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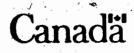
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MEASURE'S GAME: THE WRITING OF GEORGE BOWERING

by

Susan MacFarlane

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

March 1989

Canada

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MEASURE'S GAME: THE WRITING OF GEORGE BOWERING

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ABSTRACT

Starting with the rules whereby the game is delineated is not only good form: it permits form. Structure frames and builds the game, enabling measurement even of its most minute particulars. So the rules permit measure and measure, in its role as arbiter of victory, rules. Without measure is decadence and, as Bowering says in "Gentian Coloured Frock," death: "A ruler is a stick / with an unpleasant personality, / just past its end is death, & till then, / authority." So while rules are the game's lifelines, they have an oblique—never direct—relationship to that game. This is due to the abstract nature of rules, which hypothetically treat of scenarios that may never be actualized. Yet rules rely for their self-justification upon being applicable in a concrete way—they are building blocks: quantitative and geared for practicality. Rules define the game, framing the field by determining one game from another. But they also determine, within the game, its conduct. Rules provide both the external and internal skeleton of the game; as margins, they are both the external and internal limits to a body of writing. However, rules figure prominently only when the game hits out at its margins. The contentiousness of a game—or in a game—brings the margins into play, measuring fair or foul; the most querulous playing highlights its own rules. In the writing of George Bowering the margins are where the play is, all the time. Blurring borders between genres, confounding identity and subverting reference are favourite tricks of his which make the reader keenly aware of margins, lines and rules. Not playing by the rules Bowering plays the rules, and this is the measure of his game.

Though the relationship between the rules and the game is oblique, some outline of this game's rules is only fair. However, a conclusive exegesis of certain of GB's writing, illuminating this writing with the clear light of irrefutable explanation would be an inappropriate pitch to make given the duplicitous self-questioning evident in Bowering's writing. The form of a reply, rather than a replay, characterizes this critical engagement of his writing and the face, not of Bowering's text, but of the critic seeing that text is in evidence. What light there is is diffuse, creating an opaque text through which Bowering's writing can be seen: seen obliquely, equivocally, yet nevertheless seen to be integrally informing the game, which itself is measure.

DEDICATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

GB = George Bowering

A = Autobiology

Al = Allophanes

AM = Another Mouth

B = Baseball

BW = Burning Water

C = Caprice

CCPA = The Contemporary Canadian Poem Anthology

CS = Craft Slices

D = Delsing

DM = Delayed Mercy and Other Poems

E = Errata

FCC = Fiction of Contemporary Canada

GK = The Gangs of Kosmos

GV = George, Vancouver

IF = In the Flesh

KE = Kerrisdale Elegies

MP = The Mask in Place

PA = Selected Poems: Particular Accidents

PD = A Place to Die

PG = Points on the Grid

RMF = Rocky Mountain Foot

SM = Smoking Mirror

SSB = A Short Sad Book

SW = The Silver Wire

WW = West Window

WWW = A Way with Words

YB = The Man in Yellow Boots

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First, Pitch

In examining the work of a writer it seems traditional for a critic to compare (what she views as) discrete portions of that work. This procedure requires that the body of work be portioned; the integrity that it had is fragmented by the critical eye in the act of analysis. Such analysis is used by critics to distinguish genre, temporal change, subject matter and whatever may seem pertinent to their theses. But such analysis is a critical imposition. So, addressing the corpus of a writer cloaks it in the language of the critic whose own make-up is thereby revealed. Faced with a body of work, a critic reveals her position *vis à vis* that work in the act of criticism by which she, herself, defines herself. But the act of criticism is not a mirror for the critic, it is not narcissistic or static; on the contrary, it is dynamic. Criticism plays at redefining the work, constantly, as the process of being addressed by different critics creates infinite permutations of the work, each relocating it through whatever conceptual matrix the critic views it.

One hesitates to do violence to a text by misrepresenting it in the act of criticism. The least possible disfigurement, however, would seem to be in reproducing the text exactly and that is to make mockery of criticism. Then some partial portioning must be made, but the work of GB in particular poses difficulties for the critic. This *oeuvre* insists upon its own integrity by blurring such margins as critics are fond of. The "poetry" and "prose" labels have both been used to define Autobiology, the generic indiscretion of which refuses the clothing of such labels. Even "criticism" itself disfigures the text of A Way with Words, the playful, sonorous and polemical writing of which confounds description. In terms of authorship "the work of GB" is itself a misnomer, that work's compositors themselves composed by GB—comprising E. E. Greengrass, Ed Prato, Erich Blackhead, Harry Brinson and others we may never know about. With the recognition that discriminating within GB's work is curious indeed, it appears that this is nonetheless the sensible course to take, however capricious its foundation may be. I will therefore create distinctions. Using separately-published books as the units of comparison I will differentiate between those books which look to the physical text for their meaning and those which look elsewhere. Thus distinguishing certain appendages of the work's body from others is the enabling act of criticism; by seeing difference and imposing the language that reifies it grafting is possible: a shaping by the critic of a new body, wounds dressed. So the work of GB, whose subject in Allophanes remarks, "I underwent the operation of language," here is made subject to this critical operation of language.

Creating distinctions is done by approaching the corpus with a criterion; the critic engages in sorting the text by means of its close or distant adherence to this criterion. Hence the body of work is aligned according to an axis. Where two such criteria—and usually criticism has criteria which make it more than one-dimensional—interact with the corpus the critic has brought a conceptual matrix to bare (on) the text.

The matrix whereby the critic addresses the writing is similar to the grid that illustrates GB's poetic theory. Evident concern with graphic presentation has always characterized his writing—witness the title of his M.A. thesis—"Points on the Grid"—also the title of the book of poems produced subsequent to the thesis. In GB's thesis, the axes whose grid becomes the ground wherein the poem figures are an axis of universality and one of particularity. Their relationship makes the site of the poem a dynamic space or energy field which yet does not eradicate the fixity created by the address of a point on a grid. Dynamism is created by the autobiographic situation of the poet himself. Inscribing the material he derives from observing life—emotions and reactions—he creates an axis of particularity which is the range of his personal response. When conjoined with an axis of universality containing common experiences the situation of the poet is fixed, though fleeting; this is his *locus*. This locus is individual, distinct from that of any other organism, yet the axis of universality situates him as contained within the world; conceiving of the world as an indivisible totality means that all "parts" are interrelated and affect each other. These axes form a grid that is imaged, by GB, as the convergence of "the line that runs through his particularity as an observer, across the line that runs through his consciousness of himself as part of a world nature organism" ("Points on the Grid," M.A. thesis, UBC, 5). Of special note here is the situating of the grid within the *mind* of the poet. The poem is the scene where this mental grid is imaged. That is, the poem imitates a mental phenomenon.[1] The poem is dissimilar to the mental stimulus—necessarily so, being composed of different materials—so an imitation, in another medium, is what the poet accomplishes in projecting a perceived point of intersection into a poem. "Poet as Projector" illustrates this theory. Dynamism results as well from the graphic tension produced between poet and poem; tension, because this is a paradoxical situation. The (mental) observation of the (particular) poet must be imitated, rendered in terms of another particular, so made abstract by the imitation. Abstraction tends more to the universal. Conversely, this universal must be localized, made concrete in fact, by the relation of synecdoche which exists between the abstraction and the word. The tension between these two contrary processes is the space the poet addresses with/in the text.

The reader, too, is faced with particulars from which she abstracts. Her world's particular materials are the words and they are conjoined by her mental process in forming a world.

Space conditioned by the dynamic tension of contraries is the graphic situation of GB's writing. This locates him in the tradition of William Blake—in whom GB is well-versed and who figures forth in GB's work, not solely establishing the ground, but as a character, too. This cosmology is also coincident with that identified by Robert Kroetsch as a Canadian tradition. Kroetsch points out that "we Canadians seek the lost and everlasting moment when the one, in the process of becoming the other, was itself the other" ("Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue," 86). That quest for definition of borders itself becomes both the structure and preoccupation of GB's work, as he turns writing inside out playing with its rules.

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[1] I say "imitate" as distinguished from "copy," in the fashion of William Carlos Williams.

From the viewpoint of GB's compositional method, it is evident that the writing which not only centers on the grid as a metaphor but as a calibrating structure has become what he calls his "most characteristic work." This designation covers the book-length works, including Autobiology, Curious and Allophanes, though arguably Rocky Mountain Foot prefigures the shift to composing within the frame of a book instead of the individual lyric.

There are, of course, consequences attendant upon such a compositional shift; superficially, it is clear that GB has subsequently published considerably less frequently in the magazines and journals he customarily appeared in. This perhaps results from being reluctant to dismember a poem in order to see it in print. The lyric stands well when printed singly, but publishing a piece of a poem is less satisfactory than publishing a poem, less satisfactory for editor, author and reader, too. Another consequence which is more subtle and with which I plan to concern myself at length is the ascendancy of form over content in GB's work. I mean here a form which is not so much dictated by the author as by the text and by the pre-existing structure which the author capriciously chooses. Hence the parameters of GB's book-length poems, themselves structures—such as the days of the year, or the tableau at a tarot reading—measure the poem. The form is not produced by a resolution of the content or the completion of the image's projection, as in GB's lyrics, but form is given by the satisfaction of a structure's requirements regardless of the degree of resolution in the content. Hence, more attention to the physical composition of a book, rather than the occasional lyric, results in a sensitivity to structure where the form actually becomes projected by the book itself, not by the author's theme. The axes of universality and particularity are still an appropriate metaphor for addressing the writing, but the location of the intersection of those axes is no longer in the mind of the poet. The text itself has become the matrix.

One criticism that must be fielded due to the position I am playing hits upon dynamism itself. I have claimed GB's work goes by different pen names; I have claimed that it is a diverse, heterogenous body; I have even claimed that the compositional method therein expressed, changes. So the question arises that if persona is not a constant, nor even name itself, due to the proliferation of pseudonyms, then how do you identify a writer's corpus? More specifically, *this* writer's. And of course, in designating GB's writing the critic situates herself, there, to begin. That field is designated, not by GB's name or even persona, but by his signature—baseball. So to begin, good form demands a ceremonial first pitch offered by a visiting dignitary. It was Frank Davey, in his role as visiting dignitary and distinguished alumnus of UBC, who wrote that the "Message of George Bowering" was: "Play Ball!"

First Inning

Beginning with the origin of the author is a traditional strategy which I do not intend to second guess. George Bowering was born in 1933, in Penticton (Chalmers 108), though all that is reported of his first year is that he somehow got to West Summerland where he was born in 1934 (Candelaria 29; Henry 37; Miki, "Heritage Festival"). He stayed in West Summerland only long enough to want to move, both to Kelowna where he was born in 1935 (GB, FCC 10) and, simultaneously, back to Penticton where he was also born in 1935 (Nischik 25). Again in 1936, still in Penticton, he was born once more. That is, of course, presuming these to be separate incidents and not the prolonged labour of his mother. At any rate, the next birth of GB took place in the mountains of B.C., in 1937 (Gill 260), concurrent with his birth in Osoyoos (Helwig and Marshall 172), where mountains have been known to spring up. And again little George does, this time in The New Oxford Book of Canadian Literature in English (Atwood 322) where we find his date of birth inscribed as 1938. The Poets of Canada (Colombo 228) more precisely shows the reader that this auspicious event of 1938 transpired in Keremeos, with which account the august reference volume Contemporary Authors (Evory and Metzger 64-5) concurs, though that myth of origin cannot be privileged over the story of his 1939 birth in Princeton raised to the level of art in "A Poem for High School Anthologies" (Barbour and Scobie 38). There we see the author (was) born the son of a high school Latin teacher.

Mr. Bowering has certainly had a productive life, yet finds the time to work in between births in Naramata (Peck 315) and Okanagan Falls (Mundhenk 212). Even within the context of a single volume he establishes two mutually-exclusive births, (Ireland 66, ¶10) as the appended notes to "Grandfather" and "The Crumbling Wall" mention his birth as 1938 and 1935, respectively. Respect notwithstanding, there is something going on here that is inspired not by verisimilitude. This is an original recreation (of) being played out here, there, and several other places as well.

Well, among such a screwball barrage GB's pitch to the reader requires some concentration in order to hit upon it. Batting first for the visiting team is Jean-Paul Sartre, followed by Roland Barthes and then Robert Kroetsch.

Visitors

Sartre, appropriately enough, begins with a concern to define one's place in the world and, so, the ontological field one operates within. That place, he determines, is made (in) relation to the environment, an environment which includes both spatial and temporal situation. Of this place, the actual place occupied, Sartre writes: "I have been able to occupy it only in connection with that which I occupied previously [...]. This previous place refers me to another, this to another, and so on to the *pure contingency of my place*; that is, to that place of mine which no longer refers to anything else which is a

part of my experience: the place which is assigned to me by my birth" (629-30). Hence, Sartre's argument strikes at the uniqueness of that particular place, the place of birth, in the constitution of our identity. The other places we have been or will be are fastened in causality; a chain of such *loci* constitutes our place in the world at any particular instance, except for the instance of our birth which, for Sartre, alone is unsupported. He claims: "*for me* birth and the place which it assigns me are contingent things. Thus to be born is, among other characteristics, *to take one's place*"; and "this original place will be that in terms of which I shall occupy new places" (630). The birth is an arbitrary point from which, nonetheless, is derived the entire compass of our life. This corresponds to the scientific enterprise as characterized by GB in "Place of Birth" (A 38): "Science wants to know where you have been & where it will take you & so does the Canada Council. I tell them what my mother said in her chair & when & where."

The similarity of such a schema with the Saussurean chain of signification is surely no accident, as both model the composition of identity. Our identity is dependent upon language, according to Sartre; it is through language that we present our self-image to others. Language allows self-identity.

> Language is not a phenomenon added on to being-for-others. It *is* originally being-for-others; that is, it is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the Other. In a universe of pure objects language could under no circumstances have been 'invented' since it presupposes an original relation to another subject. In the inter-subjectivity of the for-others, it is not necessary to invent language because it is already given in the recognition of the Other. I *am* language [485].

Without language there simply could be no "I," nor could there be self-conception. GB might be seen to agree, writing as he does in "Place of Birth" that: "Consciousness is how it is composed & starts with birth or some say earlier. I began to be composed at such & such a time in such & such a place" (A 38). The meaning at the origin of each system of *différance* is constructed *a posteriori*. It is constructed by the consciousness which composes its own ontology, necessarily acknowledging the genealogy of *loci* which have led to the subject's present situation. These systems of language and ontology share roots in caprice and perpetuity through play, the game by which identity fashions itself *after* the contingent birth. Even revising that birth is a play of the game which alters the game; though not—what Sartre would call the "facticity" of—the birth.

But GB explicitly objects to the notion of facticity, the arbitrary though unalterable fact upon which our existence is predicated. He prefers the ontology suggested by Charles Olson where it is not the events of one's life but the actions, actions upon events, which give dynamism to the subject. We see in "The Acts" that "events & things can not act upon. You can not be acted upon by events & things & you could not in the past [...]. You are an event & a thing living as a person when you act upon. Existentialism is a conspiracy of the mind tempted by discourse" (A 73). And with that, Sartre is thrown out by the pitcher; he may have been venturing too far off base toward nothingness, as GB sees it in Allophanes ("II"): "Being ventures us. A stolen base / wasnt there before you reacht it." Whether the

runner makes the base or not matters not to Roland Barthes, who is up next, and there certainly are unresolved questions he can face in this screwball pitch.

Barthes writes of his own beginnings much as GB does. Barthes writes in the third person, as does GB. That is, in Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, the writer uses the pronoun "he" to designate the protagonist. GB's creative (auto)biographies call himself by name even though they are author(iz)ed by him, mostly for inclusion in anthologies where the editors ask him to supply information about himself. Hence, Barthes and GB are notably similar in terms of the stylization of the self, beginning as they do in the same ballpark where Barthes moves from stylization of the self to writing style. "Liking to find, to write *beginnings*, he tends to multiply this pleasure: that is why he writes fragments: so many fragments, so many beginnings, so many pleasures (but he doesn't like the ends: [...] the fear of not being able to resist the *last word*" (Roland Barthes 94). The ominous "last word" for a writer is death; it is the pronouncement of the closed book which conjures the presence of death, the stamp of authority. Then beginning again, always beginning again, is itself pleasurable and staves off the seal of death while created in its face.

Barthes identifies writing with living as Sartre did language with living. Like Sartre, Barthes sees language as composing the self, but unlike Sartre who accepted the reality of a unique origin (though arbitrary) which was irremediable, Barthes *writes* beginnings, creating the past not as fact but as a creation of the present, as a testimony to the continuity of the present. The continued writing attests, not to any continued originality of the work, but to the continuation of the writing—of the writer.

In all writing, the writer is evident; not in the name affixed as author to the work, but in the work's "*signature* (I display myself, I cannot avoid displaying myself)." Thus does Barthes define signature. He goes on to draw an equation between any writing—as it is read to be a sign—and signature, which is "to fabricate a sign, to make a sign (to someone), to reduce oneself in terms of the image-system to one's own sign, to sublimate oneself within it" (Roland Barthes 166-7). Barthes goes a little further with this, sliding in a tricky move. He claims that this sublimation of oneself is, unlike our pre-semiological perception of others, the only way we can view ourselves. "*You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image: you never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens [...]: even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images*" (36). To relate this, then, to the fabrication by GB of his physical births would suggest that such an experience is inaccessible to the protagonist (though he is involved) except as a story, as fiction. It seems reasonable to allow this, given that memories of our births usually originate as they are reported to us—li(f)e as (already) made sign.

Robert Kroetsch claims that the model (of an) artist is a figure who constructs himself, constructs his/story. In "The Canadian Writer and the American Literary Tradition," Kroetsch cites F.P. Grove as a

"paradigm of the artist," the artist who both evokes and lives our a-historical situation. "Grove's origins and motivations have long been a puzzle. The more his literal life comes into doubt, [...a]s his reality, so to speak, comes into doubt, he comes more and more to represent our own predicament" (Essays 14). Not merely representing, but *being* our predicament, such a paradigmatic artist cannot write of mistrusting historical truth while perpetuating its authority. He deconstructs that authority in perpetuating facts created for the occasion. Thus, challenging distinctions between fact and fiction he draws attention to structure, suggesting a contradictory—perhaps self-directedly violent—form. "We must resist endings, violently. And so we turn from content to the container [...]. In our most ambitious writing, we do violence to form" (Essays 57). In this formal explosion (I prefer "implosion,"[1] myself), the author deconstructs himself as author(ity), no longer standing outside the text in a pose of ego-affirming validation. "It is possible that the old obsessive notion of identity, of ego, is itself a spent fiction, that these new writers are discovering something essentially new, something essential not only to Canadians but to the world they would uncreate. Whatever the case, they dare that ultimate *contra-diction*: they uncreate themselves into existence" (Kroetsch, Essays 21). This un-creation by which writers create themselves (not as *authors*, but as writers) inscribes contradiction into a world, realistically, while it mocks verisimilitude in flaunting the plasticity of art.

The very notion of a definable *origin* is questioned by Kroetsch for whom "Origins recede into history, history into myth" (Essays 28). That is, origins become disassociated from the mundane as they become the data of history and then the tribal lore of myth. It is as if, once reified as the facts of history, origins become part of *langue*, not *parole*; they are no longer particular, because expressed in a shared and interchangeable medium. They then compose the collective tale of the tribe—the work of art. Such a *post-hoc* fabrication of origin is parallel with the creation of fiction itself, both being(s) constructed of language. Kroetsch says, "I'd like to push the notion of language experiment further. Roy Kiyooka's Transcanada Letters may be a novel. Rudy Wiebe's Big Bear may be a novel. George Bowering himself may be a novel" (Essays 44). That would be an intriguing experiment indeed, where the writer is composed by the fiction of his own creation: not merely coinciding with its perpetuity as Barthes suggests, but created by it. "You, poet, giving birth to yourself [...]. The endless need to begin" (Kroetsch, Essays 97). This is a contradiction made conceptually consistent if imaged as an interdependent dynamism or the mythological *uroborus*. Kroetsch has no reluctance to be contradictory, indeed the form of his discourse is hysterically celebratory in its self-contradiction. That Kroetsch intends an interplay between creation and created is clear when he remarks that "poets of the twentieth century, in moving away from narrative [...] were driven back to the moment of creation; the question, then: not how to end, but how to begin. Not the quest for ending, but the dwelling at and in the beginning itself" (Essays 91). Beginnings are not

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[1] Here I concur with Jacques Derrida for whom the significant other is exactly congruent with the text. There is nothing outside of the text, even the reader is inscribed by the sign of her own making and so "explosion" creates an incoherent metaphysical structure, whereas "implosion" maintains metaphoric consistency.

origins for Kroetsch. Origins are the domain of myth, the shared *langue*, whereas beginnings are particular to the articulations of individuals whereby they announce their existence. "Not origins, but beginnings [...]. Beginnings recur" (Essays 28). And so they do, by their recurrence structuring Kroetsch's essay "Taking the Risk." As Barthes claims, that recurrence of beginnings is itself the insistence on perpetuating the writing, the pleasure; though for Kroetsch "beginning" is a literal re-creation of a self referred to by the language; for Barthes, it has a structural dimension only.

A replay of the theoretical explanations thus fielded shows that Sartre hit on the theory that (past) origin determines existence though with no prior design, design being forged by the language with which one identifies oneself. Barthes throws out any notion of "past" and sees writing and being mutually affirming each other, perhaps desperately so. Kroetsch allows for a reconstruction of the past in the present, a paradoxical creation of the creator in writing (of) oneself.

Rationalizing the development of a writer in general has been the batters' strategy so far, but with a particular eye to GB's roots some attempt at explanation is launched in <u>An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English</u>:

> A playful sense of humour has led George Bowering to add to the substantial body of work under his own name so many poems and reviews under various pseudonyms that his bibliographers may never straighten out all the questions of authorship. He has similarly confused his biographers by giving at least three different towns as his birthplace: Osoyoos, Penticton, and Oliver. ('A very slow birth in a fast-moving car' is the way he once explained this) [Bennett and Brown 374].

