

# ti-TCR

a web folio



number 10 | fall 2014

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## Bowering's Books

Cover image: George Bowering with Joe Fafard's sculpture  
"Clem" (Clement Greenberg), at an exhibition at Gallery  
Moos, Toronto, 1981.

Photo credit: Michael Ondaatje

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## Editors' Note

This issue of *ti-TCR* continues and extends “Bowering’s Books,” a special issue of *TCR*. Both pay 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. This issue of *ti-TCR* includes commentary by fellow writers and readers, a reprint of an interview with Bowering published by *TCR* in 1979, and records of encounters with Bowering’s books in public spaces.

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.

Both issues are 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 both issues.

Jenny Penberthy & Aurelea Mahood

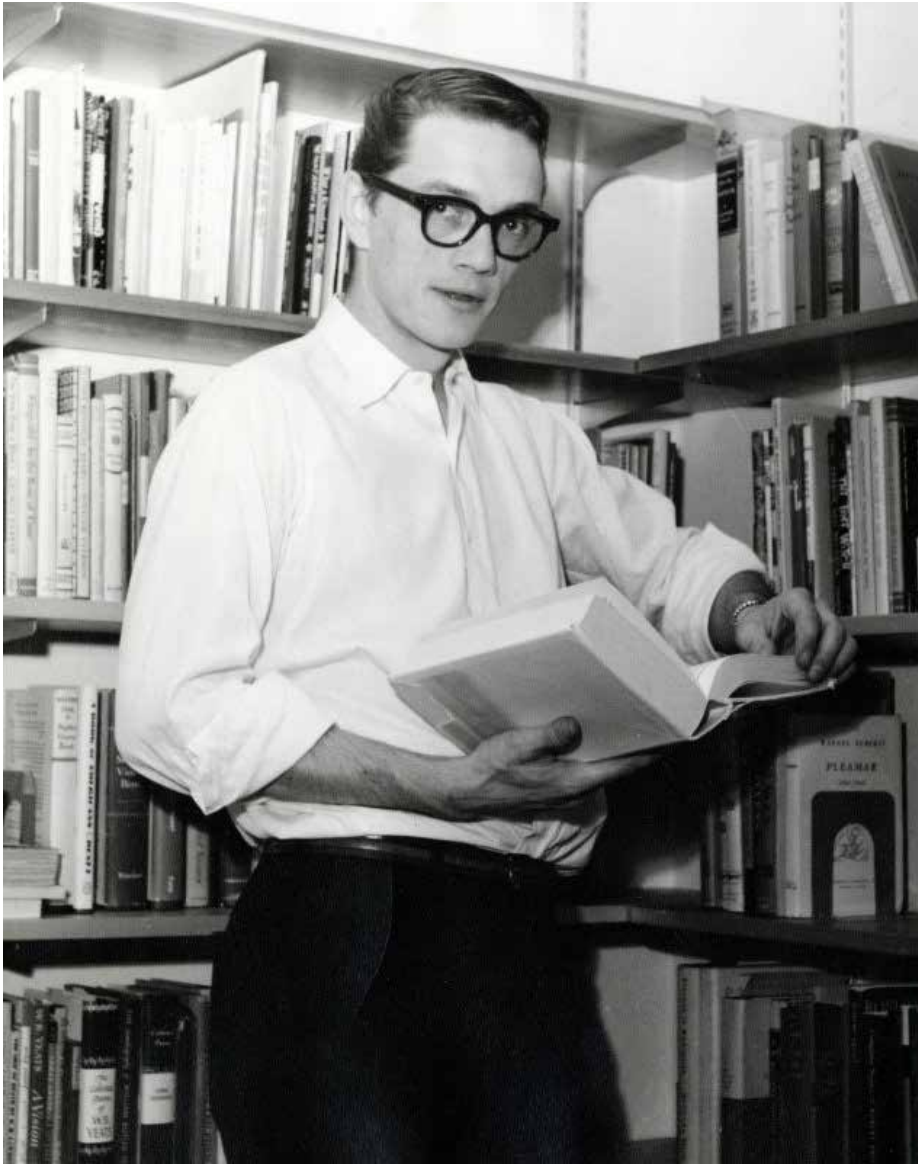
**Does it bring any solace or calm to you  
to know the sun is mortal, too? One day  
far in the future or someone else’s past  
it will be a dark skeleton tumbling in black  
space, its gleam long gone, and time some-  
one else’s job.**

**It’s happened before, and if  
you think time is a big deal in rime, you  
ought to imagine how long the poem has been  
underway since Sol was a bright new babe.**

— GEORGE BOWERING, “BRIGHT”

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George during a trip to Arizona, October 1963. Photo credit: LaVerne Clark

## JASON WIENS / *Mirror on the Floor* and Vancouver Countercultures of the 1960s

*Mirror on the Floor*, George Bowering's first novel, opens with a paragraph that consists of two lengthy sentences. Here is the second sentence:

Though as I cast back my ruminating mind I remember a rip-rapping ride down the long streets of Vancouver towards the Main Street gorge, my poor old over-traveled yellow Morris Minor sniffing happily at the prospect of a race, like some old horse on a junkwagon smelling water after a dizzying day in the hot sun of back alleys junk ride, the feeble yellow radio crackling static along with the crazy Mexican maraca music I love so well, ay ay ay ay *ahi*, only reminder now of that unbelievable and near-fatal summer I spent in old Xalapa doing things just like this, but not quite, not in the dismal winter rain of Main Street Vancouver winter, Delsing and me sitting in a beer-parlour across the street from Mickey Chang's notorious morphine café. (Bowering 7)

The sentence's ostensible purpose is to establish setting—Main Street, Vancouver, the Downtown East Side—character—the narrator, Bob Small, and his companion, Delsing—and narrative perspective—first person reflective, with some distance between the events narrated and their occurrence, suggesting its potential

unreliability. But the sentence also works to affiliate the writing stylistically with the prose and verse practices of the Beat writers, specifically Kerouac and Ginsberg. I am thinking of the length of the sentence, to be sure, but also the alliterative phrases (“rip-rapping ride”; “Mexican maraca music”), the disjunctive relationship between adjective and noun (“feeble yellow radio”; “back alleys junk ride”), and the piling-up of subordinate clauses that draw the reader down a labyrinth of distractions from the sentence’s putative subject and predicate. The italicized Spanish phrase (“ay ay ay ay *ahi*”) could even be read as an echo of Ginsberg’s “eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani” in the closing lines of *Howl* (Allen 189). The opening paragraph of *Mirror on the Floor* thus establishes its stylistic affinity with a countercultural Beat aesthetic, even as the novel explores that counterculture at the level of content.

*Mirror on the Floor* was published in 1967, long celebrated as a signature year of the 1960s counterculture, particularly the counterculture of the peace movement, the “sexual revolution,” experimentation with drugs, and other elements that would come to be associated with the “hippy” movement. The novel was written, however, “for about four years (probably 1961–64), and finished...in Calgary when [Bowering] wrote the conclusion” (Miki 13). Unsurprisingly, given the period of its composition, the bohemian counterculture presented in the novel is less hippy than Beat. When Andrea, the love interest of the protagonist, kills her mother at the end of the novel, the headline of the *Vancouver Sun* reads “BEATNIK GIRL SLAYS MOTHER” (Bowering 155). Andrea also shares a cheap house in the West End, but by

the year of the novel’s publication, the artists, students, and other persons attracted to a Bohemian lifestyle had, apparently, largely migrated to Kitsilano. As Lawrence Aronsen remembers, in the early 1960s, Vancouver was a city in which most citizens “accepted uncritically the material prosperity offered by a capitalist economy” and “the only cultural resistance came from a colourful but almost invisible beatnik community living in low-cost West End housing, frequenting lower Robson Street coffee houses, such as the International Café, and taking their libations at the Sylvia Hotel on Beach Avenue” (Aronsens 14). That Beat community, according to Aronsen, was “forced to move out of the West End by upscale high-rise construction and rent increases,” moving to Kitsilano to join other young, transient people congregating in that neighbourhood (15).

*Mirror on the Floor*, then, represents an earlier counterculture in Vancouver of the early 1960s, but was published at a time in which that counterculture had transformed into something else. This is not to overstate the differences between the West End Beat scene and the Kitsilano hippy scene, however. The opening sequence of the novel, in which Bob Small and his friend George Delsing are arrested by police on trumped-up charges, would have certainly been topical to readers in Vancouver in 1967. That summer, the first issue of the *Georgia Straight* reports an incident on April 24 in which four “Vancouver Diggers” were picked up by “the fuzz” at 4<sup>th</sup> and Arbutus for “vagrancy.” “Police harassment increases,” the report reads, “and the war between the young hip and creeping old fogginess is being escalated” (1). In her review

of the novel in the pages of *Our Generation*, the anarchist anti-war magazine published out of Montreal, Janet Kask-Rapoport notes that the opening of the novel features an “all-too-familiar scene of police harassment in a down-and-out neighbourhood” (Kask-Rapoport 125). Furthermore, the second issue of the *Georgia Straight* reported that “The sign on the door of the Arbutus Café at 4<sup>th</sup> and Arbutus read [sic] “WE DO NOT SERVE HIPPIES OR BEATNICKS,” a refusal that both conflates and distinguishes between the countercultural communities I discuss here.

There is little extended critical comment on *Mirror on the Floor*, though George Woodcock’s review in the pages of *Canadian Literature* merits some attention. Woodcock’s review compares *Mirror on the Floor* to Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers*, published the previous year to significant fanfare and notoriety. According to Woodcock, when reading *Mirror on the Floor* he did not “sense that ponderous striving after contemporary effect, that relentless and excessive ingenuity, which makes Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers*—that classic of Canadian with-it-ness—a work so intriguing to begin and so boring to read to a finish” (Woodcock 74). Woodcock’s review is something of a corrective to what he laments as a neglect of *Mirror on the Floor* “by critics who are impressed by the ingenious and confuse invention with real imagination.” He then expands his frame of reference to the previous decade in France:

*Mirror on the Floor* is a novel about a place. A decade ago in France, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and other choseistes created a small revolution in fiction by transferring attention from the character to the environment. The

human beings in their novels became, as it were, membranes to receive impressions of objects in the outer world; the objects and not the people were given solidity. The choseistes too were over-deliberate, and it is hard now to read a novel by Robbe-Grillet as anything but an intellectual exercise. What Bowering has achieved is a humanization of the choseiste approach. (Woodcock 75)

Woodcock here appears to briefly rehearse some objections to the “choseiste” style of fiction (or what we might more readily recognize as the *nouveau roman*), objections which Robbe-Grillet himself had addressed several years earlier, in his essay “New Novel, New Man”: that “The New Novel seeks to eliminate man from the world” or “The New Novel aims at a perfect objectivity” or “The New Novel, difficult to read, is addressed only to specialists” (Robbe-Grillet 134). To such criticisms Robbe-Grillet responds with the following:

Since there were not, in our books, ‘characters’ in the traditional sense of the word, it was concluded, somewhat hastily, that men were not to be found there at all. This was to read them very badly indeed. Man is present on every page, in every line, in every word. Even if many objects are presented and are described with great care, there is always, and especially, the eye which sees them, the thought which reexamines them, the passion which distorts them. (137)

I am less interested here in the accuracy of Woodcock’s criticisms of the *nouveau roman* as practiced in France the previous decade

than in Woodcock's attempts to situate *Mirror on the Floor* favourably in relation to, first, a recent, already-celebrated Canadian novel (*Beautiful Losers*) and, second, to the work of the French "choseistes" of the 1950s. In doing so Woodcock manages both to constellate *Mirror on the Floor* within an (inter)national (post) modernism, and suggest that Bowering produces a new type of fiction through an attention to the local details of Vancouver.

If the *nouveau roman* was "a convenient label applicable to all those seeking new forms for the novel, forms capable of expressing (or of creating) new relations between man and world" (Robbe-Grillet 9), then *Mirror on the Floor* attempts this most evidently by alternating narrative perspectives throughout, with the odd-numbered chapters related in the first person perfect perspective of Bob Small, and the even-numbered chapters told in third person perfect, occasionally moving into free indirect discourse with a focalization on Andrea. This distinction between narrative perspectives mirrors the position of the characters in the novel: we are privy to Bob's thoughts as he is laid bare as a fairly transparent character, while we remain distanced and detached from Andrea. This serves to support Andrea's position in the novel as both enigmatic *femme fatale* and doomed victim. Just as Andrea remains emotionally, and eventually physically, out of Small's reach, so too the reader is largely left to speculate on the nature of her difficulties and her motivations. There is one sequence in the novel which departs significantly from this structure: when Small listens to Andrea's recorded musings in chapters fourteen and eighteen. This provides us with the first-person reflective

narration we are otherwise denied elsewhere in the text, a kind of metafictional confessional narrative embedded within Small's.

The divisions between bourgeois and countercultural values align in the novel with divisions between commerce and art, compounded by a generational antagonism. This is probably best illustrated in chapter six, when Andrea, reading a collection of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry, accompanies her family on a Sunday drive up the Upper Levels highway to Eagle Harbour. Her mother at one point remarks that "Property values are going to go up fast out here," to which Andrea's father responds, "There's a nice view" (46). This exchange is followed with the third person narration of the scene, with a focalization on Andrea's perspective:

Eagle Harbour, butte-rounded rock cropping looking over the old Spanish sailing place, two hundred years of water lapping rock piling logs now scrubbed and smooth against the beach. Hopkins seeing morning's minion dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, the sun opened itself up, the water deep below was a mighty big ocean from Eagle Harbour. There's a nice view. (46)

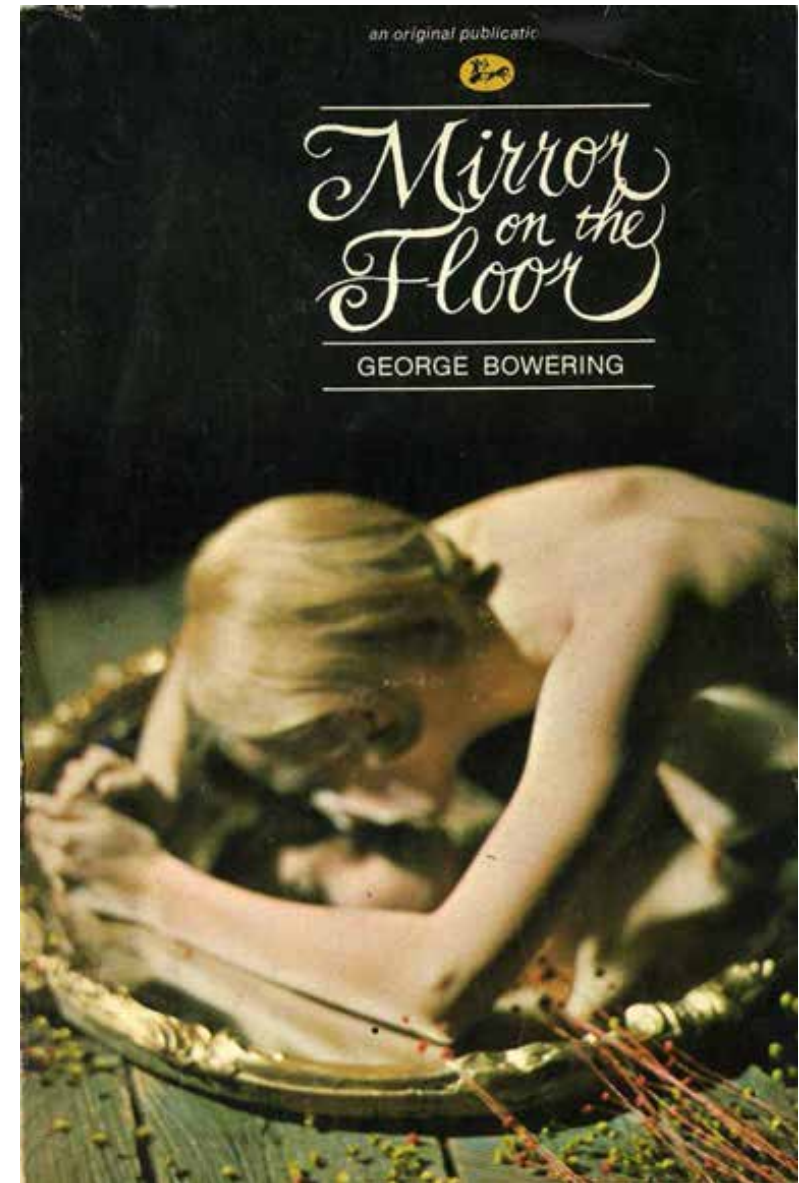
While Andrea's parents look at the scene through the frame of investment and property speculation, Andrea looks at the same scene and sees history and Hopkinsian inscape, interspersed with lines from "The Windhover." The echo of "There's a nice view" is surely ironic in this context. Andrea's parents, her mother in particular, continue to ruminate on the increase in property values, remarking that "If we had been smart we would have bought out here ten years ago" (46) and that "With this new highway, there'll



be garages and drive-ins and all—before you know it, poof! up go the property values” (47).<sup>1</sup> Andrea’s perspective, on the other hand, presents italicized passages from two other Hopkins poems, “The Lantern Out of Doors” and “Peace.” This chapter, then, helps to establish an opposition between Andrea’s parents’ bourgeois values around property ownership and speculation, and Andrea’s own values that are more closely aligned with the aesthetic and the transcendent.

The cover image, an out-of-focus colour image of a woman, naked at the torso with exposed breasts, staring at a mirror, might be read as metonymic of the counterculture of the later 1960s with its allegedly greater permissiveness around sexuality and the body. The author photo on the back, “taken at Kitsilano Beach (c. fall 1962 / spring 1963)” (Miki 13), depicts in black-and-white a clean-cut Bowering in a suit and tie. Eva-Marie Kröller observes that the photographs which often adorn the covers of Bowering’s books—think *Kerrisdale Elegies* or *Autobiology*, for instance—“continue and parody a tradition of self-dramatization developed by his mentors Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams and Jack Kerouac,” and that in the image on the back of *Mirror on the Floor* “[h]e appears less as a detached creator of his work than as a fragment contained in it” (Kröller 113). While I think there is a degree of self-parody in the photograph of Bowering, that photograph and the cover image also bracket the novel in much the same way

1 Andrea’s mother is correct, of course. A glance at current real estate listings in the Eagle Harbour area (October 6, 2014), shows homes for sale priced from \$929,000 to \$8,995,000.



*Mirror on the Floor* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967)

the early and later 1960s do so historically. *Mirror on the Floor* thus charts Vancouver's evolving social geography in the 1960s, in concert with its mapping of the physical.



Author's photo from the back cover of the 1967 edition of *Mirror on the Floor*. Photo credit: Unknown.

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**LARY TIMEWELL / Dedicated to Matter: takes on early Talons to *A Short Sad Book***

1.

Every time you sit down to write about Jack Spicer, low ghosts begin to circle the room. & when you attempt to tackle Gertrude Stein, things can come up all-too-easy roses, tender & quot-able hallmark buttons. But try to write about George Bowering & it's his voice gets inside your head—a famously resonant Old Port time-tempered one made for reading from SFU lecterns, in cross-Canada bookstores, all the poems allowed on the CBC, like the thumping speaker-cloth of our 1950 RCA Victor cabinet radio on Hope Road, North Van, 1954. & the dangerous impulse is to think you can write it speak it out like him, not in parody, but in *O! paradis* & “consciousness is how it is composed”. Or turn the anecdotal way of back in the day. Which is understandable of course because, even if imitation reveals itself as the sincerest form of falling flat, his writer friendships & cross-influences reach back past old mists-of-time Point Grey, past the mountains Black & Burnaby, the unmountain Royal, back to an eternally teenage we like to think Okanagan sun.

“I hope you won't be flippant,” said Jenny, when I e-mailed her how The Coach House Motor Inn, N.V. & Coach House Press, TO, were entangled in my remembering mind. How, as a

red-jacketed bellman, I offered my student copies of *The Deer-slayer* & *Two Police Poems* to our US celebrity/daredevil guest Evel Knieval, when he queried did I have any ‘reading material’ that summer of ‘70 Saturday. I tossed & turned all night long, fretted myself upright about how to how not to write this piece, woke up to pencil-in the given arrivals, the *awkwardnesses* that I knew if I didn't would be gone by breakfast done. Evel turned down the novel and the Talonbook, but gave me 50 cents for “a noosepaper.”

See, it's starting already.

**“I mean, good agents are kinda hard to find these days.”**

- Jack Spicer in conversation, Vancouver, 1967.

2.

