Public Access (PAC)* has been publishing the journal PUBLIC Art Culture Ideas and curating site-specific exhibitions since 1987. PAC's curatorial activities began as interventions and inhabitations of the advertising landscapes of the city and then moved towards collaborative, relational, and dialogical strategies to engage with, include and provoke diverse audiences and publics. Nearly thirty years on, this commitment to notions of the public remains politically urgent. In this context, the symbolic turn inwards of *PUBLIC*'s 50th issue, *The Retreat* (forthcoming November 2014), is a provocative meditation on the possibility of gaining perspective on the public by briefly stepping outside of it. Edited by Sarah Blacker, Imre Szeman, and Heather Zwicker, the issue comes out of "The Retreat," an event held at the Banff Centre in August 2012 as one of the four sites of *dOCUMENTA (13)* and run through the Banff Research in Culture (BRiC) research residency program. Bringing together artists and agents from *dOCUMENTA (13)* alongside an international pool of researchers and artists, the three-week retreat was planned as a counterpoint to the monumentality of the exhibition and events in Kassel. The residency was centred around a series of seminars and public talks—those by Franco Berardi, Bruno Bosteels, and Catherine Malabou are included in the issue. Residency participants provide the other essays and visual projects.

The act of embarking upon a "retreat about retreat" in a Canadian mountain resort town is immediately fraught as an act of both elitism and escapism. *PUBLIC* 50 tackles this predicament by considering how the idea of retreating outside of the public can constitute a form of resistance and non-compliance, providing access to new openings and possibilities that may only appear and become intelligible outside of the public's frenetic centre. For example, Carrie Smith-Prei argues for the political significance of retreat in the post-1945 German context through the aesthetic tactics of the author Gilda Elsner, emphasizing that retreat and negation can be modes of attaining agency and building engagement rather than merely acts of cynicism or nihilism. Some contributions employ what Raymond Boisjoly calls "the productive misuse of technology" as a method of retreat. In his piece, Boisjoly allows Kent Mackenzie's film *The Exiles* to retreat from its original form

as film and to produce a new set of meanings as a series of film stills, while David Butler's photo essay translates Robert Smithson's 1967 *Artforum* article "The Monuments of Passaic" into the contemporary visual language of Google Street View. Nico Dockx meanwhile uses the postcard as an art object to address the centrality of epistemological ambivalence, in-betweenness and the difficulty of reaching outwards from within retreat. As Alice Ming Wai Jim writes in her Afterword, retreat does not need to constitute escapism or passivity, and it does not require any physical movement away or apart. Retreat is not the abandonment of the public, its interests and needs, but an "active beholding": a step away in order to consider the totality and to imagine different ways forward. And so, onward, to another thirty public years.

JACQUELYN ROSS: Artist Poetry, Poets Theatre

In classic PT fashion, July's *Poets Theatre Double Bill* unfolds with the excitable, hushed chaos of an elementary school play. A provisional set clutters the downstairs Apartment Gallery stage with rose petals and foggy vinyl curtains as a woman's lips move quietly from a cornered chair, performing the rehearsal of the cold read. People file in and out of a makeshift backstage area clutching house plants and brooms and loose leaf pages of freshly printed stanzas, flushed with nervous energy. Before long, the tiny room is filled; a secondary audience attends a screened version upstairs. All mirage, pretense, jokes and deceit…perhaps—serendipitously—it is just as poets theatre was always intended.

Lot Potpourri by Tiziana La Melia with Julian Hou blends a dream-studded mélange of silhouettes, clinking bracelets and "déjà vu bleed." Moving between curtains autographed haphazardly by "a painter with a black marker," a female protagonist stretches non-athletically as she reads, her paragraphs and pauses demarcated by a luminous space-age elevator music. The script makes room for thought but is deliberately inarticulate in its motives—leaving only a mood or the trace of a morning's exercise routine.

Stuttering badly and deliberately (or is he really on the border of tears?) Donato Mancini plays the hilarious icon of the uncomfortably radical, visibly unstable poet wreaking havoc on the mainstream. And just like his t-shirt that reads, *The writer*

has sold weapons to your enemy, here the poet threatens chaos with his sweeping ideas, all misspelled in ugly black pen: "Skool," "famly," "werk." The poem's title *Abattlehorseanudewomanandananecdote* positions Mancini as a crazed storyteller of sorts, all runaway fiction and prophecy, at once sensible and brash.