The editors have chosen to offer GB's particularly unconvincing rationale for this logical paradox, which gets them applause since reasons for contradictions need not be themselves more rational than what they seek to explicate. But they should not then propose a discursive form which proposes to "straighten out" questions. GB himself mocks this approach in "The Breaks" (<u>A</u> 45): "Investigate him. Seek the vestiges of his movement. Look for footprints. Gumshoe investigator, break the case." Nor is it appropriate, as Bennett & Brown do, to dismiss such a rhetorical morass as the product of a "playful sense of humour." GB's play with language is not directed at using language to ridicule serious readers. His methodical patterning of birth places throughout the Okanagan, systematically covering only and all realistic dates is an intensely subtle dissemination which "playful sense of humour" misrepresents. Only a careful and widespread reading would uncover these variations and not dismiss them as typos. GB is himself intensely serious about language and writing, and respectful of comparable intellectual engagement on the part of his readership.

Unfortunately, such intellectual engagement is not the norm among readers, at least not among those who assume the stance of authority in reviewing his books. Here is an explanation of GB's "origins" that attends to figurative literary origins rather than physical birth: "In the early days GB used to be

published by the Mexican magazine El Corno Emplumado simply because he had to start somewhere. El Corno went political and its editors are, I believe, still in jail. But the back cover of this book begins only with GB's involvement with the poetry newsletter Tich... [sic; ellipsis, too] We know him as the editor of another defunct journal: Imago with which he peddled quite a bit of his own stuff" (Amprimoz). GB himself takes this batter out in a letter to Margaret Randall wherein he comments upon the review: "Got a typical review lately from one of those young punks back east, in the Windsor, Ontario paper, saying that I got my start in El Corno Emplumado because I couldn't get publisht anywhere else, and it must have been a bad magazine because, he says, the editors are still in jail as far as he knows. The rest of the review was along the same lines of excellence" (12 Apr. 1977).

So, while Barthes and Kroetsch have hit solidly upon GB's pitch and made good mileage on it, Sartre and Amprimoz were put out by the pitcher himself, and Bennett & Brown, though carefully watching the pitch, didn't get to first base on it. Three out; now the home team comes to bat.

Home

It occurs to me that the "common-sense" way of approaching the problem of GB's multiple birth-reports would see in them a pose whereby he mocks the epistemological concept of origin. But that presumes, too simply, that language is casually referential. The relationship between language and life or writing and the writer is no such simple equation. This "common-sense" position supposes that language is capable of designating life, and does so, and that empirically contradictory tokens of language show the complexity of life rather than any synapse in the equation of language and life. The antithesis of this position would claim that GB's multiple birth-reports, those empirical contradictions, show the capacity of language to create complex structures, like palimpsests, where life has but a single mundane "fact."

Sartre's stance would suggest the former rationale, Barthes' the latter, as I wrench them out of context, paraphrasing and otherwise distorting them. In terms of GB's particular situation, both these theories of the relationship between life and language—the former which leads to the complexity of life, and the latter to the complexity of language—appropriately address his work: not, however, simultaneously. Certain of his texts are apprehensible as grids which image the writer's situation, becoming his projection. Examples would be the (largely) unpublished novel Delsing, Sticks & Stones, Points on the Grid, The Silver Wire, Mirror on the Floor and even A Way with Words. But other of his texts lead the reader rather to discomfiture within the language itself, not for its uneasy reference to the world, but for its internal combustion. Texts which do this are Delayed Mercy, Allophanes and Caprice, among others.

Given then, two substantially different relationships between the writer and the writing as perceived through the texts, I cannot assert any single rationale in GB's multiple birth-reports, his writings

of the writer. But, in considering the body of work as a whole, that becomes not "different relationships" but a more Kroetschean ambiguity which would seem to be affirmed in Craft Slices where GB does not rationalize any development of his aesthetic; rather, he juxtaposes mutually contradictory theories. GB himself has set up the subtle distinction which I am concerned with here. In "Delsing & Me" (CS 29), an essay written to prefigure his story "Time and Again," GB writes:

> So, while you could treat "Time and Again" as a structure made of parts, I would entreat you to test it another way as well. Is the language interesting, for example? I'm more interested in perception than structure. That is why I treat the story as a few pages in the life of George Delsing. I think that my novels and stories are part of an open–ended testament to my lifetime on earth. If there's no end in mind, if I dont know when I will die, I dont know when the Delsing story will end. I must therefore pay attention to both lives moment by moment, and keep on doing so. I cant come back and fix it up when it's over. So I pay attention to the things that define it as I go along. To me that means telling you where I am at the moment, and watching my language as I do.

Evident from this is an aesthetic based on the concurrent existence of the character and writer—"both lives" are the subject of attention. Too, "both lives" are lived uncertain of where their closure will be fixed but certain of their unfolding, hence, "watching my language" becomes the only present concern. The interest in perception over structure coincides with the "common sense" category of writing which, though not (auto)biographical, shows the complexity of life. So, one might suppose that in GB's multiple birth fictions he is pointing out the variety of epiphanies and seminal influences which shape our lives, each equally significant as "origins" of our thought, with no one unique "origin" given precedence—especially not one, the birth, which is not retained in memory at all. But that would be to pigeonhole GB's writing as describing a (prior) world, and it is not only I who refuse to do that; GB subverts that easy equation, too. When "Delsing & Me" was incorporated into Craft Slices a single line was appended to it, not present in the original publication. That line denies all the assertions of the (quoted) passage; that line is like the biographical statements which serve to place everything that went before under erasure; that line reads: "In my fiction I try to contradict all the above." Well. An argument can be made that he has changed his mind on the aesthetic position advocated in (the original) "Delsing & Me." But then, why did he include it in Craft Slices at all, unless he wanted to reaffirm it, though with this palinodic, mischievous li(n)e peeking out from underneath it? I think GB wants to affirm nothing but the fiction of any authorial "stance" whatever. Affirming fiction, pointing to his mask, the writer is no author(ity) behind it nor is it sensible to try to uncover the author behind the text.

The multiplicity of origins GB has created is similar to the multiplicity of originators he has created for/of his writing. The pseudonyms "E.E. Greengrass," "Ed Prato," "The Panavision Kid," "Helmut Frantz," "Harry Brinson" and "Erich Blackhead" are certainly his; what others there may be is difficult to tell. I say there is a similarity because both methods of disseminating oneself make "origin" a fiction. "Talk to me of originality / and I will turn on you with rage,'" he writes in Allophanes ("V"),

quoting an unnamed "source."

　　　　If I can yet write of "Bowering's work," admittedly placing the name of the author under erasure, I will claim that an almost frenzied multiplication of beginnings and of subsequent paths from those beginnings characterizes this *oeuvre*. His pen name "Ed Prato" has become retroactively coloured with a history the details of which included a birth in Trail to Triestine immigrants (Prato [GB], letter to Pier Georgio di Cicco of 25 Jun. 1977). Developing a narrative of his life, Prato invents another (prior) pseudo-name, Edward Pratoverde, which he claims to have fashioned with some literary pretension; but "I think, after thinking about it, I think I'll drop that dumb pen name, and go with my real name, Ed Prato" (Prato [GB], letter to Pier Georgio di Cicco of 19 Apr. 1977). E.E. Greengrass ("Pratoverde" means "a field of green grass" in Italian) is also embroidered *post-hoc* with origins and employment, teaching English at UBC, or so we read in the notes on contributors to an issue of The Antigonish Review in which his poems appeared (20: 113). But GB muddies even these opaque genealogies by denying that they originate with himself. In CV2 Robin Mathews writes "Seeing Through a Greenglass Clearly" ("Greengrass" had been misspelled "Greenglass") to show that *he* wasn't fooled by this pseudonym, and GB admits to being Greengrass, but Greengrass denies being GB. Elsewhere, responding to John McAuley's letter asking if he is Greengrass, as David McFadden has said he is, GB asserts: "No, I aint Greengrass or Grfeenglass or whatever it is," claiming instead that "David McFadden is Greenglass, and he is trying to send the smoke across the campfire" (16 Aug. 1977).

　　　　It becomes impossible to separate those factual inaccuracies which GB is responsible for from those due to typographical error or the mischievousness of others; further, one has difficulty distinguishing error by intent and accident. However, if the writing as a creative act is of prime concern, multiple variations are not "wrong" but signify other than mimetically. In terms of reference, it makes no difference if there are two or a hundred reported birth dates/places, so long as two contradict each other, all are suspect. But when GB insists on reporting a variety of such births, the effect is not merely to subvert reference; such reports themselves signify a revelling in incongruity: the *jouissance* of excess. Or, they signify a distrust of the medium he is addressed within. "I lie to you / as often as I lie to myself" (Touch 11), GB writes "As Introduction" to his selected poems.[1] But distrust need not lead to despair; knowing you are being handed lies you can still revel in their coherence, even loveliness, reading "not for truth / but the shapeliness of the lies" (Touch 11). The shape of those lies is not the head-to-head confrontation of a dyadic opposition, nor is it the rootless tree of a single lie. Rather, the multiplicity of origins creates a palimpsest, the form of a carnivalesque writing where statements lie upon each other coinciding in structure while contradictory in content. The impossible past events are methodical, yet they are not related in any order other than the juxtaposition the reader creates and, as Sharon Spencer notes, if

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[1]Touch is subtitled "selected poems," as distinct from a "Selected Poems," which he declined to assemble at that time.

"events in time are spatially organized according to the techniques of juxtaposition that are employed in montage, they lose both their inevitable, sequential nature and their quality of irreversibility" (155). Their very conjunction thus acts as a catalyst to emphasize their differences and their alienation from reference—absurdly so, because we *are* sure that GB was born. We have the story on George on paper in "Place of Birth" (A 37) where his mother's sworn statement and a suborned lawyer attest to the fact that, yes, indeed, George was born, & when, & where, and there it becomes a narrative like any other.

> The story of my birth is on paper hidden somewhere in a truthful mother's room. I say he was suborned because the question was a lie & still is, for those who will not open their eyes. I say I was born & where. Since then I have decided to say where it was I was born many times in different places. [...] My mother was the contributor & the notes on contributors are suborned to swear just where & when & they are sworn to secrecy. Composition is not there it is going to be there & you are here & that is where & you might believe when.

Illustrating the ambiguous relationship of language to life, or composition to its origin, or writing to the writer, GB here shows what I have called a "Kroetschean" paradox where the writer is inscribed within the text; he is not standing outside of it.

To illustrate how this differs from a more conventional conception of the written self, GB's own work again provides examples of that. It is not a simple early/later or immature/mature distinction that I am drawing; the metaphor of linear, temporal development as if towards some climax disfigures GB's work. His own "ABC" dictates "order but not development" (CS). But speak in metaphors we must, and I would venture the orderly grid metaphor, modified as a matrix to admit multi-dimensionality. Then, two different matrices model GB's writing. One such matrix would be grounded in the writer's experience and, simply, be a projection referring back to the writer's (signified) mental image. Conversely, the writing where the text's references are incongruous is metaphorically cut adrift from meaning through denotation. Such writing coheres as a set of signifiers which show their own alienation from reference—except self-reference—the shapeliness of the lies is foregrounded. This second matrix then has one less dimension, if you will. But in exchange, neither is the text in any way descriptive of a prior reality; it creates its own with the added perspective of the reader. Thus, two matrices are here being posited. The latter is the unconventional (as measured by the conventions of realism) model of a purely textual writer, dependent for his substance upon the graphemic network wherein "he" is situated. The ontological status of such a figure is derived from its locus: "If you pick up a book you do not see a red wheelbarrow; you see 'a red wheelbarrow'." (GB, CS 5). However, before I address the texts which are themselves ontological networks, I will discuss those texts which seem to depend upon reference, creating an intersection of the particular experience of the writer with the shareable, universal imitation of that experience as projected into the writing. In so doing, I expect to make this distinction clear by example.

Second Inning

In this inning certain autobiographical texts are addressed. Mirror on the Floor has been received as figuring within the tradition of realism and so have Sticks & Stones, The Man in Yellow Boots, Points on the Grid, The Silver Wire, Flycatcher—even Caprice and Burning Water are measured by this tradition. The detail in GB's writing suggests, to some, autobiographical realism, but if his writing is revealing it is unpleasantly exhibitionistic to some.

Visitors

Craig W. Fess sees in Mirror on the Floor a scant plot clothed in blurred genre: GB's "periodic blending of poetry into prose provides scant respite from a flimsily-disguised plot of debauchery." Well, my goodness. "The debauchees include university students Bob Small and Delsing, long-time boozin' companions who are tossed into a Vancouver drunk tank as the story begins. This nauseating experience initiates an in-depth study of depravity." This study of depravity is, interestingly, divided by Fess such that the story begins concurrently ("as") with the experience of the debauchees; Fess implies the two are coincidental but not identical. Hence, a presumption that plot and its inscription are separate things underlies Fess's criticism, unacknowledged, and this strikes a limitation of his review.

There seems to be no limit to Fess's alliterative indignation when Bob Small and "nubile, nutty Andrea (a nymphomaniac) embark upon a series of passionate performances—uninhibited, of course—supplying plenty of angles for a plot permeated by premeditated perversity." Pretentiously put, a pitch performing with plenty of passion and plotted—premeditated, and hence inhibited—offends Fess. Well, most writing is premeditated in both its plot and activity, but in finding the plot permeated with both inhibition and its lack Fess doesn't know which way to look when faced with this debauchery. He misses the pitch, completely. Further, that Andrea strikes him as a "nymphomaniac" exposes Fess's eagerness to strike out quickly. Which he does.

Chester Duncan objects to GB's volume. "The Silver Wire is 32-year George [sic] Bowering's third volume of poems, and, despite the fact that there are far too many of them, these pieces show a lively talent." It is not only the volume of GB's poems, but of his friends that Duncan strikes at, too. If, "Perhaps at the moment, like a lot of other Canadian poets, he has too many stupid friends," presumably Duncan's kindly advice to GB would put him on the road to cultivating what lively talent he has. After all, "Mr. Bowering can be a very good minor lyrical poet," Duncan is quick to point out.

Duncan sees the potential for GB's voice to grow in the poems where the "lyrical voice, though very clean and pleasant at times, is tempted to grow raucous and exhibitionistic on the subject of sex." I am puzzled, not that a voice grows, but that it can be tempted. Still, Duncan has hope and advice: "One can hardly be a reader of poetry and be against poetic sexuality. That would be like being against Herrick.

But I think it would be better for all concerned if Canadian poets stopped writing about sexual intercourse." Striking out: now perhaps that's what Duncan would prefer.

Red Lane has his doubts about the Sticks & Stones poems, writing to GB in the summer of 1964 that:

> I think you are getting into a FORM as yourself being FORMULATED and I cry for the wide open spaces of that poetry that's in you came out in poems like "Meatgrinder" and especially the "Grandfather" poem like I know you are far greater than your poetry and this Creeleyistic form is really a bind on your ability come out come out wherever you are else your poems become mere chips in the stream of your consciousness!!! [Geeksville].

Charging the pitcher with formulating himself Lane seems to have hit home, as GB acknowledged (two years earlier, to Lane): "I suppose that's what my writing is in a sense—the sweepings of my mind" ("Kamloops, March 1962," Geeksville).

Louis Dudek, like Duncan, believes that GB is "much too prolific" and "revels in the intimacies of sex." This fecundity offends Dudek, "not on moral grounds," but for the detail of its inscription. "When nothing is left to the reader's imagination, is there not a failure of imagination—somewhere?" Perhaps the failure is with the critic's imagination in his privileging of abstraction over particularity. GB himself says as much putting the batter out from the introduction to Vibrations: "Poetry feeds on the senses, and a desire to share sensual experiences. That means speaking of objects and their particularities" (Vibrations vi).

Much of the critical attention GB has always received cautions him to censor his personal life from his art. Reviewers who state that they don't care to hear about his sex life and reviewers who advise that he adopt a polite distance from the material of his art are the majority. The general attitude seems to be that he runs, to quote Kroetsch, "perilously close [...] upon the rocks of mere autobiography" (Essays 42) and, indeed, falls upon those rocks.

Home

I believe that the presumption of verisimilitude is a misreading of any text. The simple act of ordering events, of editing and giving form to experience separates it from the life being lived. As GB himself insists, "Great poetry does not tell you things about some poet's day or family" ("36," E); that is, great poetry is not referential. After all, "You do not need a reference to nature to create non-nature, or art" ("95," E). Indeed, Errata recounts how an uncharacteristic piece of descriptive realism in A Short Sad Book impressed a woman as so vividly referential to a particular railway station in Saskatchewan that she asked GB when he had been there; "But I have never been at a Saskatchewan railroad station on a cold winter's day. I told her I had made it all up out of words" ("28," E). Reading writing as primarily referential the reader displaces what is presented to her, privileging what is absent. Thus, descriptive

writing, which claims to be an analog of railroad stations and life, is predicated upon displacement of the writing itself in privileging reference outside the text. GB is against description for this displacement of the (temporally and spatially) present text. In the poem "Ex-is Sensual" (SW 53) the poet's existence is defined by his immediate sensory recordings, the eye will look:

> [...]
> & find myself
> in focus fine
> astride a line
> of here & now

Astride a line "here & now," both poet and reader are measured by and measuring in the poem; there is no referential context unique to the poet, neither is there a separation of the poem and the real as created by the "similie" (GB, SSB 133) of "verisimilitude."

Roland Barthes, like GB, puts reference under erasure.[1] Barthes, too, dislikes analogy, verisimilitude, resemblance—in short, realism—his bases for which I am stealing. Barthes claims that his "*bête noire*" is analogy because it "implies an effect of Nature: it constitutes the 'natural' as a source of truth"—displacing the present textual artifice only to reform it in terms of what it is not—"no sooner is a form seen than it *must* resemble something" (Roland Barthes 44). To address this problem, which is unavoidable in contemporary art due to the prevalent tradition of realism, Barthes subsequently notes that artists seek to escape analogy either by the "zero degree" of description (art spectacularly devoid of impression) or "by *regularly*—according to the regulations—distorting the imitated object." When GB draws portraits of his life in "notes on contributors" sections of anthologies he follows the regular form of such writing every time and thereby distorts the object of (presumed) reference within the rules. But in subverting reference and analogy it does not follow that the metonymic relation between the poet and poem is rejected; indeed, I believe it is not.

The poet's hands fashion the poem within margins determined by the poet's locus which includes the textual environment he spends long hours within. For instance, where GB attempts realism his sentences are long, full of adjectives where the reader may "lose" herself in a story *about* something other than the writing, because that was the model he was raised on. In a letter to Matt Cohen (28 Sept. 1980) GB explains this phenomenon of sentence length: "in my earlier prose I did run to long sentences. I think that was because I was really then convinced that one should turn one's life to fiction, a la all them American realists ans [sic] friends I had been all my youth reading." The attempt to capture the lush variety of one's life is inadequately served in long sentences, but short sentences make such a comparison less likely. GB's shortening of sentences "happened as I started making something up instead of making

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[1]There is a sense in placing a sign *sous râture* that the sign can yet be seen to point to its meaning, though in so doing pointing also to its own *différance* from that meaning and refusing to be obliterated in signification.

something of what was already down, and that does seem possible but is it." But is it. Where originality is itself fiction, "making up" is a lie based upon what is "already down"—already text. In "14 Plums" GB professes admiration for what bpNichol "says at the end of Journal: he says you put the book down, look your reader in the eye, and say such-and such" (98). It clearly is of no consequence what is said by the writer; it is the stance and its ambiguity which interests GB, as he goes on to explain. The writer fosters the pretense of detachment in "writing down" the (closed) book, but drops it, too, in looking the reader in the eye, making it clear that this is a book and you are a reader and I's meet.

The poem is made up, now, within parameters which pertain to the act of its making but may be withdrawn upon completion. In "Printed into Time" (SW 72), the poet casts off the woven text ("I give you your freedom / fly from my hands"), ironically, because freedom is death: it unwinds the poem. "Free verse" is a misnomer because all verse is measured, as E.E. Greengrass pointed out to CVII (3 May 1978) in response to an article by Wynne Francis in the January issue. A poem without limits or margins, not contained in lines, disintegrates. Language is synthetic and operates by rules; a poet learns to be natural as a measure of craft. "Breathing is natural, but it does not teach anyone how to write poetry. Poetry teaches poetry. Art teaches art. But nature does not even teach nature. Nature cannot learn. Poets can learn but nature cannot teach. It can only be what is learned. A poet must learn that nature cant teach him anything" ("39," E). That is what nature teaches the poet, hence, "If we are ever to learn anything from nature, we had / better scuff around in the tortured soil of Mars" (DM 53). A poem given to nature does not become nature, it cannot fly from the poet's hands; the poem takes shape from those hands and is cast off from them: advantage dressed, the poem makes an address not of nature but its clothes. That is "What the Poet Does": "The poet worships the naked human form, & sets about to clothe it in the globe's finest raiment" (GB, Strange Faeces). The "globe's finest raiment," poetry, clothes the human form but takes its shape—is informed—by the writer's sensory reception of that form. The two meet in the writerly[1] text where, too, the reader discovering the poem for herself enters into a spatial, physical relationship with the text; opening a cleavage in the book whereby to enter the text, the reader also opens herself to its reciprocal penetration. Textual pleasure is, as Barthes makes clear, sexual in nature. GB's lyrics illustrate a sensitivity to this. One such example is "To Cleave" (YB 6):

> When I enter you
> you enter me.
>
> That is to cleave,
>
> to cling,
> cut,
>
> penetrate
> & love.

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[1]Barthes' distinction between the readerly text (that which is closed and admits only passive activity on the part of the reader) and the writerly text is articulated in S/Z.

I love you inside
& offer my inside to you.

To cleave is to separate
& join:

to open
& fill.

And I am filled with you
even as I place myself
in our cleft
my love.

In this poem the "I" is not ambiguous in terms of its referent, it is multiple: the poet, the reader, and the poem itself coinhere in the pronoun, making reference an act of will on the part of the reader. The poem is put down so that it looks the reader in the eye; the insightful reader sees many "I"'s.