*Two Police Poems*, the red white & blue ink of it, priced at .95 to indicate a good pre-loonie marketing hook from a fledgling *locus* called “talonbooks 1911 acadia road”—now *arcana*, now our Canada—surmise this Karl Siegler's home address at the time & you are free to dismiss me for the no-footnote non-academic I am. It's 1969: John Sinclair is languishing in jail (& did

much longer) for what would qualify him as something of a *cannibus-barrista* in entrepreneurial 2014. Kent State, Watts, uncivil wrongs, the American disfunctional culture as it dominated the continent's consciousness, even as nascent notions of Canadian

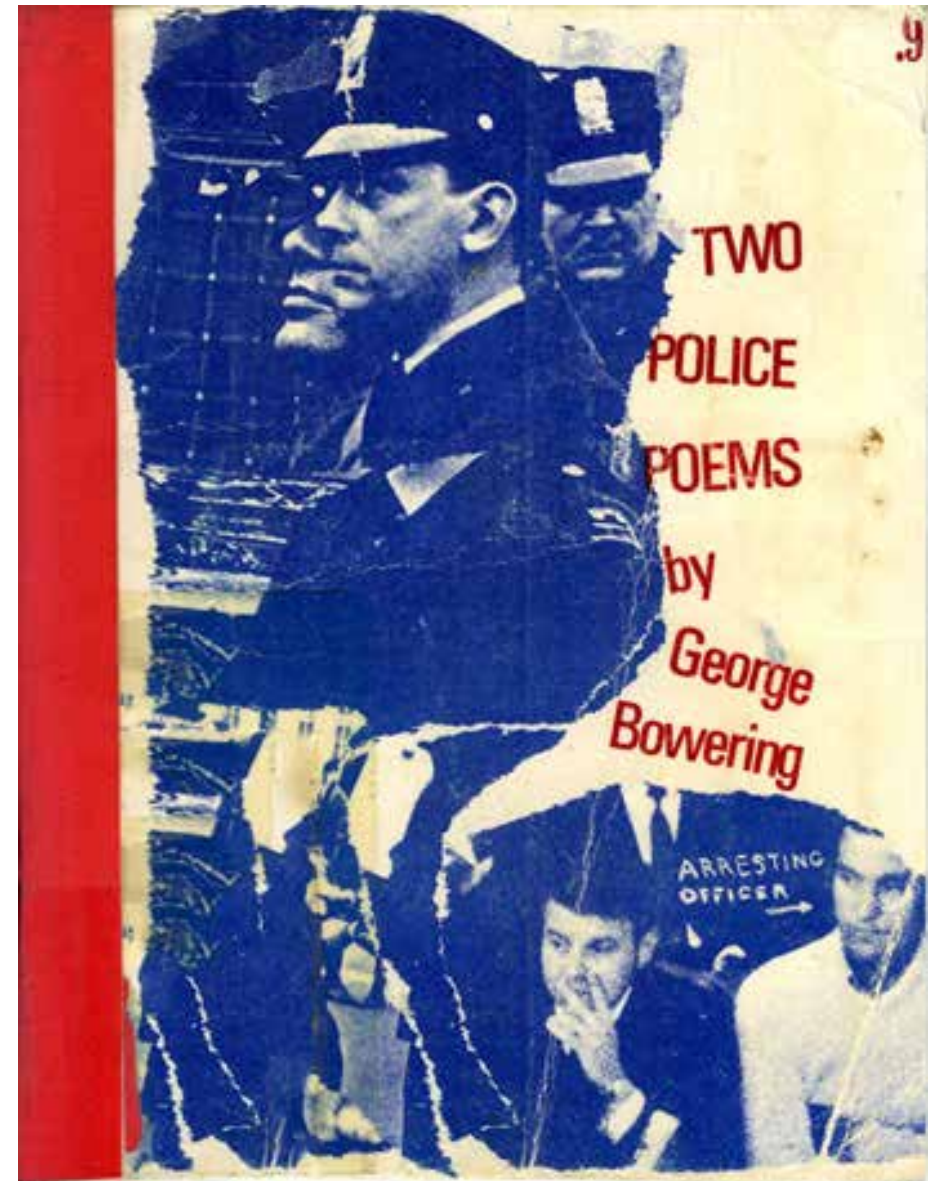


identity first began to sketch themselves out as being simply what USAmericans were not. Bowering's *Rocky Mountain Foot* and *The Gangs of Kosmos* double-teamed to win the GG award for poetry, & "computer riots" (imagine that) to protest racism at Sir George Williams University in Montreal were soon to be overshadowed by the bombing of the Montreal Stock Exchange by the separatist FLQ, the War Measures Act, & tabloid images of Pierre Laporte's body in a car trunk. It would only be a few

years more before Vancouver mayor Tom Campbell's Nixon-lite tirades would be daily fodder & Vancouver police would take to horseback, "quelling if not intimidating the hippy kids" in the Gastown Riots. First of the two police poems, "Support Your Local Police," traces personal memory (is there a Bowering poem that does not reach back with precision & detail to rival Kerouac's

*memory babe* powers?) of the excesses of "protect & serve," & centers around Duthie's bookstore as it was then, pre-*City of Glass*, pre-per-cubic-foot of store-space, Robson-strasse, the "blocks of immigrants & long hair kids." When Bowering writes, "raincoats darkening the interior / where small students with glasses / move toward the walls, close books / of Greek statuary, that beauty

an ideal / slammed shut," it is still to my years-later ears so Ed Dorn & unadorned—the kind of no-nonsense acuity that



*Two Police Poems* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1969)

would soon make him the brunt of superficial attacks from a set of literarily myopic & self-appointed Canadian “nationalists” who criticized him—indeed, the whole TISH & Warren Tallman-mentored group—for the American (*hoodoo & bugbear!*) “Black

Mountain influences.” If the leaving out of the clutter a writer might otherwise scratch down when being self-consciously Writer (“selling a used car,” as Jack Spicer said) was American, then Robin Matthews (codename “Sparrow” in *A Short Sad Book*) was no more an authority, nor the ultimate arbiter of culture, than has proved more recently newspaper biz’s litigious (& ultimately

defrocked) mogul Conrad Black. & one page before the decades-enduring staples that hold my copy of *Two Police Poems* together I find again Bowering making a typical & pivotal Blakean turn from “BUT I WAS READING ALLEN GINSBERG / in the bath today, August 13...” through “mind-forged manacles” & “love will out,” as organized an articulated innocence as 1969

would produce. By the end of “American cops (for John Sinclair)” we are south of all borders in Kerouac’s *fellaheen* Mexico, where the “sand of Chihuahua / drifts across the narrow highway. / Here / there are no American cops...,” the poem’s bare communicative bones left to dry in the sun. & the likely typo

on page (*were* there pagination) 8, “wars glasses,” I still want to celebrate

as deliberate, as a waging of *la guerre culturelle* in the southern drawl of a Mississippi trooper. Ah, I marveled, George finding another way to square meaning, to *potentiate* poem as Lionel Kearns would have said it then. If it’s a typo, it’s a full 45 years later & I don’t want to know, want to let it operate, double-up dictates like a jack-booted motorcycle cop staring at a foreign license plate.

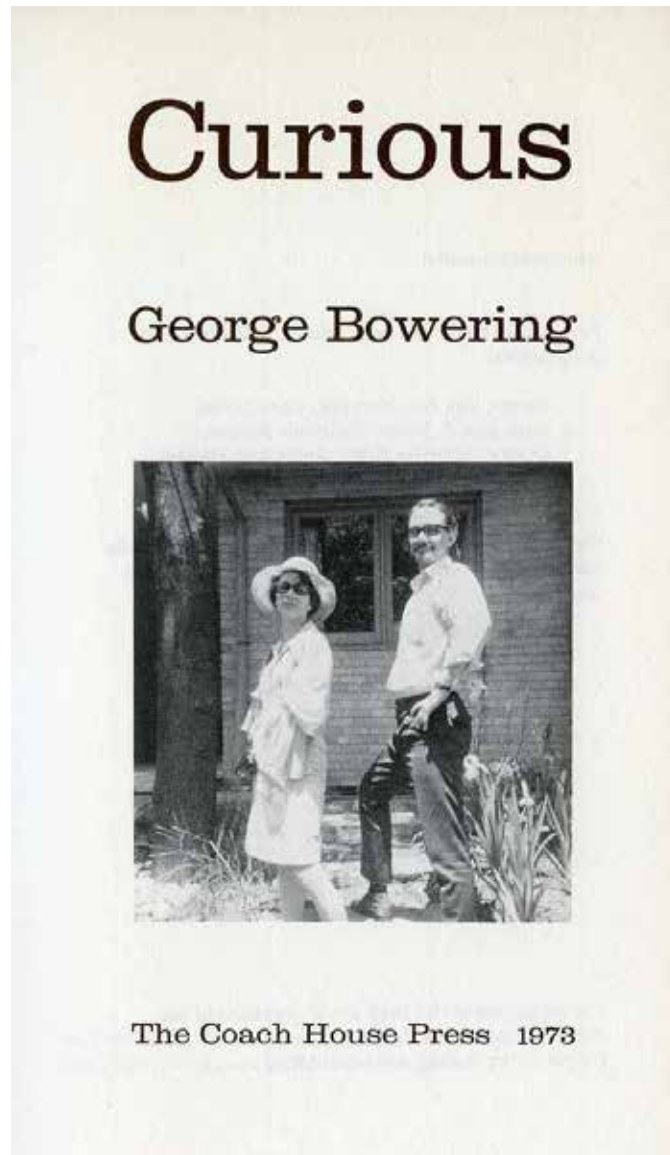
3.

“He is nobody else.”

—Bowering on Raymond Souster in *Curious*.

My Bremner father (not my Timewell father) was George B. & after he died I wrote a poem for him, George B. that is, called *Spring Training* & I sent it to Barry McK way up there in your Prince G. & it was a poem about fishing & baseball & mortality & it tried so hard to be an elegy like George B. could would really write & I liked to think it was, like to think it is a little still now I somehow vainly do.

The first line read, “A Canadian camper parked in the heart / of the desert of American values, / migrants in Indio seeking some / reward.” The last line keeps saying to this very day, “I see you / chopping firewood—you’re / 62 in ‘84 & ready / for spring training again: / workhorse / & knuckleball.”



Title page, *Curious* (Toronto: Coach House, 1973) Image: Margaret Atwood and George Bowering, Toronto, late 1960s. Photo credit: Angela Bowering

But this piece is supposed to be about George. Remember: everything is about George, all is all about George. & anything here that is not about George is about Mickey.

4.

**“Hey, hey, get outta my way!  
I just got back from the U-S-A!”**

- popular North Van arms-linked schoolyard chant, circa 1958.

**“There comes a time  
when we must  
take measures”**

\_\_\_\_\_ begins  
*At War With The U.S.* Currently, we might speak  
of the procedural poem as an effort to remove  
an author’s intrusive intentions, but the  
seriousness & patience with which  
this poem/book waits for its Spicerian messages struggles even  
to begin to say something as simple as *you we she they I*. It is  
nothing less than a test of poetry’s ability to  
effect change in the world,  
its 34 *transmissions* straddling a clear-as-a-bell  
/cryptic letter to one Richard Nixon. The

**“slow slow  
page one”**



With “girding themselves at the general store for the war of  
words”

Bowering pinpoints early, in the *soft propaganda*-era of nascent  
mediated rhetoric, that which would become an art by the time  
we encounter the more professional euphemisms ‘shock & awe’,  
‘collateral damage’, ‘terrorist insurgency’, ‘WMD’,  
the enemy among us  
& other greatest hits.

“Lets do something  
we’ve always done

for a change” \_\_\_\_\_ a line so lyrically  
operative it loves without saying love.

One hopes no future Harper  
acolyte digs up that one to use as a  
campaign slogan in 2036. (Forget  
that I said that I never said that.) By the time Bowering writes,  
“**This is my moment, our moment**”

we know it as an unequivocal  
address to a generation of readers, to the innocence  
of his then one-year old daughter Thea, to the ancient  
question of whether **one thumb four  
fingers** should hold weapon or pen.

The *honor* he calls upon is that of guides Spicer & Kerouac, not  
the senators, judges, old men, not the pride of domination  
identified with since 1945. Fear here is not fear for one’s own  
mortality, but that one’s own child should not live.

“Quit looking at the  
clock, Dick go to bed & listen to the radio” near  
desperate, personal, outreaching *act*,  
above the concerns of poetics, a centerpiece *libretti*, a letter/  
petition to Richard Nixon, calling upon The President to “**let  
Lorraine of France tickle**” his palm. Invoking the voice of Walt  
Whitman “**for the Body and for the eternal Soul**” even as  
bodies are bagged on TV,  
or left to rot in shell-pocked  
ricefields.

Bowering asks if writing is a way, if Dickinson’s  
“**stroking the melody**” is the route to the  
divine when the vanity  
plates of the California rich are what passes for poetic attention.

Asks if we are not just Jack Spicer’s *poor  
bastards trying to get through hell  
in a hurry*. Asks if poetry & music are merely things that we can  
have when war is over, when the jets are shut off. His answer &  
his solace are in Olson’s

“**What you depart from is not the process**”,  
in the *corpus callosum*, & in the blue  
hemispheres of Earth.

\*



**“Myths communicate with each other, & men  
seldom find out.”—Allophanes.**

A young Thor-like, fore-locked Karl Siegler, then my English  
T.A., had me mystified as to the import of  
MYTH, the SACRED (the  
*Socred*, I thought, *har har*) & why those very words needed to be  
*intoned* with something like high reverence. *Sir Gawain and the  
Green Knight*. I wondered if there had been a Classics Illustrated  
version & if I maybe had one somewhere where  
my Gordie Howe & Tim Horton hockey cards were stored  
& if so from whence all mystery & magic would be unlocked  
& my sagging grade-point average salvaged  
at last. An SFU Student  
Bookstore copy of *Four Journals of a North Manual*  
was certainly a bargain at \$2.50, but  
of no help really, the intellectual  
lack surely mine not that of then up& hot-shot poet of *The Open-  
ing*, Brian F., & it would be another seven years before George  
would *relay* to us that *The snowball appears  
in Hell / every morning at seven*  
& a furthering 40 years before I could finally start to honestly  
appreciate Jack S., the juice  
of a Fukushima La France La Furansu pear  
dribbling down my chin,  
the Murakami, H. section of my bookshelf stretching  
to occupy a new, a second, tier.

\*

**“When this you see, remember me.”—Gertrude Stein**

By 1977, Michael Ondaatje has followed up his left-handed *Billy  
The Kid* with the revolutionary syncopation that was *Coming  
Through Slaughter* (Canadian from Ceylon taking on Ameri-  
can outlaws & New Orleans jazz legends, enough to make the  
nationalists quake in their Roots & Bata snowshoes); the Mack-  
enzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry is completed (some things never  
change); a team called the Toronto Blue Jays has played its first  
game, defeating the Chicago White Sox (some things do); a com-  
pany named Apple has been incorporated (leading directly to  
instant novels & and over-abundance of “Canadian” poetry);  
Jimmy Carter has pardoned the Vietnam War draft evaders  
(who long ago anyway had wised-up & decided to stay in Can-  
ada); Elvis Presley dies at 42, Reggie Jackson hits three home  
runs to lead the New York Yankees to the World Series, & one  
unlikely rock star, Marvin Lee Aday, releases the album *Bat Out  
of Hell* under the moniker of Meat Loaf.

Or: 1977, Talonbooks now has 12 fiction titles under its already  
influential belt. *A Short Sad Book* arrives. I bought it & I got  
it right way. Since *Autobiology* (New Star Books, 1972) had  
achieved the personal status of favorite book I got it. George  
had even used some of the same lines over again but since con-  
sciousness is how it is composed I didn’t feel I’d been cheated

of my word's worth. Sometime smartass petty provocateur, I even rearranged a couple of copies of ASSB in the SFU bookstore to obscure a Hugh Hood novel & headed for the studious seclusion of the little-known west rotunda. George, had fast-forwarded through *Autobiology*, paid tribute to poet friends in *Curious* (Coach House Press, 1973), & had already hit the timeless (&, at the time, relatively unsung) Spicerian home run *Allophanes* (Coach House Press, 1976). From the 'wacky' sketch of a chortling W.A.C. Bennett sketch on the front cover (another Curnoe, reminding me of the day I was seated next to the Premier at lunch, a 1967 high school field trip to Victoria) to the



Stan Persky and Angela Bowering at 2249 York St., Vancouver, c. 1971 (from *Curious*, 1973).  
Photo credit: George Bowering

near post-coital portrait on the back cover, ASSB proceeds to thoroughly enjoy its own drollery & doubling sense, its throw-away lines delivered the way the great old Catskill comics did, the one more after the perceived-as-punchline line. I flopped in my secret hideaway west rotunda designed by Arthur Erickson & read ASSB, not in the time it takes to smoke a mirror, but in one energized sweep. The road up Burnaby Mtn to SFU was (or soon would be) named Phil Gaglardi Way & the Socreds were the movers & shakers from the Interior & this was when it first occurred to me (in an unoriginal but minor epiphany that endures in me as a conviction still) that all writing was first about writing, & that George's entertaining & comedic *métier* was masking its own high humanity & seriousness. It moved with as much *musica reservata*—as Robert Hass puts it in *A Primer For The Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*, (Black Sparrow Press 1971) one of a set of three that has survived a few hundred Japanese earthquakes and two Pacific crossings) as anything of Stein's, but with a wet & westcoast readability. When coming back to *Autobiology*, *Curious*, & ASSB, these many years later, when sampling Stein from a sealed *Kuroneko* packing box unopened since leaving Fukushima, I was reminded how slight shifts (an eighth-note out of sync, say) in repetitive cumulative rhythm create a new melodic structure, & I wondered if Glenn Gould would have appreciated, had he lived to hear, Glass or Reich. George generates a rhythm born of reading, & to return to his early books 25+ years later is to not miss a beat, but to hear those melodic shifts again.

ASSB's opening quote from Alain Robbe-Grillet, "...the time of our minds is no longer that of the clocks..." puzzled me at first, but lead me to (later) tackle the glacially slow movement of his 'pure surface' labyrinths (those hot item *nouveaux romans* by '77 popping up everywhere on campus in paperback translations) & several only partially successful attempts at Michel Butor in the original. *Last Year at Marienbad* & other 'oddities' new wave French cinema could be viewed at lunchtime, courtesy of The Student Film Society, the movie medium always hotter hipper easier (anyone can watch, not everyone can *read*) than that laborious university thing called Literature. ASSB was dedicated to Cigarillos & Murchie's Tea & made sincere but almost quaint appeals to Dear Reader Reading. But it was no longer Gertrude Stein's bulk speaking from a hefty salon armchair on Rue de Fleurus, but Bowering writing the real country of imagination, creating (one Old Port at a time) the real Canada. Stein's repetition not as *répétition* but as *insistence*—something akin to history in Pound & Duncan—everything connecting with everything else. "I love this country I write," he writes, in an adapted methodology unfolding, pointing forward & back, inverting the writing life, the life of friendships, of place, of books, with *real* fictional history (life is error is contradiction) & double-agent nationalist petty-minds be damned for the uncomprehending fools they were.

Now, am I supposed to make an argument here? An essay must make an argument. "You & who's army?" as we used to say, from

above the longest unprotected border in the world, from north of intentional USA. This is not an essay, clearly not clear. I gave up on the essay the day Prof. George E gave me a B+ for my essay *Allusions to Eastern Mysticism in Ethel Wilson's Swamp Angel* because I, in my 20-something liquid white-out & IBM Selectric-centered universe, had not properly *footnoted*. "But they haven't invented Word yet!" I protested. So, I closed my Ridgeway Elementary *Think & Do Book* forever, & voted with my feet.

\*

**northpaw**

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

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

\*



From left to right: George Bowering, Frank Davey, Robert Hogg, Red Lane and friend outside the Bowering house in Oliver, c. 1962.



Laughing old TISHers at the launch for *Words, Words, Words* in December 2012. From left: Lionel Kearns, George Bowering, and Fred Wah.

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

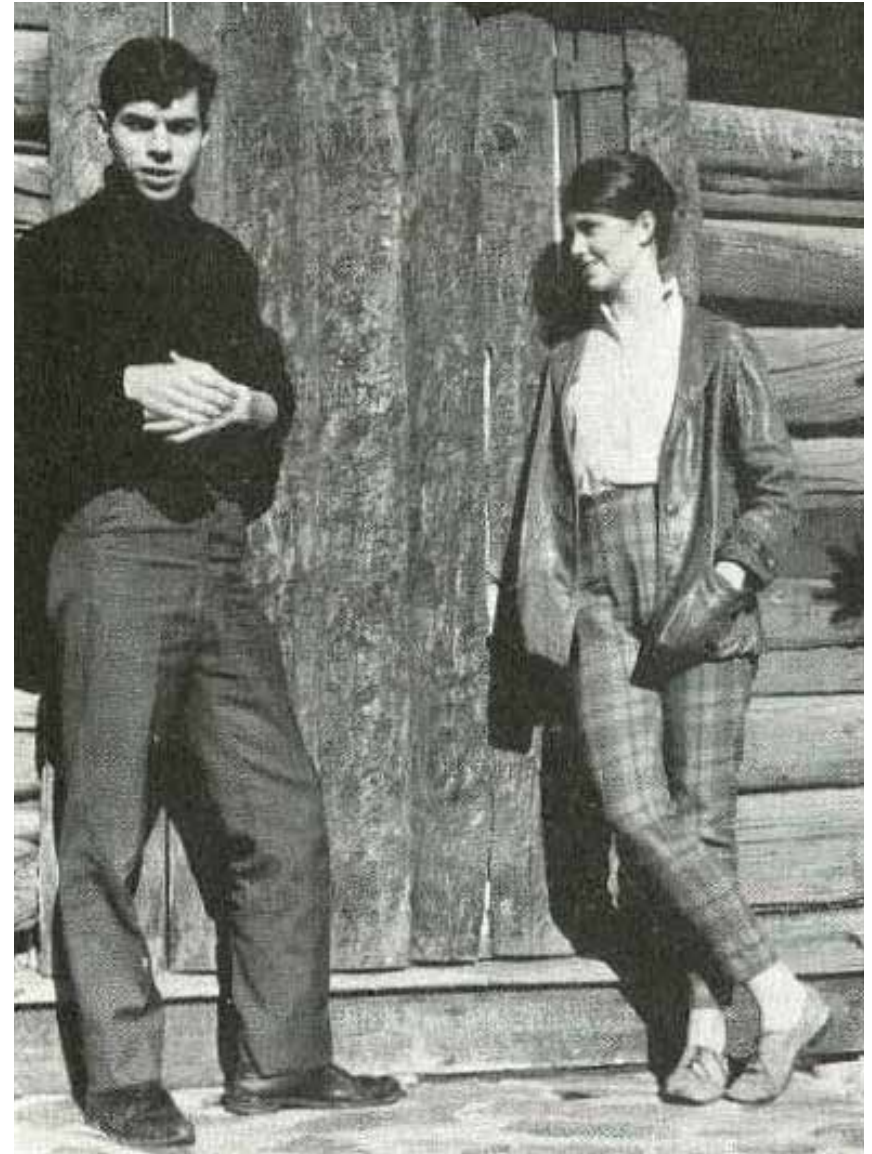
meatier than the shard. *Tish are jumpin'*  
& *the cottonwood's high*. Poetry isn't

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.