Rhythm Jams by Kate Moss draws a picture with whistles and swoops; musical and textual matchmaking. Out of boredom or whimsy or both, the artist's studio becomes a banal set where words, rhythm, and line collide to produce "honking dogs" and "honking noses." Then there's Johan Björck with his keyboard, playing *Tom Hanks and Tom Cruz*. In this ten-minute-long character duel, Björck's portrait comes out in the song too, as a lonely narrator of celebrity polls. Followed by a performance by Carolyn Richard on the nature of contemporary media wars and military crises, the poems as a group perform an outspoken contemporaneity: somewhere between fantasy and quiet urgency.

The night closes with an obscure case of a text lost, then found, then found again, as Michael Turner presents a reading from Jack Spicer's 1946 student adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1835 story "Young Goodman Brown." A classic allegory on the ambiguity between good and evil, and one ripe for poetic exaggeration, the play's excerpts are full of witches and over-the-top dream sequences. A minimally rehearsed cast of local artists and writers delivers the script seated around a candlelit table, like kids discovering a secret diary in a retired attic. Ghosts read in the audience's company.

Both *Artist Poetry* and *Poets Theatre* set out to define a specific arena with interdisciplinary approaches and aims. Not poetry or theatre for its own sake, but rather as an extension of an entire creative practice. For a notoriously shy but well-read breed of artists and writers, the provocation of performance makes for an awkward spectacle. Some small effort is made "to perform," but these works are more concerned with the wordiness of words and the noisy images that they conjure than any needed fourth wall or proffered fiction. Call it a public form of artistic research. Of thinking out loud.

The Poets Theatre Festival, co-produced by The Apartment Gallery and *The Capilano Review* featuring San Francisco guests Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian, revives these enduring values gallantly.

Poets Theatre Double Bill
July 31, 2014 @ The Apartment, Vancouver

JOCELYN MORLOCK / Composing, curating, and collaboration

Over the past two and a half years, I've had the good fortune to be the Composer-in-Residence for Vancouver's Music on Main, and I am just starting my term as Composer-in-Residence for the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. As well as working on programming concerts, I'll be writing a number of pieces for the VSO during the next couple of years (I say, veritably wriggling with glee). When not working as a C-i-R, I have been a freelance composer, and as such, I have mostly written for performers or presenters on commission.

These two activities may sound entirely similar—both a freelance composer and a C-i-R write music for an individual or ensemble. In fact, the two are quite opposed. One peculiarity of writing on commission is that there is generally a set of restrictions already in place before you start—instrumentation, duration, and often a concert theme have been set. If not a theme per se, chances are that the other pieces on the program are already programmed. Most of the time, this will, and I believe, should, affect what a composer writes in terms of mood and style: a disregard for context works to the detriment of the entire concert if the event has been conceived as a whole experience, rather than a set of unrelated pieces that happen to be written for the same instrumentation.

In contrast to the way composers usually work, as the VSO Composer-in-Residence I will have the freedom to program an entire concert—the VSO's Annex Series is programmed entirely by the C-i-R. I can choose to write a new work of my own and program around it, essentially creating the dramatic arc for the concert and making my own thematic connections between other composers and myself.

Ideally, curating a concert program, creating these thematic connections through thoughtful programming, is creating collaboration between the pieces of music and composers involved. Writing a piece that responds to and engages with the other music on a pre-programmed concert is another form of collaboration. Writing to the strengths of the performers is collaborating with them.

This ethos—gaining ground in Vancouver[1]—is exemplified by Music on Main's recent *Orpheus Project*. This immersive work combined new music, spoken text,

1 Both David Pay, the Artistic Director of Music on Main, http://vimeo.com/100334199, and Mark Haney, Artistic Director of Little Chamber Music Series That Could http://falaiseparkmusic.com/post/96551684546/the-two-way-street, have recently commented on how collaborating strengthens all of our work.

high-level theatrical design, video, and innovative use of the entire complex of The Cultch. The project was masterminded by David Pay, who assigned broad thematic concepts to the composers which involved our responding to texts and film. Rather than writing in a vacuum, all of our pieces were informed and influenced by our fellow collaborators. This method of working involved some relinquishing of control. Thrillingly, the end result was greater than what any of us could have achieved without the input of the others.