Writers of realism saw a world prior to the writing and wanted to change life into fiction, but post-modern writers have only fiction—making his own history, finding for himself his own reality, the man of action fictionalizes himself and the world: everything is text wherein he figures and is read as such, thereby turning what appears to be a reference to the world into a textual quotation made present. When located in language, anything becomes text. Kroetsch considers this linguistic trait the primary manner by which experience is apprehended; he writes of "the binary patterns that the human mind uses to construct its day and its labyrinth" (Essays 74). Frank Davey, interviewed for TV Ontario about GB's work, remarks upon this ubiquitous grid underlying the concept of identity as "everything is a crossroads; we are all crossroads." In ordering experience (without which order it would not be comprehended in any way at all), one fictionalizes oneself therein. Consciousness is language: its component units figure(s) in fiction. This textualization in consciousness is depicted in GB's "Anniversary Recall" (SW 50) where a young man perceives his contextual relationship to have altered and he is changed by that self-consciousness:

[...]
but then actually thinking
"I am noting this

I am different now
& this is my girl & I lying here."

Apprehending the world as text it then becomes the problem to make of that text life: not life made text but text made animated as in "Chap ter," from In the Flesh (84). Here,

I'm reading, your white
wide parted
            like pages
I enter, largely, your story
[...]. The page
open in the light, you read

aloud to me. This is no story.

It is a life.

The act of the lover entering the beloved is particular, whoever the "I" is at the time—at the time of reading it is the reader, as the poem announces. But it is also the poem challenging the reader to discover her own story through her capacity to actualize the world and the text. The reader does not passively recognize her reflection in the text, she puts herself there, unlike realist writing which invited the reader to identify with it, to read it as a story *about* her. But, as GB expostulates, "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?" ("14 Plums" 91). GB does not tell stories *about* people; the figures in his stories have appropriately lexical substance. In "For Angela, Sheila, Marian, Sarah, Aviva, Magdelein, Etc." (AM 17), GB appears to appropriate people in poetry, but by making up the wives of the poets as metaphors within poetry he thereby distinguishes them from living women (metaphor emphasizes difference), and makes these metaphors appropriately contextual. The "Angela" which holds the poems together is an extended metaphor used by the poet, the same poet who says that "You should not use poetry, just as you shouldn't use people" (GB in van Luven). "Angela" is used; Angela is not: the poems are not *about* her but "Angela" determines the direction of that work—writes it, to some extent. Davey sees this device as characteristic of GB's writing. By establishing a parameter (tarot spread, alphabet, arithmetic series, temporal duration) to measure the poem beside the writer's measuring, the choice of a metaphor shapes the poem. GB does this, Davey claims (TVO), in order "to avoid the personal." Leaving control of its own unfolding with the work itself is the idea behind most of GB's poetic compositions, such as Genève and "Mars." Even in that writing taken by several eminent critics (including Davey) as referential to personal experience and entirely controlled by the author GB sees the text writing itself, as here in "The Typewriter":

> Across the room
> Angela sits at my typewriter.
>
> Ah, the firm sound
> of my fingers.

This poem (YB 10) shows GB's "metaphor" composing at the other side of the stanza and joined to him in the writing implement. When Davey reviewed the book he wrote that each of the poems "catches a perception & projects it thru its particulars & the ironies of those particulars, with great dependence on personal statement, an exhibition of the poet as fact #1" (Davey, The Open Letter). It is not, I think, the poet but the poem which is fact #1: here the poem by a metaphor about the two identities, of the poet and his metaphor, joined in the metonymic fingers. In "Last Lyrics: She Pulled My Skin" (AM 31) the speaker's skin is the "she" figure, between them a metonymic relation which (metaphorically) corresponds to the poet's articulation in the skin of language. Olson's Maximus figure, in "Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 [withheld]" (Maximus Poems 185) has this sense, "that I am one / with my skin," but to

discriminate that body is impossible in terms of classical form. This form is romantic, admitting the interdependence of contraries and measuring intensity rather than fealty to an ideal.

Being one with one's skin is tactile, immediate and metonymic presence—a "here," whereas metaphor sets up a distant "there." In GB's "The Kitchen Table." (YB 58) "They are there / there is someone here under this face." A face, skin, forms the faceless "someone" who, mask in place, faces the crowd. But that someone actualizes the crowd ("under this face" is "there," where "they are"). So, facing both ways, the (sur)face mask is an unavoidable medium. What, if anything, lies behind it is made more problematic when GB, in "The Smooth Loper" (SM 42), admits to an affinity with Coyote:

> He was my favourite animal
> but I didnt know
> I imitated him
> till recent years.
> [...]
> Also I have friends
> who tell me I am wily
> to my innocent
> hairy face.

The mask is impersonal. It is a role in language, a script, departures from which are yet codified. With GB, even apparent excesses conform to rules. In "Five Cents' Review of Sports," originally titled "Montreal's Big Leak Baseball, One Reason for Keeping the 49th Parallel Open," he writes of the players that: "they never would have been able to wear Mickey's mantle. That last sentence is very much like the colourful writing baseball reporters always use" (19). Placing himself in the role of baseball reporter and then distancing himself from that role, GB acts in two mutually-exclusive roles, or perhaps occupies a third position aloof from them both. The reader cannot fix the writer in the text, but she can fix the text, and faced with that the figures therein. Interestingly, Red Lane cautioned GB (letter of Feb. 1963, Geeksville 39–40) to "write about Delsing not Bowering...you know very little about Bowering." And, indeed, GB writes *about* Delsing writing GB: inscribing himself in describing Delsing, GB fashions his role as writer. As Barthes insists, "For the history of sources we should substitute the history of figures: the origin of the work is not the first influence, it is the first posture: one copies a role, then, by metonymy, an art: I begin producing by reproducing the person I want to be [the writer]" (Roland Barthes 99). Which is what GB did—his literal beginnings began when: "I wore my old airforce clothes around UBC & became the mysterious young writer Delsing" ("Some Data," Geeksville). Delsing, of course, began to write a novel about then.

This sort of "becoming" integration of writer and writing differs from autobiography because, as GB defines it in Errata ("34"), "Autobiography replaces the writer." GB prefers the term "biotext" which connotes "an extension of the writer." Biotext is not, then, metaphoric but metonymic writing; it doesn't "stand for" a life, implying closure, stasis and the discrete distance of metaphor. The writer sheds writing

like skin, but following the trail left of skin is not to progress closer to closure, it is only to continue. In "Elegy Eight," from Kerrisdale Elegies, the speaker knows the fiction of his past and expects to walk straight into his fancied future (112); ringed by artifice and situated within the present text, by it, he is entirely composed where he is: where he is acting. There he is actualizing his relationship to his locus with the face looking in two directions at once, as it does in "The Shifting Air" (YB 88):

> I push my forehead
> against a nose
>
> And I'm on—
> the air is still
> a crowd smiles at my back.

Playing to the crowd the actor yet fashions his role facing the page, readers behind him watching the unfolding of the scene before them, before him, and he goes down, drawn on the page.

The double aspect of every performer is a condition of the role our self-consciousness plays in constituting our humanness. And, as Olson remarks in The Special View of History, man's perception of his situation as one among objects rather than as commanding subject makes of every man an axis measuring the place where he finds himself.

> One will get nowhere in catching the traffic of the human universe if one does not recognize that a man is at once subject and object, is at once and always going in two directions (in many, of course, as he is a sphere, but two at every essential intersection—at every point of action or decision a man is binary, is involved in choosing between one or two). That is why I have tried to establish the double axis or axe as a sign—that functionally no matter the plurals (plurables), the double is the confrontation, that single plural. This tremendously modifies the old static of one (the unitary) [32].

This double is not an either/or dualism—the mind is not ordering the body—but an (het)erogenous, open, multiple field.[1] Composition of oneself within one's environment, acknowledgement of one's own objectism is characteristic of Canadian writing—it is not an exclusively American stance. Tom Marshall makes this clear in Harsh and Lovely Land when discussing Irving Layton's poetry: "Layton's frequent identification with insects on the one hand and gods and giants on the other is another example of the Canadian ambivalence and shifting perspective, a result of the encounter with our open space" (72). Whether there is an open space independent of our encounter with it is perhaps more directly the point of departure between Marshall and GB. GB is quite clear as to his viewpoint in a letter to Silver Donald Cameron (1 Oct. 1972):

Now, to yr remarks about the difference between finding the "external" world in

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[1] I think it's important to mention my agreement with Charles Bernstein's criticism of Olson's sexism in "Undone Business." One of the concerns is Olson's suggestion that the "field" is "female," open to action by the Man. "Towards the Last Spike" operates on a similar sexism—this is by no means a problem particular to non-Canadian writers.

writing vs finding the writer's experience of the external world. I, ahem, hold with Shelley that there is no external world made up simply of objects. That is the Newtonian, back there yes, fallacy that has exactly resulted in the condition we have that the world can kill us, that is IT wont kill us, WE will. Look at Birney's "Bushed" or Reaney's "Avon River"—they show you a nature that is not confronted as object but that literally enters the heart, where it belongs & inescapably is [...]. There is no universe but the human universe, at least in man's discourse/eyes. The term "Human universe" doesn't just come from Olson; it is in the preface to "Queen Mab" [...]. I'm not talking about mystic stuff, and neither is Shelley.

He *is* talking about "something that has to include that process thru the human mind, not thru the objective, unquote, world viewed from the mind standing back. That is, the effect is on the mind as well as the universe, and in a like process, and the other way round, inescapably, the world of things is made the way we see it because we see it."

To go back, then to "The Kitchen Table": "they" are "there" because the mind defines them in such relative terms. As Sartre wrote, before proprioception was articulated by Olson, "they" "indicate me as the reason for their order":

My place is defined by the spatial order and by the particular nature of the "thises" which are revealed to me on the ground of the world. It is naturally the spot in which I "live" (my "country" with its sun, its climate, its resources, its hydrographic and orographic configuration). It is also more simply the arrangement and the order of the objects which at present appear to me (a table, beyond the table a window, to the left of the window a cabinet, to the right a chair, and beyond the window the street and the sea), which indicate me as the reason for their order. It is not possible for me not to have a place; otherwise my relation to the world would be a state of survey, and the world would no longer be manifested to me in any way at all [Sartre 629].

It is by the manifestation of the world that place and the perceptor are configured—however mental the awareness of one's objectism in the world may be, it is primarily a spatial relation and is realized as such in the physical writing.

By the activity of *parole* a particular speaker announces her participation in *langue* and carves for herself a niche. The poet thus improvises his place within the world-text. "Scraping in Italy" (SM 30) is carved to the form of a Petrarchan sonnet yet its subject is the particular poet's improvisation within a tradition: the traditional shaving of civilized men. The sculptured artifact is here both poet and poem.

In Florence, Tusc.
on Christmas day
my wife was at the sink.

So I had to shave
in the bidet,
& that set me to think:

did Giotto too,

did Cimabue
improvise, & feel the course of wit
as they bent to wash a brush?

Wash, that is, a male brush
held in fingers imagining
a gold halo while
scraping at only flesh?

One of the improvisations upon tradition here is the reversal of the sestet—traditionally used to resolve the particular problem within a larger context—and the octave. The crossing of the particular with the universal in GB's poem has the particular expressed in the universal's place and vice versa. The mystique of great art(ists) is part of our contemporary mythology. GB certainly is cutting that mythology down to size in "Scraping in Italy," as he does so often in his work. The symbolic phallus as paint brush, razor, and elsewhere, pen, is revealed as absurdly pretentious when the (male) wielder of the Law of the Father is often, in GB's poems, a lonely boy masturbating. Making myth particular challenges its authority; it also makes otherworldly icons humbly human. In Caprice the west was once a mythological place full of wild Indians and figures larger than life which has become scaled to human dimension. "By the 1890's the west had started to shrink" (108), and shrink it does, to a point where it becomes the locus of its inhabitants when the "west has shrunk so much that we can get it inside us."

Rules of language and the propriety of expression measure the performance of a speaker within the language—place her. Conversely, place becomes integrated within a populace and within a person among that populace as manifest in the enunciation. This is not only an intellectual identity—there is a physical dimension to this interpenetration as well. GB's locus becomes manifest in the cadence of his verse as much as its rational element. He insists: "*le poème sur la page est un partition en vue de la composition, que les caractéristiques de toutes les facultés du poète devraient se retrouver dans cette partition, non pas seulement les ukases de quelque rationalité souveraine.*"[1] The particular cadence of a speaker is a vital element of *parole* which, in voicing a language that is held in common, enacts the intersection of universal and particular.

It would seem that in GB's "lyric" stage—as distinguished from the "post lyric" and separated by the "Last Lyrics"—he composed poetry as a score for the voice, thus privileging the activity of articulation which is removed from the printed poem. That is, the locus of the poetic energy transfer is not in the printed text but in the voice of the poet and the ear of the audience. This aural tradition as touted in How I Hear "Howl" and "Poetry and the Language of Sound" does not presume the reception to be an

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[1] The typescript found in the "George Bowering Collection" in the National Library's rare books collections is called "A Few Blesst among les Maudits; it reads: "the poem on the page is a score for the composition, that the characteristics of all the poet's faculties should be recorded in that score, not just the decisions of some presiding rationality." The article was translated by Raynald Desmeules into "Quelques bénis parmi les maudits" and published in Ellipse 1; this passage is on page 50.

intellectual activity but a physical one, a sensory perception no less physical than sight or touch—perhaps even more alert because, as James Joyce reportedly commented, "the sense of hearing [...] is always awake, since you can't close your ears" (Ellmann 547). Certainly in _Allophanes_ you "cannot close your ear— / _i.e._ literature" ("I"); in _Allophanes_ literature must be thought, now, as the senses receive the physical data and create mental images.

The _Tish_ poets treated the world as non-linguistic data, nature undressed, which stimulated a sensory response in the poet and the poem was the projection of that mental interface. GB's own "Points on the Grid," "Poet as Projector," "For WCW" and "Metathesis," here quoted in its entirety from _Points on the Grid_ (38), illustrate this:

> Moving from the margins
> back
> > to the center of the mind
> > thru the eye
> objects
> > together
> > > hurtling inward
> associations set behind the cornea
> patterns in the brainpan
> pictures reflected back from the margins
> become
>
> > words
> > > in a web suspended.
> from the margins
>
> > > ended there & begun
> heavy in the center of the mind.

The mind was the center of a line—hence the ubiquitous bridge metaphors—connecting the poem and the world, both of which were ground held in common with other minds (hence the notable population of proper nouns in this poetry which draws common ground as the site of this polis), but the individual poet was the catalyst between them. In _Points on the Grid_ the poem "Tuesday Night" (40) insistently situates the poet—first, by its title, but in a city pinioned by bridges, at night lined with lights, one is spatially located within a matrix. The poem of locus attends to margins and lines as the address of the poet at the time of writing. "Walking Poem" (41) comparably situates the poet where place, the "trees lining me," gives form to the poet. The poem is a projection of the poet's situation so, naturally, is informed by his place. But when the world is seen as no longer data but already text, and the poet's locus is textual from the start, writing is an extension of that locus. If it is a bridge, there is no other side. And the reader accompanies the writer in following the text: both are present "here & now."

From the lyric (an occasional, discrete form) to the "post-lyric," GB moves from points on a grid to the integrated tissue of larger forms such as _Autobiology_. The writer goes on measuring, but the world, too, is text. "The place, the 'out there,' is not prior to human perception or activity; it is a result of

someone's being in the world. 'Environment' is not possible, because one cannot be surrounded by something he is part of. The writer's words call the fictional place into being. The human being's presence is the first language" ("38," E). This is proprioception with a difference: where everything is text there is no "outside" language. Hence, in perceiving his locus the poet cannot write *from* that place or *about* that place because what gets written is still a part of that place. When the proprioceptive consciousness is textual, the "I" is just another word whose locus is the discursive matrix within which the figure constitutes itself. GB composes himself as a present participle determining, and determined by, the syntactic structures he occupies: "Maybe I learned from the start of the written language to think of myself as an ongoing verb [...]. What I do is not write or written. It is writing, and so am I. I am Bowering and I am writing" ("7," E). But he is not only Bowering, he is acting and he is Delsing. Delsing's poems are, like Whitman's, blood on the page: "He wrote poems in red ink and saved them to show her [Frances], and burned them in the furnace when he couldn't do it. He imagined himself curling up and wisping away in the fire of the furnace" (D 194). Not only does GB become Delsing, GB becomes the writer and the writing—he is Bowering, burning in the language he lives in. This is not metaphor—beside the subject like an autobiography—but metonymy, an interdependence graphically depicted by Escher's hands drawing each other. No subject/object differentiation between GB's text and that of the world is possible—nor is he an omnipotent creator separate from the creation. Michel Foucault sees the author made a "fallen" god in contemporary discursive practice since, he says, "the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (138). GB sees the discursive identity of the subject as necessitating a departure from realism on the part of the writer. "The fiction writer begins to depart from realism when she replaces the referent with the signified," he writes. After all, realism is so because it has an unmistakable correspondence to reality; the "main purpose of the referent is to be unmistakable. But the sign now: think of all the times when the sign has to be mistakable" ("93," E). Certainly, as a "complex and variable function of discourse" the signifier is, necessarily, ambiguous. GB explicitly situates himself as a figure often in his work: "Old Time Photo of the Present," "Stab," and "A Poem for High School Anthologies" are just a few examples. But thus textualizing himself he becomes a discursive element, a variable in a relation to its context. The textualized writer is a symbol which removes the referent, another base stolen from Barthes:

> Do I not know that, *in the field of the subject, there is no referent?* The fact
> (whether biographical or textual) is abolished in the signifier, because it
> immediately *coincides* with it: *writing myself*[...] I myself am my own symbol, I am
> the story which happens to me: freewheeling in language, I have nothing to
> compare myself to; and in this movement, the pronoun of the imaginary, "*I*," is
> *im- pertinent*; the symbolic becomes literally *immediate*: essential danger for the
> life of the subject: to write on oneself may seem a pretentious idea; but it is also a
> simple idea: simple as the idea of suicide [Roland Barthes 56].

"Why have a story *about* me, instead of me?" One of the problems for the writer who writes himself is the negation of a self outside of the writing. Realist writing directs you *elsewhere*, the surface obliterates

itself; not so postmodern writing, which foregrounds its surface at the expense of the referent. GB is curiously astride this line between figure and referent, and the ideal example is Fiddler's Night. In Errata ("70"), GB calls it his "third published book of *fiction*," (italics mine) in which he "tried to find and show whatever it was that had always married realism and the openly-manipulated text in my mind." Using metaphors both of crafting and discovering, GB situates the interface of these processes in his own mind. The text, however, is an attempt at this interface which seems doomed to fail except as it may exemplify contrary stances the harmonization of which is left to the reader. Thus, in the active integration of the irreconcilable the reader's mind marries "realism and the openly-manipulated text." The energy transferred by the text to the reader in the fashion of projective verse is heightened by the extremity of polarization in the text, which is why, GB says, "In Fiddler's Night the young people should have been as persuasive as those in U.S.A., and the formal fiddling as irritating." The greater the difference, the greater the potential energy.

A postmodern biotext which foregrounds the words as aborted signs is a body deconstructing itself, a (rocky mountain) foot, a(n imaginary) hand, an ear (reach) or a(nother) mouth, autobiological writing *in the flesh*. The poet composing himself on the page, line by line, piece by piece, casts himself in "Last Lyrics: From The Mystery" (AM 23):

> Thru the windows come
> the low sun of March second
> lies warm on my neck
> white on the page
>
> of soft hand-made paper
> in the afternoon late
> where poems are & shadow
> of a vine, of my hair
>
> [...]
> & death someway old news
> somehow familiar, remember
>
> I said this
> I was saying this.

The sun casting the poet onto the page in shadow makes from the poet the poem: the poem is the poet's shadow, made by Apollo's hand it lies on hand-made paper where the poet does, where the poet dies, where, in saying this, he makes himself past, imperfect. Here the poet is measured by the poem, by the size of the page, by light and shadow, even by grammar as tense confers relatedness. Measure is the means by which the poem is articulated and the means by which the poet articulates his locus therein; it is also the fundamental activity of a person in the world concerned to discover or maintain perspective. As Henri Michaux remarks: "I had to admit it: from birth, I had spent most of my life orienting myself [...] I had—like any man alive—been made to take bearings, second by second to take, to retake my bearings" (Major Ordeals 4).

GB's forebearers mark points he defines himself in relation to, whether it be the "father I chose," Williams, the land marker Vancouver, GB's own father whose face is discovered behind George's glasses, or GB's grandfather. "Grandfather," likely the most-anthologized (hence widely disseminated) of his work, shows a traditional measurement of oneself drawn from one's antecedents, thereby making those antecedents present in the measuring. D.G. Jones finds "One of the characteristic preoccupations of contemporary poets is a concern to possess, or to re-possess, the actuality of their childhood, or their father's or grandfather's world" (171). But the poet often does not aggrandize the ancestral past, as GB does not; it is not the stuff of heroism but "may well have a grotesquely ironic character," and Jones claims that GB demonstrates "this concern in several of the poems in Points on the Grid." Kroetsch, too, sees a tradition of "Visions/revisions of a grandfather in Canadian writing, a tradition acknowledging our need for and resistance to history; our finding in the local tradition" (Essays 99). Finding in the local tradition is finding the past made present and the locus nexal to a universe.