\*



Jamie and Carol Reid at a pioneer park on an island in Calgary, c. 1964 (from *Curious*, 1973).  
Photo credit: George Bowering

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.

july 20 / 2014



*Autobiology* (Vancouver: Georgia Straight Writing Supplement, Vancouver Series #7, 1972)

**MICHAEL BARNHOLDEN / *Autobiology*: Bowering's Abecedarian**

**Consciousness is how it is composed.**

*Autobiology*, has a full bleed black and white image of George Bowering, at an early age sitting on his mother Pearl's lap on the front cover and on the back cover an image of George with his daughter Thea, age 2 months, laying against his chest.

**Consciousness is how it is composed.**

The colophon reads: Five hundred copies printed at the York Street Commune, with assistance from the Canada Council.

**Consciousness is how it is composed.**

The book is dedicated: "Here you are Gladys. You too Ange."

**Consciousness is how it is composed.**

Composed between 12 June 1970 and 12 June 1971 published in February 1972 by the Georgia Straight Writing Supplement, Vancouver Series #7, *Autobiology* was begun in London, England, continued in Montreal, and completed in Vancouver, B.C. one year later.

**Consciousness is how it is composed.**

The 48 chapters in this book were written entirely by hand in pen—I always had to use a certain brand of pen—but the book was printed using typewriter font.

**Consciousness is how it is composed.**

"I am no longer a 'Lyric Poet,'" he said. Somewhere to someone. I think. So does Blaser.

## Consciousness is how it is composed.

When the first edition of 500—priced at one dollar each—sold out, a second edition was typeset but never printed because... the sheets were lost?

### Chapter 14: COMPOSITION

What is it? It is *Autobiology*. Is it prose or is it poetry? The ragged right margin makes it look like prose. Is it prose or poetry? In his introduction to *Particular Accidents: Selected Poems*, Robin Blaser calls the chapters in *Autobiology* “poems in prose”. Roy Miki says serial poem. Bowering says:

This was my way back into writing fiction, this book, which really got going again in *A Short Sad Book*.

When he’s kidding around, I (Bowering) refer to this period of writing long poems from *Genève* through *Allophanes*—most of the seventies—as my “symphonic period”. But not really kidding you know?

According to Blaser, he—Bowering—did not want to write (compose) the same poem (it?) over and over again.

48 is one (two?) of my (Bowering’s) favourite numbers. There are 48 chapters in *Autobiology*, 2 of them are titled “The Breaks”. 8 and 20.

When I wrote the second one I didn’t know I had written the first one. I (Bowering) had a rule that said you’re not allowed to read the book until you’re finished it. Isn’t that weird? I (Bowering)’d totally forgotten.

I (Bowering) sit down and I (Bowering) don’t know what the (I Bowering) subject is.

Well this prose I’m writing (*Autobiology*) now. It has never been read much by Eastern and more general readers, being done here in mimeo three years ago. I (Bowering) am also very high on it, and consider that I will stand on it in years to come.

Wd instruct that the distinction is not really between prose and poetry but between prose and verse. Poetry can be in both (?) prose or verse. In any case *Autobiology* is poetry.

Watch for it. I’m afraid it is going to be part one of a trilogy, so there goes another two years of my short life.

I don’t write occasional poems much anymore, but when I do it seems almost always...

...Always be composing or sleeping and that is what Bowering is: composing or sleeping, conscious or not conscious, awake or dreaming. Or dreaming you are awake and consciousness is composed, but you are not composing it. It composes you composing it, and since you can never step in the same stream twice to not compose is to decompose.

The copy of *Autobiology* I am reading now—actually mere moments ago—now I’m composing this sentence, is not the same copy of *Autobiology* I read in 1972. Nor is my reading of it, *Autobiology* or consciousness. It is different, now and then, his (Bowering’s) it and my it, his consciousness and my consciousness, now and then. Different, and that is composition. Abc, always be composing.

So what happened to the reprint? For mimeograph machine



or stencil duplicator printing, new stencil sheets would have to be cut on a typewriter, preferably electric for each printing, in other words the stencil was only good for one press run. Just as a compositor would set type, the typist would compose (put together) a stencil. There was a method for corrections but it either didn't work or it only partially worked. Then came the actual printing or duplicating which involved mounting the stencil on the drum and cranking the handle at just the right speed. There was a bunch of things to be done to ensure the ink spread evenly, but in my experience that never worked very well either. Was *Autobiology* printed in the basement of the York Street Commune at York and Larch on a Gestetner™? named after its inventor David? or a Roneo™? named for a contraction of its function Rotary Neostyle or an A.B. (Albert Blake) Dick Mimeograph™? I'm thinking it was an ABD.

#### Chapter 46: IT

"It was not a loud buzzing but it was like a loud buzzing  
I still do not know what it was  
It was all around  
It was there"

There are 4 copies of *Autobiology* available on ABEbooks including this 1:

Pooka Press, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2006. Paperback Card Covers. Book Condition: Fine. No Jacket. Limited First Edition. This special limited edition was created with permission granted by George Bowering, for use in a University Course. Created from copies of the original book

printed in 1972 at the York Street Commune in an edition of 500 copies. This special new edition was published October 2006 in a very limited numbered edition of only 52 copies, of which this book is hand-numbered #41. Paperback card covers book, 105 pages, size 7 1/8" x 8 5/8". Fine very close to new condition; no prior owner handwriting or text marking, no smoke or other unpleasant odor.

All 48 chapters of *Autobiology* are included in *The Catch* published by McClelland and Stewart in 1976 along with *George, Vancouver* and *Cereals for Roughage*—a sort of addendum meant to include recent poems that do not constitute a book. The publisher refers to them as 'extended poems'. 4 Chapters from *Autobiology* are included in *Changing on the Fly: The Best Lyric Poems of George Bowering* published by Polestar in 2004. In the "In True Diction" to *Touch: Selected Poems 1960-1970* (M&S 1971) Bowering tells the reader: "I didn't think it right to take any bites out of any of these latter, *George, Vancouver*, or *Genève*, or my *Autobiology*, for instances."

*Autobiology* is tarted up in *The Catch*—one chapter per page, different line breaks and typesetting in some Bourgeois' typeface like Times. In the "Acknowledgements" to *The Catch*, he also thanks: "...the Canada Council for a senior arts award during which time this poem was completed".

*Autobiology* is the 7<sup>th</sup> book in a series of 14 edited by Stan Persky and published by The York Street Commune in the old house on the SE corner of Larch and York in order to "make clear the local scene—according to George. The first 6 titles are issued under

the imprint of *The Georgia Straight Writing Supplement: Vancouver Series*. *Autobiology* is #7 and the publisher's imprint on the spine changes to VWS: Vancouver Writing series or supplement. Number 8, Judith Copithorne's *Heart's Tide* through number 12 are issued by the Vancouver Community Press (VCP). 13, David Bromige's *Ten Years in the Making* appears under the same sign on the title page but Curiously NSB with the black 5 point star is on the spine. Al Neil's *West Coast Lokas* a co-publication with the Vancouver Art Gallery is the last of the series and only VCP appears on the spine and the copyright page. There is also a preface by Dennis Wheeler who was Persky's co-editor on the last issues of TISH 41-44/45—which also, I'm told, had numbering designed to baffle librarians—and the *Georgia Straight Writing Supplement* a quarterly (or so) insert in the *Georgia Straight* which was edited, and published according to Dan McLeod, a former editor of TISH, by a collective named Dan Macleod. McLeod also did the banking. Some of the changes of publisher names is likely due to a schism at the *Straight* between McLeod's camp and the collectivists who started up the *Georgia Grape* (after court case real or threatened, *The Grape*). I have seen fleeting mentions of a "Grape Writing Supplement" but never actual copies.

The other thing that stands out in a close reading of *Autobiology* is the publisher and authors' acknowledgement of assistance from the Canada Council. Bowering for a 1971-72 Arts Award, and The York Street Commune under the GSWS brand, for Assistance with the printing of *Autobiology* and I doubt whether John G. Prentice (chair of the CC at the time) flew out to Vancouver to

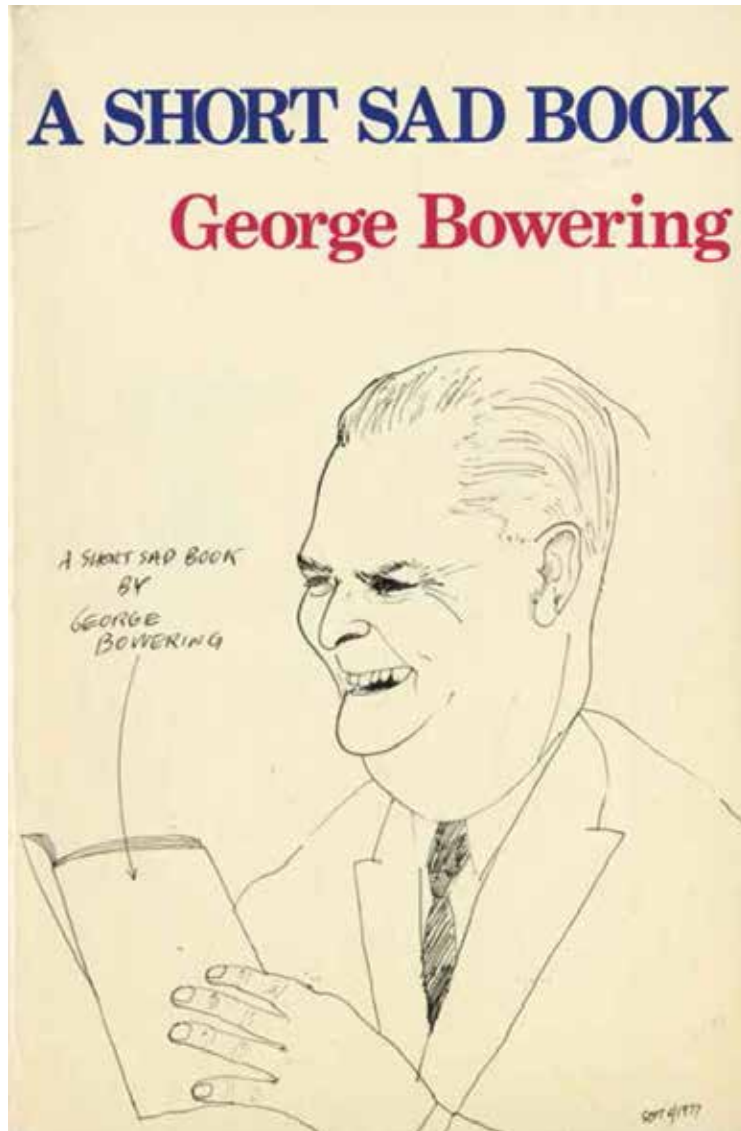


*Autobiology* (Vancouver: *Georgia Straight Writing Supplement*, Vancouver Series #7, 1972); back cover.

crank the handle of the mimeo that consciously printed the book.

So if we were to "follow the money" in the parlance of J schools we would see the early archives of TISH being sold to fund the *Georgia Straight*, then the *Georgia Straight* publishes the *Georgia Straight Writing Supplement* in a quarterly run of 25000 copies sold with the corresponding weekly issue of the *Straight*. Where does the money to print the books come from? Possibly sales—*Autobiology* sold out its run of 500 copies fairly quickly and it had CC money as well, or theft of materials—paper and ink, a philanthropist, or bake sales? I've been asking around to little or no avail. According to George's "Chapter on Consciousness" nothing sub or un happened, so what did happen? Who "composed" the loss of mimeo sheets and what is to be done?

Finally, George tells us in the preface to *The Catch*: "Nature's captive [it?] lives to be composed another day."



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

## JONATHAN BALL / *What A Short Sad Book Is & Is Not*

What is *A Short Sad Book*, this protean monster? We must turn to the book itself.

“a novel by George Bowering” (inside title)

If that even is his real name.

“a book about love” (15) ... “a patriotic novel” (32)

Love of this country—manifested (in true Canadian form) through passive-aggressive joking about its pathetic derangement. When Bowering says he loves this country you believe him, but also believe that he can barely believe it himself.

a hiding place (43)

Bowering begins by stating that “there is one dream in the following pages” (n. pag.) and later notes that he has used the book to keep secrets and hide things. He will be disappointed if we discover any, but the dream should be easy to find. The book incessantly lays bare its own operations, but we should keep in mind the irony of it being a secret drawer.

“a little treatise on snow” (43)

Elsewhere, “is winter my country” seems to equal “of course”

and so a short sad book about Canada might equal a little treatise on snow.

**“a picaresque novel” (50)**

The hero of this picaresque is Bowering himself, who as narrating author travels with and spies on his characters in their adventures.

**“thematic criticism not a novel” (53) ... “it may get to be a short sad book” (58)**

Elsewhere, Bowering writes that “Canada is the country in which writing about literary criticism is literary criticism” (74) and his character Sparrow is a thinly veiled assault on Robin Mathews, through whom (like Al [Purdy] the detective) Bowering satirizes anti-American sentiment. The novel operates like a criticism of such criticism, while also parodying the school of patriotic “thought” that sees the author as “CanCon” provider. *A Short Sad Book* offers *nothing but* “Canadian content,” one ridiculous cultural cliché or in-joke after another, *as if believing* that this is what critics like Mathews and Purdy would want. Of course, they want nothing of the sort, and might overlook the book’s content but object to its *form*.

**“an adult book” (62) ... “a political novel or a philosophical novel” (67)**

Despite its immature humour, Bowering’s novel seems *more*

*grown up* than the anxious teenage angst of the Mathews/Purdy anti-American paranoia. The novel’s implied argument is that a literature focused on Canadian content will remain content to ape inherited models, and thus never develop. The saddest aspect of *A Short Sad Book* is that Bowering needed to write it in the first place, that the reactionary position of refusing artistic influence and clinging in a death-grip to conservative literary forms could be seen in Canada, as a revolutionary position *if we just add some beavers!* Bowering’s antinovel remains more radically political and deeply philosophical than much of the canon of Canadian literature while being an absurdist parody of those books.

**“a novel of ‘rare beauty & literary merit’” (72)**

This according (in the novel) to “Judge Bryan” (72)—the reference is to the censorship of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, only published in unexpurgated form in 1959 after Judge Bryan ruled, among other things, that it was “replete with fine writing and with descriptive passages of rare beauty. There is no doubt of its literary merit” (qtd. in Boyer 279). In the Puritan realm of Canada’s literary culture, Bowering might meet similar “charges” so he appropriates this “blurb” in his defence.

**“an autobiographical novel” (84)**

On one level, strictly autobiographical: the story of Bowering writing the novel. However, the context of this quote is the narrator’s claim that the novel is writing itself, and writing about itself,

and therefore *the novel produces itself as autobiography*. For all of his apparent stage time, Bowering remains just one more member of its cast. Later he calls it “a novel in which I will not be able to write what I want” (147).

**“a military novel” (91)**

Specifically, “about General Wolfe who died & got into Canadian History some time later” (91), but in another sense about the battle for the Canadian literature. Who will win? Who has won? I once took down posters advertising a CanLit course that was “not all wheat & sad animals” because a professor objected, offended, having taught courses on those topics. So you decide.

**“poem containing history, not a bloody romance” (92)**

Bowering often refers to the novel as a poem, or a history, and declares that although it is about love it’s not a romance. The love precludes the romance, produces a hatred of the nation’s history, of where the country is going, has gone.

**“a post-modern novel” (108) .. “not Canadian literature [but] post-modern Canadian history” (114)**

Perhaps *THE* post-modern novel of Canadian literature, for taking Canadian literature and its stubborn refusal of the post-modern as its topic. If “Canadian literature” hadn’t already become an insult of sorts, Bowering certainly made it into one. If we’ve recuperated the term, at all, then Bowering also deserves

much of the credit.

**“a ghost-written novel” (116)**

As in written by ghosts.

**“a text book” (121)**

Here Bowering suggests that, if his reputation grows, he might have some influence on what books are assigned in schools, and perhaps *A Short Sad Book* might also be assigned. Misread, this phrase best describes the text-obsession of the text itself.

**“a bunch of endings” (125) ... “the invisible book I am not writing” (127)**

Bowering appears surprised throughout the book to find himself still writing it, and the book always seems on the verge of collapse or dissolution. Also, the phrase suggests the novel’s recurrent refocusing on death and the dead, something easy to overlook in the face of its laughter. The latter line might be misread to suggest that the frenzied, tentative prose seems designed to stave off the possibility of ending, of fixing narrative into some stable form, which might amount to an artistic death.

**a series of cigars (128)**

“The cigar means more to Canadian literature than the beaver” (128) because Canadian authors have smoked cigars while writing. A silly observation meant to deflate the seriousness of the

“CanCon” pose, but also a smart emphasis of the writing *act* over writing’s topic.

**“not Canadian literature” (131)**

Despite all its beavers? It’s not Canadian literature in the pejorative sense, by virtue of being *too much* the very thing it disdains, pushing the clichés of CanLit to ridiculous extremes.

**“a novel made of the sounds of leaves turning” (131)**

What a beautiful line—such rare beauty & literary merit.

**“not writing [but] thinking” (134)**

“He is not writing about something; he is writing something.”  
Said Samuel Beckett, *re* Joyce. (Markson 13)

**“a mirror on the floor” (134)**

“Ah, Sir, a novel is a mirror carried along a high road.”  
(Stendhal 372)

**“not a clear lake with a body on the bottom” (134)**

The lake, and the body, without clarity.

**“not a puzzle” (135)**

There is no puzzle. There are only the pieces.

**“a serial novel” (139)**

Serial killer of “serious” novels.

**“a ghost-ridden novel” (147)**

Ghost-written, and ghost-ridden. What secrets has Bowering hidden? Where is our dream? The whole thing might be a dream. We might be ghosts that will never wake into our lives.

**“the Pretty Good Canadian Novel” (150)**

The best we could do, until somebody writes *Beaver Wars IV: The Beavening*.

**“archaic avant-garde writing ... warmed over Gertrude Stein” (154)**

As Jason Wiens points out, “the novel’s title [is] an antonym of Stein’s *A Long Gay Book*” (307). Bowering anticipates the best complaint about his novel, by means of which he implies the best (twofold) defence: (1) anyone thinking this is just warmed-over Stein cannot tell the difference and therefore has nothing of value to say, and (2) warmed-over Stein sounds a helluva lot tastier than unmicrowaved “CanCon” gruel.

**“a fast-moving, entertaining & bawdy novel” (158)**

According to the *Washington Star*, according to Bowering. Really, it’s the *Washington Times*, praising *The Apprenticeship of*

Duddy Kravitz with boilerplate gibberish.

**“longer than *Autobiology* or *Curious*” (164) “better than *Whirlpool* by Diane Giguere ... *Knife on the Table* by Jacques Godbout ... [&] *Execution* by Colin McDougald [sic]” (165)**

Well. You have gotten your money’s worth!

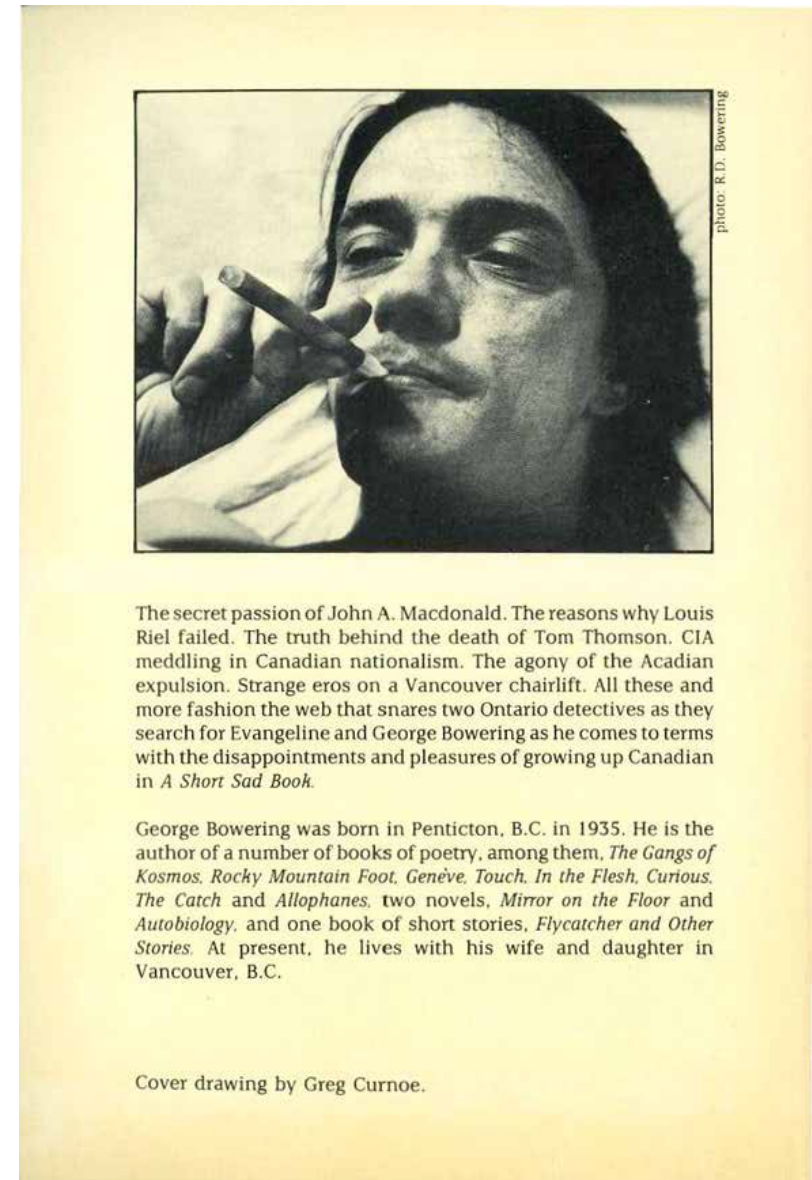
**“a story about a detective who, after following a false lead to a mountaintop in British Columbia, confronts the slayer of Tom Thompson in London Ontario” (165)**

This is, in fact, the plot of the novel. I dare you, now, to read the novel and discern this plot. It’s a perfect plot for a perfect Canadian novel that Bowering doesn’t write. He just flushed that GG down the toilet.

**“a waste of time” (185)**

Bowering only tells you this on the last page. Goddamnit! He won. He gets the last word (from an interview with Alan Twigg):

**“It’s an emetic for Canadian literature! It’s important.”**



Back jacket cover of *A Short Sad Book*. Photo credit: R.D. Bowering.