I see fostering collaborative work as a significant part of my role as a composer and curator. I'm happy to see my fellow performers, composers, and concert programmers gaining strength from each other, and I look forward to doing more of it myself.

LOUIS CABRI: "an expertly banalized version of tomorrow's world"

> …The name of
> things is very important. The naming
> of human intellectual work and our
> entire intellectual record is possibly the
> most important thing…. (20)

Ron Silliman's *Against Conceptual Poetry* transcribes, into the reified form of expressive linebreaks, an oral interview that the former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, conducted with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in 2011. Schmidt and company wanted to interview Assange for *The New Digital Age*, which Assange went on to review in the *New York Times*, calling it "an expertly banalized version" of "the inexorable spread of American consumer technology over the surface of the earth" and a "blueprint for technocratic imperialism."

What Assange says about *The New Digital Age*—"this isn't a book designed to be read"—Kenneth Goldsmith has said about some conceptual poetry. Assange adds, "It [Schmidt's book] is a major declaration designed to foster alliances." To compare alliances today (those between conceptual poets, those between global technocrats) is to miss the point that there's currently a split between the formal and the social both in poetry (as aspects of poetry) and between poetry's formalism

and the other social discourses. It takes a poet formed in 1960s revolt to want to reflexively mend that split.

Against Conceptual Poetry is one big wikileak into poetryworld. A must read, the "must" here is an ethical must. Silliman's selected source text addresses the Internet not for its playground but for its politics. Assange is concerned with how the human historical record can be made to disappear on the Internet. By an act of disclosure (the Assange interview is disclosed as a poem), Silliman recalls one of the originating radical gestures of expressive politics transforming 20C poetry: D.H. Lawrence's analogy of the painted church ceiling ripped asunder to disclose the chaos of the cosmos in infinite space—except here it's not natural but social machinations revealed. Goldsmith, too, has noted that if as poet or artist you're not present on the Internet then "you don't exist." But can poetry only mimic the present situation where the formal and social aspects of the poem are split, or can poetry change or at least reflexively address this situation?

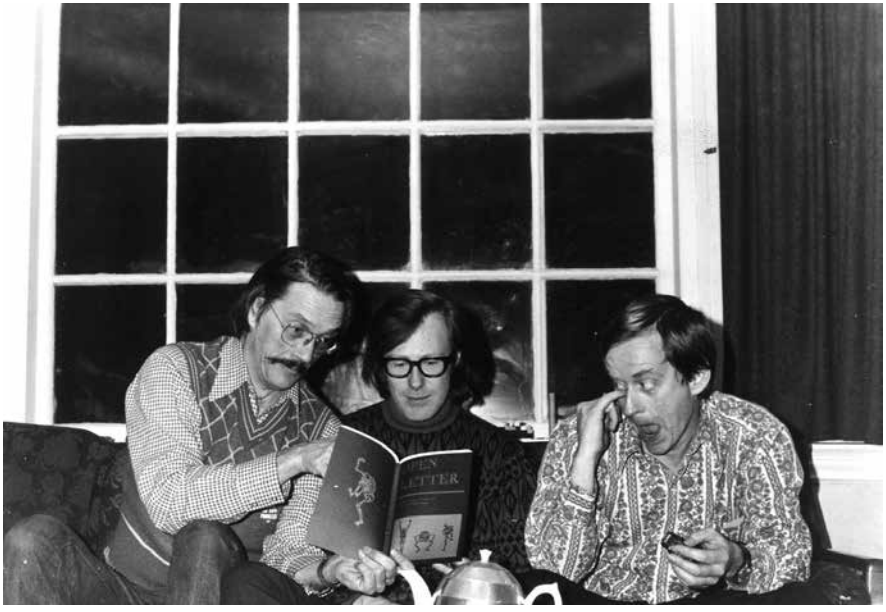
Is *Against Conceptual Poetry* against conceptual poetry? Rather, the book urges us, as did Pound a century ago, to read beyond the literary field (the rough-cut quality and speed of thinking displayed in the interview would have appealed to Pound and signalled its overlooked importance). If we're only arriving at Assange through poetryworld (i.e., through the book *Against Conceptual Poetry*), then we're symptoms of the split and not diagnosing it.