Tom Marshall, in Harsh and Lovely Land, places GB "in the grand line of Pratt, Birney, and Purdy" (176), although "he has developed along esoteric and mystical lines in more recent times in a way that is consistent with his admiration for Margaret Avison." Doug Jones is eager to situate GB within The Canadian Tradition, as is Marshall, but Jones does this by redefining that tradition in pan-national terms—like GB's own "Canadian Tradition." Jones shows that Canadian writers are in a larger tradition which is not completely contained by national borders: "In varying degrees Bowering or Newlove, Nowlan or Purdy share with Williams a common distrust of conventional forms, rhythms, diction, and imagery, and a common desire to explore and articulate those aspects of their experience that are ignored or denied or simply distorted by the traditional matrix of language" (168). Adopting the phraseology of Williams himself—or is it Phyllis Webb's phraseology—Jones' conclusion, in the first person plural, is that Canadian writing is not the dualistic us-against-the-wilderness of Atwood's position two, but "what was a wilderness is now also a garden." An integration is becoming manifest which "provides the basis for the individual's affirmation of his actual world, his own authentic reality; he need not conform to an external order to justify his life or possess an identity" (Jones 183). And that goes for the identity of The Canadian Tradition, too.

The diversity of GB's work has enabled theorists like Marshall and Jones to pen him within The Canadian Tradition creating conformity where none exists. Yet, where place is important, as has been the thematic critical assessment of Canadian writing,[1] measure is important, too. The stagnation which weighs David Canaan down is measured by his spatial fixedness: he never leaves. Rachel Cameron and Gander Stake, like David, are sterile when immobile; moving opens their horizons and ends their written stories. And measuring the individual is part of the "garrison" legacy of containment against the wilderness, or

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[1]Marshall insists that "all important Canadian poets past and present from all parts of the country have been obsessed with wilderness and space" (173).

nature—the immeasurable dark which the American Puritan tradition mythologized, too.

The mass of Canadian literature which measures the individual *against* her place is well-known as such. And the revisionist attempts to redress this duality are similarly well-known. I am here thinking of such works as Atwood's The Journals of Susanna Moodie and Kroetsch's The Ledger. There is also an impressive body of Canadian writing which concerns itself with measuring the writer in her place *at the time of writing*—her textual identity composed as a metonymic relationship with other figures in the text. There are works *about* this relationship, like Hodgins' The Invention of the World or Blais' A Season in the Life of Emmanuel, but there are other works which take their form from this investigation and those I consider the more interesting works. Nichol's The Martyrology is the prime example of this; Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter, Marlatt's Anahistoric, Scott's Heroine and McFadden's Canadian Sunset, among others, show the prevalence of this structural configuration of author and character or writer and figure. Such a configuration makes order problematic. As Olson saw, discriminating this body along classical lines is not possible, and this is due to the awkward breaks in the openly-manipulated text where the attempt to impose order on chaos is shown for what it is: awkward manipulation. Kroetsch describes this typically Canadian interpenetration of chaos and order in terms which apply to the pre-text and (ordered) text, respectively. He writes: "Canadians seek the lost and everlasting moment when chaos and order were synonymous. They seek that timeless split-second in time when the one, in the process of becoming the other, was itself the other" (Essays 86). The writer's identity as a structural chiasmus is seen in Alibi where the collector William William Dorfendorf (Dorf) keeps a journal in which he lies about himself, perhaps; it is Karen Strike, the journalist, who accuses him of inventing himself: "You do those real 'takes' on this Dorf guy that you're trying to put together" (62). The composition of identity is here a matter of textual manipulation (ordering) of the chaotic life. Neither alone is identity; they are each a mask, a face(t) of a personality which, like Maximus and his skin, (inter)depends upon the other to compose identity. One's self is a construct, a composition projected by the conceiving eye.

The distinction between the perceptor and the self is the distinction between objectism and a subject/object dualism. In the former, the perceptor is located in her locating; in the latter she is, as Sartre said, "in a state of survey." GB's burlesque of the self in "Impaucester" (SM 24) is notably similar to "Last Lyrics: From the Mystery." Here, however, the sun is nature crafted by the poet; "old son," the contradictory relation composed by the poet is the medium whereby he perceives the world. This is not survey but creation:

> Ah, there you were
> old son, my self sitting
> in your dark chair, looking
> from your window [...].
> There you were, sun
> shining on that shit, my
> head picking up
> pieces of string, to build
> my self, my ass, sitting in his

last room.

The self-mockery of the poet is evident; his role as creator, albeit *bricoleur*, "picking up pieces of string" is that of a Raven or Coyote figure writing strings of strange fæces against the sun—signs of his passage. This is not the idealized, abstract, pure "Self", but rather, one as contingent player of a narrative thread. Such a "self" is not absolute—is not independent of the character string which constitutes its locus. Writing re-forms the writer's situation and, hence, his self, making him join the community of *langue* at the expense of his Self as a discrete particular. Keeping this in mind, one reads differently GB's (apparently New Critical) statement in Errata, that the "literary text has no continuous or reproductive relationship with any people, places or events in the phenomenal world" ("73"). Barthes, in the biography he wrote of himself, explains: "*Once I produce, once I write, it is the Text itself which (fortunately) dispossesses me of my narrative continuity. The Text can recount nothing; it takes my body elsewhere, far from my imaginary person, toward a kind of memoryless speech which is already the speech of the People*" (4).

The text names and, in so doing, fixes figures therein. After the composing it is composition, the measure of the poet's vocation, the prints of his passage. Poems fall from his fingertips "as hair from my head" in "Midnight Lunch" (IF 14):

> & I am composed
> of particles forever leaving
> my organism, hair, nails
> I am fixt by, the cells with their secret
> code writ there, [...].

Situating leaves open for attack—what is unnamed is unassailable, mutable—not fixed—broken. Roland Barthes imagines himself (in the third person) fixed within language, described, contained in a form which precludes mutability and "He is troubled by any *image* of himself, suffers when he is named. He finds the perfection of a human relationship in this vacancy of the image: to abolish—in oneself, between oneself and others—*adjectives*; a relationship which adjectivizes is on the side of the image, on the side of domination, of death" (Roland Barthes 43). GB does not seek to describe himself or make his texts reflect his world view. He burns: purifying and destroying his identity in the Heraclitean fire:

> Fire from smoke,
> the mirror no longer desired.
> It is not to seek reflection
> but to burn
> we must strive.

This passage is from "The Water Flame" (SM 12), but it is to burn that Delsing strives, too, making it clear that burning is writing:

> I was going to write serious fiction—there, it was out, cold, clean. Let them come
> and tell me I had a tough-row-to-hoe you'll get a bit older and think back tenderly
> on your romantic youthful ideals. And they came, and I told them all, and I told

myself, sure, that's true in a good huge percentage of the cases, but with me you'll see, you'll see, and I burned white to show them. And of course they too said sure sure.

So I wrote a forty-stanza ballad about a captive of headhunters in Malaya and lit a match to it and said if I can do this I can do the same thing to myself for years until there is nothing left but a burnt-clean core, and that is writing [...]. So I wrote a science fiction adventure...and I ripped it into twenty-four pieces and dropped it like space snow into the green river [D 179].

Ashes to ashes: it is not content but strife in action which will animate a text "so that the poem can be an act of language [...] rather than a search for content," as Davey noted in the TVOntario interview. In the same program GB himself said that "any relationship between the world and what I'm writing is only incidental." That is, a signifier is not inherently a sign. Relationships between words are fictions forged as acts of proprioception, "picking up pieces of string" to knit into text, but the signifiers written down are broken lines. Each piece of text he casts off enters the shared domain of *langue*: it is no longer part of the organism. Thus, he carves pieces of himself (Osiris or Orpheus) for the reader's collection. As for his own collection,

I've got a job to do too
with my own dead—
(aw come on, you cant do that)
lines

cleverly assembling verse anthologies
in this dry
dry room full of books.
—"Last Lyrics: Across 37th Avenue" (AM 16)

Collecting lines in the room full of books, the stanza full of words is a measure of the poet. Care with their presentation is needed in order not to shame the language and to dress it in the globe's finest raiment. Part of the measure of the writer is, therefore, in his collecting, presenting, staging.

Third Inning

GB's biotext lends itself to measurement by units larger than the line–by–line distinguishing marks (breaks, scars) of the lyric poem. The poet finds calibration within larger forms more fitting his stride. Indeed, the lyric itself becomes assimiliated into the book measuring aspects of the larger cosmology of locus. Where some leaning toward a book–based compositional aesthetic is evident, the measure of the poet is the book, the fragmented body as a biotext. Among the titles which fit this criterion are Rocky Mountain Foot, Baseball, Autobiology, George, Vancouver, Genève and Curious.

Visitors

Bruce Whiteman hauls up his bat for The Catch and is first faced with "George, Vancouver." Whiteman's stance is that "Bowering simply admires Vancouver for his way of dealing with the new land" (84). Struck with fancy, Whiteman is blind to this imaginative text where it is not "simply"—not simple at all—admiration George holds for George, but loathing as well. And "dealing with the new land" is simply not an attitude the poem is in sympathy with.

Whiteman, confused, takes a stab at "Autobiology." Hoping to get it defined he starts with "'Consciousness is how it is composed.' A life, in other words, exists in its telling" (84). But he changes his mind without following through, hoping to check his swing seeing that, in "Autobiology," "the life remains somehow unilluminated and unfocussed. One feels that there must be more to it than this particular telling" (85). If the life exists in the telling, there can't be more outside the telling—that's the premise of the work, according to Whiteman, so why he changes his strategy is as puzzling to me as it is to the umpire. But it is not successful and he strikes out.

It counts against Robert Billings, who is evidently concerned with the value to the consumer of literature, when he claims that several of GB's lyrics "can be read profitably without reference to the influence of Stein, Blake or Olson" (113). Were Billings willing to spend some time reading Stein himself he would not then puzzle at the impression created by "Autobiology," it being of "one long (and good) acid trip: the sentences speed along without commas (consciousness—thinking—has commas!) and all thoughts seem to have equal value" (114). All thoughts do have equal *status* in "Autobiology"—the child's fear of bugs in raspberries is as vivid as the adult's fear of a man's face at his girl's window—that's the point, but it counts against Billings. Commas in one's consciousness strikes me as ludicrous, and Billings, well, he is just struck (out).

With two down so quickly, the hapless visiting team is even now preparing to return to the field. But Terry Whalen, set to thinking at the plate, comes out with "More than any other poet in Canada I can think of, Bowering spends a great deal of energy measuring his relationship to other literary figures on the stage. He sometimes pokes at others with a stick" (Fiddlehead 103). With that sound base hit the visiting

team goes wild, that is, until they see that Bryan McCarthy is next up.

McCarthy hopes to hit Whalen home but has trouble hitting stationary typewriter keys let alone the pitched <u>Rocky Mountain Foot</u>. He is, however, impressed with GB's "apocalpytic [sic] vision of the city of Calgary," but he does not approve of the book despite its "apocalpytic" vision. Just to supply some performance statistics for this batter, the writing he is here on record as favouring is that of Alan Pearson whose "<u>14 Peoms</u> [sic]" is in "sharp salutatry [sic] contrast" to GB. I presume that "salutatry" is a mark of approval. He also admires Newlove's "America" as "cooly [sic] sardonic" among other poems "outstanding for intellectual grip." Milton Acorn has a "strong grip on reality" as opposed, supposedly, to Miriam Waddington's "womanish 'airy fairy' lyricism." Bringing these tastes to bear upon <u>Rocky Mountain Foot</u> and <u>The Gangs of Kosmos</u>, he writes: "More than 80 poems, spread with buttressing quotations" fill the former, yet "All too many pages are occupied by a tasteless, colourless, odorless, almost weightless verbal susbtance [sic]: the literary equivalent of cotton wool." I have my doubts that a "verbal susbtance" is also a literary substance, and I shudder to imagine a substance tasting of—what McCarthy admires in a poem—the "psychotic flavour of North American life." But I am certain that whatever substance this writing is its alimentary characteristics are beside the point, which goes to the pitcher. McCarthy himself is unsure what substance is before him, which perhaps explains the confused metaphors with which he describes it. What was "cotton wool" becomes "tumbleweed" and then it becomes the very opposite of benign—it actively murders: "A lightweight prose observation which would not distinguish a decent guide-book is tricked out as verse to kill a page with minimal exertion." McCarthy's foul play leaves him at 0 for 2—he decides to try another bat, only to find that <u>The Gangs of Kosmos</u> "tells a similar story." And what is similar about their stories? Why, the story written by Mr. McCarthy about them. "A few genuine poems [...] are packed in the deodorized poetical floss for which Bowering (not to mention his Tishy tribe) is becoming well-known." Oddly, McCarthy has earlier admitted that GB is not guilty of certain "amateurish defects" among which he lists "screeching emotionalism" and "strained metaphor"; McCarthy certainly *is* guilty of these, and with a third batter thus retired the home team comes to bat. The pitcher is first up.

> There comes a Time when you must Act
> they told me & I went into my role,
> tripping, really, across the stage till
> they said you idiot you know
> what we mean.
>
> Sure, do you, I replied, I the player
> in the first Act, the first half
> of the double header, the beginning
> of Thought.
>
> Will-ful man they said & I
> was reading Will, rounding the base,
> playing it too, picking it up & acting
> on all their opposing intentions, what they
> mean, poor visiting team at the dis-
> advantage.

"Play's a Thing" In the Flesh (85), and only in the flesh, only as a person acts it out, making it actual. "Man is not except as he does," we are told in "The Acts" where: "There are events & there are things but they are not actual until you are there to act. You are an actor & they are not & they may not act upon you" (A 73). At War with the U.S. tells us, "Now is the time we must take measures" ("1") and the measure of a man is evidently that he does: he is measured in acts and is not distinct from the play. It is not that the role is made to suit him, but he the role; in learning a role for a play Delsing didn't concentrate on the lines, he assumed the character so that people assumed he *was* the character. "The important thing was to be the character from the play all the time. The people that said oh, the part is just cut out for you, you'll just have to be yourself, those people were wrong" (D 86). If it were a matter of the role suiting Delsing the play would then be a metaphor for his life (other than the life). But because he cuts his life to the part he makes his life a piece with the play, and when it thus has a pattern, a measure, a form taken from art it is more satisfying, as is the orchestration Delsing liked in the airforce routine. He saw it as a form of art, comparing it to how "a stage actor feels when he knows for a certainty that the other people on the stage are going to say and do what he expects them to do, and knows that everything he does on the stage will have more direction and conviction behind it because it has a pattern, and therefore is more real than the conversation of people in timid working and playing and family real life" (D 387-8). The privileging of the ordered, crafted world as "more real" than chaotic real life corresponds to GB's privileging of craft over "unlearned instinct" poetry. Confirmation of one's situation is recognition of order, however unordered it may appear from another perspective. It is also, necessarily, recognition of identity manifest in the design, not prior to it or vilified by it but composed by it. The poet is composed by the composition, as he was in "The Desert Music" with its insistence that "I am a poet." GB's "The Flying Dream" is a more tentative placing of the poet: "I thought I was a poet, I had to be a poet or what was the use of learning words & being inside my skull rather than out there where they all are" (A 14).

The distance between the "working and playing and family real life," where "they all are," and the composing consciousness is affected by measure. Here, in excerpt, the poet addresses himself "To You & You" (IF 111):

> Keeping everything
> at its proper distance
>
> the story, split, of
> my life.

The measure is realized in (the) composition. Rocky Mountain Foot shows the pacing poet at some distance from the discourse of the politicians and oilmen though having no more affinity with the populace of the city; his expression is grounded in the local geography whose figures (Mt. Norquay, grass, dust) are markers the poet places himself with. His place is a terrestrial matrix maintained at a distance from social attachment. When offering The Concrete Island for publication, GB said it was "sorta in the manner" (letter to Anna Porter, 31 Jul. 1975) of the Alberta suite, though set in Montreal, and the lyrics leaved therein are, if anything, more impersonal. GB considers that, particularly with George, Vancouver and Genève, he found how to move away from the "danger of the lyric which is the personalism that's involved, the seeing things from that personal point of view" (qtd. in Stewart 28)

GB can be said to be finding his locus in language and specifically in the book, a unit itself composed of accreted acts by their juxtaposition refusing the closure each individually offers. When, in Outposts, GB describes George, Vancouver as "a collection of lyrics taken from different places, all on the same subject" (92) the move to make a spatial collage with a single figure is, curiously, both more personal than Rocky Mountain Foot and less so—it being a personal re-assessment of Vancouver's mapping poet mapped as a collage himself. The map's legend codifies the land in stages: elevations, topographical features, latitude are not absolute but relative measures founded upon others. Measuring relations between things instead of absolute quantities makes any map provisional, different from its territory and self-referential; it makes any map charted *différance*. The various categories of data, all on the same subject, make any map a palimpsest: elevation, "orographic and hydrographic configuration," latitude and longitude, even human settlement, to mention only a few, are each charts overlaid on a map. Various topographical features of George, Vancouver and Rocky Mountain Foot are evident as mapped in prose, verse, lists (as of Menzies' diary) and epigraphs. Typographical features expressed in italics, roman, upper and lower case, indentation etc. also present the text as a varied landscape, a trope which Barthes relates to staging: "'To stage' means: to arrange the flats one in front of the other, to distribute the roles, to establish levels, and, at the limit: to make the footlights a kind of uncertain barrier" (Roland Barthes 105). This is a montage of planes such that levels are created but not hierarchy, levels within the limits of the stage—something like each inning within the game. With the "footlights" an "uncertain barrier," perhaps even an arbitrary one, the potential transgression of this barrier becomes foregrounded rather than its status *as a barrier.*

Sharon Spencer, taking her notion of "closed structure" from Hugh Kenner's "Art in a Closed Field," attributes to several contemporary novels a—closed structure which is composed by "defining an arbitrary and fixed number of elements and by subsequently arranging these elements into patterns dictated by an arbitrary and invariable plan" (9). That "invariable plan" is in the composing, not the composition; it is exemplified in the composing of Autobiology as described by GB to David Rosenberg: "I gave myself a year to make 52 sections, partly because a year is 52 weeks, but also because it is my autobiology and 52 has always been an operative number in my life."[1] Hence, the ordering and fictionalizing of events selected from his early life was done from a frame of reference mapped by his middle-aged life—one year—where the pre-determined structure dictated the work's compass. That structure is a measure of his life, but it is also arbitrary; the narrative is in the composing, not what is composed. Similarly, the reader's composition constitutes a narrative in the continuity of her engagement with the text. Narrative is not, in GB's work, prior to the actualization of the text as mimetic or descriptive realism—would dictate it be. As GB himself said in the interview with Stewart, "That's why the form of Autobiology [1972] is so intent on making the present happen in the language. It's prose but its not prose that's saying 'this happened,' it's prose that's saying 'I'm happening.'"

The exclusively first-person point of view is a significant element of a closed structure as the "closed structure derives its essential features from the fact that only one perspective is permitted as a point of view upon the subject" (Spencer 26). The effect of the closed structure upon the reader is to distance the reader from the content and focus her attention on the structure of the work, because "Authors who have chosen to work with an exclusive single perspective and to close off their novels from surrounding contexts do not wish to explore their subjects. They wish to enthrall, to capture and to enchant the reader by insistence, by intensity and by prolonged exposure, so as to make him experience the reality of the ostensibly unreal" (Spencer 47). GB's story "Old Bottles" is a vivid example of such a closed structure where the understated narration, from a single perspective, brings the reader to doubt the sanity of the narrator whose quietude in the face of the glass tomb is itself "ostensibly unreal." The only window through which we see is discovered to be stained glass and "Verisimilitude is, then, beside the point" (Spencer 30). The closed structure which addresses its own telling is not concerned with realistic characterization, indeed, "character is likely altogether to disappear in a composition that is preoccupied with itself *as a composition*" (Spencer 6). It is not surprising, then, that the narrating "I" of Autobiology is not "fully drawn" but is a figure who inscribes himself within the text, acting, working by wearing the text as his skin—Autobiology does not describe what happened to "I," it's "I" happening, where you are. "Composition is not there it is going to be there and you are here," whether you are in "Composition as

[1] When asked why A has 48, rather than 52, chapters GB replied: "Even if the number you mentioned (say the no of weeks in a year) had declared itself for Autobiology I wd—not have consented. Wait'll you see Errata regarding that. 1948 my favourite year of all time, but that is not really it. 48 is a lovely number, 4 dozen, that stability. It gets divided into by a lot of numbers" (letter to the author, 31 Aug. 1988).

Explanation" or <u>Autobiology.</u> In Stein's works the reiteration of phrases creates an insistence upon the present (yes, you have seen that before and it may be monotonous but it is here, and what was before is here before you, too). It is a structure that produces the effect of monotony with movement, a structure both going on and re-calling itself in its own composition, as GB finds the urge to finish the book matched by the pleasure of the text. Where the teleology of reading becomes, then, uncertain, the reader becomes a composer rearranging the notes in orders dictated by no hierarchy.

Spencer quotes Gertrude Stein on the principles of cubism and relates them to literary art, appropriately, I believe. First is "the composition, because the way of living had extended and each thing was as important as any other thing." Secondly, reliance upon visual perception as absolute diminished. "Thirdly, the framing of life, the need that a picture exist in its frame, remain in its frame, was over," even to the extent that "pictures commenced to want to leave their frames" (Spencer 56), making the footlights of the stage questionable limits inviting transgression and re-creation. Thus, a structure composed of frames—the collective design of which is dictated prior to their genesis—is a closed structure; when the design is seen to be arbitrary and rearrangement is possible, the principles of composition are themselves the subject. The reader's own perspective is seen to be shaping, composing: composition is not over, it becomes open. "The open structure is a demand for the reader's acute concentration, and sometimes it is a demand, as well, for his active participation in the re-creation of the book" (Spencer 57). That re-creation is characterized by "a new alignment of elements: in particular, by the shattering of the 'frame' that allows the contents to spill out into life and that permits the artifacts of life to flow into the work." The withdrawal of the author is not the last word for the work, however. In commenting upon the delusion that a work of art can be "finished," Spencer writes that "every art work is but a fragment, an incomplete and forever tentative statement, partly dependent upon its audience for its meaning" (58). Its actualization demands a writing reader's presence.