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## 14 PLUMS: An interview with George Bowering

"Kerouac said ... that he sailed on the Pequod for fifteen years and never saw one single whale, just a lot of flounders. And I really respect a guy that will do that and then write about them."

George Bowering was interviewed on February 18, 1979 by Bill Schermbrucker, Sharon Thesen, David McFadden, and Paul de Barros, in Vancouver. These extracts were edited by Sharon Thesen and published in *TCR* 1.15 (1979).

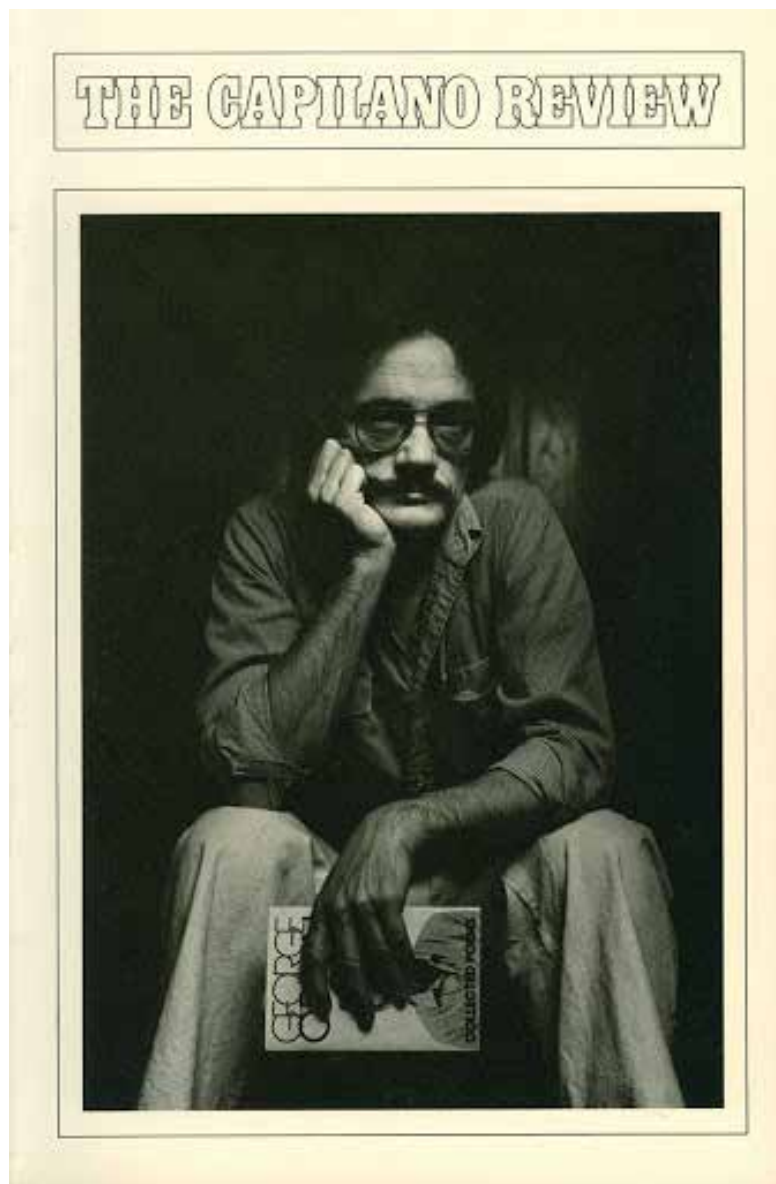
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*George Bowering*: I've changed a lot of my ideas since *A Short Sad Book* came out in 1977, or, you know, fiddled with them a bit. And I've gone completely around on some.

*Paul de Barros*: What have you turned around on?

*GB*: I've refined some ideas from that book and I've become, in the last few years, a lot less nationalistic than I was four or five years ago, going back more to the position I was in ten years ago. Compared to the way I was feeling about poetry, say, ten or





TCR 1.15 cover with portrait of George Bowering by Nathan Hohn

fifteen years ago, I'm much more oriented to the idea of writing as artifice, as visible page artifice, but not in the sense of concrete poetry. I think I've got it straightened around now that prose is a spatial experience. As I was saying the other day, poetry is basically a temporal art and despite the fact that I feel the same way about a lot of things, I feel there is a basic difference between the two of them, that poetry involves memory, for instance (when you're reading a poem) a lot more than prose does—with prose you're more engaged on the space that you're looking at and using it at your own speed and at your own entry. Whereas with poetry, you're in a more passive role; you're sitting there listening to it go by you, second by second, the way you do with a movie or a piece of music. You can't stop and say, wait, let's slow down here, let's go back to where we were and come back again, or let's change where I'm sitting.

2.

*Bill Schermbrucker:* You seem to get a lot of energy out of vacillations or pendulum movements from one thing to another: from prose to poetry, from Vancouver to Toronto, from Canada to the States, from man to woman. Like, in the language of *A Short Sad Book* and in something else that I've read recently, every time a word comes up that fits in *this* context there's a comment on how it doesn't fit in *that* context.

*GB:* In *A Short Sad Book* I was trying to clear the boards and make clear a lot of my opinions that had been working up over the years

on various things and say them out. bpNichol says at the end of *Journal*, I think, that what you're doing when you're writing a novel or writing a book is, you just look into the person's eyes and tell them how you feel. And he says that's the whole function of writing a novel—what it's all about. I just wanted everybody to know how I feel about everything. So there is a lot of measuring of those relationships.... I was trying to get the sense of spreading the whole thing out on one big flat surface and then you might see something in the top right-hand corner that connects with something down at the bottom left-hand corner ironically or simply in order to rhyme with it or whatever. I guess it's like a Leonardo da Vinci painting: every part of it is related to all the other parts in terms of the motion of the hand that you saw doing it. He hardly ever finished a painting, and there's supposed to be a sense of that in the book, too. That book just ends because one ran out of space or ran out of pages to do or whatever.

*PdeB*: I can see a connection to Gertrude Stein, where you're spreading it all out and it's almost like each page, each composition...

*GB*: It's a way of denying the subconscious, too. The subconscious suggests that we are enacting something on the time continuum. Either you connect it with your own childhood or you connect it with the childhood of the race or whatever.

*PdeB*: Well, most poetry does, too. The whole modern novel is dealing with nothing but that.

*GB*: That dumb path that Henry James put us down, and you'll notice that the problem for the modern novelist or fiction writer from James up to, say, 1950, the main problems have been time. The characters' psychological problems have been time, and you get all that, and then the technical problems have all been time, too, so you get all those great inventions like the flashback and the internal monologue and the cutting back and forth between the times of two different people and all that.

*PdeB*: Are you suggesting that it is a betrayal of what prose can really do?

*GB*: Not a betrayal. It's funny—just a 75-year experiment and something new for the novel to do, and a lot of people recognize that it was getting into the business that poetry had claimed before that. I mean, I don't think anybody makes that claim for the relationship between poetry and prose before that. We can see carry-overs between the modes of thought between an 18<sup>th</sup> century prose piece, but the whole act of narrative in a Pope poem is quite different than an act of narrative in a Fielding novel. A Fielding novel doesn't gather up everything. If James had been writing *Tom Jones*, something that happened to Tom Jones in Chapter 2 would reassert itself in Chapter 35 as causal, but for Fielding, the past is just another place he's been and you could probably put most of those chapters in different places. I mean, Tom does learn a little bit, but he's just as naïve when the next chapter comes along; and I aspire to that kind of space for a novel.

3.

GB: James says in *The Art of the Novel*, I think, that the novel is to history as painting (he's talking about realist painting) is to nature—an imitation. His assumption was that the rules we have of history are the rules that we're going to have when we get into fiction. We've come around and changed the rules of fiction and at the same time changed the rules of history. Maybe we changed the rules of history first. We look at history in a much different way now. We looked upon it then, in 1840, as a kind of a given: we were not the administrators of it, we were sort of the functionaries of history and it acted upon us. So, fiction was to do the same thing. There was to be an inevitability about fiction, and the author was to pretend he wasn't there, in other words, to disappear. And it's funny because I was just re-reading William H. Gass's *The Figures of Fiction* and he says that most people nowadays want fiction to act like history without having to take care of all those details, like, easy history without customs rates and stuff like that; they just want to sit back and let it happen to them, he says. Like sociology without statistics. And that's a preamble, in his terms, to getting rid of it. The way he's describing it is one of two things: either nurse novels or the most honoured Canadian fiction of the last ten or fifteen years.

4.

GB: In poetry I like some kind of arbitrary structure that will then free you in your response to it, whereas in prose I like total control on the part of the author. I like the author to assert his

independence of causality as much as possible in the prose, in the causality of the novel. I really used to feel very romantic about the image that novelists always made; they said, I created these characters and then after a little while they took off, right?

PdB: Yeah! They don't behave themselves—uncontrolled. (laughter)

GB: I don't want to be the victim of my characters; I don't believe any more ... I just said, that's all a game, you know, it's not true! it's a lie! They're lying when they say that. It's the same lie the realists use when they say that nobody in this novel resembles anybody in their life—you know that's a lie. And then they turn around and say, why do you keep treating this as autobiography instead of fiction? And they got characters in there that you can recognize—that you're *supposed* to recognize.

PdB: Well, is what you're talking about that you're disbanding fiction?

GB: Yeah.

PdB: But you're not even disbanding it. It seems to me even back in those early books you never bought the idea of fiction.

GB: Well, I did, but then I could not resist the desire to show off my power, but I did feel—like, I really was a sucker for the Ernest Hemingway thing, you know. That's what I wanted to do. The novelists I liked were all the big standard American realist

novelists: Steinbeck and Hemingway and John Dos Passos and William Faulkner and, you know, all of them, I adored them all. I remember I'd look at old notebooks and see my responses to those novels and say, god, they saw right into my heart, you know? Even though they were about somewhere that I've never been in my life, the story is still about me. Now I say, why the christ should I go to a goddamn book to find a story about me? I mean, I've got a story. Why have a story *about* me instead of me?

5.

GB: You notice how the realists—these Freudian modernist fiction guys—are all dead serious? And it's the comic writer and the comic movie makers who are dealing in other terms than realism. For instance, in the early 1950's you had all these super-serious James Dean stories about adolescents growing up and being wounded by the world and the obvious cataclysmic effects of those. And then you have *The Road to Morocco* with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, who keep letting you know that the camera's there, and they keep letting you know they were characters in another movie. As soon as you recognize a camera's there, you're out of realism—it's disappeared. Because realism depends on your setting the people up on three sides of the table in a movie, although there might be 17 people, they're taking up only three sides of the table because the other side has the camera on it, and they pretend the camera isn't there.

PdeB: It seems really important all the way through the poetry

and the prose—that idea of verifying everything: verifying where you are, verifying what you're seeing, having some evidence. It seems that a lot of the poems are nothing but that, like, searching for the evidence.

GB: Yeah, I see what you mean but I don't know quite how to connect it.

PdeB: Well, my connection is that you're saying, if I can't believe in this system to apply to daily life or dream or experience, then how am I going to verify what's going on? How am I going to have any way of talking about it?

GB: Well, for poetry, in the TISH days, the days when we were all learning to write poetry, that involved making use of the lessons of imagism because when you're an 18-year-old kid you're an automatic Georgian, right? And you start talking about things that must be very important. Teenage poets—untutored—always write about suicides and bodies cut open and blood and death and pain and loneliness—I mean that's what the Georgians were, a bunch of arrested adolescents, right? They would be out in a lake and the lake would just be a backdrop for their own loneliness. That's not what you find in our early poetry. You find an incredible number of proper nouns because proper nouns are the most concrete nouns there are because they verify the existence of something outside your own colorations of the landscape.

6.

*David McFadden:* Do you ever get depressed with what you're writing?

*GB:* No, not very often.

*DMcF:* Do you ever find it scary or dangerous?

*GB:* No.

*BS:* Do you believe him, David?

*DMcF:* Yeah, I think so. It's amazing but I do.

*GB:* There have been times when I've gone back and read something and was surprised by it or felt that it was—it had more to it than I thought it had at the time, or felt as if I didn't remember having written that, and I've been moved by it emotionally, but I've never been scared by it.

*Sharon Thesen:* I wonder if David asked that question out of a similar sense that I have to some of the recent work, that there's an attempt to reclaim some innocence, either from the 18th century, in the romantic conversion of your own language in poems like "Which Poesy" and "Old Standards." It's quite different than, say, the "Touch" poems. But I found that in "In the Flesh" there began a shift, a kind of falling away from, or falling apart of a sense of love that is so much there in the earlier poems. And in the introduction to that book you yourself say something about having entered your thirties and becoming aware of your life as

part of a larger drama. And it's around that time, too, that you write *Curious* and *Autobiology*, and of course that takes me back to a couple of things I wanted to talk about in terms of what you've been saying about memory and so on. But the last line of "In the Flesh" is "Reaching out to hold you, off."

*GB:* To hold you—comma—off. I wanted both to be there because earlier in the poem it says to pay attention to my endings.

*ST:* Yeah, but you never seem to have any trouble with that, you seem confident in that ability of language to hold the world.

*GB:* Well, that's what love is—you write lyrics with love for the world, you want to name it and say: there, there, there. And what you're talking about in these other poems, the commonality that runs through these later poems, is that the language tends to be more about itself, and that has left what I take to be the lyric impulse—has left it behind, and it is not the dramatic but it is the parallel in writing to the feeling of drama in your own life, so that you're attesting more to the poem having an existence, whereas a lyric poem tends to—it allows—it gives itself to the occasional all the time and verifies that out there is the real and therefore the beautiful, because, I mean, what you should love is the real, I think.

*ST:* But there's definitely a "you should" loving in it, there's more of a presence of you.

*GB:* Yeah, the more you say, look at that, look at that, look at

that—the only motive to do that is to say it’s beautiful or it’s ugly and could be beautiful—one of the two. I guess when you get to be in your thirties you’ve done that so often that you begin to see that, and that’s when you can make a choice, you can either get psychological, which I felt ...

ST: Well, no, but there is a recovering of the past that you’re also doing in your thirties, which is not ... well, I want to get back at some point to that denial of the subconscious in your work but there certainly is a particularized recovery of—I hate to say your past because it’s not really personal history in that sense.

GB: Yeah, I know the hesitation you’re feeling if we’re talking about *Autobiology*. That’s why the form of *Autobiology* is so intent on making the present happen in the language. It’s prose but it’s not prose that’s saying “this happened”: it’s a prose that’s saying “I’m happening.” I don’t know if that’s what you said but I think you’re absolutely right in the sense that at that moment when it is one’s past rather than one’s present, it is involved in terms outside the poem. But maybe it’s to get over what the realists or the confessional poets, who are sort of the poet version of realists, would do with that material. You throw all the attention on the page so that the reader is not then going to say, oh god, here goes another dreary story about how awful the mother [father, ed.] treated that kid.

PdeB: Well, you’re resisting that all the way.

ST: Yeah, he is. It’s that discomfort with the idea of causality that he talked about before, that he preferred to write a kind of Fielding novel. There’s George the Picaro, exactly the same at the end of that road as he was at the beginning of it.

7.

DMcF: This goes back to a very mundane level. What’s happening to your sense of audience?

GB: I don’t know. I’ve never been clear about what it was except in some instances—there’ve been lots of times I’ve had that experience in Vancouver. I’ve had all kinds of people talk about this, the scariness or the meanness of it, where it was always traditional in Vancouver that if you read a poem that your co-poets in town didn’t like, they wouldn’t have a nice liberal attitude about it. They wouldn’t say, we’re just talking about the poem, George, we’re not talking about you, you know. They wouldn’t do that; they wanted you to go kill yourself! (laughter )

PdeB: If you feel that way about it...

GB: Yeah! And so that was one version of the story, but I still think that that’s part of that business of Toronto and Vancouver. When I go to Toronto I say, that happens out in Vancouver and you wouldn’t be able to get away with this shit there. And I’ve always thought there was more good to that than there was bad. I mean, I had my feelings hurt lots of times and I probably hurt other people’s feelings lots of times, but I think that was more

good than bad. When I think about audience that's the first thing I think about, and that audience is made up of other people in that circle of poets and so forth. It's like a bunch of Knights Templar on the West Coast.

8.

GB: All my books start off with "why am I writing this book?" except in "The Dead Sailors" it's "he"—the guy who's writing it is called "he," and about every second chapter it gives you a page of the circumstances of the guy writing the Captain Vancouver book.

ST: The circumstances while he's writing, or...?

GB: Yeah. It's like, it starts off I went to Trieste, right? So it starts off with a parody of the beginning of a realist novel, which goes something like, "he was residing in a hotel in blah-blah-blah" and the same thing with that book: I had to declare the circumstances of writing the book just to lay the cards on the table and say, I'm the author and you're the reader and this is the book. And that goes right back to what bp says at the end of *Journal*: he says you put the book down, look your reader in the eye, and say such-and-such. But "put your book down"—you know bp, he never says anything that doesn't have three meanings. You put your book down like this, you know, and you put (write) it all down. And through that action look at the guy in the eye. But it also means that you've been sitting there reading and he says, get out of reading and get into real life. So you put your book down and you look

him in the eye, right? So, "He lifted his foot and kicked the kid"—it's the same function and that's to get rid of ... I don't know. There are two things that happen: one is, some people got all snarled up in the end of the realist tradition and started trying to fight their way out of it, like Mailer, and tried to shoulder their way around it and call the novel a piece of non-fiction and vice-versa, and so then Barth came along and had the author going psychologically crazy because he has to handle this funny old material. Then you get the next batch of people that have to parody it, or—I like Hawkes' term "travesty"—make a travesty of the whole situation. That has to be done. Then you don't know what's going to happen after that. I think we're still in that space. There are all kinds of interesting things happening, but they're almost all of them done in terms of travesty: Ishmael Reed is just making a hash of history and by extension James' notion that novels are history in fiction.

9.

GB: I wrote a Beckett paragraph today. It was like a long Beckett paragraph.

PdeB: But that's art as problem-solving. Art as problem solving is the main modern idea.

GB: Yeah. It is in painting, and it has not been acknowledged enough in poetry, as it has been in prose.

PdeB: So that accounts for the move and interest in prose.

GB: I think so, yeah. I think that it's more that in poetry I will always look into my heart and write but with prose not so much. And that gets you into the spatial thing: this is really a lot more important to me than time right now.

10.

DMcF: There's a tradition in Canadian poetry for most dedicated poets to be—let me boil it down—to be dedicated to their own egos and reputations and things like that, and, what are you dedicated to?

GB: The first thing I think of is that I wouldn't want to shame the language. That sounds very pretentious but it's true. Literally I don't want to bring shame down on the language and I feel the same way about other people's poetry. That involves abrogating its space, using language as a tool, and I suppose that that's why I automatically detest confessional poetry. It's why I just cannot read Sylvia Plath. She's one of the most beautiful stanza-makers in recent American poetry or English, whatever she is. She's a lovely stanza-maker but she, what she says is, if the world is shitty for me, the world is shitty, and she then finds various ways of saying that. But as a friend once said, why didn't someone just tell her to go stick her head in an oven.

11.

PdeB: Would you mind answering here Brian Fawcett's attack on *A Short Sad Book*—his political attack on it?

GB: I thought he liked it.

PdeB: Oh, he didn't dislike it, but he was attacking you for not taking into account (I can't remember his exact language) the social implications of who that speaker is in the book, like, how you come to write a book and what is a writer—that you don't take on the political at all as content.

GB: It's funny, it's the one thing that only one person in reviewing it has ever mentioned. The literary politics are pretty clear.

PdeB: Oh, yeah!

GB: And the statement about literary nationalism and socialization—sociology-ization—of literature is pretty clear. The sexual one I thought was clear but is perhaps not quite—only one person in a review ever mentioned that *A Short Sad Book* is a title that takes from *A Long Gay Book* in which Gertrude Stein—and she didn't publish it, right?—was writing a book that involved her sexuality. But what that would suggest immediately was that whereas “gay” means homosexual, then “sad” must mean heterosexual. And I sort of half believe that and half don't.... In *A Short Sad Book* there are female characters and male characters, and male characters and male characters, and most of the relationships between men and women in it are political relationships. The main boy-girl relationship is between the Father of Confederation and the lady for whom there was no space in this country, and who gets shunted off to Louisiana.



And he puts his arms around her when they get up to the top of the mountain and points out over Vancouver and says, “Some day this will all be yours,” and she doesn’t say it out loud, but she says something to him about how he can go fuck himself. What you’ve got there is a male-female relationship that involves power, so you have Scotch-English-Canadian versus French Canadian, man versus woman, powerful versus not so powerful, guy who’s putting the train tracks here and bam! this is Canada and the lady gets stuck on the boat and sent off, either to drown or to get to Louisiana and so forth: so I thought that all the way through that was a pretty strong political statement.

ST: Well, it’s a political statement implicitly in that male-female relations are relations of power to some extent. It’s one thing to have both male and female characters interacting and say aha! I’ve written a politically conscious book, but to consciously state the politics of that relationship is something else again. And I bet you joke about it too!

GB: Oh sure!

PdeB: That means your answer to Brian is that there is politics in the book.

GB: Sure. It says, “In the mountains with the Acadian girl, John A. Macdonald felt all at once very romantic. He pickt some alpine flowers & offered them to her in his trembling fist. The flowers are nice, she said. But I would rather have the earth they grew in.

But this land is promist to Macmillan-Bloedel, he said. Everything over a thousand feet to MacMillan-Bloedel, everything under a thousand feet to the CPR.”—and if that’s not political—“Who is Bloedel, she enquired. I wish you hadn’t askt me that, he said, I don’t know, but I can assure you that he is a part of the national policy. It sounds to me like a classic rip-off, was her reply. I’m afraid you will eventually end up in Louisiana, my dear. Come, let us go down now. I just have time to catch my train. You couldnt catch a cold, she thought to herself. Theirs was a love-hate relationship. ” I think that’s the authentic real relationship between sexual politics, racial politics, and big business versus nature politics. Really, I thought I tied them all in brilliantly! If it’s not clear where I’m coming from in terms of that, then, you know...