Yet as with any conceptual poem that appropriates and repurposes source text, one may read *Against Conceptual Poetry* aslant, for what it says about and adds to poetry. A key question the interview raises is how to preserve, from online tampering, the integrity of the name—from domain name to proper name—and the "human intellectual content" intrinsically attached to it. In this context, Assange evokes for a reader the modernists' desire for the thing: substitute his example of the name "tomato" for Pound's example of "red" (in *ABC of Reading*) and Assange morphs into Fenollosa and Agassiz. Due to Silliman's re-mediation of the interview—from an MP3 audiofile on the WikiLeaks digital archive to a poem published in print by Denver Colorado's Counterpath Press—one sees Pound's ideogrammic method as a parallel invention to Assange's algorithm invented to digitally preserve the name's intrinsic attachment to its content.

Of all the poets to emerge from the San Francisco poetry scenes of *This* magazine and the Grand Piano reading and talks series, Silliman is perhaps most

sensitive to the ethics of the name as name of a thing in the world. A great tension in *the Alphabet* holds between word and thing, formal language and social world. Evoked at a foundational level, history's records, the name's integrity must be defended from false simulacra, because "as / soon as you have a nice / naming system, some arsehole is going / to come along and register every / short name themselves" (49). "Short names" range from the phrase "the US first amendment" to "Ron Silliman."

Ron Silliman, *Against Conceptual Poetry* (Denver, CO: Counterpath, 2014).



George, Frank Davey, David McFadden, at Frank's house, Toronto, c. 1970.
Photo credit: Angela Bowering

Contributors

JORDAN ABEL is a Nisga'a writer from Vancouver. Abel's first book, *The Place of Scraps* (Talonbooks), was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award and the winner of the 2014 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize.

MARGARET ATWOOD is a very old friend of George Bowering's.

JEAN BAIRD introduces George Bowering as "my current husband," to keep him on his toes.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR has published many books of criticism and poetry, including *Fragmenting Body etc*, *Breath Takes*, *Continuations & Continuations 2*, with Sheila E. Murphy, and *Recording Dates*. He was inaugurated into the City of Edmonton Cultural Hall of Fame in 2003. Review blog: http://eclecticruckus.wordpress.com

SARAH BLACKER is a PhD candidate in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, currently completing a dissertation on the politics of personalized medicine. Her work has appeared in *parallax*, *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, *TOPIA*, and *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*.

As a fetus, THEA BOWERING was referred to as "Little Art" by her father. Since then, she has written a number of minor pieces in response. Some can be found in her first collection of stories *Love At Last Sight* (NeWest 2013).

LARY TIMEWELL is a North Vancouver poet who, as an SFU student in the early 70s, sat at the back of every George Bowering lecture he could slip into (registered or not) just to be introduced to the range between Swedenborg and Stein, between down south black mountaineers and back east Sousters and McFaddens.

COLIN BROWNE's most recent book of poetry is *The Properties* (Talonbooks 2012). A new collection is due next year.

TED BYRNE bought his first copy of *Genève* in The Fifth Kingdom Bookshop on Harbord Street, over forty years ago. Several years later he abandoned it, probably in a moment of embarrassment about the sixties. The book, beautifully made by Coach House Press, cost him $3.00, or about two hours wages, and retrospectively he finds considerable circumstantial evidence of having read it at the time.

LOUIS CABRI's recent poetry book is *Posh Lust* (New Star). Last summer he ran, together with Cecily Nicholson and Listen Chen, KSW's Projector Verse series of poets' presentations at UNIT/PITT Projects. He teaches at the University of Windsor.

ALESSANDRA CAPPERDONI teaches modern and contemporary literature and critical theory at Simon Fraser University. She is currently working on a book manuscript, *Shifting Geographies: Poetics of Citizenship in the Age of Global Modernity*. Her first encounter with George Bowering's poetry was during her undergraduate studies at the Università degli Studi di Bologna in Italy, where Bowering was invited to read his work. The spell of his voice inspired her to explore Canadian postmodern poetics further.

STEPHEN COLLIS is a Vancouver-based poet. He studied with George Bowering in the 1990s, and has been a professor of poetry at Simon Fraser University since 2000. He does not watch baseball.