In "The Spatialization of Time," Spencer agrees with Arnold Hauser and Joseph Frank who both (independently) conclude that "discontinuity and juxtaposition constitute the novelist's most effective approach to the destruction of linear chronology and to the reconstruction of events into spatial constructs" (156). All of GB's books are spatial constructions. This has already been remarked of <u>George, Vancouver.</u> Even those with a narrative "line," such as the novels, are not chronological (except for <u>Mirror on the Floor</u> and <u>Concentric Circles</u>). Curiously, the structure of <u>Delsing</u> is like that of <u>Burning Water</u> where two interpenetrating narratives, that of the writer and that of the subject, are juxtaposed. But certainly the discontinuity of parts in works such as <u>Curious, Genève, Allophanes</u> and <u>Autobiology</u> is more striking.

Time is made spatial in <u>Autobiology</u> as it measures spatial difference. In "The Next Place" (<u>A</u> 76), the next place is time—converted into a series of places, not developing upon but different from each other. With time thus spatialized into episodes, one "can, not, deny now that time is converted into space," because the "next place is really, a series of what they drank, & what they danced, & we were waiting,

always, for the time." And when the time *comes*, they *go*. Time similarly expressed as a measure of spatial difference in the reconstruction of events also directs GB's usage of the word "first" in Autobiology. "First" is either a lie, perpetually prefigured, or it is a marker differentiating between events. Illustrating the latter, the "first" time is the (lost) origin, as of first sex (where "I found myself for the first time in the present"), subsequent "presents" of which are anticipated by the "I" become self-conscious, in Stein's sense of human nature: "I came back again & found the dear path of putting it in but I was already not the same & each time thereafter I was only by memory & the gift of the present not the same, a little" (A 19). The other treatment of "first" in Autobiology pertains to the fabrication of origins. Was the writer excited at the publication of his first book? Well, it wasn't really the first; he had always been writing and had been published in the high school annual. Here was another first, by George. And each place is a new place, a "first" place: even the second town can be a "first," depending upon how it is reviewed. Hence, the artifice of originality is evident yet lost origins are, nevertheless, desired.

Kroetsch, too, is fascinated with the "dream of origins"; indeed, he considers it one of the bases of Canadian writing. Genealogy is one particular form this fascination with origins takes, according to Kroetsch; writing of "Canadian writing itself, in the past decade," he finds "in novel after novel, the quest is, implicitly or even explicitly, genealogical." And the "nature of the genealogical patterns, when tested by journey and quest, becomes more and more elaborate, more nearly a maze" (Essays 83). In these mazes there is no straightforward vilification of antecedents. An ambiguous relationship with the past results—GB's "Grandfather" poem is ironic and Kroetsch sees this as symptomatic of the ambiguity in our response to genealogy and history—"Our genealogies are the narratives of a discontent with history that lied to us, violated us, erased us even. We wish to locate our dislocation, and to do so we must confront the impossible sum of our traditions" (Essays 84). The locating of the dislocation which GB termed "deracination" has itself become a tradition in Canadian writing expressed in "our genealogies": in Wah's Waiting for Saskatchewan, Brandt's Questions I Asked My Mother, Newlove's "The Pride" or GB's George, Vancouver. This is genealogy such as Foucault describes when he claims that: "Genealogy does not oppose itself to history," but, "on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" (140). Foucault's illustration of this is, in fact, a genealogy branching from an individual *backwards* in time (four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, etc.) showing a heritage of multiple origins for any single individual. History, on the other hand, decrees a single trend or, sometimes, a chain of events leading directly to a unique first cause. Chauvinism of all sorts rests upon such a teleology which, in a Darwinian sense, has no tolerance of "losers" or marginalized peoples. They discover their own stories in genealogy, not history.

Kroetsch says that genealogy, as personal document, "is a naming act, but in a special way: the documentary act precludes all generalization. Document opens up the site; it is the archaeological act that

resists the over-arching generalization of history" (Essays 87). Genealogical naming is special, is spatial because, while it situates oneself in language, like any naming, it defers fealty to an antecedent. In genealogy the author's name, her locus, is that of a signifier located metonymically within a structure without an origin. One writes oneself into a system without a foundation, a groundless chasm, but one nevertheless writes, placing oneself. And, "unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of an author remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence" (Foucault 123). So the names "George Vancouver" and "George Bowering," names of authors figuring (in) their own texts, are related through a textual genealogy crossing the frames of their respective texts, graphing the one onto the other without regard for "the real person outside who produced it."

Trying to escape being composed by the text and knowing that he cannot because he is its medium, GB in his writing struggles to escape his own (imposed) limits, defining himself in that contest. Foucault considers this agony in "Preface to Transgression": "Rather than being a process of thought for denying existences or values, contestation is the act which carries them all to their limits and, from there, to the Limit where an ontological decision achieves its end; to contest is to proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where the limit defines being" (36). That articulate, empty core is also, you will recall, the model Delsing used to illustrate the ontological contest in which the writer defines himself as such, burning "until there is nothing left but a burnt-clean core, and that is writing."

Transgression of the code in Autobiology (39-40) takes the form of cracking the Captain Marvel code without paying for the key, defying an imposed behavioural code only to implement another—the expected prevalence of articles.

> It is not so much composing as the imposing & breaking the code to break the imposing. The letters are impostors easily broken.& composing is not there it is. going. To be there but we are here, on this side of the page begging to be seen. breaking. The code broken is no breaking of the law it is the discovering of the law. [...] I was still mosaic when I broke the puzzle & put it together with the help of the & a .

The "I" which cannot escape its own code of signification except by breaking it with a circumscribing code is caught in perpetually codified congress; "I" is always a mosaic, a composition of the fragmentary articles of a code. In "What is an Author?" Foucault claims that "the writing of our day" is "an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier. Moreover, it implies an action that is always testing the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates. Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind" (116). The accepted order "which is not so strange is the more used & it walks on its own number of legs & it goes there, there is the writing. When I got there it was not but when I was there it began to get there, it has managed to get there, especially when we do not manage" (A 93). More

strange is the particular *parole*, not the codified *langue* but the articulation which uses the rules and goes beyond them. Writing himself out of a network with another network the writer is a webbed construct in his writing. Hence, the image in "The Spiders" where the writer looks out in eight directions. This is not quite the "dead letters" of a purely formal system but certainly a web en-mazing the writer.

The address by a writer to his prescribed parameters is the subject of GB's "There's Handwriting on My Manuscript" where he chronicles the impact of the medium upon the composition with examples of Dr. Williams' prescription-form poems and the dictates of various notebooks in his own composition. Evidently the text itself, particularly its spatial dimensions and the architecture of the writer's method dictate the text, and when an author abdicates control of the text it is no longer an authorized product. As in "The Owl's Eye" (Touch 113), where "the pictures / they seem to write," the artist's work goes on without him. The text which draws (on) its own genesis transgresses conventional limits and, in fact, draws itself (up) in the gaping space left by the effacement of the writer who declines to "manage."

The role assumed by such a writer is that of a medium and the message is seen to change—the "change that comes at the beginning of the 70's is partly a turning away from the poem as object made, to the poem as poetic session recorded, GB says. The interest in the long poem, the serial poem, the novel as poem, gradually makes itself clear as an interest in language out of control of the writer and in control of itself" (Stewart 28). GB has, understandably, been impatient with a type of review which chides the writer for not being in control of his materials. It is the writer's situation *vis à vis* the writing which humbles the writer; he declines to rule the text. Explaining this position in Errata he writes:

> A small number of us on the West Coast make much of what we call dictated poetry. It is something we cherish as against the exploitive will, against the order of subjective description and anecdote. Of course we recite the examples Rilke, Yeats and Spicer. But of course we are not mesmeroids; we are more likely to be scholastics of verse practice. In an essay called "Concerning 'Adonis'," Paul Valéry probably most honestly or accurately put our case: "The gods in their graciousness give us an occasional first line *for nothing*, but it is for us to fashion the second, which must chime with the first and not be unworthy of its supernatural elder." In this way, failing or not, we turn our ears to the poem—it is its turn to take our attention. We will insult that first line the second we turn our hungry regard upon some "subject." We are priests, not monarchs. We have no subjects. A gift from the gods is not a licence to rule ["33"].

Receptive to the text and to its lead the writer admits indeterminacy into the composing—it is never sure, and it is never composed before the writing. GB thus treats the text as itself the message and not the dispensable bearer of an intended message; the method replaces the subject, stands in its place. Discussing his subject-made-method, the "human sentence," in Errata GB re-states his position that "you should not use poetry, just as you should not use people," because "Most of what we might discover is bypassed when we treat human sentences as message-bearers, dispensable when they reach their target. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog, but the dog can follow any scent that diverts him, in patterns that are never there till he is" ("37")

Essentially composing by admitting de-composition to the text, the writer facilitates the text's generation in a matrix. "The Breaks" which portion such a body place integration under erasure and acknowledge the place of caprice in disintegration and reintegration. Breaks force the realignment of tissue in patterns that are never there until you are: the mosaic, composed. "Those are the breaks. We make our own breaks. We learn to take advantage of the breaks. We step on the breaks. We apply the breaks. The breaks even themselves up. We dont ask for more than our share of the breaks. Those are the breaks of the game" (A 22). Broken lines measure a writer's game even up to the finish where the assembled pieces compose fertile ground. "When you're finisht with them words, throw the skins on the compost, will ya? / That is composition, autobiologist" ("XVIII," AI).

The body, broken, draws attention to its irregular portioning. The unscarred, regular body is a manifestation of an ideal form, of statuesque beauty; it displaces attention from itself representing, as it does, an abstraction. But the broken body is undeniably present, particular, and calibrated; if it will only "hold still. You bastard you bastard I said to my own body, part of my body I want you to hear about. It is my body and it rimes, this is the basis for composition & autobiology it is going to be there if you can hold still long enough for it" (A 95). Broken lines signify the poet's stride, his cadence, even in the "prose" of Autobiology. With "The End of the Line" (CCPA IV: 352) GB hits a line drive up the center: "I suppose that generally the line & its breakage represent or record the meeting of self & other, writer & universe, maybe body & mind." GB goes on to equate the heart-beat of personal consciousness with the forward urge of the line, and the shared principles of language's craft and form with the line-break, his own variation on "Projective Verse." Like Olson, GB would correct tired lines with attention to the syllables, technical craftiness as performed in "The Operations," where "The body of the work gets tired as the body gets tired & that is your own biology & it is not disaster, it may need an operation. Foot by foot, tonsils, appendix, hand & jawbone" (A 96). We "take advantage of the breaks" to re-knit the bones; becoming thus engaged in composing, the writing reader attends to structure in the practice of writing itself.

The discontinuity of brokenness, whether of images (as in H.D.'s Trilogy), form (as in The Wasteland) or structure (as in Mallarmé's "Un Coup de Dès") is standard in modern poetry. But in post-modern poetry the break dictation affects is primary to the writing act itself; this is a break in the composing where the writer is challenged by the text. Here the writer is, too, a reader forging continuity if only by the sequence of her engagement with the text. While he refuses to rule, I would never say that GB was letting his subconscious compose: no, I would never say that. But with an effort to let the momentary, immediate confluence of hand and paper shape the text this method suggests the composing Stein claims creates masterpieces. In "14 Plums" (107), GB dismisses the subconscious to explain the continual composing that enables consciousness:

D[avid] M[cFadden]: If there's no subconscious, who created us?
GB: I did! I did out of...(laughter)

S[haron] T[hesen]: 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 [...]. 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?

Portraits by anti-realist writers are not *of* things, they *are* things; in A Short Sad Book, GB writes that taking a photograph is "not preserving," it is "making a picture" (18). In Caprice, the photographer Minjus measures light and dark to make art which the artist is not the genius, but the medium, of: "you know it was made more by light than by you," GB says of photographs, and "I keep hoping that that is true about my books—or something that feels like that. Writing can be so nice when it is a snap" ("27," E). But the portrait is not, no more than is writing, a "snap." The careless reader might pass Genève off as descriptive portraiture: leaves of the poem as portraits of leaves in the deck. But, turning, the poem's leaves uncover their own faces at the pace of the writing reader who is reading tarot or reading a poem and writing her own life from th4at:

> (& YOU KNOW ALL ALONG it's myself
> I'm talking about,
> that discovering
> you're so wise about,
> I must walk
> my own allotment of steps)

The viewer thus actualizes the tableau such that portraits become mirrors.

Curious is a book composed of portraits—both typographic and photographic—inseparable from the composer's autograph. These portraits are not copies of life but artificial life. They are imitations of writers, in writing, but it is the writing and not the writer that is portrayed. When he wrote to the editors of Curious (to Carol and Linda at Coach House, 20 Apr. 1973), GB insisted that "The most important part" of the book was the disclaimer: "The characters in this book are all creations of the / author's imagination. Any resemblances to actual / people, living or dead, are coincidental." It is significant that a convention of realism would be emphasized by GB in an evidently non-realist work. Here the portraits are not description but creation. Of "authors about whom one writes," Barthes says that "their influence is neither external nor anterior to what one says about them" (Roland Barthes 107). That is, these portraits are GB's creation of his influences and his antecedents. By saying that this is creation in the disclaimer GB disavows description; he also, and in the same words, indicates that he is lying since the portraits depend upon reference—the writer renouncing that makes the reader aware that the writer is fabricating.

When an author writes his own influences and writes himself, yet by reading the text he is given, notions of "authority" and "originality" dissolve. The writer is a reader invited to actualize a text, and the

author has become a concept employed to give stability to a group of texts among which genealogies and dependencies are established. But it is no less valid to establish genealogical relationships outside of a single author's work. Thus, any unity attributed to an author's work is a fabrication distorting the work by cloaking heterogenous elements in nominal homogeneity. In <u>Allophanes</u> the homogeneity is just that—nominal.

Fourth Inning

Visitors

Terry Whalen comes to bat, bursting in with: "<u>Allophanes</u> is one of Bowering's least engaging works, one in which the poem is a lexical playfield" (<u>CP</u> 35), although, as it is not engaging, Whalen refuses to play. Sulking, he takes his first strike. Whispering behind the plate, other of his teammates are eager to play. Among them is John Orange for whom the recognition of space as a playfield alone suggests that it is enticing; as for play not being engaging, he mumbles that the "energy and playfulness in many sections are in themselves enough to recommend the poems."

Whalen's aloofness is the result of his misunderstanding, evident when he inaccurately paraphrases the poem. He claims that it "has a direct didactic aim" (<u>CP</u> 35), so it must be *more* than a playfield, then; curiously, he doesn't state that aim, ambiguously characterizing the poem as "about the nexus between discourse and power" (<u>CP</u> 35). Moving beyond ambiguity to contradiction in the same paragraph, Whalen cites Ken Norris, agreeing that: "Neither the reader nor the poet is ever quite sure of exactly what is taking place," which is surely not the condition of direct didactic discourse. He takes a strike, too.

Not allowed a pinch hitter after two strikes, Whalen goes the next best and grabs another bat. Attacking <u>Allophanes</u> in another article, he there explicates its covert didactic aim and its method: "<u>Allophanes</u> unmelts authority by unmelting literature by unmelting quotable lines from the seized up literature of the past" (<u>Fiddlehead</u> 106): a kind of <u>Beautiful Losers</u> in verse, "what it seeks above all is to upend our (assumed) servility before authoritarian, literary, and political structures" (<u>Fiddlehead</u> 106), hence the "deprogramming aim of the suite." With such a weighty purpose why, one wonders, would GB display "a collage of intentional disorientations" (<u>Fiddlehead</u> 106); that is, why would he "opt for the chaos of collage over the more readable and convincing strategy of narrative hard work" (<u>Fiddlehead</u> 109), as Whalen claims he does. Perversely, Whalen insists on imposing a more "readable" narrative upon this poem thereby swinging at a pitch of his own creation. He takes a strike with a foul ball.

Whalen's confusion causes a third strike to be counted against him when he criticizes GB's "penchant for treating his audience as a relatively slavish lot in need of mental renovation at very rudimentary levels" (<u>Fiddlehead</u> 105) while, in the same article, remarking that "Bowering often damages his amiable contact with his readers by expecting too much of us." Discordant voices break onto the field, arguing whether, indeed, GB asks "too much" of the reader. "The rewards can be considerable for the reader who 'takes his time,'" one asserts, "then the collaborating reader will find many delightful passages in this volume" (Orange 106). His companion agrees, saying that to "make <u>Allophanes</u> come alive, the reader has to help it happen, to participate and play with it" (Oughton 20). Emerging to play with <u>Allophanes</u>, the next batter is Bruce Whiteman.

Whiteman finds the form of _Allophanes_ in its composing rather than the composition; he says that "the form of the poem may be assumed to be that period of time during which the poet, sitting at his desk or otherwise engaged, is given to hear the outside coming in" (87). Whiteman's reverential attitude to the notion of Outside occasions his defense of it from the "mere collage or unconscious rambling" (87) he feels it necessary to slap GB's wrists for. Seeing himself as a priest defending the mysteries from opportunists like GB, Whiteman assumes "the role of a Celsus" (87) and cautions against those who "prophesy at the slightest excuse," shaking his head at GB's high, over-arching pitch. Unfortunately, the pitch strikes Whiteman as "mere collage" and he takes his base with the sombre admonishment: "It is a danger to be kept in mind" (88).

In the hush following the swing, the next batter is heard prattling as he advances to the plate. Michael Brian Oliver's jauntiness is in sharp contrast to Whiteman's sombre tone, and he first addresses the pitch with familiarity:

> Yes, everything about this sounds familiar, but it is all juggled just enough to make it sound almost profound, sort of a hipster's _Waste Land_. Only it isn't hip. The central metaphor of this poem, and of many of Bowering's poems, is that everything is a baseball game. Well, as Holden Caulfield said so long ago, 'Game my ass.' Sorry, George, but games are simply not hip: their predetermined, moral structures are antithetical to the hip life which is open, free, and flowing.

It strikes one that Oliver cannot disparage _Allophanes_ for the familiarity of its concerns, even its diction, when he himself uses quotation—and from a literary source of "so long ago" which, nevertheless, has evident relevance for Oliver. Secondly, poetry, or language of any sort, is governed by rules—predetermined, moral—yes, moral—structures. Oliver himself is denying the "hip life," as he defines it, simply by writing.

Yet he is trying again. This time the swinger insists that the "roots of _Allophanes_ are surreal, and its message is orthodox existentialism." But even the umpire's face twists in perplexity imagining "surreal roots" and "orthodox existentialism." Ejected, Oliver oozes from the field to pursue the flowing, "hip" life elsewhere as, from the dugout, his teammates are in as much disagreement as Oliver himself.

Considering "Allophanes" as collected in _West Window_, "things go downhill" for reviewer Jon Pierce when he comes to that poem; he agrees with Oughton that "'Allophanes' is the most modernist (read difficult) selection" (Oughton 20). Orange disagrees, saying that other parts of _West Window_ "are boring, while _Allophanes_ (1976) is beginning to look better and better." But Pierce persists, although in "The Poet as Traveller" he refuses to be, like Al "Chemical" Rose, a "wild skier" himself: "'Allophanes,' another twice-recycled piece, supposed on the poetic process, is virtually incoherent, with the exception of a single moderately lucid section on history." Another voice breaks in at the mention of history,

commenting that it is a more than "moderately lucid section" of the poem. "This is almost a metaphysical poem, deeply concerned with history and theology" (Holland). Certainly, asserts another player, "'Allophanes' is a metaphysical poem," one "in which Bowering explores the meaning of life and language" (Girard). Paying as much attention to the unruly players at the margins of the field as to the batter, the umpire struggles with these illegitimate voices bursting in out of turn; the form of the game has taken a decidedly informal turn. As to the "meaning of life and language," this is too much: the players are revolting. From the bullpen the relief pitcher, Delsing, has been warming up until his temper flares and, irritated, he shouts at the noisy dugout: "Probably if something had come to me that I knew what it meant, it wouldn't have been worth putting down" (D 309). Delsing is not the only player to revolt—from the visiting team's dugout Robert Kroetsch and Steve McCaffery emerge and cross the field to join the home team while the umpire screams for silence; still, the accursed are full of passionate intensity.

Amid this cacophony Bob Lincoln is disoriented. Coming to bat in Quill & Quire he shrugs his shoulders and takes a mighty swing. Not making contact, he nevertheless runs, screaming, to first base.

> The poem is not a formal descent into hell, nor is it a pilgrimage; yet it has elements of both. There is no one here to guide us. The poem does make some direct judgments: "Hell is filled with those who have / lost the good of the intellect," and "Does not the eye altering alter all?" Dante had a place for himself in hell, but in this poem one is unsure if Bowering has intended the same. He covers himself: "If you don't [sic¹] understand the story you'd better tell it." This poem takes the chance of becoming a parody of itself. Perhaps the only comfort possible is that the dead may be judged by those things that have been written in the books of life.

A veritable cacophony unto himself, puzzled faces try to follow one *non-sequitur* after another, but even the most sympathetic audience is lost when he calls a question a "direct judgment" and extends his penchant for the judgmental to the dead being judged in the "books of life"; Lincoln is a confused player who is easily put out at first by an equally puzzled baseman.

Home

Confusion is actually not an inappropriate response to this hellish pitch—"this prepronominal *funferal*, engraved and retouched and edgewiped [...] as were it sentenced to be nuzzled over a full trillion times for ever and a night till his noddle sink or swim by that ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia" (Joyce, Finnegan 120). It is darkly obscured even to its self-contained, ideal reader: "He's

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¹GB characteristically omits the apostrophe from contractions; Lincoln's misquote of Allophanes is here quoted exactly.

ninety years old & he sits reading in the pitch / black night."[1] Devoid of illumination, he yet can see in the pitch the black night, window on the void he reflects upon.

> Not seeking to under
> stand this world
>   (I am making)
> but to put his hands
> into it, to continue
> shaping what he is.

Shaping what he is, the reader peers at this black night window–turned–mirror telling his own story: as he looks, "The writing finger moves on / & the sentence continues." While inconclusive, "If you dont understand the story you'd better tell it," so vital is that story. Such an opaque story draws attention to itself, to its expression as to a stained glass window instead of a transparent window. Stories that are transparent pretend not to bring artifice to bear upon their subject; stories that are the most easily understood are propaganda. When you understand that, you no longer seek to understand the world's, his, story.