BS: I’m interested to hear you talk about what you’ve displayed over the years as a great antagonism to American cultural colonization.

GB: In “The Dead Sailors” I occasionally called them Americans and going through I’ve revised it and every time they’re mentioned they’re called Yankees.... In this new book the only time the Yankees ever appear is when they keep going up to the Indians and saying, pssst, wanna buy some rum? Got any waterfront property you wanna sell?

12.

DMcF: How important has Greg Curnoe been to you?

GB: He's vastly important to me. He and I are the same age, think a lot alike—we used to sit up till four or five in the morning drinking Italian coffee every night when I lived in London and he taught me a lot about painting and a lot about contemporary jazz, because I had let it go for about ten years. He made me more nationalistic than I was in certain areas, but we also have had and have a lot of arguments about the nationalist position.

DMcF: What sort of differences do you feel you have?

GB: He's from Ontario and I'm from B.C. and there is that basic difference that we had when I first moved to Ontario. He was interested in a term that was used there—regionalism. I was interested in a term we used here, *locus*. We used the noun, to borrow it from Pound or Olson. And regionalism is a curiously centralist attitude. It's a slavish centralist attitude because that's what Toronto says the rest of the country is. And so he says, okay, I will assume that and call it regionalism without questioning the idea. And I said that I couldn't believe that he would assume, without a sense of irony, without saying, okay, we are the niggers of the world, or something like that. I mean he wasn't—he was championing it without that kind of irony. So I guess that was the beginning of a basic difference. His regionalism is kind of—I admire it and love it and I also got that year with James Reaney and what he was doing with the regional. I found it reactive, and I never felt that the localism that we were practicing here was reactive. It later became reactive in certain statements in which we would belligerently say things to people back East....

13.

GB: I think that poetry has shot its bolt and is just going to lie down for awhile and then come back in one way or another. Who needs it, we got lots. The drama has been really happening a lot in Canada. I'm really discouraged by the fact that Canadians somehow or other think that you can make a national consciousness by going back into history, finding some character or some event, and writing a goddamn play about it and giving it a one-word title. That's *not* what James Reaney is doing, by the way.

DMcF: Is that what's motivated the series of changes that's gone on in your writing—the notion of filling a void?

GB: Maybe it's just that I'm coinciding with various other things. Or maybe it's because I pay attention to that more in other people because that's what I'm interested in myself.... When Kroetsch was at that conference of writers in the Canadian West and they asked him what was the relationship between history and the historical novels he's writing now, he said Fuck the past.

14.

GB: Yeats said, toward the end of his life, speak to me of originality and I will turn on you in rage. And I believe that, too. Originality suggests mastery over the materials, the individual purchase on the stuff that rightfully belongs to everybody. That's where the responsibility towards wide audience comes from, that the language *does* belong to everybody.

BS: Like the moon.

ST: So does the subconscious—

GB: There can't be a subconscious—

DMcF: If there's no subconscious, who created us?

GB: I did ! I did out of ... (laughter )

ST: You atheist! But I know what you mean—the creation of the world taking place every moment, every day.

GB: As long as you sit down and do the writing.

DMcF: You don't get that as much in Ontario.

GB: I used to hate the term creation—that's one of the big changes I've come to. I've now allowed it back in as long as you're talking about writing anti-realist writing, because the realists pretend that they're mimeticizing that which has been created and as soon as you pretend that, you suggest that creation is over with and you can now make a portrait of it, right?

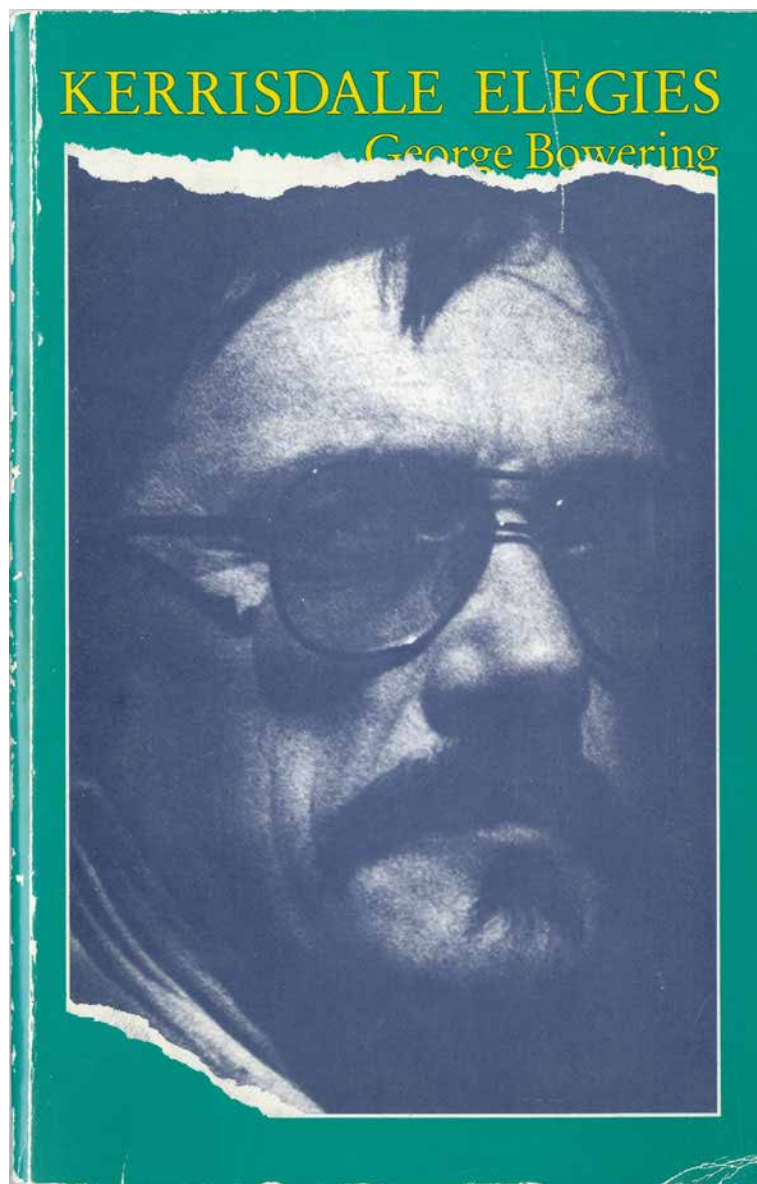
ST: Nevertheless, I think your disallowing of any such thing as the subconscious is bullshit.

**AMBER McMILLAN / Serious Play: Implications in  
*Kerrisdale Elegies* by George Bowering**

*"Like a singing branch I call out in return"*  
*Kerrisdale Elegies* 2.7

In *Craft Slices*, Bowering writes: "When university students, thinking that I teach creative writing, tell me they want to study such a thing because of their desire to express themselves, my heart shrinks. Poetry is not yourself, I tell them; poetry does not come from inside. It comes, as it always has, from the world. The poet's job is not to disgorge, but to read all the great and good writing that has been granted to the human race, to learn all the mechanics of our language, tune his body and then listen. The poet is not an expresser but a reacher" (22-23). Bowering renounces the poet-as-prophet and refigures the poet as a grounded reader and writer.

In the more recent collection *Left Hook*, Bowering quotes Warren Tallman quoting Olson: "Self is subject, writing is verb and the object is life, to be as fully alive as one can manage by way of sight, hearing, thinking, feeling, speaking—that is, writing. The reader becomes the respondent, hopefully the correspondent" (*Left Hook* 87). The correspondence between reader and text is a theme that can be traced clearly throughout *Kerrisdale Elegies* as Bowering digs in among the elegies, talks back to Rilke and to the



*Kerrisdale Elegies* (Toronto: Coach House, 1984)

overstated, inflated poetic language of the past. He pits himself against the authority of Rilke and the *Duino Elegies* and proposes a new kind of writing where the role of the poet is invested in the experience of writing and in the oppositions and paradoxes that can be brought into play. He leverages two primary concepts in *Duino Elegies*—the certainty of the poet and the certainty of the poem—to make a case for its opposite and to formulate a contemporary poet-figure, the artifact of which is *Kerrisdale Elegies*. In a 2010 interview with *Cancon*, Bowering notes, “If you are a person inclined to be oppositional, and you are a poet, you are likely to be oppositional in terms of aesthetics and prosody, etc. That means being oppositional to the current practices most favoured by the bourgeois forces in one’s society. This, for example, means trying not to write anything like the way the winners of the novel contest write” (Hörner n.p.). With *Kerrisdale Elegies*, Bowering insists on oppositional experimentation with language and oppositional translation of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*—interrogating past and present notions of “translation” and how those and other conventions can and should be bent or broken.

Experimentation locates the potential in the language. As Bowering writes, “What is potent? Or where is the potency (the potential)? It is in the possible combinations and recombinations of the basic materials of our language,” which is both the potential in translating already written poetry, but also the inherent function of poetry, a continual practice of combining and recombining the words and letters of the language to form new amalgamations (“The Power is There” 1). During the spring of

1988, Roy Miki conducted several interviews with Bowering that were subsequently incorporated into *A Record of Writing: An Annotated and Illustrated Bibliography of George Bowering*. He asked Bowering to discuss why and how he chose to translate the *Duino Elegies*. Bowering explained that his method was pieced together and constructed on the fly rather than as part of a systematic study in translation. He admits that the decision to translate and the process of translation began instinctively, in a deliberately less than serious manner. If *Kerrisdale Elegies* works as a statement against the Romantic impulse that Rilke stands in for, then Bowering's process of translation and engagement with the project furthers the point: Bowering is less serious than Rilke; he would prefer to be understood in contrast to Rilke, as impulsive, creative, and contradictory, not only in his writing but also in his demeanor and his approach to his writing. Through this interview, Bowering effectively outlines not only his piecemeal process of translation, but also a rationale for the translation, one that aims to inject and demonstrate his poetics.

Reading *Kerrisdale Elegies* as a statement of poetics demonstrates Bowering's juxtaposition of the poet-as-witness (Bowering) and the poet-as-prophet (Rilke), situation of the general or Universalist poetry (Rilke) against the local and personal (Bowering), and exploitation of the reverent and serious tone of Rilke against the irreverent and playful tone that Bowering consistently adopts. By way of these comparisons, Bowering manages to critique the totalizing, or "stable text" of *Duino Elegies* and pit it against the unfinished and "moving text" that is its counterpoint in *Kerrisdale*

*Elegies*. He further takes issue with the laboured craftsmanship of the *Duino Elegies* and replaces it with notions of automatic writing or "instantism" as Bowering calls it.

Bowering hilariously defines "instantism" as "compositional decisions made (and seen to be made) in and by the poem too quick to be shaped by a will that would put poetry at the service of an already held opinion or program, yet made by the linguistic suggestions there in the poem-so-far" (*Left Hook* 83). His last point speaks to the often-invoked jazz analogy, the riff, and the spontaneous, immediate expression of language as it happens. Bowering's definition of "instantism" includes what he refers to as an approach that "races to elude the authority of the poet" (*Left Hook* 83). The result is a critique of the poet and his poetry as overtly *meaningful*:

Somebody's talking.

Listen, stupid Kerrisdale heart,  
the way your dead heroes listened, till  
they were lifted out of their shoes,  
but they couldnt hear it all, they thought  
they were standing on earth.

No,

you're not going to hear the final clap of truth;  
that would kill you in two heart-beats (*KE* 1.100-6)

Bowering is the listening, stupid Kerrisdale heart and the "dead poets" are Rilke, at least, and the inherited history of all poets, at most. The "final clap of truth" is the grand statement Poetry aims at and these lines become a comment on the ambitious,

authoritative voice Bowering works against. The correspondence Bowering enters into with Rilke works to question the chronology of the historical procession of poetry. Perhaps Bowering does not envision himself as among the ranked poets of chronological history, but sees the poetic past and present as a *trade* rather than a succession.

Bowering writes, "... the poet might learn to refuse the temptation of description. If he thinks he is in the business of representing the world, he can try methods of re-enacting experience rather than describing it. The act of description is a kind of constant low-energy simile-making. It entails appropriating the world, qualifying it, and emitting a somewhat abstracted amalgam of its materials" ("The Power is There" 1). This theory ends up talking back not only to Rilke, but to many generations of poets who have used description in an attempt to "represent the world" and gestures toward an entirely different kind of poem-making, one that grants that the perspective of the poet is unique to her and is not prognostic, that by describing the world the poet effectively appropriates the world, and not without damage to the poem. Bowering imagines less distance between poet and reader; by eliminating the space between, a more direct treatment of "the thing" can be achieved.

What Bowering writes about Frank Davey's "A Light Poem" could be said to reflect his own poetic practice: "Not the poet as authority, not even the poet as muse-driven scribe, but the poet as reader, and the text as something that can throw light not on a topic but on the readers themselves" (*Left Hook* 88).

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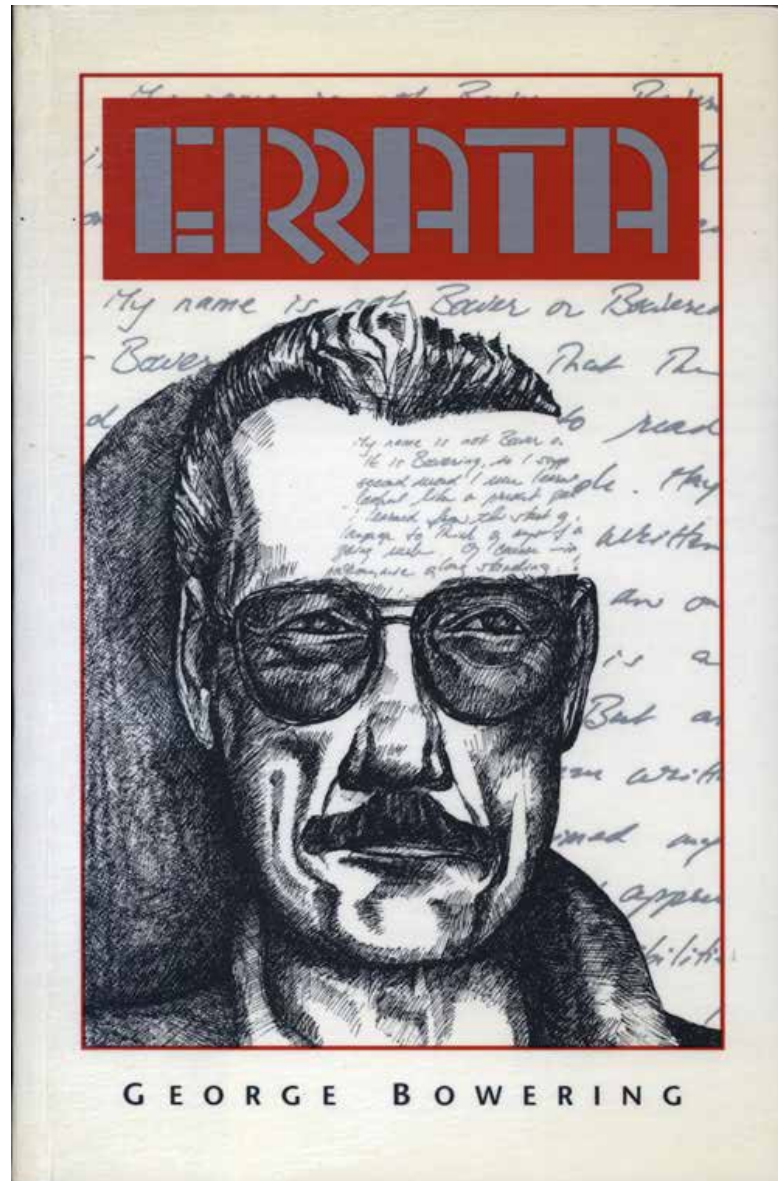
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## KIM MINKUS / Tipping in

*This is how intertextuality works best, as a series that looks accidental...*

George Bowering, *Errata*



*Errata* (Red Deer: RDC Press, 1988)

When George Bowering signed a copy of his book *Errata* for me, he told me it was the only book of his I needed. He said reading this book was, “as good as getting a PhD.” When asked to contribute to TCR’s Bowering issue, I went back to *Errata*. This time while reading I made a list of the books Bowering referenced. I didn’t read them all, but over the course of the summer I read Jack Conroy’s *Disinherited* and was reminded of the personal tragedies behind extraction mining. I read Mavis Gallant’s *Pegnitz Junction* (and *Varieties of Exile* and *Going Ashore*). Ethel Wilson’s *Swamp Angel* fell by the wayside while Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy* didn’t interest me as much as his script for *Last Year at Marienbad*. I read portions of Hume’s *A Treatise on Human Nature*, particularly “Of the Ideas of Space and Time,” and wrote this in my notebook: “The only defect of our senses is that they give us disproportioned images of things, and represent as minute and uncompounded what is really great and composed of a vast number of parts.” Concurrent with my reading was my writing that was centred on two poetic projects: a play and a series of poems



composed of many parts. Both of these projects intersected with the pipeline issues facing this province and both are ongoing. The series of poems takes as its premise a trip across waterways and shorelines altered by an oil spill, and pulls language from notes made during a workshop with Cole Swensen. Visual art and the role of “the frame” drove our writing. Swensen quoted Gerhard Richter: “What happens when you cut out the frame”? My series of poems also takes sentences from daily entries I began in the summer fashioned after Bowering’s *Errata* and Clarice Lispector’s *Selected Crônicas*. Lispector’s crônicas (chronicles) are a gathering of short newspaper articles she wrote on subjects of her choosing. I loved the idea of Bowering and Lispector writing what they pleased. At the end of the summer I took time to reacquire myself with the concept of a “special issue” on an author and pulled the *Chicago Review* issue on Lisa Robertson from my bookshelves. My Bowering research and reading, my Cole Swensen workshop writing, and my series work on shorelines converged while reading Benjamin Friedlander’s “A Reading Diary.” Friedlander’s diary records his impressions of reading Lisa Robertson in 1995, and the “27 June” entry contains notes for a potential essay “on three first books that use the seashore as their organizing theme.” The second paragraph for this day’s entry reads, “A poetics of the seashore redefines marginality—places the margin at the center of two worlds (water and land)—not at the outer limit of a single world. A shoreline for thought, a shifting threshold between the known and the unknown.” I ask what shoreline my words belong to.

## Tipping in (1–4)

I can only attend to my own grief.

movement of water - the bridge disappeared

There is a smudge between land and me.

golden marks yellow and mustard - mask it

rivers cloud on the horizon - where smears are hidden

angled outside of frame - mute coating over image

I am unable to shed tears.

a drip foregrounds oil smudge - spelling a zero sum

I have made a game of unhappiness.

houses float a spill - repeated grayed out - smudged

hours drawing and drawing lines over and over - a flow that repeats

still formed in the front of the skull arranged - split in two

I know I have no courage and it is intensely cold.

heavy oil forced into figures - carved out of green and red clouds

I am living as if drunk every day.

pooled algae dotted onto circles - foaming

heavy gas runs smudge-like over layered blue

water cut out and traced over - blotted paper

I sadly come to the shoreline.

composed point in a different order - triangular blue movement

I no longer know whose ideology I'm defending.

the image looks flat - a heavy curtain of paint

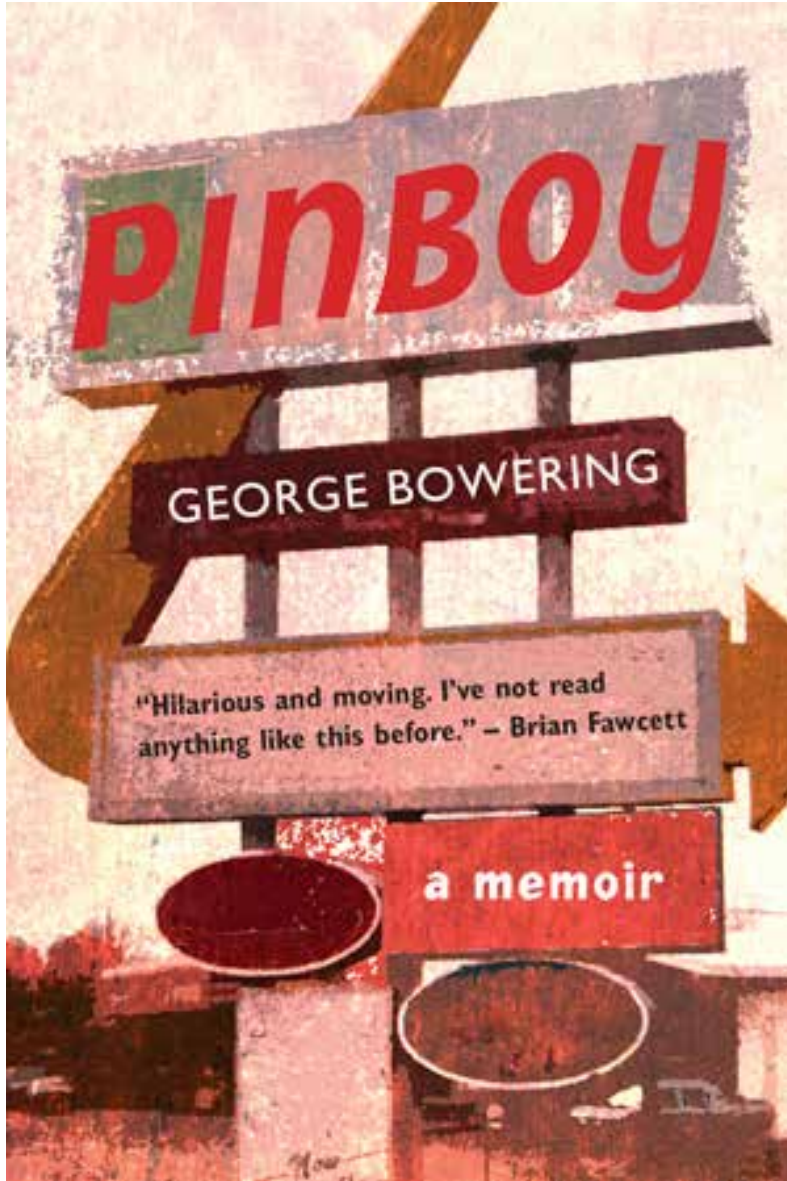
fire-tree burning orange

cut outs painted over - red ships some dead

## BRIAN FAWCETT / *Bowering's Pinboy*

George Bowering's new book, *Pinboy*, from Marc Côté's Cormorant books, is an entertainingly wise account of male adolescence seen through the lens of three relationships with women—two of them girls—that the narrator pursued and was pursued by between the ages of 14 and 16. The book has been described as x-rated Stephen Leacock, but I think it's better than that. Bowering has long been a Canadian writer that one compares to others at peril, because he's utterly original, and deceptively playful—some say, irritatingly playful. He's Canada's first parliamentary Poet Laureate, a writer of popular histories that are more complicated than they appear, a GG fiction award winner (for *Burning Water*) and maybe the most subtle poet Canada has yet produced. Now, as he approaches his late 70s, he's still finding new ranges to explore, and *Pinboy* marks a very new range. It is every bit as playful as his other work, but it carries itself with the sweet calmness of a man happy and secure enough to be curious about exactly what made him who he is.