J MARC CÔTÉ studied at Capilano, where he was student associate editor of fiction and poetry with *TCR*. He also studied at McGill. As publisher of Cormorant Books, he won the Libris Award for editor of the year in 2009 and 2010.

DEANNA FONG is a PhD candidate in English at Simon Fraser University where her research focuses on the intersections of performance, audio archives, and literary communities. She curated a selection of archival audio for Bowering's SpokenWeb performance at Concordia University in 2012.

DWIGHT GARDINER was a student in George's creative writing class at Sir George Williams University, the year after Artie Gold set the standard for English poetry in Montreal. They played baseball together where Dwight found it easier to throw the ball to Drummondville than first base. George has always encouraged my writing, even though it has gotten pretty weird lately.

TOM HAWTHORN is a newspaper and magazine writer in Victoria, BC.

ALEKSANDRA KAMINSKA is a Mitacs Elevate Postdoctoral Fellow at Simon Fraser University and Sensorium: Centre for Digital Arts and Technology at York University. Her first book, *Polish Media Art in an Expanded Field*, is forthcoming from Intellect Press. She is the Managing Editor of the journal *PUBLIC*.

KEVIN KILLIAN is a San Francisco-based writer and artist. His books include *Shy*, *Little Men*, *Impossible Princess*, *Action Kylie*, two volumes of *Selected Amazon Reviews*, and *Tweaky Village*. Recent projects include a novel, *Spreadeagle*, from Publication Studio, and *Tagged*, intimate portraits of poets, artists, writers, and musicians.

JESSICA LANGSTON is an adjunct professor at Concordia University. Her previous work includes articles on BC's *TISH* group, "Then and Now Converging: Lionel Kearns's Complicated Nation" (in *SCL*) and "Burning History: George Bowering's Disruption and Demythologizing of the Canadian Exploration Narrative" (in *Open Letter*).

MONROE LAWRENCE is a poet and critic from Squamish, British Columbia. He lives and studies in Vancouver.

DAPHNE MARLATT's titles include *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* (Talonbooks), the awards-winning contemporary noh play *The Gull* (Talonbooks), and a novelistic long poem in prose fragments, *The Given* (McClelland & Stewart). Most recently, a selected, *Rivering: The Poetry of Daphne Marlatt*, edited by Susan Knutson, appeared from Wilfred Laurier University Press.

STEVE MCCAFFERY is author of more than three dozen books of poetry and criticism. A founding member with bpNichol of the Tronna Research Group (TRG) and a longtime member of the sound poetry ensemble Four Horsemen, McCaffery now lives in Buffalo, NY where he is the David Gray Chair of Poetry and Letters at the State University of New York. McCaffery has known George Bowering for several decades and is familiar with all his pseudonyms.

The author of nearly thirty trade books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, ROB MCLENNAN's

most recent titles include *notes and dispatches: essays* (Insomniac press 2014) and *The Uncertainty Principle: stories*, (Chaudiere Books 2014), as well as the poetry collection *If suppose we are a fragment* (BuschekBooks 2014). He has been corresponding with George Bowering since 1993 or so. robmclennan.blogspot.com

Through family travel pictures SACHA MILOJEVIC, who left Vancouver for Auckland as a child, can recall the exceptional atmosphere of the Sitka spruce groves of the Carmanah Valley. Working recently with exceptional Iberian and Alpine architects his own work references landform, geology, and porosity as well as the monolithic and Neolithic.

Juno-nominated JOCELYN MORLOCK is one of Canada's most distinctive voices. She began her term as the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's Composer in Residence on September 1, 2014. She has just completed a term as inaugural Composer in Residence for Vancouver's innovative concert series, Music on Main (2012–14).

ERÍN MOURE is a borscht-making friend of Elisa Sampedrín's, long-time admirer of George Bowering. Elisa writes: "Erín and George became friends through poetry, George being a great supporter of young poets, always at their readings, ready to chat and grin. *Rocky Mountain Foot* by GB was one of the first poetry books Erín ever read, when still in high school, before CanLit existed. Moure's humour in her poems (ha you may not laugh but they are funny!) owes an eternal debt to George Bowering's humour in his." Moure's most recent scribble is *Insecession*, a book intercrossed with Chus Pato's *Secession*, both published in a single volume by BookThug, 2014.