> history is a thing.A dead language
> in which all words
> describe, & refer.

> you may understand history because you made it.

> You will never understand nature
> because you are nature,

and, as nature, what the reader is is open, alive, he cannot be enclosed by an expression totalling his value. He's poet's work, and "a work whose only meaning resides in its being a self–enclosed expression of its glory is no longer possible" (Foucault 60). The work is not made, but its making is imperative—"Choose becoming / over being"—yet with an awareness of paradox. We are led to choose the open, processual form of human life in which "we are engaged. / Language rings us," however, even there, and we recognize the inescapable rigidities of language as a system.

Networks of significance woven in threads of common metaphor, common speakers, even the commonness of tone enable one to abstract from this poem a formal model and analyze it. When Kroetsch attempts to do just that he declares its structure to be that of a maze. More particularly, it is a maze where "voices threaten to override the voice" (Essays 84), thereby drawing attention to the composition of the maze as to *parole*, not *langue*: the actual play of an abstract game.

The basic play of this game and, as Foucault claims, of all literature, is associative. In severing lines and rejoining them to pieces from other texts a "void has been hollowed out in which a multiplicity of

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[1]This is from "Allophanes" as printed in WW (104); subsequent quotations from this poem will be taken from the first edition of Al without acknowledgement.

speaking subjects are joined and severed, combined and excluded" (42). Both prolific and devouring, "Man is nature, devouring, / man is culture, fueling language." Which is why language, the medium of the poet, must be both the stock, self-contained *langue* and the dynamic, indeterminate *parole*. "Language, in this case English or French, is not spoken. It speaks" (GB, CS 140). And the present participle recalls but alters the (finished) past. "The language / is not spoken, / it speaks." That is, "language is not spoken. It speaks" (GB, CCPA I:2). Where GB qoutes himself, showing the "thingness" of the quote—its integrity as a unit—its status as a token is of the order of *langue*, not *parole*—yet he is saying the language is not so given to precedent, but to currency.

Understanding is "distinct from, though not opposed to, Reason," GB wrote in his notes for Allophanes. Reason is killed by contradiction; understanding is capable of vacillating in contraries without any irritable reaching for facts. Allophanes is understood as a graph of contradiction—against the Word—denying the finitude of the Word while desiring it, as Kroetsch explains:

> The problem for the writer of the contemporary long poem is to honour our disbelief in belief—that is, to recognize and explore our distrust of system, of grid, of monisms, of cosmologies perhaps, certainly of inherited story—and at the same time write a long work that has some kind of (under erasure) unity.
> And yet the long poem, by its very length, allows the exploration of the failure of system and grid. The poem of that failure is a long poem [Essays 92].

The poem of that failure leads the reader to realize the impossibility of what the poem says; successfully communicating its failure the poem asserts *"Credo quia absurdus sum,"* and is, itself, absurd. "The / purposefull suspension of disbelief / has about the chance of a snowball in hell" (Spicer 226). Believe it: "The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven." That impossible snowball melts and renews itself throughout the poem, eternally dying and being—well, being reborn.

In GB's notes for Allophanes he wrote that "understanding partakes of Death (disappearance of Discourse)." Death figures (en)closure in *langue*, but writing is *parole* discovering and moving towards that closure where it will be understood and no longer necessary. As old as the word, Foucault tells us (quoting Blanchot), is the desperate writing so as not to die and "it is quite likely that the approach of death—its sovereign gesture, its prominence within human memory—hollows out in the present and in existence the void toward which and from which we speak" (53). "Oh dread! what enters / to fill that space?" That void is the condition in which our speech is manifest; it is that absence whose trace stains all discourse. Hence, this phenomenology of *parole* posits it as the *langue* marked by death. Where you "Open me not to find a beating heart / but the irregular book of my people," this *parole* comes into being articulating its death and the perpetuation of *langue*. Language (as commonly used to denote both *langue* and *parole*), is understood, therefore, as the negation of he to whom it gives expression.

In the notes taken for Allophanes, GB scribbled: "language not self, but first expression of that which is not self." Erasing identity in language is a consequence both of the posture whereby *parole*

speaks the death of its speaker and of the formalistic constraints imposed upon individuality by its expression in a shared medium. Clearly, Allophanes displays both means of erasure. In the multitude of quotations a riot of *parole*—I say "riot" to suggest the incongruous juxtaposition of verbatim James Joyce and devilish puns on pristine cultural figures ("& where has Maud gone?")—interrupts itself.

> Dr Babel contends
> about the word's form, striking
> its prepared strings
> endlessly, a pleasure
> moving rings outward thru
> the universe.All
> sentences are to be served.

This constant diffusion is, of course, itself a form. In her book Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel, Spencer catalogues works such as Allophanes as "open-structured" and "the creators of open-structured works aspire toward the approximation of diffusion; of flux; of constantly forming, dissolving, and re-forming among the elements of the work" (52). Flux as a form is inherently paradoxical. It would seem, simply because it has "unity"—however fragmented its structure—to graph closure and end, affirming death. In "A Fake Novel," Spicer wrestles with formal resolution, agonizing that: "The dead are not alive. That is what this unattractive prose wants to stamp out. Once you see an end to it, you believe that the dead are alive" (152). Open structures (frictive, rough surfaces—unattractive as they are) do not admirror the traditional beauty, yet invite polishing, as Williams said, finishing (not finished, but the present participle in process of understanding (inviting active participation by the viewer rather than the passive admiration as of one parenthesis for another ("The closed parenthesis reads: the dead bury the dead, / and it is not very interesting" (Olson, Selected Writings 161), which is self-interested) incompletion—"the long ellipsis that is Bowering's poem" of ghostly echoes (Kroetsch, Essays 100). Because of the open structure the reader is an integral element of the poem's order; its form is closed only should the reader choose to bring resolution.

Drawn out, the poem draws (with)in itself articulations which antedate and will postdate itself. Jorge Luis Borges writes "that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."[1] Merely by quoting (or misquoting) GB draws the source into his own work and makes it present, contemporary, whether the lines lead from bpNichol or Hermes Trismegistus. But what Borges is proposing is a more radical interdependence where GB re-composes his precursors. And, as Foucault pointed out, the name of an author is unlike that of a fleshly being because what is an author but the sum of their works? I may say I read Spicer and I do not refer to blemishes, body language, etc., but to texts. GB, then, is bringing Spicer into the present poem, re-formulating him

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[1] This is by Borges, from "Kafka and His Precursors," in Other Inquisitions (108). The dissemination of this quote itself throughout postmodern writing is intriguing; it was chosen by Foucault as an epigraph to Language, Counter-Memory, Practice; it was also chosen as an epigraph by John Barth for his seminal essay on the "Literature of Exhaustion."

and animating him as an author. "Allophanes then, emerges beneath two signatories, two proprietors: the author (George Bowering), whose proper name will authenticate the book, and a dictator, Jack Spicer, a disembodied voice, whose proper name re-formulates the deceased" (McCaffery 131). Nominal re-formulation by the orphic invocation of a name ("*El verbum cano factum est*") provides a text with a body because "a name is the same name that has a property. A property right" (Spicer 156).

The name adds space, McCaffery agrees, adding that "to these names we will add the snowball in hell, as a blank, yet eponymous space, placed in Allophanes prior to all metaphoric operation and akin to the arche-sentence, providing the *condition*, not the sense of, Allophanes as a writing" (131-2). As the condition of the poem's writing this dictation is the opening of the field to chance, peripheral association and, above all, to vacillation between self-effacement and presentation. Just how seriously GB takes this sense of the "condition" of writing is clear when he says, "I think of myself as the audience, as listening to the voices as coming to me from wherever they're being dictated from, but not myself as the maker of the sounds that the audience is going to hear" (Eggertson). Hear, then, "Bowering: the poem become notation" of which "We try to read, not what is in the book (that failing) but the book itself. The poet, then, not as maker, but as book-maker" (Kroetsch, Essays 104), is here present(ed) to the reader.

GB's concern for the book certainly did extend to the making of the book—*this* book in particular. Proofs were corrected, returned and disregarded as the book was printed without regard for the specifications GB had made for revising the spacing. So, GB wrote to the publisher of Allophanes with an appeal to "count the spaces carefully. They mean more to this poem than to any I've done (or will do)—in fact they're in many ways the content" (GB to Coach House, 3 May 1976). This privileging of space over what occupies it characterizes architectonic writing as described by Spencer: "In architectonic books, words bear the same relationship to the whole as do bricks, stones, steel rods, and concrete blocks to a building. This relationship is more accurately structural than expressive. The meaning of the book, then, is no longer *in* the words, but arises [...] from the tensions among the elements of the composition in their various juxtaposed arrangements" (169). But those arrangements, with their gaps—interstices, synapses—are compositions of

> space in which the directions are by no means equivalent, a space encumbered by
> objects that distort all our trajectories, and where movement in a straight line from
> one point to another is generally impossible, a space with open or closed regions,
> the interior of objects [the primary snowball—O] for example, and above all, a
> space involving a whole organization of links between its different points—means
> of transport, references—so that the proximities we experience are not at all
> reducible to those of cartography [Butor 22].

Hence Kroetsch's observation that voices threaten to override the voice; the points defy the cartography.

The map is not the territory, but we have a map before us, any point of which may lead to Joyce, Spicer, Yeats, Merleau-Ponty, Pope, as well as to other grid coordinates of the map; each pathway is

crossed by others, some relatively distinct and others distorted by misquotation or playing obscurity. Within this matrix there are, as Butor supposed there would be, "closed regions" embodied in "the marginal sentence, phrase, or word," which "is not directly attached to something that precedes or follows it in the disclosure of the line, groove, or tape, but is rather the source of a certain illumination increasingly noticeable the closer one gets; it is like an ink spot which soaks in, which spreads ['See the word made white & melting'], and which will be counteracted, contained, by the spreading of the next spot" (51). One might say of the text that "It is the pattern of snowballs / thrown against a maroon wall." Hence, in the space of this text a metaphysical space/time framework, derived from Newton and Euclid rather than Einstein, is disturbed. In Allophanes "Space, as we experience it, is not at all the Euclidean space whose parts are mutually exclusive. Every site is the focal point of a horizon of other sites, the point of origin of a series of possible routes passing through other more or less determined regions" (Butor 37). "No place on Earth / is the centre of the world, / it is the centre of the world." Every site, then, radiates—is at once the "center and circumference" (Olson, Special View 45), a focal point whose "edges," according to Butor, are "the words which immediately precede and follow it" (52). "Any word or group of words embodies its own comment both upon itself and upon the adjacent words or phrases, even if they are simply listed next to each other" (Spencer 75). Naturally, then, "Any quotation necessarily incorporates a perspective on the subject of the book in which it is cited" (Spencer 143), and perspective and structure are, therefore, inseparable.

There are three basic structures which diagram the use of quotation in Allophanes. First, the palimpsest where a (prior) text is evident. Thus have I seen the best mined, lines recognizably misquoted which "ne'erdowell exprest." Second, at times one is unsure where the voice is coming from and may even wonder was that a real poem or did GB just make that up. This second structure I would graph as a discontinuous function, a line with a hole in it. The apparition of these faces is ghostly, indeed. Then, the latter problem leads to a further—feared quotation. As there are passages the reader is pretty sure lead (from) elsewhere, the intermittencies of the art are such that the entire text may be fraught with such passageways. With no verification of such a structure possible it is the graph of mere anarchy loosed upon the word—every word becomes a trace, an alibi, becomes suspected of being other than what it is presented as. Then what lies before you, this writing, is itself the product of "writing not in order to get closer to what is to be said, but in order to get away from it. Writing with the greatest application, I invariably end up wide of the mark" (Michaux, Major Ordeals 31). Although wide of the mark it points to, with each attempt to grasp that mark writing notates the limitations of its reach—formal and traditional constraints come to the fore and the word can do no more than re-produce its longing and itself. When it is thus "Present only in its repetition the word becomes sensed as a *betweeness* [sic]" (McCaffery 141)—a "betweeness" whose meaning (denotation, reference) is absent but whose structure (grammatical conformity) is reproducible. Throughout Allophanes images, for a start, regenerate themselves as examples of such "betweeness" ("●," "⚶"). So do words ("cano," "lives & lives & lives"), phonemes ("neo

classical / Neal Cassady," "knee / oh / class / equal") and graphemes ("O," "I"). Morphemes become graphemes ("He," "He'll say that's what they all / say," "He'll freeze to death, he obviously needs help," "Hell," "Hermes," "Here I am," "Hera's clitoris," "Hear a / dead face," "Heaven," "headline in Hell," "Here is the theology") and, in so doing, multiply the discrete, closed regions of the text. A word like "He'll" is seen to present a spatial juxtaposition of the morphemes "He" and "Hell"; in fact, all words appear to be montages of such units and invite decomposing by the identification of the closed regions inscribed: "help" is a morpheme decomposed by its proximity to "Hell" and "He." Evidently, then, quotation is only one aspect of Allophanes which signalizes both the spatialization of the text and the rupture of that space. There are elements both larger and smaller than the quoted phrase which share this property.

In Allophanes, intertextuality is composed by re-inscribing prior alphabets, prior script—not only quotations. It draws its own history as well as drawing upon its history in present re-formulation. "A dead language / in which all words / describe, & refer," such a language is not that of Allophanes. Even the artifacts of "dead" languages, like the aleph or the iconic Astarte, are vivified as contextualized anew. GB's notes for Allophanes say that a "poem presents a field, does not represent it": although the text bears witness to its antecedents their inscription is made new. "You are not rereading," GB tells us in Errata, "pay attention—see? You are just reading" ("3"). And, however aged the material, situated in a different context it is regenerated. The artifacts of dead languages give the texture of montage to their present context and Allophanes is montage which is constantly changing the reader's perspective. It is difficult to read literature, I think, without seeing in it echoes of Allophanes. So the dynamism of their context alone ensures the revitalization of Astarte, the aleph, and the roman numerals. Far from dead letters, they nevertheless refer to "dead" languages and to their abortive signification therein. "A dead letter is there because / it has no longer real addresses" (Spicer 162). A dead letter is not going anywhere. —

<blockquote>
This is not going,
anywhere, not going,
anywhere, not,
going, I dont seem to be,
going.Anywhere.
</blockquote>

Not going anywhere (but doing so in the present participle) by its repeated inscription alone this phrase becomes a "closed region" of the text—isolated as an icon and intoned repeatedly it re-produces the structure of ritual. With such figures the text presents a "meticulous re-staging of images [which] creates the effect of a weaving (the etymological source of the word 'text') that promotes an undecidability between an abstract, formalist pattern and a shifting representational meaning," an undecidability that is the condition of "the literary order, where the focus is not on explicating the productional operation of the developing text, but on the spatio-temporal play of the surface" (McCaffery 139-40). This is not progress but process: going—anywhere, perhaps, or not—intransitively.

Spatio-temporal play is primary in <u>Allophanes</u> where temporal progression is by accretion rather than development and is shown spatially. In the numbering of chapters, for instance, we move from "X" to "XI," then "XII." The introduction of a new figure ("XIV") distinguishes one sub-group of chapters from another, much like the marginal justification of alignment among passages. Two stanzas indented equally "speak" to each other as like to like—liking to find common ground. In this spatial feature the passage of time is calibrated, as it "is by shifting our gaze within a clearly imaginable space that we can actually follow the march of time, study its anomalies" (Butor 22). This is the principle illustrated by Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase"—a progression implied in a sequence presented spatially, it is also one moment identified in terms which compare it to another—the interdependence and simultaneity of spatial presentation. The numbering of chapters in <u>Allophanes</u> is made a spatial presentation of temporal movement by the selection of roman numerals instead of arabic ones; hence the phenomenon of accretion. But one cannot (at least I can't) miss the double duty roman numerals do as letters—both letters and numerals simultaneously.

Any text is a two-dimensional matrix insofar as the "book, as we know it today, is [...] the arrangement of the thread of speech in three-dimensional space according to a double module: length of line and depth of page, an arrangement which has the advantage of allowing the reader a great freedom of movement in relation to the 'unfolding' of the text, a great mobility which most nearly approximates a simultaneous presentation of all parts of a work" (Butor 42). GB sees his work as facilitating such mobility on the part of the reader due to its spatial dimension. In a letter (19 Jan. 1976) to Victoria Walker, he writes: "I just tool along, making the universe's work, and people see something there and something else there. All my poems are holographs you can walk around." In this initial proximity of reader and text the "text is immediately seen as compact or ventilated, amorphous, regular or irregular" (Butor 52) in its phanopœic dimension, and presents the "simultaneous exposure to our eyes of what our ears can grasp only sequentially" (Butor 40). This primary experience of a text as presence most nearly precludes interpretation and intellectualization of that text, insofar as "My consciousness cannot grasp what I see, my eye distinguishes but my mind sees all as a whole, is slow in individualizing one after the other in elements of the field of vision, in recognizing the objects. It is an effort to have to apprehend them rapidly and successively with their attributes, their function, their signification. To identify them" (Michaux, <u>Major Ordeals</u> 56). All appearances inhere simultaneously and are present(s) to the reader, varying with the capacity for reception in the altering eye. But the reader sees a numeral one time and a letter another—the same figure interpreted as being another symbol—which shows the active creation by the reader of the text. Blind readers trying to understand the snowball are in a circle of hell, a hell filled with those who have "Lost their *parole vide*, / unable to serve their sentences in the dark." Where one has no eyes—that is not *polis*, but hell.

Perspective structures the world, and language is a perspective on that world. Simply put: "Language: the word as EYE" (Kroetsch, Essays 29). In Allophanes we face a subject, the inscribed "I," composing with another I's words and making an other's language—the "irregular book of my people"—another eye. "Does not the eye altering alter all?" It would appear to, but in abdicating control, refusing to subject, the "I" risks the "vision" of the art work itself and, hence, its self-effacement. He must "fail at suicide, / barely" for there to be any art work at all, any perspective at all.

> There is no perspective
> when the eye is transparent.
> When the author dies
> I disappear.

In privileging space over all else in this poem, GB emphasizes that it is not what the words say but their presence that signifies. That presence is not at all disembodied—quotations bring their own spatial identity into the poem. Hence, Allophanes is the site where books are made in a palimpsest; books whose text figures in Allophanes (and who can claim to enumerate every one of these?) point to their "antecedents" and so on in an endless genealogy. This genealogy fans at an exponential growth rate as each focal point radiates toward several "antecedents"—the text creates its own precursors and ultimately the Word, the Logos itself. And here "There is a dilemma: either all these books are already contained within the Word and they must be burned, or, they are contradictory and, again, they must be burned" (Foucault 67) "—burn the books / burn the books" are the horns of this dilemma. "And thus the paradox: if we make a book which tells of all the others, would it or would it not be a book itself [Foucault 67]?" Bertrand Russell formulated such a paradox dealing with a class of classes, asking whether such a class is itself one of its own members—in fact, circumscribing itself. If so, it confuses language and metalanguage or, as in this case, books and a book-about-books. Foucault claims that:

> Literature begins when this paradox is substituted for the dilemma; when the book
> is no longer the space where speech adopts a form (forms of style, forms of
> rhetoric, forms of language), but the site where books are all recaptured and
> consumed: a site that is nowhere since it gathers all the books of the past in this
> impossible 'volume' whose murmuring will be shelved among so may others—after
> all the others, before all the others [67].

The content of Allophanes creates just such a formal paradox, capturing (prior) texts which are made new. But the structure of—not merely the text—the book is itself a paradox. Any book, according to Butor, is a "diptych" merely because we are presented with two distinct pages at a single glance. Allophanes becomes a three-dimensional triptych due to a "profound discontinuity": "Through a fold in the paper, the cover's underside becomes a surface. The triangular excision in this way serves to frame a part of the cover's unexposed side. As a result of this cut and fold, the cover's recto-verso distinction collapses and a profound discontinuity is produced upon the cover's plane" (McCaffery 133) whereby the book itself is made a catastrophic site, folding upon itself and disturbing the unitary plane of a diptych.

The fold is the simplest of the catastrophes—"a discontinuity or instability in a system" (McCaffery 136)—and is evident in numerous dimensions of Allophanes. One such fold exists in Allophanes in the form of the received dictation, "The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven." Hell–0. "At times the condition of change, at times the change itself, the sentence [...] will raise constantly the question of the productivity of its own significatory ground," hence, "where space explicates itself [...] hell's snowball is born into writing *as a writing*, a dictated and a written moment that asserts its identity as its own rupture, signalizing the opening of the moment into the multiplicity of which Allophanes will be the trace" (McCaffery 132). This rupture, so identified, is what McCaffery designates the "matrix sentence"; it would be, for Butor, a "closed region":

> It enters the textual economy as a perverse 'fold' in the writing and similarly participates without membership. Rendering *all* quotations in Allophanes contaminated, this sentence further prevents the writing from being a first order operation. The writing cannot even gain an innocence but must inscribe itself and its implications inter–textually, with a constant referral to another voice beneath the surface of the writing, held absent but constantly recalled inside of the writing's shifting scenes [McCaffery 135].

Re–staging its seems as the I's altar all appearances inhere in the fragments—phanopieces—"the fragments (Heraclitus) of Bowering's Allophanes: all/appearances/sound/voice [...]. The poem with no more chance than. The poet as skillful alchemist who changes sound into silence" (Kroetsch, Essays 100). Transmuting aural experience to a written, silent one, the poem *shows* rather than *tells* of its re–construction of blown fragments. Yet it transmutes again: here there are phonetic chains of rhyme, as usual in a poem, but imaginal chains too, as in the metamorphoses of the snowball into a "perfect smooth black orb" and "the word made white and melting." There is also the physical recurrence of black dots on the page, of "o" and "O." McCaffery suggests that we can "think of this letter as the snowball's anasemic state [...]. In acknowledging this anasemic element in Allophanes we open up the poem to a bewildering play within its own micro–structures. Wherever an O occurs (in 'god' and 'dog' for instance) then the catastrophic moment takes effect" (137). "Morphemes fall in flames from the tree" in this perfor(m)ative text whose elements—morphemes and phonemes—perform alchemical rites opening fissures and re–fusing "the fine étude of man." (*Fin*, again, is his name.) "Things fit together. We knew that—it is the principle of magic. Two inconsequential things can combine together to become a consequence. This is true of poems too. A poem is never to be judged by itself alone. A poem is never by itself alone" (Spicer 61). The poem is never by itself—though distinguished as such—alone. "(Put the contraries / back into mortal life.") Recognizing common ground yet without losing its uniqueness each poem, each line, each morpheme is integral; is (a)part. "Recognitions. Like coyotes, howling in the night. The way the blood, then, moves differently" (Kroetsch, Essays 65). The simultaneity of familiar and unfamiliar, indeed their causal connection approximates the form of Allophanes, where "literature / must be thought, now."