It is not clear to me that *Pinboy* is fiction or memoir, and I think the ambiguity is deliberate. I've long believed the distinction is obsolete anyway, and is upheld by the intellectual naïveté of today's commercial and conventionally literary novelists—a naïveté that involves a kind of self-seducing stupidity about where the writers are getting their materials from, and about what



*Pinboy* (Toronto: Cormorant, 2012)

really goes on in the cognitive tool-shed of a human brain. The difference here is that Bowering has never been either naïve or stupid about these matters. In fact, he's been painfully conscious of them through most of his career, sometimes to the point where it has been an intellectual touchstone he can't resist tapping on. In most instances this has been quite charming, but when he's merely been elusively postmodern about it, it can irritate. But *Pinboy*, playful as it is, has much more serious intentions, and they're not really formal. This is a book about the construction of socio-sexual reality.

The epistemological construct Bowering is working with in *Pinboy* is the interesting element of postmodernism in literature (as opposed to the far more prominent side of it, which is the business of gluing ornamentation onto the too-sleek facades of modernism and its narrow definition of efficiency and function and claiming complexity). The non fashion-related reality that postmodernism explores is that epistemological certainty no longer exists, and never did except as an ideological illusion. Any writer today who doesn't recognize this condemns him or herself to genre and the marketplace as a manufacturer of semi-precious conventional commodities that are fading in value due to over-production. But the alternatives generally haven't been much more promising. Usually they range from aridity to the fatuously self-referential.

The other problem literary fiction faces—and usually ignores—is that television and movies have enhanced the suspension of disbelief while more or less demolishing the Fictional Agreement.

Not sure what I mean? A few years ago, a network television drama series based itself on the premise that the assassination of John F. Kennedy was perpetrated by space aliens. A survey of viewers of the series done midway through its mercifully-short run established that a solid majority believed that Kennedy had indeed been killed by space aliens. The suspension of disbelief, in other words, is pernicious unless it is purposeful and provisional.

*Pinboy* makes a point of opening for question the verity of its narrative, both in terms of the basic characters and the events. Without making it the primary issue, Bowering points to the unreliability of memory, providing particulars of his own characteristic faults both structurally and during events within the narrative. He also forces you to question the verity of his narrator—who is named “George Bowering” by introducing, briefly, and then dismissing the alter-ego he has frequently used in his earlier fiction, George Delsing. But unlike in his past work, he’s neither particularly arch or playful when he delivers these ambiguities: he simply notes them, and watch out. So you do, and it infuses the story he tells with an additional layer of meaning. Sometimes, as when the narrator is being seduced by a squat but well-constructed teacher at his school, you might find yourself thinking, “whooh, did this happen or is this the author constructing a reality out of his adolescent fantasies?” In any memory theatre, there is what did happen, what you wanted to happen, and what you were afraid might happen: event, expectation, fear, which when you’re an unusually bright 15 year old, engram roughly equal loads of data into the brain for future recall.

Bowering is cognizant of this, but doesn’t make it a major issue. He simply reminds you that it’s there, and goes on with the story, fastidiously sticking to the fine-grained memories he has as a counter-weight. That allows him to, among other things, pursue the most interesting narrative strand in the book, which is that of his narrator’s relationship—or attempted relationship—with Jeanette MacArthur, a young girl from the wrong side of the tracks, literally and otherwise.

The young narrator isn’t sure what it is he wants from—or with, or even for—Jeanette. So he tries to make friends with her, exercises his junior sleuthing skills by spying on her, and he tries to help her. None of it succeeds. She rejects his overtures at friendship, her father catches him spying, (and the second time he does, breaks his arm), and he can’t find or do anything that make Jeanette’s life better because he doesn’t have the resources. Yet he persists, because he senses that it matters, even though he doesn’t know how or why. Without anything in his toolbox and with the intermittent fog brought on by the testosterone coursing through his system, he tries to understand how “other” people live and think—“other” in the sense of more disadvantaged, and less resourceful than himself. The narrative that results is a tone-perfect portrait of how empathy and a moral sense is developed in the young, and how relentless and remarkable its urges are—as powerful and compelling as sexual desire. Bowering doesn’t argue this directly in the book, but his narrative does with startling clarity, without the author having to get up on a pulpit and shout.

But that’s the thing, see? Shouting and pulpits are things Bowering has steered clear of throughout his long career, to the point of sometimes making his work appear more glib and intellectually slight than it is. But here, in the midst of a seemingly unambitious and riotously funny book, he lands himself and his readers in the long grass where the bears and the wolves lurk. And that’s a place where only very good writers can take you.

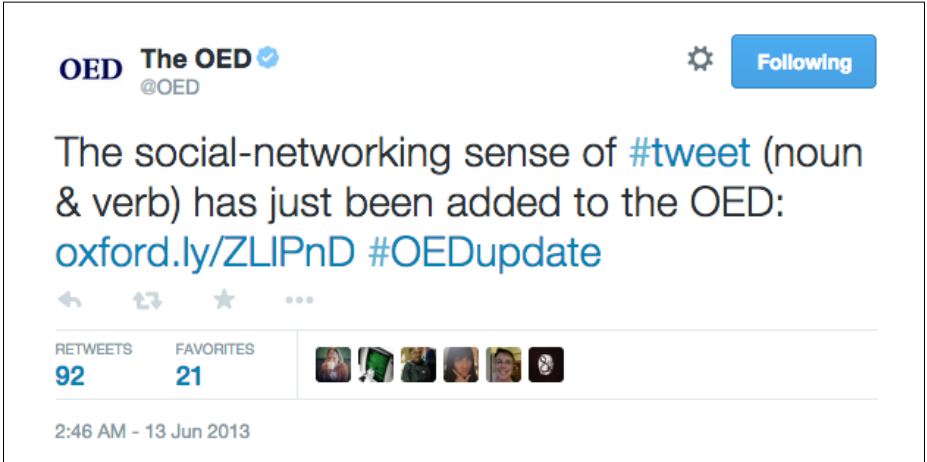
Reprinted from *Dooney’s Café*, December 23, 2012.

**AURELEA MAHOOD / *Burning Water* at Burns Lake:  
Literary Geography and the Twittersphere**

Twitter was launched in July 2006. Five years later, “tweet” was added to the *OED*. The June 2013 *OED* update was a break with tradition.

Traditionally, new words must be used relevantly for ten years before they can be added to the *OED* wordbank.

When explaining the decision to break the rule, John Simpson, *OED* chief editor, said the word “seems to be catching on.”



George Bowering required no official sanctions before embracing the social media site. Bowering joined Twitter in December 2008.





Since then, Bowering has acquired almost 900 followers, posted nearly 1800 tweets, and followed more than 100 other tweeters.

Back to the *OED*. The definition for the verb tweet (*trans.*) reads “To post (a message, item of information, etc.) on Twitter.”

(The *OED* joined Twitter in March 2010.)

Bowering doesn’t limit himself to such narrow uses of the tool, instead his feed functions largely as a multi-year word-play project. This is notable. It differs from the ways in which many of his peers elect to use the tool as a primarily “personal” account or PR tool.



E.g. since July 2009, @margaret atwood is a glorious mashup of tweets & retweets on topics as varied as ecoburials and images from #FNLROM.

David Mitchell’s use of Twitter dates back to April 2014. His arrival was tied explicitly to the about to be published *Bone Clocks*. On July 14, 2014, Mitchell began tweeting #THERIGHTSORT. 280 tweets later the story concluded on July 20, 2014.



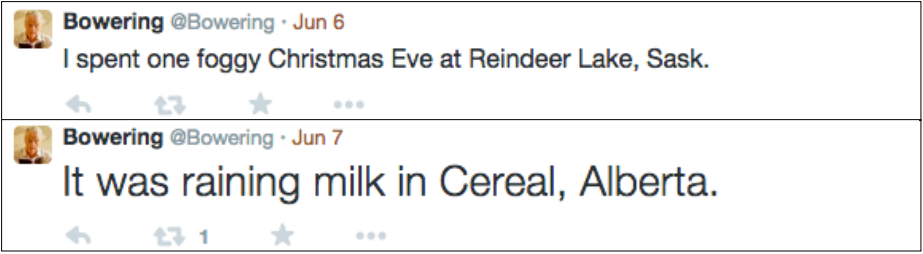
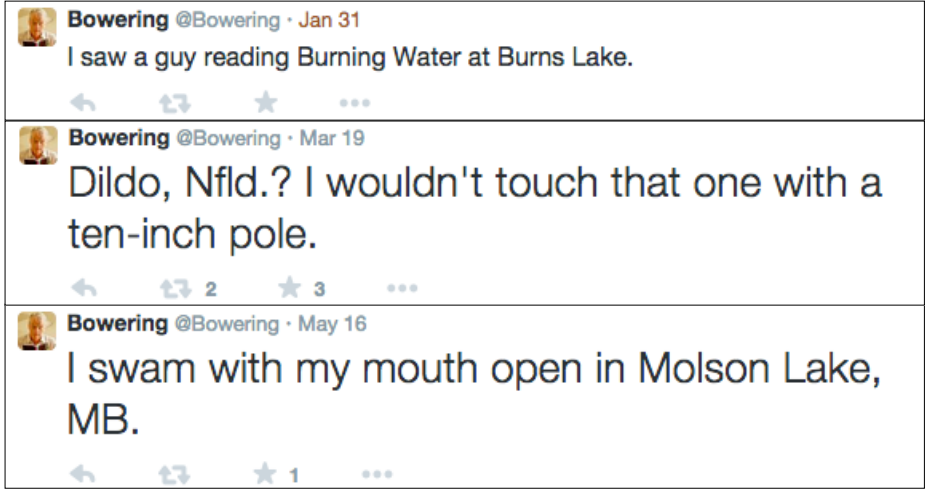
Post-story, his account has almost exclusively been leveraged as a tool to promote readings and other *Bone Clocks*-related events. In contrast while Bowering's feed isn't without occasional promotional posts, it's more pleasingly a collection of pithy sallies and quips.

Bowering's Twitter account is an extension of his writerly activities.

The pleasures of @Bowering fall into multiple micro genres of which at least 3 can be enjoyed by scrolling back through 2014 & into 2013.

Place name one liners.

This micro genre is almost exclusively Canadian in its focus with quips involving Canadian cities and towns from coast to coast. Throughout 2014, a fantastical Canada emerges. With each scroll into the recent past, the posts generate a new road map.



Why hit the road in search of giant nickels and Canada geese? A post-Twitter road-tripper could traverse the nation Instagramming tableaus conjured by Bowering's Twitter feed.

Idiomatic updates/lexical substitutions.

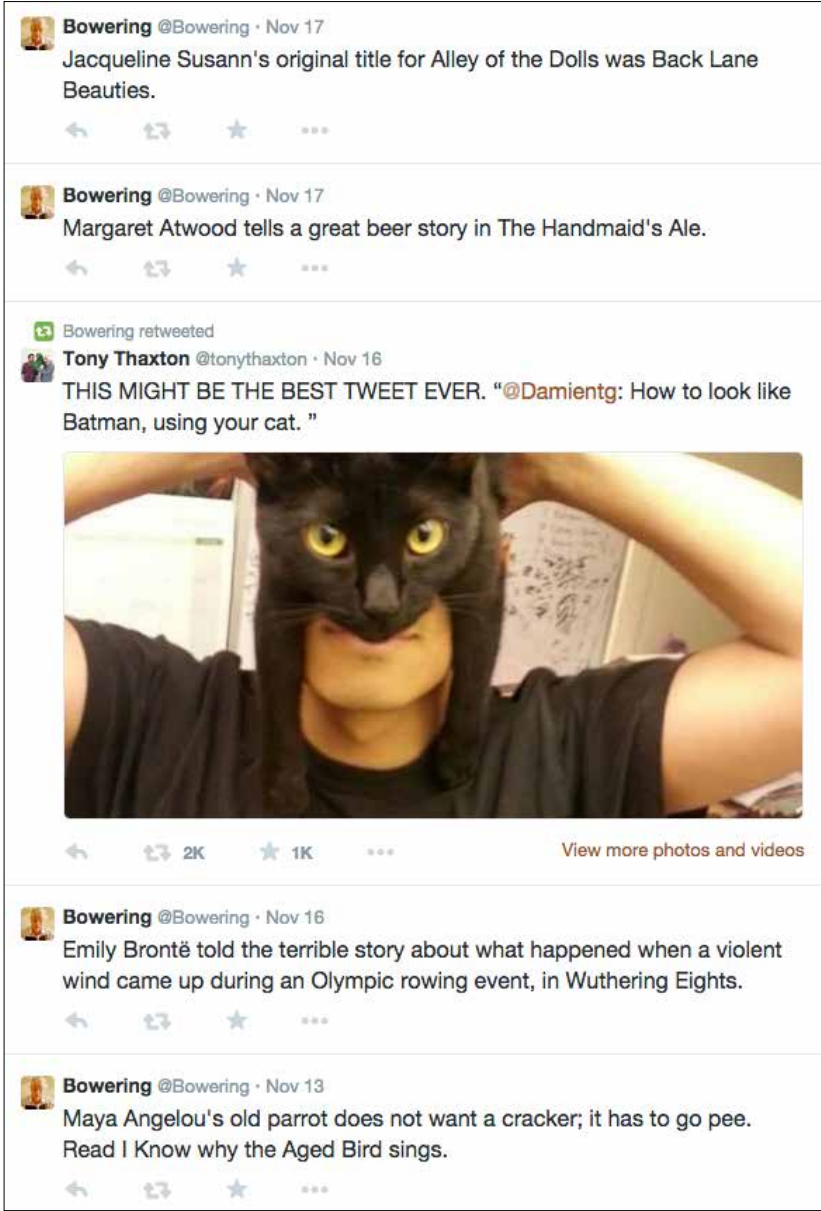
Posts in this micro genre often appear in quick succession and draw readers back to @Bowering in hopes of finding more as in mid-Sept 2014.



These posts will please almost all fans of wordplay relying as they do on entrenched expressions common to English speakers.

Lost consonants (as applied to the titles of books).  
This series of posts has appeal for readers who read happily and curiously across genres, centuries, continents, and languages. It is wonderfully boundary-less.  
In November 2013—a particularly rich month of the lost consonants project—Susann, Atwood, Bronte, and Angelou nestled on either side of a man demonstrating how to like look Batman by using your cat. And so, as the cat demonstrates, the incongruity achieved through the lexical substitutions is not the only source of the humour @Bowering.  
The juxtapositions of the posts themselves become a source of the humour and pleasure of reading Bowering’s Twitter feed.

Alas, however, Twitter is best designed to be experienced in the now rather than as a repository to return to months or years after the fact.  
The pleasures recounted here may prove fleeting depending on the long-term storage capacity of Twitter and a reader’s willingness to search Twitter.  
@Bowering is a rich repository of George’s humour. The digital ephemera may need to be saved in print if these writings are to become a lasting branch of Bowering’s books and literary output.  
According to Twitter search, there were only 3 Bowering street tweets. Never. Far too small a scale (as his Wikipedia entry attests).



They were very funny. It is regrettable that only three are now easily located.



Bowering’s bibliography on Wikipedia currently includes entries for fiction, short fiction, book-length poems, collections of poems, criticism, chapbooks, memoirs, history, plays, editions, and books edited. There has yet to be an entry for Bowering’s twitticisms. An anthology project for 2015?

**DANIEL ZOMPARELLI / Every Book George Bowering Has Ever Written**

*My Darling Nellie Grey, Kerrisdale Elegies*, other books/chapbooks buried in my childhood bedroom.

\*

There is a saying that has stuck with me, as a writer, since it was spoken to me. “I always say once you’ve done something and it works then don’t do it anymore.” This is how I have taken on writing projects. George Bowering, in a coffee shop, after I spent a summer reading his 365-page book of poetry, and reviewing every chapter.

\*

I always hated it when creative writing teachers said to find your voice. Worst horse shit I ever heard.”

\*

*Delayed Mercy and Other Poems; The Box, Particular Accidents: Selected Poems, Standing on Richards*, still unread.

\*

I have a goal that I never liked to admit to myself until now, because it scares me how impossible it might be, to read every

George Bowering book in existence. If I'm at a bookshop and there's used copies of his books, I buy them. If they show up in a catalogue sent to *Poetry Is Dead*, I request them. George Bowering has more of my money than my landlord.

\*

In the time it took me to write this, I have purchased another George Bowering book, and another one is being launched.

\*

When I co-hosted the humour issue launch of *Poetry Is Dead*, I introduced GB as my Facebook dad. This is because he is always correcting my grammar and letting me know when I look sharp on Facebook. He once asked me what "a Beyonce" was.

\*

There is one thing that holds me back from reading too many George Bowering books: baseball.

\*

"Main question I ask myself before writing is, 'I wonder if I could get away with it?'"

\*

At this moment right now, George Bowering is on Facebook, telling you to do better, to write more, and correcting your grammar.

\*

But what about all the books that are about George Bowering?

\*

Ivan Coyote walks into the coffee shop as I'm writing this and asks what I'm doing. I explain that I'm writing about GB's books. Ivan asks what I will say. I am uncertain at this point. Ivan tells a couple of GB stories, then comments "I hope that in the future, some forty-something year old and some twenty-something year old are telling the stories of us when we're older, trying to find all 100 books we've produced."

\*

Without meaning to, there is a George Bowering section on my bookshelf.

\*

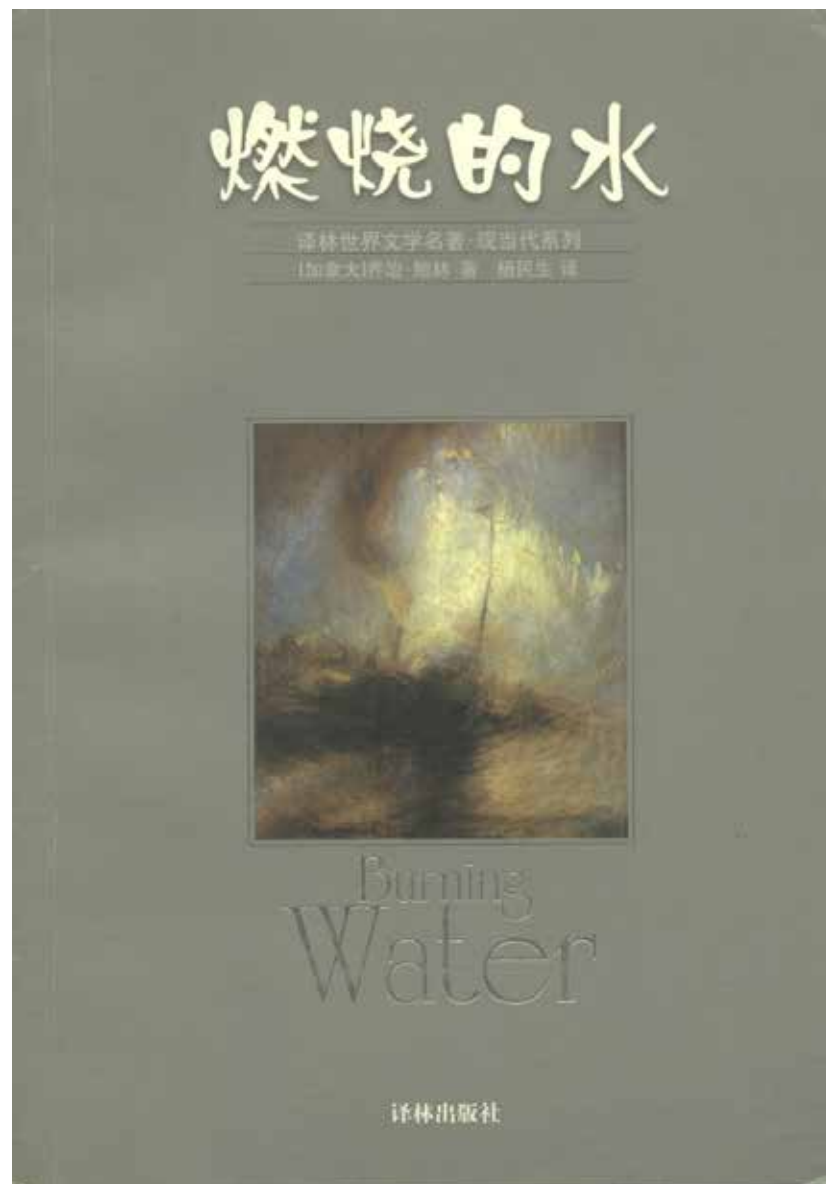
*Burning Water, Mirror on the Floor, Pinboy.*

\*

"I shouldn't be telling you this," Jean says, "but he has eight manuscripts on the way."

"No, it's more like seven or nine." George responds.

"No, it's eight." She methodically goes through the eight manuscripts. "So, good luck with catching up with reading all of his books."



Yilin (Chinese translation of *Burning Water*, 2000)

George looks at me, “When did your first book come out? It’s been years since your book came out.”

“It’s only been two years,” I say.

“That’s a long time,” he says.