MIRIAM NICHOLS is an Associate Professor of modern and contemporary literature and theory at the University of the Fraser Valley. Her publications include editions of *Robin Blaser's Collected Essays* and *Collected Poems*, and *Radical Affections: Essays on the Practice of Outside on New American Poetry*. She is currently working on a literary biography of Robin Blaser.

KEN NORRIS was born in New York City in 1951 and emigrated to Canada in the 1970s. He became a Canadian citizen in 1985. His latest book is *Rua Da Felicidade* (New Star Books). Norris currently teaches Canadian literature at the University of Maine.

JOHN O'BRIAN is Professor of Art History at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. His current research is on the engagement of photography with the atomic era. He first met Bowering in the late 1980s through the artist Greg Curnoe and then again through Roy Kiyooka.

AARON PECK is the author of *The Bewilderments of Bernard Willis* and his reviews frequently appear in *Artforum*. George Bowering (a) blurbed Peck's first book, (b) is in a reading group with him, and/or (c) occasionally kicks his ass in bowling.

STAN PERSKY teaches philosophy at Capilano University and is the author of several books, most recently *Reading the 21st Century* (McGill-Queen's 2011) and *Post-Communist Stories* (Cormorant, forthcoming 2014).

CARL PETERS is a critical theorist, curator, teacher at the University of the Fraser Valley, and author of *bpNichol Comics* (2002) and *textual vishyuns: image and text in the work of bill bissett* (2011). His *Studies in Description: Reading Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons* is forthcoming (Talonbooks). Bowering was his teacher at SFU where he wrote a dissertation on bpNichol. He

learned more from GB in 10 minutes than from anyone else in 10 years!

MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN was immensely proud when George (Vancouver) Bowering became Canada's first Parliamentary Poet Laureate. Bowering's work made it possible for her to imagine writing her award-winning *Vancouver Walking*, followed by *Nightmarker* and *Recipes from the Red Planet*. Talonbooks will publish a book of Vancouver narratives, *I, Bartleby*, in spring 2015.

IAN RAE is an Associate Professor in the Department of Modern Languages at King's University College at Western University. He is the author of the monograph *From Cohen to Carson: The Poet's Novel in Canada* (2008) and editor of *George Bowering: Bridges to Elsewhere* (2010), a special issue of *Open Letter*.

NIKKI REIMER is a poet, critic, and artist. Published books include *DOWNVERSE* and *[sic]*. She has published essays in *Lemon Hound*, *The Rumpus*, and *Modern Loss*. Reimer currently resides in Calgary.

CHELSEA ROONEY is a host of The Storytelling Show on Vancouver Co-op Radio, and has been a regular contributor to Project Space's artist-publishing web series (www.projectspace.ca) since spring 2013. Her work has been published and performed across Canada. Her debut novel *PEDAL* appears with Caitlin Press in October 2014.

JACQUELYN ROSS is an artist and writer based in Vancouver. Her current research is concerned with poetics and translations between language, painting, and sculpture. Her art writing and reviews have appeared in *Decoy* and *C Magazine*. Ross is a 2013-14 curatorial resident at 221A.

KARL SIEGLER is a writer and translator; the former publisher at Talonbooks; three-time President of the Association of Canadian Publishers; co-founder of the SFU Centre for Studies in Publishing, the LPG and the ABPBC; and has served as Vice President, Policy, of the CCA. He lives in Powell River, BC.

GEORGE STANLEY's latest book is *North of California St.: Selected Poems 1975-1999* (New Star). George Bowering was the first new friend he made on coming to BC in 1971; they have been pals (and fans) ever since.

ROB TAYLOR is the author of *The Other Side of Ourselves* (Cormorant 2011) and the Poetry Editor at *PRISM*.

MICHAEL TURNER is a Vancouver-based writer of fiction, criticism, and song. He first met George in 1991, at one of George's failed heckling workshops, which in this case devolved into a KSW reading.

FRED WAH's recent collections of poetry are *Sentenced to Light* (2008), *is a door* (2009), and a selected poetry edited by Louis Cabri, *The False Laws of Narrative* (2009). An anthology of poetics, *Toward. Some. Air.* (co-edited with Amy De'Ath) is forthcoming. He lives in Vancouver.