<p align="center">What off
was Thoth</p>

but ne'erdowell
exprest.

It is a creation at once familiar and de-familiarizing—even threatening. "His thought threatens him, it is / the perilous deterioration of dynamite," the explosion of which initiates the thinker into a world without icons where inspiration is associative rather than generative and spirit is what you make of it. "The winds scatter fragments of the exploded gods. / Fall leaves blowing about one's feet. / Cross yourself."

While the feet are constant, you never step into the same quote twice; even idols are re-composed when situated at a unique contextual address. They de-compose too, from what they were to what they are. Cultural icons de-compose (in) Joyce's writing, as well as GB's. Joyce did not like Rome and left it quickly, writing to his brother that they could "let the ruins rot" (Joyce qtd. in Ellmann 225). "Goodbye, Rome," GB writes, affirming the Joycean tradition of (inter)leaving icons.

'He does what is done in many places;
what he does other
he does after the mode
of what has always been done.'

Exploding gods thrilled Joyce; he said, "The Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church was built on a pun. It ought to be good enough for me.' And, to the objection of triviality, he replied, 'Yes. Some of the means I use are trivial—and some are quadrivial'" (Joyce qtd. in Ellmann 546). "As Samuel Beckett writes in _Murphy_, 'In the beginning was the pun'" (Ellmann 546n). In this tradition, GB writes: "Where else may we find our beginnings but in the language?" The Word is the pun upon which our lines are founded. The poem, then, can be the site of the divine where hieratic sounds emerge from the priests' commotion or the Muse sings heavenly, but with this apprehension of the Outside within its confines it becomes an extra-rational, amazing space itself. Far more than the sum of its parts, it is nonetheless the (evidently fragmented) parts which demonstrate this. _Allophanes_ is a fragmented structure, "Not as a gesture of contempt for the scattered nature of reality. Not because the pieces would not fit in time. But because this would be the only way to cause an alliance between the dead and the living. To magic the whole thing toward what they called God" (Spicer 176).

"An argument between the living and the dead" is how Spicer defined the ghost, an (id)entity structurally repeated in Rilke's angel. As margins, the living and the dead are absolutely polarized; fixed each in their natural realm, the means of transmission from one to the other are supernatural. Alchemy is but one of a multitude of compositional—and decompositional—models (among them baseball, radioactive decay and concentric waves) alluded to in the poem which by their conjunction create a quibbling form, a disturbance from within which defies paraphrase, a perpetually quivering, electric, field. Accepting that this argumentative "disturbance" cannot be "Pure" poetry simply because "Pure poetry has no presence / but only its own being," we nonetheless see that _Allophanes_ does present a vibrant form the resonances of

which (en)join us in the "endless murmuring we call literature" (Foucault 60). "One is not born alone, one borrows the earth, / a clay, formed anew. A language filled again / in an oast heated from an ancient flame." Primordial clay afresh made flesh is the Word Host of the Logos which can yet be no more than lowghost, becoming fleshly rather than being the (last) Word. These fleshly, impure poems breed: "Poems should echo and reecho against each other. They should create resonances. They cannot live alone any more than we can" (Spicer 61).

Perpetually contextual, these works of language reflect their origin in mortal fear of closure:

> somewhat before the invention of writing, a change had to occur to open the space in which writing could flow and establish itself, a change [...] that forms one of the most decisive ontological events of language: its mirrored reflection upon death and the construction, from this reflection, of a virtual space where speech discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image and where, it can represent itself as already existing behind itself, already active beyond itself, to infinity. The possibility of a work of language finds its original fold in this duplication [Foucault 55].

The possibility of a work of language, of the inscription of *langue*, of an everyman, of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker depends upon an author, who depends upon a work, and so on back to where this ur-rhythm is recognized, where it grips down and begins to awaken:

> H.C.E.
> lives & lives & lives
> reflected in the mirrors
> along the wall.

In showing the inconclusive nature of words, their infinite capacity for re-writing, re-vision and appropriation in diverse, even perverse contexts, <u>Allophanes</u> is a provisional finitude, a completely incomplete text. "What is produced is not a traceable theme but the graphic appearance of the *multiple* and the impossibility of the single instance" (McCaffery 140-1), as if "language can no longer avoid multiplying itself" (Foucault 65). But when multiple cites anarchically dis-place unity of theme or even meaning the words are shells—skins.

> When you've finisht with them words
> throw the skins on the compost, will ya?
>
> That is composition,
> autobiologist.

And they are fertile as such, them words, indeed, they are prolific. The reader finds the poem fertile yet grounded in a matrix, "You'll join in burying my poem / at some crossroads," addressing it to read therein a narrative—"Aw narrative / is a telling blow."

> Build, though
> with snow,
> blow language
> nummular

at the flame.

"Yeats appealed to "sages standing in God's holy fire;" GB's sages are "standing in God's holy shit." Literature is both purified and fecund, both prolific and devouring: an old sow that eats her farrow.

> Headed toward death, language turns back upon itself; it encounters something like
> a mirror; and to stop this death which would stop it, it possesses but a single power:
> that of giving birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits. From
> the depths of the mirror where it sets out to arrive anew at the point where it
> started (at death), but so as finally to escape death, another language can be
> heard—the image of actual language, but as a miniscule, interior and virtual model
> [Foucault 54].

Such an image is evidently illusory yet the surety of its reflection in perpetuity is a guarantee of form at the expense of reference, a guarantee of structural verity. "Myths communicate / with each other, & men / seldom find out." This "is the song of the bard who had already sung of Ulysses before the *Odyssey* and before Ulysses himself (since Ulysses hears the song)" (Foucault 54-5). "(They've already printed / the date of your death," when and where the book is fixed, printed—the final etching of the character in stone closes the life and this moment is prefigured in each word written, and when it comes "you'll say you have things to do," as indeed you do, not being finished becoming. "<u>Allophanes</u> is weighty with its insistence that we cannot write the word, only process it through a labyrinth of re-writings" (McCaffery 141). So the "author" is dead and the work is but a trace of the interface between a writing reader and their textual world.

> The work is henceforth
> the author dead
> the book, beside you
> a face of the world
> to which it was always leading

"'I know it's beautiful, what does it mean?'" (Spicer qtd. in Blaser, "Outside" 312). "I know, I know. / it's all beautiful. / Tell me what we said on it."

Fifth Inning

Canadian literature, we have been told, is concerned less with beauty than with fear: that is its theme. Maybe beauty is the first prod of fear, but it is the fear that lingers. Beauty may even be a delusion to mask the fear, as the early writers in Canada dressed the inhospitable landscape to fit their sonnets. The pre-existent form imported to measure the present is our tradition in Canada, and it is a theme seen repeatedly in the estimation of GB's writing.

Visitors

The critical reception of Burning Water has been, to paraphrase, concerned with GB's violation of the "facts"—lots of facts. The American reviewer in Publishers Weekly finds much of the novel suspect; "Bowering slips from precious musings on his own travels, to levity (attributing to American Indians dialogue with rejoinders like "Okay"; "Search me") and sloshy descriptions of various sexual lowjinks—distracting and suspect to the reader." The form itself is considered a violation of the facts by Janet Giltrow who prescribes: "Voyage narrative is neither realistic or novelistic; it is documentary and compellingly linear. Against this serious straightforwardness Bowering works, interrupting itinerary with his interpolations and fictional inferences." Agreeing with Giltrow that non-linearity is disturbing, the reviewer from Canadian Yachting finds that "Burning Water is rather confusing, since it jumps back and forth in time." In fact, the reviewer is so confused, he puzzles that GB "couldn't even get the date or circumstances of his [Vancouver's] death right." Aritha Van Herk is one of many who concur with this observation. She writes: "Indeed, the novel distorts the facts of Vancouver's life so much that when the book appeared, there was a minor uproar, with historians and biographers falling over themselves to prove how wrong Bowering was. Needless to say, Bowering laughed" (82). GB laughed, as did Michael Ondaatje at the critical reception of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid because, as Tom Marshall writes: "The true story of the historical William Bonney is not all that important here, in spite of what certain, perhaps stunned, reviewers have written" (145).

Another theme among the reviews of his work, GB's "self-indulgence" comes under heavy fire with regard to both Burning Water and A Short Sad Book; of the latter, Peter Crowell considers that "The novel's weakest moments are the result of Bowering's self-indulgence, and are most evident when he prattles on about the actual act of writing this book." And the former, "Burning Water, in many ways is a self-indulgent book. Aside from pandering to his own historical theories, Bowering seems continually drawn in by his own work" (Faustmann). But the critical estimation of Burning Water is constructive, too: "Burning Water might have been a better book if Bowering had been able to keep his excitement over Vancouver's story between the lines, instead of leaping in and out of the narrative bodily like an over wrought kangaroo" (Barclay). Giltrow, too, picks up the theme of self-indulgence in commenting upon the "interpolations" GB makes within the text: "Conveying some very ordinary details of the writer's life,

the interpolated narrative embarrasses the text, lingering like an unnecessary excuse." The text consequently embarrasses itself grammatically when "he" is indiscrete—Giltrow objects to the "pronominal confusion" created by the "he" which she claims is ambiguous in its denotation. But there is no ambiguity here. "He" denotes *both* GB and Vancouver. Without a storyteller George, George is just another dead sailor and without a story he is telling George would not be a storyteller, which he is. He is not intruding; he is(,) composing.

Burning Water, like A Short Sad Book, confronts tradition and makes traditionalists show their own limitations, as when the aforementioned Pat Barclay admits to her confusion when faced with an anomaly and calls Burning Water "the literary equivalent of a chocolate-covered grasshopper." Strained metaphor as a response to an unfamiliar subject characterizes the reaction of Tom Marshall, too, who says: "A Short Sad Book is more witty monologue than novel and has the effect of Chinese food. It is not substantial enough to remain in the memory" (176). But the most peculiar metaphor I encountered was Giltrow's, its semantic absurdity ironically appropriate in spite of her: "Finally, Vancouver's behaviour towards him outrages the botanist beyond forebearance and GB's version of the journey comes to a violent conclusion." One imagines the violent conclusion, not of the journey but of GB's version, involving some assault by GB upon his typewriter in striking the final words of the text. Expectations as confronted, affronted, and revealed characterize the reception of most of GB's writing. Eva-Marie Kröller says this is particularly the case with Burning Water; she suspects "that at least part of the emphatically negative response to Burning Water received in the English-Canadian press has its root in Bowering's association with the Tish and Black Mountain poets" (54-5). The reception of the book in the francophone press has been quite positive, she argues, because it is taken on its literary merits without this "associative ballast."

Home

The documents GB draws upon for material in composing Burning Water include the diaries of Menzies, the maps of Vancouver, "The Tempest," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," even his own "Smoking Mirror" and personal history ("burning water," aguas calientes, is a place he had written to Margaret Randall about in 1964, suggesting she meet him there rather than in Mexico City). Eva-Marie Kröller calls this material heterogeneity a "mixed language," which term she takes from John Berger's G (and GB admits to "slyly quoting" from G in Burning Water). This "mixed language" "alternates between fiction and documentary and involves visual codes other than letters, namely pictorial material such as the recurrent Chinese character in Burning Water" which is "the sailing-boat logo from the notebook Bowering drafted the novel in" (Kröller 58). That logo (metaphorically) suggests Vancouver's ship while (metonymically) drawing GB's writing into the novel itself. This "documentary" then maps both GB's account of the novel and Vancouver's voyage, and both are equally made fiction by the form in which they are re-counted; all materials are equally real, as are all fictions. GB says of the novel that "the details are immaculately researched, but I don't adhere to the official fiction in the accounts of the time" (letter to

General Publishing, 11 Sept. 1979). His un-"official fiction" is in the very act of charting (mapping, writing), itself a fiction-making producing, not the referent, but language, as Aritha Van Herk makes clear in "Mapping as Metaphor": "Maps are representations, yes, but as such they do not define and fix so much as they symbolize. Even the most scientific cartographer will tell you that maps are implications, language themselves" (76). A language which foregrounds its own heterogeneity is, nevertheless, commenting upon its subject. Both <u>Burning Water</u> and <u>A Short Sad Book</u> use "mixed language" to depict, realistically, the variety of writing that composes identity and the inadequacy of any single perspective to contain reality. The formal "intrusions" of the narrator similarly show the pretense of "control," with its attendant detachment, to be a delusion.

> Right now
> are you wishing I had more control
> over my material?
>   (If you are not into it yet,
>   keep trying. Love & History
>   are like each other.
>   —"Single World West" (<u>Touch</u> 105)

In re-presenting history time is also made non-linear. A review of <u>A Short Sad Book</u> in the book's text shows the future made present—or, the book part of the review's history—and time spatialized as a fiction of one's passage through space. Of time in <u>Burning Water</u>, GB wrote to his editor that:

> the real continuous time is the one involving the story of the novelist who is writing the novel; the other story, i.e. the 18th century one, does not go 1-2-3-4-5-, and neither does it avail itself of the flashback technique or any of that realist stuff that makes the reader shuffle till he gets back to 1-2-3-4-5; I think those wars have been won by lots of writers long ago. My attitude toward "history" is much like that of Mr. Robert Kroetsch, who summed it up in three words at a conference somewhere on the prairie a year ago [to Julie Beddoes, 23 Oct. 1979].

Kroetsch, as quoted in GB's "A Great Northward Darkness," said "Fuck the past." Which is both "fucking with" the past and actively engaging it in the present, a literal interpenetration which is not by any means disregarding either the past or the "official fiction" of history. As Roland Barthes says, "it is when History is denied that it is most unmistakably at work" (<u>Writing Degree Zero</u> 2), and both Kroetsch and GB ascribe their genealogy from Barthes.

Barthes' critique of history in <u>Writing Degree Zero</u> suggests that it legitimizes certain discursive models, effectively silencing what it marginalizes. This is a thematic concern in Canadian literature as "many of the poets of the past decade" have attempted, according to D.G. Jones:

> an inventory of the world but scarcely uttered, the world of the excluded or ignored.
> It would comprehend whatever is crude, whatever is lonely, whatever has failed
> [...] It is the wilderness of experience that does not conform to the cultural maps
> of the history books [...], it is the wilderness of language in which the official voices
> of the culture fail to articulate the meaning or the actual sensation of living and
> tend to become gibberish [166].

Which is why, in Kroetsch's words, "we feel a profound ambiguity about the past—about both its contained stories and its modes of perception" (Essays 74). The historical modes of perception focus upon winners; the official fictions ignore losers and failures, structured as they are by positivism. They are a "language which is both History and the stand we take in it" (Barthes, Writing Degree Zero 1), whether that stand is acceptance of the status quo or revision of it. John A. Macdonald tells Evangeline in A Short Sad Book that "History is us," an "us" from which she reminds him of her exclusion, replying, "History is us, too." "'Perhaps,' he smiled. 'But history is written by winners [...] & I will write this book'" (39).

Co-opting the tools of expression is only one means by which the dominant maintain control; the traditional positivism of history is another way in which it enforces alienation. GB considers the "problem with the historians, or let us say the way they chose to work, is this: they did not study what people are, but what they did" ("34," E). In "The Body" (A 102) there is a comparable dissatisfaction with historical method: "There are parts the eye can not see because they are in the past they tell us has done just that, what a view of the stream." A Short Sad Book picks up this theme again, reminding us that "Incidents are not history. Writing history is history" (94). Often throughout the novel we are told that "In Canada the only history is writing history" and that history is present, where time is, here & now:

> Who did what to whom happened in time.
> History is all about writing history.
> All about.
> History is all about.
> One is in time.
> History is all about.
> Just have a look [98–9].

All about is writing; we are in a book. History is writing and "It is so if it is written," we read in "Chapter XVII," where "I made that up & now its there. How are you going to unmake it" (62). You can "unmake it" by writing another, by composing your own. History is you, too. Van Herk makes an interesting comment upon this when she claims that the "only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories" (77): the writing that is, itself, historical documentation of a particular nature because composed by an individual, not because it tells a (single) national story.

The Saskatchewan railway station described in A Short Sad Book is particular, as is all experience. "For those who lived here it was not by any means Canada. It was Saskatchewan" (56). To locate it no more precisely than "Canada" or "Canadian writing" would distort by glossing over the very detail that makes it "real," as abstract notions of "beauty" have depended upon covering up individual blemishes and idiosyncracies. GB suggests that "People who posit ideas such as The Canadian Tradition or The Northern Experience should travel less and spend time in more places" ("1," E), but that such monoliths as The Canadian Tradition are posited at all suggests, to my mind, fear of the very particularity and disparity that belies such unity.

Reading in Sherbrooke, Quebec in 1979, GB encountered the imperialist "Canadian Tradition." He says, "I read Allophanes, a very complex poem full of lots of allusions to European philosophy and poets like Edgar Allan Poe. I got into a big fight with the English department because they tried to tell me that that was not my tradition. They had some concocted sense of a Central Canada—Ontario/Quebec—tradition" (GB qtd. in Eggertson): a tradition that was not his. GB certainly has a notion that "my tradition" exists, but he also distinguishes that from an *ipso facto* "Canadian Tradition." As he wrote, of Burning Water, to his editor Julie Beddoes (23 Oct. 1979): "I know that it is not in the Canadian Tradition, as I have heard it called these years, but I think it is in mine, and another, I think." Perhaps that "other" is the tradition outlined to the "Canadian Tradition"—a community of great writers defined as great, and as a community, by the individual writer who measures his genealogy by them. While not in the Canadian Tradition, this is not to say that Burning Water is not a traditional novel; GB clearly believes that it is: "there is plenty of plot and even characterization in it, and lord knows a suffocating amount of theme, but nothing that has been recognized so far as a Canadian theme" (letter to Matt Cohen, 16 Apr. 1980). But what constitutes a "Canadian theme" is not, as it once was thought to be, "Carleton McNaughton walking rubber boots out of the swamp with a beaver by the tail in each hand" (SSB 47). A "Canadian theme" is also the rejection of theme and its prescription of homogeneity.

Eva-Marie Kröller, Brian Edwards and Reginald Berry all (independently) discuss how, in former colonies, postmodernist writing signifies revolt against the prevalent order—that being realism whereby the imperialists perpetuate themselves, (rein)stating the form of the present circumstances. In former colonies "the break with realism implies a reaction not only against literary modes preferred by the mother-country, but also against its concepts of time and place, as well as personal and collective identity" (Kröller 53). Imposing abstract concepts measures reality by the degree to which it mirrors these ideals; thus does the official history determine literary modes, as it does time and place and even, yes, identity. Brian Edwards uses the example of GB's Indians who "are one site of the post-colonial dilemma. How does 'other' resist reduction to 'the same' [7]?" That is, how do they maintain their distinction from the "prevalent order" wherein they would be assimilated as colonial victims and remain outside the symbolic order of the colonizers without being silenced? Or, how does what is marginalized (set in parentheses) keep those parentheses from closing—reflecting each other, sealing death. The Indians in Burning Water and Caprice do it by remaining unnamed, outside the terms of fixation within the symbolic order. Names reflect the traditions of genealogy, paternity, and allow a subject to take their place in language—the institution of language—as language. Barthes characterizes this situation when he says, "the writing to which I entrust myself already exists entirely as an institution; it reveals my past and my choice, it gives me a history, it blazons forth my situation, it commits me without my having to declare the fact" (Writing Degree Zero 27). Similarly, in "Duet for a Chair and a Table," Jack Spicer reminds us that things, even as inconsequential as a chair and a table, once named: "Assume identities / take their places" (74). Notice that "take" is in the active voice, because "Words make things name / themselves" (74); this in a shared

language, with common terms, thereby inviting analogies and homogeneity. Kroetsch considers the "task of the Canadian writer is to un-name" (Essays 17), by this un-naming deconstructing the ready-made analogies of descriptive words. On this subject Barthes says, "When I resist analogy, it is actually the imaginary I am resisting: which is to say: the coalescence of the sign, the similitude of the signifier and signified, the homeomorphism of images, the Mirror, the captivating bait" (Roland Barthes 44). Analogy is metaphor, description: the disfigurement of the present subject in privileging an absent ideal reflected in the subject's new address. Such a Mirror is not innocent but clothes who enters it in terms of the traditions, simply because writing, as we see in Allophanes, "remains full of the recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent" (Barthes, Writing Degree Zero 16). But GB "would like to write a book, let us say a novel, an historical novel, in which once in a while a page is an actual mirror. If the reader has been deluded into thinking that the book 'mirrors reality' or 'holds the mirror up to history,' the appearance of her own reading face might serve to shock her out of that error" ("62," E). The sort of mirror GB is talking about would shock the reader out of blithely "identifying with" a stock character or pre-fabricated (id)entity and make her see the particularity and otherness of her own identity. But, at the same time, a page-mirror would show the reader where they are in the text—and that they are in a text—forcing her to take her place as active in the book's creation. As GB says, "what would you do if you turned to a page, and it was a mirror? The image of your backward personal self as text. You would be compelled to relate it to the previous page and the following page" ("62," E). Here, the reader's eye is seen to create the text and to be, itself, text peeking out at the reader.