“Not for me, it isn’t.”

\*

The Wikipedia entry for George Bowering is behind by several books.

\*

I was going to see how many books I could find at my local library of George Bowering’s but they had 127 different items, and I am just one person with one small tote bag.

\*

Do chapbooks count?

## TODD NICKEL / Bowering's Books in the City

George Bowering's Cormorant Books edition of *Pinboy* is available at Costco for \$11.49, regular price \$20. Or, acknowledging Costco's selection of inventory guaranteed to move, *Pinboy* was available in September. It's A *Globe and Mail* Best Book according to the blaze on the cover. Appearing in the bin at Costco is some kind of achievement. All he needs now is an Oprah's Book Club sticker.

I hadn't stepped foot inside a Chapters bookstore for quite some time. In the Arts and Letters section I found two copies of Teeth nestled between Christian Bök's *Eunoia* and Tim Bowling's *Selected Poems*, stacked above a shelf labeled "Canadian Poetry." Over in the sprawling Fiction section, tucked in the corner, were three copies of the Anvil Press edition of *Mirror on the Floor*. Two titles out of Bowering's 120 seems rather mediocre stock. Twice as many as Costco, though.

Looking for Bowering's books at the Vancouver Public Library, I find it boasts a grand total of ninety-four records for George Bowering across its collection. There are eighty-eight at the Central branch. The Kerrisdale branch, Bowering's old stomping ground, has a paltry four. The West Point Grey branch, Bowering's current stomping ground, has an equally paltry four.

I visited the Central branch and pulled and flipped through each and every one of those eighty-eight. My hope was to find

marginalia of curiosity. What I found instead was plenty of eraser work by attentive librarians, any and all marked-up editions having their penciled notations rendered illegible. A couple smaller comments snuck past the otherwise diligent eraser-wielders. On the inside jacket of *A Magpie Life: Growing a Writer*, Bowering's bio begins "George Bowering was born in British Columbia. He has authored over forty books ..." and some lark has circled "authored" and then under the bio scrawled:

its not writing

its authoring!

Bowering might well agree.

Sometimes I wonder who decides the placement of the library barcode, and does she or he have a sense of humour about it? The cover of *A Magpie Life: Growing a Writer* features a photograph of Bowering with a pensive outward gaze. The library cataloguer has opted to place the barcode in the centre of the cover, right across Bowering's forehead, as if it were the Mark of the Beast.

Leafing through the library collection I came across a few ephemeral bookmarks. Inside Bowering's *A Place to Die* was a hold slip issued 12/06/12 at 2:39 p.m. at the Britannia Branch library for a copy of Raymond Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. A serious reader tracing the source of Bowering's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. Searching through the Vancouver Public Library database I found that Roussel's book is no longer listed. However, the Central branch has two copies of Bowering's.

The best, though, I found slipped inside *His Life*: a penciled note torn from a spiral notebook that simply read:



This  
man  
is  
a  
God  
Pot  
Pick

PJM 5-31-013

It's curious that the librarians remove pencil marks in the margins, but have no qualms about leaving page markers in place, as if the thought is, *Perhaps the reader only made it this far in A Place to Die and he intends to come back to it once he's finished with Ray Roussel.*

Albion Books on Richards Street has *Protective Footware* and *The Catch* in its Poetry section, and *Burning Water*, *Shoot!*, *Caprice*, *The Rain Barrel*, *The Moustache*, and the co-authored book with Jean Baird *The Heart Does Break* in its Canadian Fiction section. I'd hoped to find *Standing on Richards*. Alas, no such coincidence.

Around the corner and up the stairs at Criterion I did find *Standing on Richards*, along with *Burning Water* and another half dozen or so books of Bowering poetry. On one of the few bare walls there's an eight-by-ten black and white of Bowering sitting in a chair, stubby beer in hand, having a laugh in the direction of someone just out of frame. I swiped a photo of the photo with my iPhone.

Across the street at venerable MacLeod's Books, Bowering is nowhere to be found in the Fiction section. Over in Poetry, I find



George Bowering hanging [out] at Criterion Books.



*Changing on the Fly*, the anthology 71(+) for GB, and a copy of *The Capilano Review* Issue 2.17/18—the Robin Blaser festschrift that features four Bowering poems.

A block further east on West Pender at the Paper Hound Bookstore I came across a copy of *Teeth* that included two post-it notes of pseudo-marginalia by a K. Braid. She doesn't seem impressed with *Teeth*. What I could decipher I've excerpted here:

Post-it #1

Playful! 67

Stupid! 79 80 as if nothing to say

Works on content 41, 46?

Generous in as encomium

Ok—60

Post-it #2

Terrible rhyme [indecipherable] 81

My Paper Hound regret was coming across George Bowering's copy of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* complete with a plethora of marginalia and a Bowering poem scribbled on the final two pages. I should have bought it. I didn't. Then went back for it, only to find that someone else didn't share my indecisiveness. I tried to track down the buyer, to no avail. It would have made a nice addition here and to my scribbled-upon book collection. Alas.

People's Co-op Bookstore on Commercial Drive "currently" has three of Bowering's Books: *The Box*, *Burning Water*, and *Shoot!* Up at the south end of Commercial Drive, the new location of Spartacus Books has one: *Shoot!* "It was a donation," I'm told by the guy behind the counter, who seemed to have no idea who

George Bowering is. "How do you spell that?" Me: "B-o-w-e-r-i-" he: "'B-o-w-b-" me: "No, B-o-w-e-r-i-n-g" he: "Oh."

Book Warehouse on West Broadway has *Mirror on the Floor* with *Pinboy* "on order." Its Main Street location has also has *Mirror on the Floor*, along with *Kerrisdale Elegies*.

When I inquired about Bowering's books at Pulpfiction on Main Street I was informed that "he's a friend." I found *Baseball Love*, *Caprice*, *The Rain Barrel*, *Protective Footware*, and *Shoot!* in its Fiction section, along with Roy Miki's annotated bibliography of Bowering *A Record of Writing*. Down the Poetry aisle, I found *Bright Circles of Colour*—Eva-Marie Kröller's full-length critical work on Bowering—and *My Darling Nellie Grey*.

Roger Farr is planning on teaching Bowering's *According to Brueghel* to his English 191 creative writing class in the winter semester at Capilano University, so come mid-December you'll be able to find about forty copies in the Cap U bookstore. (I happen to know that CUE Books also has a few signed, numbered copies of *According to Brueghel* for sale.)

The Capilano University library has 53 listings for George Bowering in its collection.

The Simon Fraser University library has 174 records for George Bowering in its collection. University of British Columbia has 193. UBC wins. SFU's bookstore has *Pinboy* in stock and for sale. The UBC bookstore has *Mirror on the Floor*, *Pinboy*, and *Teeth*. UBC wins again. Bowering's head spins.

## Bowering's Books year-by-year

1963

*Sticks & Stones*. Vancouver: Tishbooks, 1963. (Collection of poems)

1964

*Points on the Grid*. Toronto: Contact Press, 1964. (Collection of poems)

1965

*The 1962 Poems of R.S. Lane*. Toronto: Ganglia Press, 1965. (Edited by GB)

*The Man in Yellow Boots/ El hombre de las botas amarillas*. Mexico: Ediciones El Corno, 1965. (Collection of poems)

1966

*The Silver Wire*. Kingston: Quarry Press, 1966. (Collection of poems)

*What Does Eddie Williams Want?* Montreal: Shoestring Theatre, CBC-TV, 1966. Ottawa: CBC-TV, 1966. (Play)

1967

*How I Hear Howl*. Montreal: Beaver Kosmos, 1967. (Chapbook)

*Mirror on the Floor*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967. (Novel)



*Baseball* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1967, 2003)

## 1967 continued

*Baseball*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1967, 2003. (Book-length poem)

## 1968

*Rocky Mountain Foot*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968.  
(Collection of poems)

## 1969

*The Gangs of Kosmos*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969.  
(Collection of poems)  
*Two Police Poems*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1969. (Chapbook)

## 1970

*Sitting in Mexico*. Calgary: Beaver Kosmos, 1970. (Book-length poem)  
*George, Vancouver*. Kitchener: Weed/Flower, 1970. (Book-length poem)  
*Al Purdy*. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970. (Criticism)  
*Vibrations: poems of youth*. Toronto: Gage, 1970. (Edited by GB)

## 1971

*Robert Duncan: an Interview*. Toronto: Coach House/Beaver Kosmos, 1971. (Criticism)  
*Genève*. Toronto: Coach House, 1971. (Book-length poem)  
*Touch: selected poems 1960-1969*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971. (Collection of poems)

## 1972

*Autobiology*. Vancouver: New Star, 1972. (Book-length poem)  
*The Sensible*. Toronto: Mississauga, 1972. (Chapbook)  
*The Story so Far*. Toronto: Coach House, 1972. (Edited by GB)  
*The City in her Eyes*. By David Cull, Vancouver: Vancouver Community Press, 1972. (Edited by GB)  
*George Vancouver*. Vancouver: CBC radio network, 1972. (Play)

## 1973

*Layers 1-13*. Kitchener: Weed/Flower, 1973. (Chapbook)  
*Sitting in Mexico*. Vancouver: CBC radio network, 1973. (Play)  
*Curious*. Toronto: Coach House, 1973. (Book-length poem)

## 1974

*At War With the U.S.* Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974. (Book-length poem)  
*Flycatcher & other stories*. Ottawa: Oberon, 1974. (Short stories)  
*In the Flesh*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974. (Collection of poems)  
*Imago Twenty*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974. (Edited by GB)  
*Cityflowers*. By Artie Gold. Montreal: Delta Canada, 1974.  
(Edited by GB)

## 1976

*Allophanes*. Toronto: Coach House, 1976. (Book-length poem)  
*The Catch*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976. (Collection of poems)

## 1976 continued

*Poem & Other Baseballs*. Windsor: Black Moss, 1976. (Collection of poems)

*Letters from Geeksville: letters from Red Lane 1960-64*. Prince George: Caledonia Writing Series, 1976. (Edited by GB)

## 1977

*The Concrete Island*. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1977. (Collection of poems)

*In Answer*. Vancouver: William Hoffer, 1977. (Chapbook)

*Concentric Circles*. Windsor: Black Moss, 1977. (Short stories)

*A Short Sad Book*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1977. (Novel)

## 1978

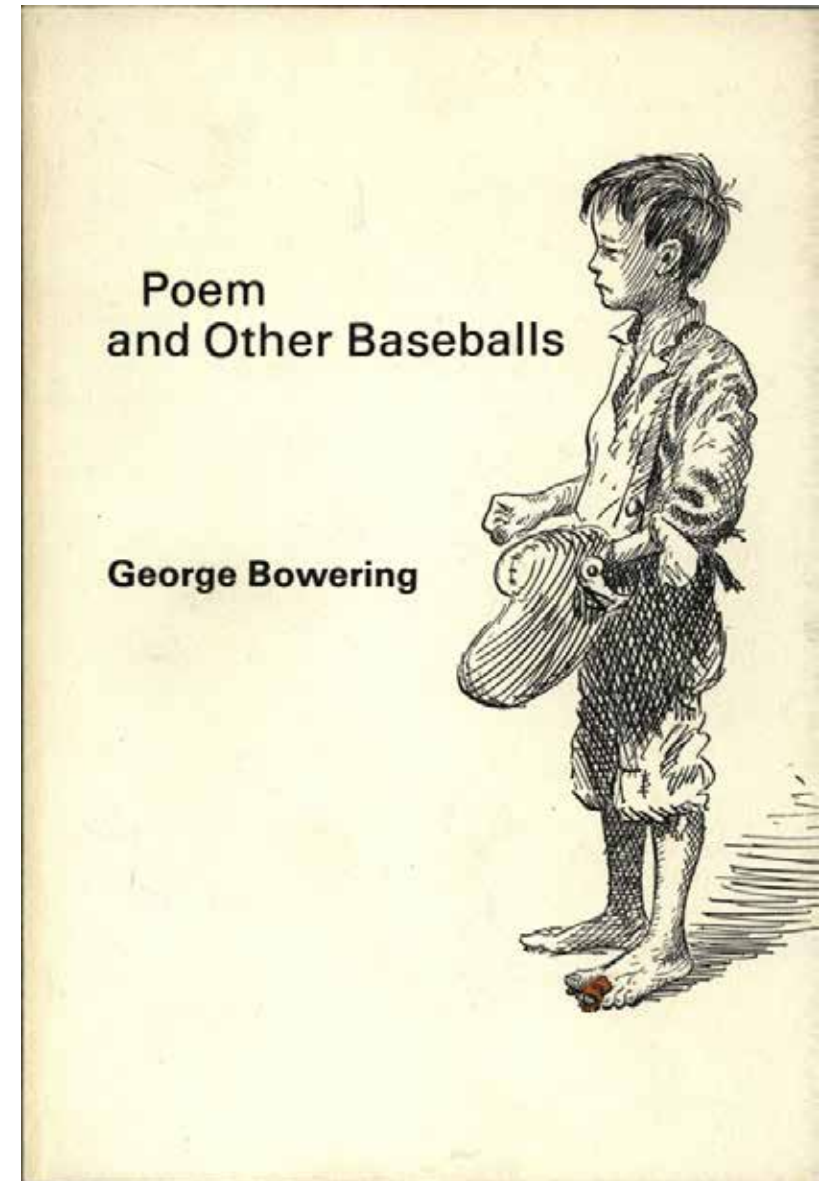
*Protective Footwear*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978. (Short stories)

## 1979

*Another Mouth*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979. (Collection of poems)

*Three Vancouver Writers*. Toronto: Open Letter/Coach House, 1979. (Criticism)

*Great Canadian Sports Stories*. Ottawa: Oberon, 1979. (Edited by GB)



*Poem & Other Baseballs* (Windsor: Black Moss, 1976)

1980

*Fiction of Contemporary Canada*. Toronto: Coach House, 1980.

(Edited by GB)

*Burning Water*. Toronto: General, 1980, 1983. (Novel)

*Uncle Louis*. Toronto: Coach House, 1980. (Chapbook)

1981

*Particular Accidents: selected poems*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981. (Collection of poems)

*Loki is Buried at Smoky Creek: selected poems of Fred Wah*.

Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981. (Edited by GB)

*My Body was Eaten by Dogs: selected poems of David McFadden*.

Toronto: M&S. New York: CrossCountry, 1981. (Edited by GB)

"1945-1980," in *Introduction to Poetry: British, American, Canadian*. By David Lecker. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981. (Edited by GB)

1982

*En eaux troubles*. Montreal: Quinze, 1982. Translation by L.

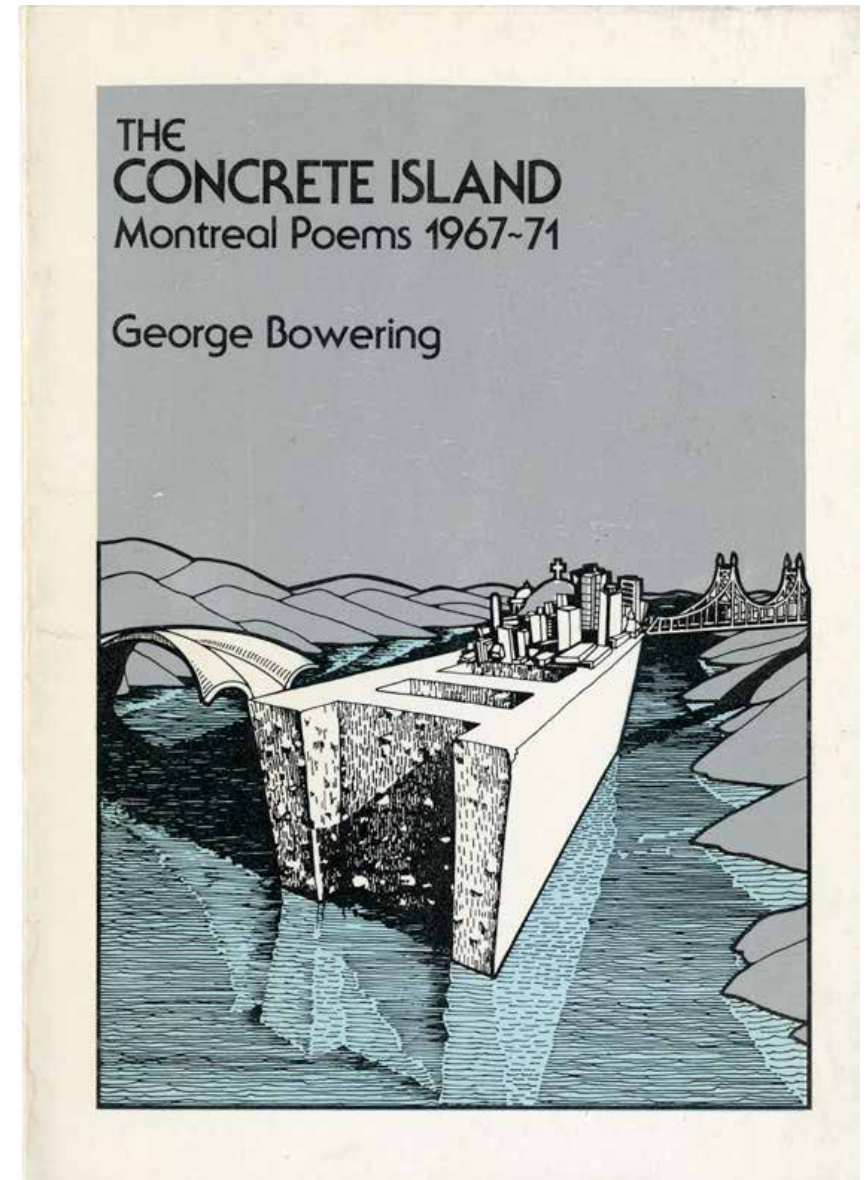
Philippe Hébert. (Novel)

*Ear Reach*. Vancouver: Alcuin, 1982, (Book-length poem)

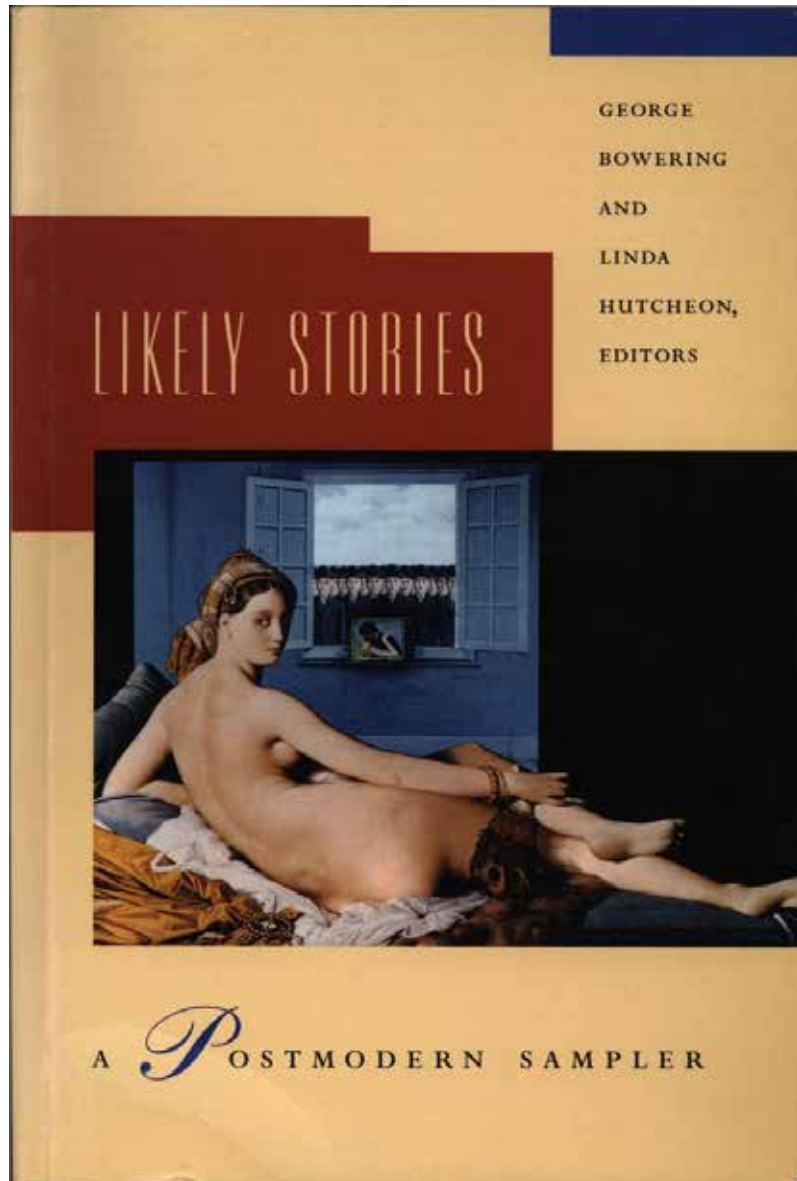
*West Window: selected poetry*. Toronto: General, 1982. (Collection of poems)

*Smoking Mirror*. Edmonton: Longspoon, 1982. (Collection of poems)

*A Way With Words*. Ottawa: Oberon, 1982. (Criticism)



*The Concrete Island* (Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1977)



*Likely Stories: a postmodern sampler* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1992)

1983

*The Mask in Place*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983. (Criticism)

*A Place to Die*. Ottawa: Oberon, 1983. (Short stories)

*The Contemporary Canadian Poem Anthology*. Toronto: Coach House, 1983. (Edited by GB)

1984

*Sheila Watson and The Double Hook: the artist and her critics*.

Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1984. (Edited by GB)

*Kerrisdale Elegies*. Toronto: Coach House, 1984. (Book-length poem)

1985

*Craft Slices*. Ottawa: Oberon, 1985. (Criticism)

*Spencer & Groulx*. Vancouver: William Hoffer, 1985. (Chapbook)

*Seventy-One Poems for People*. Red Deer: RDC Press, 1985. (Collection of poems)

1986

*Delayed Mercy & other poems*. Toronto: Coach House, 1986.