REBECCA WIGOD, formerly the editor of the *Vancouver Sun*'s books pages, is at work on a biography of George Bowering.

ANDREW ZULIANI is a writer, painter, and graduate student living in Kitsilano. He studies material and visual poetry in the English Department at Simon Fraser University. He first encountered George Bowering's poems in tenth grade—thanks, Ms. Lawson—and has been keeping an eye on the guy ever since.

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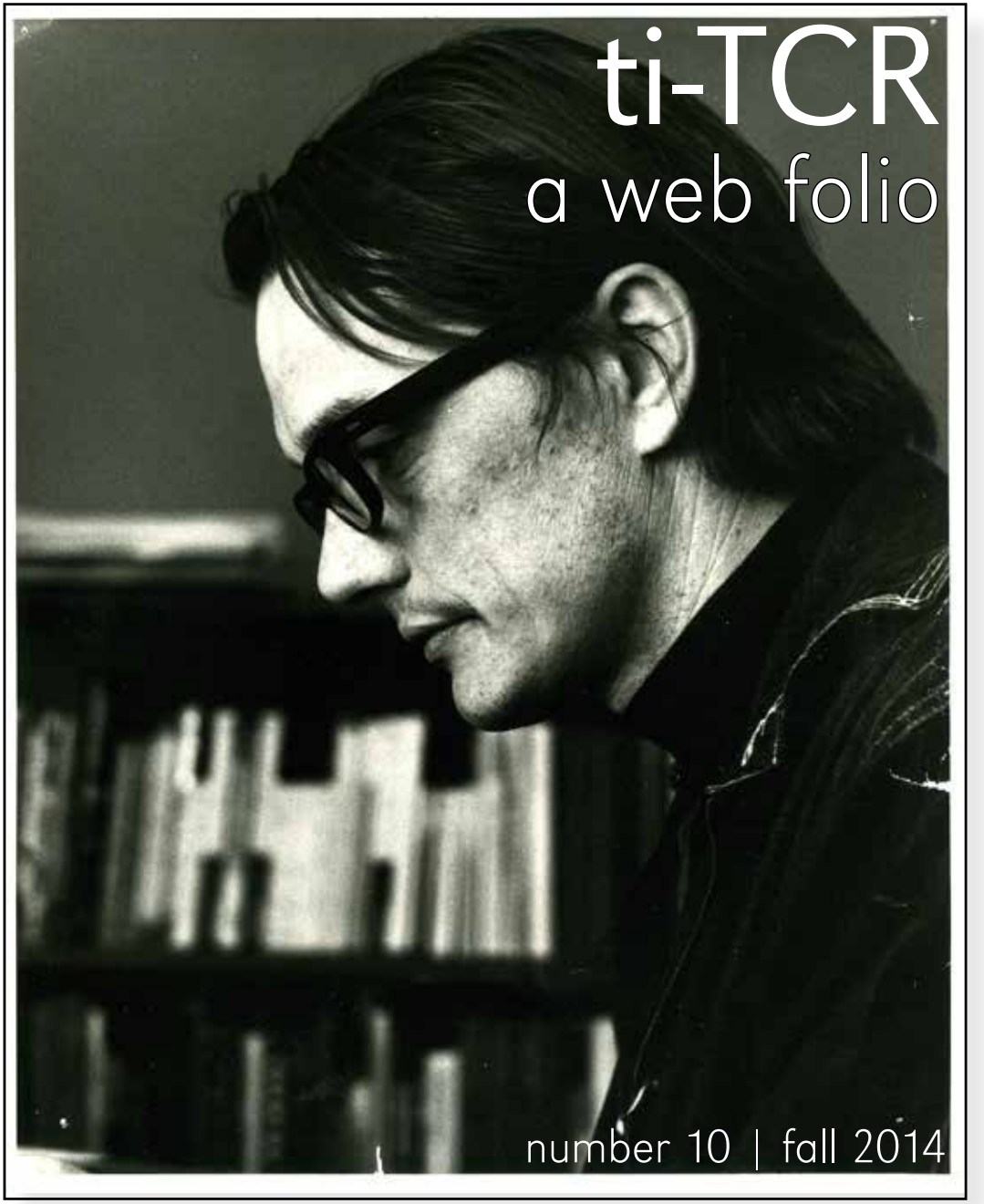

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