(Collection of poems)

*Music in the Park*. Vancouver: CBC radio network, 1986. (Play)

1987

*Caprice*. Toronto: Viking, 1987. New York: Penguin, 1988, 2nd Ed, 1994. (Novel)



1988

*Errata*. Red Deer: RDC Press, 1988. (Criticism)

*Imaginary\_Hand*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1988. (Criticism)

1989

*Sticks & Stones*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1989. (Collection of poems)

*The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett's Mice*. Vancouver: CBC radio network, 1989. (Play)

1990

*Harry's Fragments*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990. (Novel)

*Taking the Field: the best of baseball fiction*. Red Deer: RDC Press, 1990. (Edited by GB)

1991

*Quarters*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 1991. (Winner, bp Nichol chapbook award 1991) (Chapbook)

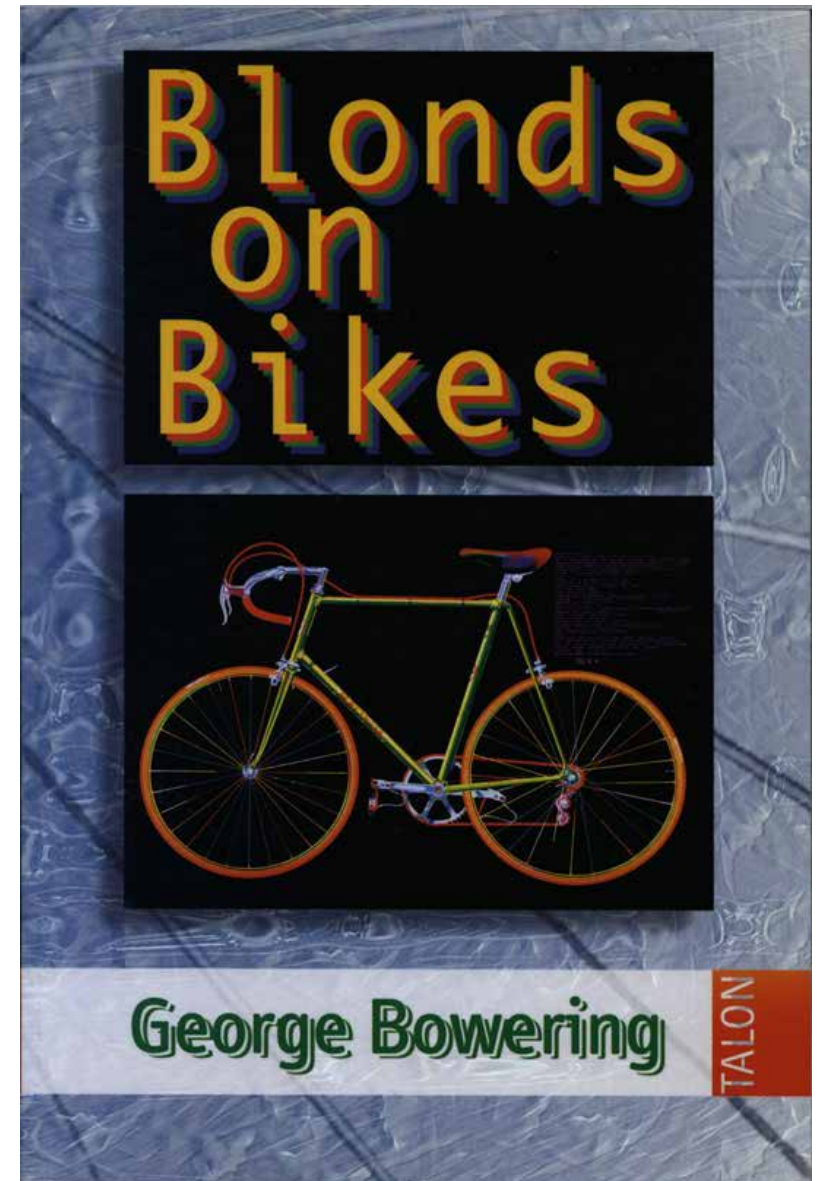
1992

*Urban Snow*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992. (Collection of poems)

*Do Sink*. Vancouver: Pomflit, 1992. (Chapbook)

*Sweetly*. Vancouver: Wuz, 1992. (Chapbook)

*Likely Stories: a postmodern sampler*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1992. (Edited by GB with Linda Hutcheon)



*Blonds on Bikes* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1997)



1993

*George Bowering Selected: Poems 1961-1992*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993. (Collection of poems)

*The Moustache: remembering Greg Curnoe*. Toronto: Coach House, 1993. (Memoir)

1994

*An H in the Heart: Selected works of bpNichol*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994. (Edited by GB with Michael Ondaatje)

*Parents From Space*. Montreal: Roussan, 1994, 2nd ed, 1996. Toronto: Scholastic, 1996 (YA). (Novel)

*Shoot!* Toronto: Key Porter, 1994. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. (Novel)

*The Rain Barrel*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1994. (Short stories)

*Burning Water*. New York: Penguin, 1994. (Novel)

1996

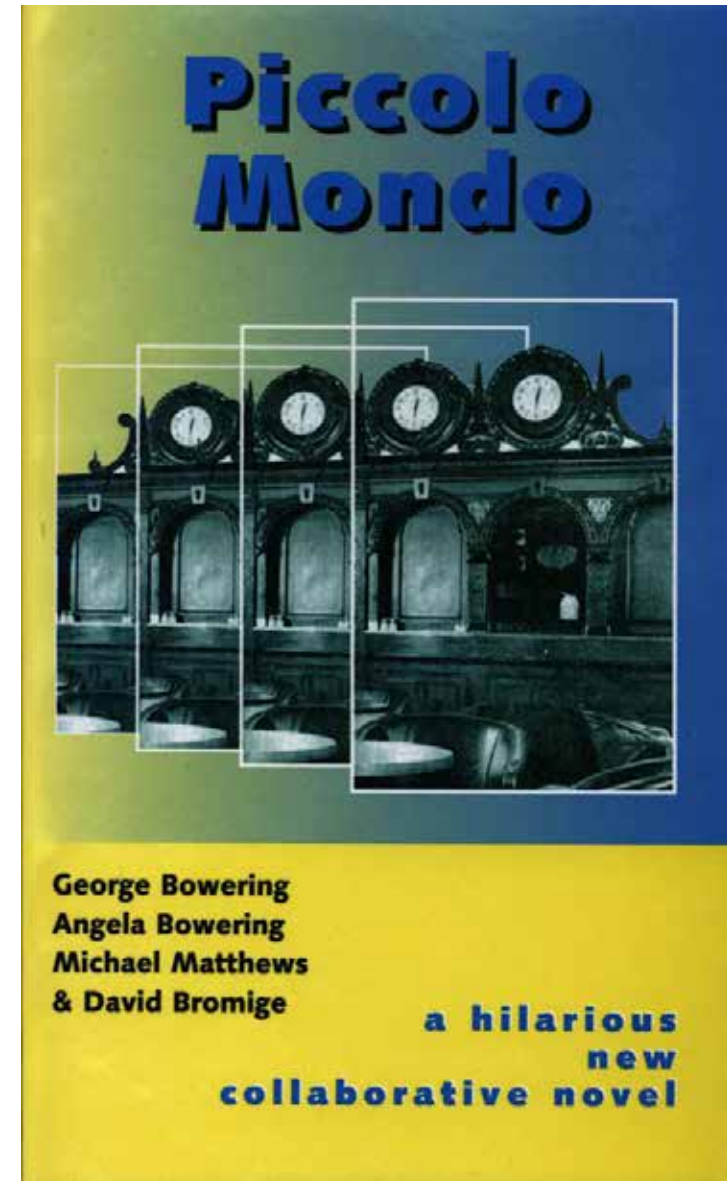
*Elegie di Kerrisdale*. Rome: Edizioni Empiria, 1996. Translation by Annalisa Goldoni. (Book-length poem)

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

1997

*Blonds on Bikes*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1997. (Collection of poems)

*Blondes on Bikes*. Ottawa: Above Ground, 1997. (Chapbook)



*Piccolo Mondo* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 1998)

1998

*A, You're Adorable.* Ottawa: Above Ground, 1998, 2004.  
(Chapbook)

*Diamondback Dog.* Montreal: Roussan, 1998. (Novel)

*Piccolo Mondo.* Toronto: Coach House Books, 1998  
(collaboration). (Novel)

1999

*Poèmes et autres baseballs.* Montreal: Tryptique, 1999  
(collaboration). (Collection of poems)

*Egotists and Autocrats.* Toronto: Viking, 1999. Toronto: Penguin,  
2000. (History)

2000

*Yilin* (Chinese trans. of *Burning Water*), 2000. (Novel)

*His Life: a poem.* Toronto: ECW Press, 2000. (Book-length poem)

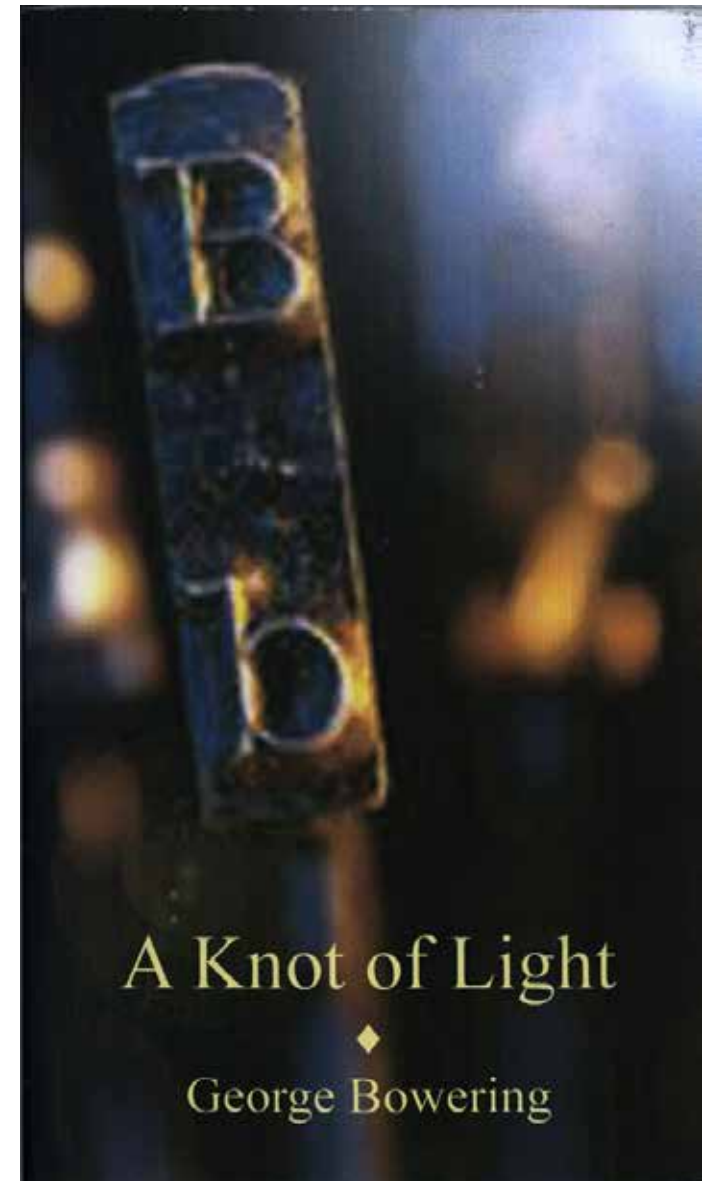
*6 Little Poems in Alphabetical Order.* Calgary: House Press, 2000.  
(Chapbook)

2001

*Some Writer.* Calgary: House Press, 2001. (Chapbook)

*And Other Stories.* Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2001. (Edited by GB)

*A Magpie Life.* Toronto: Key Porter, 2001. (Non-fiction)



*A Knot of Light* (Calgary: No Press, 2006)

2002

*Cars*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2002. (Non-fiction)

*Joining the Lost Generation*. Calgary: House Press, 2002.  
(Chapbook)

2003

*Stone Country*. Toronto: Viking, 2003. Toronto: Penguin, 2004.  
(History)

2004

*Standing on Richards*. Toronto: Viking, 2004. (Short stories)

*Changing on the Fly*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2004. (Collection of  
poems)

*Lost in the Library*. Ellsworth, ME: Backwoods Broadides, 2004.  
(Chapbook)

2005

*Left Hook*. Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2005. (Criticism)

*Rewriting my Grandfather*. Vancouver: Nomados, 2005.  
(Chapbook)

2006

*Crows in the Wind*. Toronto: BookThug, 2006. (Chapbook)

*A Knot of Light*. Calgary: No Press, 2006. (Chapbook)

*Vermeer's Light: Poems 1996-2006*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2006,  
2007. (Collection of poems)

*Baseball Love*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2006. (Non-fiction)

2006 continued

*Autobiology*. New Edition. Vancouver: Pooka, 2006. (Book-length  
poem)

2007

*Montenegro 1966*. Calgary: No Press, 2007. (Chapbook)

*U.S. Sonnets*. Vancouver: Pooka, 2007. (Chapbook)

*Eggs in There*. Edmonton: Rubicon, 2007. (Chapbook)

*Some Answers*. Mt. Pleasant, ON: LaurelReed Books, 2007.  
(Chapbook)

*Horizontal Surfaces*. Edmonton: Olive Collective, 2007.  
(Chapbook)

*Tocking Heads*. Edmonton: above/ground, 2007. (Chapbook)

*Burning Water*. New Edition. Vancouver: New Star Books, 2007.  
(Novel)

2008

*There Then*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2008. (Chapbook)

*Animals, Beasts, Critters*. Vancouver: JB Objects, 2008.  
(Chapbook)

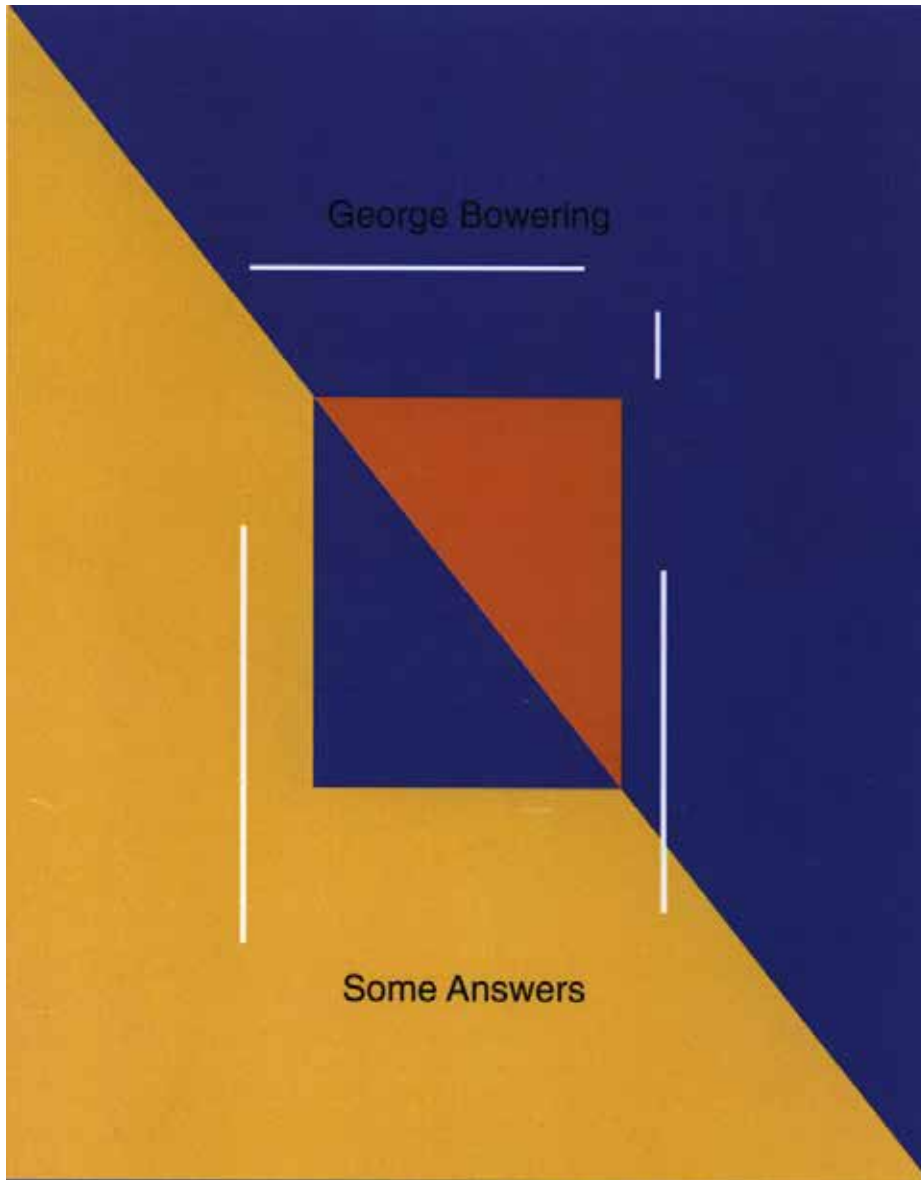
*Valley*. Calgary: No Press, 2008 (Chapbook)

*Fulgencio*. Vancouver: Nomados, 2008. (Chapbook)

*According to Brueghel*. North Vancouver: CUE, 2008. (Chapbook)

*Shall I Compare*. Penticton: Beaver Kosmos, 2008. (Chapbook)

*The 2008 Griffin Poetry Prize Anthology*. Toronto: House of  
Anansi, 2008. (Edited by GB)



*Some Answers* (Mt. Pleasant, ON: LaurelReed Books, 2007)

## 2008 continued

*Kerrisdale Elegies*. New Edition. Vancouver: Pooka Press, 2008.

(Book-length poem)

*Kerrisdale Elegies*. New Edition. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008.

(Book-length poem)

*Shoot!* New Edition. Vancouver: New Star Books, 2008. (Novel)

## 2009

*The Box*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 2009. (Short stories)

*A Little Black Strap*. St. Paul: Unarmed, 2009. (Chapbook)

## 2010

*My Darling Nellie Grey*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2010. (Book-length poem)

*Horizontal Surfaces*. Toronto: BookThug, 2010. (Criticism)

*The Heart Does Break*. Toronto: Random House, 2010. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011. (Edited by GB with Jean Baird)

*Caprice*. New Edition. Vancouver: New Star Books, 2010. (Novel)

## 2011

*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2011. (Non-fiction)

*The Diamond Alphabet*. Toronto: BookThug, 2011. (Non-fiction)

2012

*Words, Words, Words*. Vancouver: New Star Books, 2012.

(Criticism)

*Pinboy*. Toronto: Cormorant, 2012. (Novel)

2013

*Teeth: Poems 2006-2011*. Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2013.

(Collection of poems)

*Los Pájaros de Tenacatita*. Ootischenia: Nose-in-Book, 2013.

(Chapbook)

2014

*Mirror on the Floor*. New Edition. Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2014.

(Novel)

FORTHCOMING:

*The World, I Think*. Vancouver: New Star (Collection of poems)

*Desert Elm: the collected writing of George Bowering about the*

*Okanagan* Vancouver: Talonbooks (Non-fiction)

*Ten Women*. Vancouver: Anvil Press (Short stories)

*hockey book without a name*. Toronto: ECW (Non-fiction)

*Autobiology, Curious, Allophanes*. Vancouver: New Star.

## Contributors

JONATHAN BALL is author of *Ex Machina* (BookThug 2009), *Clock-fire* (Coach House 2010), *The Politics of Knives* (Coach House 2012), and *John Paizs's Crime Wave* (U of Toronto P 2014), co-editor (with Ryan Fitzpatrick) of *Why Poetry Sucks: An Anthology of Humorous Experimental Canadian Poetry*, and Bowering fan.

MICHAEL BARNHOLDEN, son of Earl and Marjorie nee Ross, brother to Patrick and Robbyn, father to Daniel, Kristopher and Neale, husband to Nancy, ex-husband to Susan and Kathryn, is an unreliable narrator who does not live where he says he lives, and no longer does what he used to do. His career batting average is well over the Mendoza line, while his won/loss record was even. He struck out Bowering once, with a grapefruit.

BRIAN FAWCETT has known George Bowering since 1969, when he attended a Bowering reading carrying a brick. Since then he has played baseball with Bowering for 25 years, driven him to various hospitals when his nose got between his glove and the ball and has told innumerable other nose jokes in his honour, mostly to hide the truth that he'd throw himself in front of bus for his beloved friend.

AURELEA MAHOOD is an instructor in the Department of English at Capilano University, where she also coordinates the university's Liberal Studies BA. Elsewhere she has published on authors who have written far less than George Bowering and increasingly gravitates towards electronic literature and digital poetics.

AMBER McMILLAN is currently living on Protection Island, B.C. Her poems have appeared in several journals and magazines across Canada. Her collection of poems, "We Can't Ever Do This Again" is forthcoming with Wolsak and Wynn (2015).

KIM MINKUS is a poet with three books of poetry *9 Freight* (LINE-books 2007), *Thresh* (Snare Books 2009), and *Tuft* (BookThug 2013). She has had reviews, poetry, and fiction published in *The Capilano Review*, *West Coast Line*, *The Poetic Front*, and *Jacket*. Most recently, she co-edited an issue of *The Capilano Review* that focused on innovative narrative. Her work will appear in the anthology *Best American Experimental Writing 2014* (Omnidawn).

TODD NICKEL is the managing editor for *The Capilano Review* and CUE Books.

LARY TIMEWELL is a North Vancouver poet who, as an SFU student in the early 70's 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.

JASON WIENS is an instructor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary, where he teaches Canadian Literature. He has previously published articles on George Bowering in *Open Letter* and the collection *Re:Reading the Canadian Postmodern*. He has also published on Dionne Brand, Margaret Avison, the Kootenay School of Writing, and has a chapter forthcoming in a book on Sharon Pollock.

DANIEL ZOMPARELLI is the Editor-in-Chief of *Poetry Is Dead* magazine. His first book of poems *Davie Street Translations* was published by Talonbooks. His collaborative book with Dina Del Bucchia, *Rom Com*, is forthcoming from Talonbooks, Fall 2015. He has published about 103 books less than George Bowering.