Foucault believes that in fear of death and the void language masks nothingness with a mirror reflecting its sameness in perpetuity; thereby the rigidity of representation in language is fixed and the speaking subject avoids closure in turning himself into a language-being, a name, thereby symbolizing himself in immortality. "Perhaps the figure of a mirror to infinity erected against the black wall of death is fundamental for any language from the moment it determines to leave a trace of its passage" (55). George Vancouver, determined to leave traces of his imperial passage imposes culturally-specific names on prominent geographical features—names of his English associates. According to Kröller, Vancouver "believes that the charting of new territory, whether it be geographical or imaginative, implies the mirroring of one's own personal and national philosophy" (56). Certainly, that is its effect in the novel. Van Herk, too, insists that, "Even though man attempts to map objectively, he exists within the map he makes" (77). Along with the mapper's personal and national philosophy, the "conceptions, the point of view, even the blindnesses of the maker are always present." But what Olson wrote, and Spicer of language, that the map is not the territory, describes Menzies' attitude to Vancouver's enterprise; Kröller makes note of "Menzies' understanding that charting strategies do not equal the thing, that 'the language is burning' [GB in Out-Posts] and must be tended like a flame" (58). Language, while enabling the perpetuity of the subject does so by purging it of its irreducible individual identity. Barthes, in differentiating the "living language" of Nature from written language describes this transmutation of the

writer which purifies him of Nature:

> In front of the virgin sheet of paper, at the moment of choosing the words which must frankly signify his place in History, and testify that he assumes its data, he observes a tragic disparity between what he does and what he sees. Before his eyes, the world of society now exists as a veritable Nature, and this Nature speaks, elaborating living languages from which the writer is excluded. [...] Thus is born a tragic element in writing, since the conscious writer must henceforth fight against ancestral and all-powerful signs which, from the depths of a past foreign to him, impose Literature on him like some ritual, not like a reconciliation [Writing Degree Zero 86].

All writing, then, purifies itself of organic elements including the uniqueness of death and of birth. These elements are, however, reproduced structurally again and again by the writing, their multiple occurrences showing their inorganic composition. So, we find not one death, but several: not one birth but a multitude of origins as "Canadian writing [...] comes compulsively to a genealogy that refuses origin, to a genealogy that speaks instead, and anxiously, and with a generous reticence, the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel" (Kroetsch, Essays 89).

The language itself becomes the focus, its own reflexive focus, as it is in A Short Sad Book which describes itself as: "It is about & I hate it when the writer says this is about & it is now about that too, it is though about our words" (108). By our words, about our words—the writer's place in this text is itself textual; he is a name signed by the book itself. He is not in control of his materials. He has no authority over this text but is composed as he goes along by the very text he writes. That text writes itself, too—this is "at heart an autobiographical novel, I said" (84). The book is not the *writer's* autobiography but its own, the tale of a life led in step with the writer who writes, in "Chapter XLII," "I am in my forties & so is this book. We breathe together" (143). Not surprisingly, then, the writer confesses that "he felt almost as if he would find himself at the end of the sentence at last" (122). What he finds while in the process of serving the sentence is that he is ordered about by his writing: "The novel knows all about it but I dont I said" (83). GB's deferral of authority is, undoubtedly, one of his many poses. That's what makes it genuine—a genuine stance he adopts *vis à vis* the text. But, if you will recall Valery's sense of dictation as a gift the writer must not shame, the responsibility of the writer to the given (language) is overwhelming. This is no casual "free association" or the involuntary product of the subconscious but a challenge to the writer. When Kroetsch notes that the "Canadian writer is tempted to let himself out of the agony of commitment by pretending that he isn't serious" (Essays 12), we can see how this route would have its appeal. GB chooses to acknowledge the "agony of commitment," but in ways that allow the audience to pretend that he isn't serious and so let *themselves* out of the agony of commitment.

There is, as in Burning Water, a "suffocating amount of theme" in A Short Sad Book. Perhaps even a "Canadian theme" which, like Kroetsch's identification of our traditional un-naming, erases itself. As in Burning Water, paragons of Canadian culture are shown in decidedly un-paragonish poses: beavers

are exposed and victims violated in novel positions. But, perhaps more significantly, these icons are shown to be constructions of writing which can be deconstructed, too, by writing; here themes become structures where one chapter contains names of books; one, names of lakes; another, of streets; yet another, of cigars. The place of structure in the writing of the text is made clear when the writer says: "I smoke a cigar & I tried to write I spoke a cigar, I smoke a cigar every time I write a chapter" (128). That "smoke" and "spoke" almost become interchangeable in the book's lexicon, and certainly in its composition, blurs those very distinctions.

Corresponding to this structural and mimetic deflection of authority, a deflection of formal authority is evident in the self-effacing pose adopted by the author within the text. Violating the polite distance usually kept between author and text, the author is a character, a fictive entity: making himself up as he goes along. The similarity with GB's earlier work where Delsing figured is clear, but the stories about Delsing were stories about a *writer*; in A Short Sad Book and Burning Water the story is about a *writing*. And that writing is being done by someone who is both distracted from writing and reluctant to assert the truth of what he writes, which is a stance Spencer considers to be characteristic of open-structured novels. "If the novel with a closed structure is often an assertion of belief, the open-structured novel may well constitute an intellectual exploration undertaken by a novelist who actually is not certain what he believes about the nature of reality: fact versus fiction, imagination versus observation, feeling versus thought, creation versus reportage, and so on" (52). The text is then palinodic in form. Instead of the reader being given the "straight goods" by a writer, here the writer denies his ability to deliver; thereby delivering denial, pointing to his mask or, as Kroetsch puts it, lowering the veil. Robert Kroetsch finds this aspect of the narrative to be characteristic of Canadian literature, where veiling rather than unveiling is a common feature of our fiction. This is a cold country—you cover up to stay alive. Animals whose clothes were stolen by fur traders died, "of exposure" (SSB 62); exposure which is "not there, it's here," here where the writer is keeping things from the reader and hoping that the reader finds (him) out.

An *exposé* gets the *real* story underneath the fictions. But when a writer exposes fiction, as fiction, the liar's paradox results and the fact is fiction, too. Hence Barthes' claim, that the "teleology common to the novel and to narrated History is the alienation of the facts: the preterite is the very act by which society affirms its possession of its past and its possibility. It creates a content credible, yet flaunted as an illusion; it is the ultimate term of a formal dialectics which clothes an unreal fact in the garb first of truth then of a lie denounced as such" (Writing Degree Zero 33). And of this dialectics, of "the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance," he says in The Pleasure of the Text (10) that it is a pose inviting, while deferring, exposure. GB told his editor (Julie Beddoes, 7 Nov. 1979): "As you can see, I go not for the comfy consumable story, but the pleasure of the text, if I may be allowed to pocket a coin & call it a word."

In the same letter, GB demonstrates the indecision and vacillation Spencer describes, but it makes for a more authentic narrative that the historical "facts." He writes: "does Menzies kill Vancouver? Does Vancouver kill himself? I dont decide there. Actually, I want it to appear [...] that I killed Vancouver. Or rather the writer of the book did, that narrator again, he did it. You see, that is literally true; and I wanted it to be narratively true too, to show that even after the realist age we could make the narrative agree with the narration." By making the narrative agree with the narration a realism based on structure—the similitude of stance vis à vis the mapping act—rather than referential content emerges. This is a reaffirmation of tradition: the traditional association of literature and life, where life is seen to be affected by the writing act itself. Hence, as Butor proclaims, "Formal invention in the novel, far from being opposed to realism as shortsighted critics often assume, is the sine qua non of a greater realism" (28). This "greater realism" is brought about by a few species of formal invention, at least. One is a conflation of identities in the free indirect discourse with which the narration leads us from one character's mind to another; Burning Water's monologues are structured like Nathalie Sarraulte's sous- conversation, where "the very mystery as to who is speaking seems to press the reader into a more than usually intense identification with the narrator and, consequently, with the substance of the book" (Spencer 80). The reader, too, is identified with the "I" seeing the landscape from within the text. Another related technique of formal invention concerns this pronominal confusion. Butor believes that:

> A further study of pronominal functions would show their close connection with temporal structures. To take a single example, a method such as the 'interior monologue' is the linking of a narrative in the first person with the imaginary abolition of all distance between the time of the adventure and that of the narrative, the character telling us his story at the very moment when it is occurring. A notion like that of 'sub-dialogue' [Sarrault's 'sous-conversation'] allows us to break the bonds in which the classical interior monologue remains imprisoned, and to justify flashbacks and recollections in a much more plausible manner [23-4].

Thus does pronominal mutability affect the spatialization of time in the novel, leading to a "greater realism." Both these techniques involve treating the novel as a spatial construct which occupies a space addressed by and addressing a reader. Such treatment is characterized by, as Spencer sees it, two corollary moves: "first, the destruction of the 'frame' of the novel so that its contents are free to spill outside; and, second, the intermingling of the elements of the art work with elements drawn from outside. This second step completes the fusion and makes of the novel a fact, a thing, a mode of experience, an indisputable part of reality" (69). Certainly GB's creation of an author within the text destroys the "frame" and opens the novel to re-vision from outside. As the writer is in the text, the stance of the reader is called into question and the first question is: why just watch the fun? When the reader, too, can be drawn into the text no pretense of detachment is possible on the part of either reader or writer.

Spatial disruption and the resulting textual mutability makes any chronology incidental to the present spatial arrangement. In A Short Sad Book, "Chapter XVI" shows how spatial disruption actually makes an "eternal present." When "a huge inquisitive reptile head" appears in the writer's window the

"outside" would seem to be encroaching upon the (enclosed) writing, writing defined spatially by the room—"my writing room." As for the window, well, "you know what windows are in writing." Here one certainly is in the writing and it looks like a "window on the world," but it is opaque; it is the writing itself, this window is something you look at and you may see your reflection in it. When writing is a stained glass window it is not clear, it may colour the enclosure that is clear but it is not. The opaque window formally equalizes the patterns upon it as language homogenizes what it expresses.

Another aspect of linguistic homogeneity is evident in the hypotactic syntax of A Short Sad Book. Generally, a novel is read as if it had solely a horizontal axis the reader runs along—a linear narrative serving sentences. But, "when we encounter a certain number of words which have the same function within the sentence, a series of direct objects, for example, each one is attached in the same fashion; they have basically the same position in the sequence of links, and I perceive a kind of interruption in the line's movement; this enumeration is arranged, then, perpendicularly to the rest of the text" (Butor 44-5). Similar to Saussure's syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, Butor is here describing the graphic situation of the (implied) paradigmatic axis within the text. Such a situation obtains in A Short Sad Book: "She stood in front of a tree & she stood in front of a tree & she stood in front of a tree & she stood in front of a tree & she stood oh you poor typesetter in front of a tree & she said" (38). The non-linear structure of this writing in particular is not limited to its syntax but makes time itself spatial in the arbitrary order of its chronology. But Michel Butor claims this is a traditional feature of novels, and GB himself was earlier quoted as mentioning that the temporal structure of realism has never been "1-2-3-4-5," either." Butor reminds us that "no classic novel is capable of following events in a simple manner (moreover was it not our humanist poetics which advised us to begin the narration or drama *in medias res*); we must therefore study the structure of succession (18) or how events are given independent of our normative re-working. Continuity is inherent structurally both in writing and reading: a reading which re-constructs (writes) the text.

There is clearly a perceived disruption on the mimetic, if not the diegetic, textual level. The writing is constantly disrupted by external material getting into it, for instance: "My favourite place in Alberta (oh this new pen is getting broken in nicely) is Drumheller (my wife will hate that one because she hates this novel she says I'm getting too far removed from my readers with all this obscure self-absorption. What do you think dear friend) although I have been there only once." Drumheller is "where the dinosaurs come from," and you "can go there & see them any time you want." Any time you want, my friend, you reading this after I am writing it can go later to Drumheller to see the past. Any time you want, it is there. (And where did that reptile come from? Were his ancestors Scottish?) The writer's ancestor Emmett wants to know where his "constant singing Indian companion" comes from. "I am not from, said his companion. I am here, at your side" (67).

Beside an "I" is another "I" who, as this one is, may articulate their place in language differently or, indeed, may not have one. The structure of self-consciousness is such a double "I," but any act has a double, an opportunity cost, as does the act of writing: "All the time I am writing this Canadian book I am not writing something else & it is the invisible book I am not writing. There is one of those for every book that is written" (127). There is an absent double for every inscription of identity; we are told in Allophanes that: "Man & the unthought are contemporary. / The unthought is not born of him or in him / but beside him." We must be careful, then, when we read, as we do in A Short Sad Book, that "the novel is not writing the novel, two people are, all the time" (148). GB elucidates this somewhat in discussing Burning Water. He says that, in the novel, "there's an understood 'I' who's another George, in other words, GB in that text writing the whole thing about 'he' or 'him'" ("Syntax Equals the Body Structure" 41). The "two people" are the writer and reader, of course, but they are also the writing "I" and the written "he."

Identity, whether personal or national, is also the crux of A Short Sad Book. The subject's confusion—"am I I," (52)—appears to result from the potential for language to reify a construct independent of its referent. Van Herk says of language that it is more creation than representation, like maps which are "surrogates of space. A map is not *the* territory, but a territory itself" (76). Hence, to map is "to make a place real in some representative way" (75). Language is, of course, non-demonstrative by nature. That's its *raison d'être*. But discourse creates objects, words, whose function in reference is their own displacement. Where they refuse to be displaced they create an identity existing parallel with, and equal to, their referent's. In A Short Sad Book the writer muses: "If I had been someone else I could have told where I was going by the tracks, at least until it started snowing again" (45). And "I" am someone else when "I" am written, mapped, a construct of lines tracked across a snow-white page. The map is necessarily *other*, while yet inscribing identity. It both creates and kills, in the same action. To discover a "Canadian identity," or even a personal one, histories, genealogies and stories document its trace, while their positivistic elements are not the identity but its constructs. The writer of A Short Sad Book says: "It is true, we have to find out what we are not first. / We are not first" (32). First, we find what we are not—the lines tell us that, as do the lines defining Saskatchewan whereby the province is mapped as its own trace: "defined as something in the middle of four other things it is not" (67). It is not Alberta, Ontario, the North-West Territories or the United States. The next chapter re-defines the four victim positions of Survival in novel fashion, climaxing when the "novel withdrew itself painfully from its skin & assumed position five"; the mystical position Atwood posited as not conducive to the writing of books. In position five, definition is not a positivism but relatedness and integration, an absence of self-consciousness. But without the self-consciousness created by language, "The question arises whether the author possesses a perspective of his own, from which he can view simultaneously not only the subject but all of the perspectives he himself has focused upon it. The answer," according to Spencer, "is a clear 'no'" (76). That is, "no" because the mapper is not external to the map but located within it, at any

particular address. Like Vancouver *in* the landscape, a writer cannot step back out of his writing's context. Hence, Van Herk pinpoints Burning Water as "the ultimate contemporary exploitation of the mapping metaphor," because "what Burning Water does is re-map the mapper, thus carrying the metaphor to its ultimate conclusion"—a conclusion where the text gives language to articulate the writer's self, presenting the trace of the writer who remains, himself, the absent double.

<center>Sixth Inning</center>

The book wherein texts lie, side by side, individually wrapped, models GB's work as a whole. Such books include Craft Slices, A Way with Words, Poem & Other Baseballs, Particular Accidents, Errata, The Mask in Place, The Catch, West Window, Delayed Mercy, Flycatcher, Imaginary Hand, Protective Footwear, Smoking Mirror, 71 Poems for People and A Place to Die, although the discretion of each unit in volumes like West Window is, to my mind, comparable to that between, say, each stanza of "Between the Sheets," included therein. Where such a process of delimiting significant boundaries would stop is a problem GB forces the reader to address in his collections.

Visitors

Robert Billings is at the plate now, swinging an *ad hominem* at a collection of pitchers: a collection of Talonbooks' series of selected poems which included GB's Particular Accidents. He writes: "Much of the development of Bowering, bissett, Nichol, Davey, Wah and Marlatt took place during the halcyon days of easy publishing, wide funding and the Jefferson Airplane. And it shows" (112). Billings deplores these upstart writers for their uncorrected "loosening of form," which he finds in the composition of Particular Accidents and other of these volumes. "Maybe all this is the result of an absence even after a quarter of a century, of a widely accepted and acceptable criticism of the loosening of form which Williams, Olson et. al. initiated. Too much of it still sounds as if poets are being given official license to get away with as much as they can" (112). Reacting is what batters do, but embittered reactionaries are easily put out by novel ideas such as A Short Sad Book, excerpted in Particular Accidents, pitches: "Whatever else poetry is not freedom. No it is not" (PA 147). Put out by the pitcher, Billings retraces the well-worn path and Karl Jirgens steps forth to meet Craft Slices.

Jirgens is eloquent in his articulation of the many positions from which one might address the pitch, but hits it in the *jouissance*, upon which he bases his reading:

> I could enter into post-structural analysis and say that Bowering shifts the centre of his essays, deconstructing them by showing their pre-constructions, by revealing his thought roots, by having himself interviewed by an invented "Canadian Tradition" only to demystify its self-referentiality through the narrator's pose of *faux naif*. I could say that Bowering blurs genres here, is self-reflexive, uses inter- and intra-textual references, appropriates and dis-appropriates methodologies, redefines the roles of author, artwork, audience. I could also say this is a significant book for theorists, perhaps an essential book for scholars. But that would be taking half the fun out of it; that would be eating the sausage without mopping up the *jouissance.*

Fluid as this pitch is, taking shape as it does from the container which collects it, collecting batters to address its multiplicity is called for. The first such synthetic player stands composed at the plate, composed of Don Precosky, Alvan Bregman and Brian Flack.

Synthesizing order from a collection so as to see a single pitch is a fiction-making GB leaves to the reader, much to Don Precosky's chagrin. Reviewing 71 Poems for People (BCLA Reporter) he is indignant that the "book is misleadingly called 'six poem sequences' on the back cover. There is, however, nothing sequential about the six parts." Also seeing The Mask in Place as "somewhat randomly ordered," Bregman nonetheless recognizes the case GB is making for a subversion of theme leading to "emphasizing the book itself as object." But when Bregman claims that, "Most important are his theroretical [sic] essays," the assertion of an order based on privileging theme shows that Bregman doesn't know what to do with the pitch passing him. Another component of this batter is similarly disoriented, this time by A Place to Die. Brian Flack is "Lost in the Maze" where he finds GB founders; according to Flack, GB the explorer faces "a great problem inherent in the process of continual trail-breaking that must be carefully addressed and requires total authorial vigilance. Once set astray from the intended and narrowly defined goal, there is every possibility that the adventurer will fall into a pattern of aimless circling, perhaps even crossing and recrossing already travelled paths." An example given is the story "Arbre de Décision," a "multi-narrative exercise in reader confusion" which "begins and ends nowhere." In this perpetually reflexive, circular structure Flack yet finds "The Clam Digger" to be a "trite moral tale that reaffirms Thomas Wolfe's souring dictum: you can't go home again." Flack never thought he would return to the dugout when the game plan was to make it home, from whence he began.

Not even a team within a team can connect this scattered shot, but they didn't make much of an effort, disoriented as they were when faced with open structures. So another composite batter steps forward to review the pitch's form, the pitch's collective formation.

Terry Whalen considers that the essays in GB's A Way with Words "show that he is pondering the issue of mind in relation to particulars, and, if he is too much in love with details at the expense of concept and organic form, he at least knows where his poetry must start" (Fiddlehead 110). While seeing the interrelatedness of genre in GB's writing, Whalen yet criticizes the lack of organic form; why, is not clear: GB is not an advocate of organic form. That does not mean his work is formless, as Billings was reminded. Attention lavished upon detail may suggest a form which tolerates heterogeneity: a form Bruce Whiteman attributes to The Catch. Whiteman comments upon The Catch's variety which is such that "only the most eclectic reader will not find himself with attractions and indifferences, like a very serious child in a sweetshop of the imagination" (83-4). Distasteful as the simile is, Whiteman's foul strike is aimed at the pitch and directed toward the field which he sees not so much as composed but collated—a net dropped to recollect stray works—be they confections or no. Yet formal heterogeneity does not have any attractions for Ellen Quigley who finds it in Another Mouth. "For the most part, tne consistency of the book is quite uneven" (122) she writes, elliptically. "For the most part" indicates that there are exceptions, as does the word "quite." But saying that consistency is uneven, although there are exceptions, makes no sense at all even were we told—as we are not—how Quigley measured "consistency."

Home

Books which present themselves as collections—whether of verse, prose, or both—figure prominently in GB's work. There are many of them, yet they have elements in common[1] and I believe these elements to reflect principles of structure in the work as a whole. This is sensible as the "work" is itself a collection of heterogenous material characterized as a unit simply by the attribution of a label to it. As Foucault writes, "if some have found it convenient to bypass the individuality of the writer or his status as an author to concentrate on a work, they have failed to appreciate the equally problematic nature of the word 'work' and the unity it designates" (119). This is reminiscent of the fourth inning where Allophanes was the site where all books were captured and re-presented and, you may recall, I posited three structures to model this re-presentation. Those three models will help us here to get a handle on these books-made-of-books.

To recap briefly then, the three models which represent the structures of collected works are, first, the palimpsest where a lexical cluster is present both as contextually unique and as drawing another text held in parallel with the immediate one; second, the discontinuous function where a gap or synapse interrupts the two-dimensional text without ostensibly making present another dimension; finally, the third model was absence introduced (as with the discontinuous function), and run wild—anarchy where disturbance is more prevalent than order and becomes the chaotic order of "snowballs thrown against a maroon wall."

The structure of a palimpsest is created often enough within a single text by rudiments of cohesion—congruence of figures, repetition of images, rhythm. GB's collected books like Errata or Craft Slices cohere by reference to (or re-production of), a previous text or textual event; hence, from the single text as autonomous grid of signification the text becomes another plane in the field defined by common figures, images and rhythm. Indeed, with the possible exception of Concentric Circles, no GB text is autonomous but all are re-collected throughout the work.

In terms of content, GB's texts are correspondingly dual (and sometimes multiple), modelled by parallel rather than single, usually rising to climax, lines. The cast of characters in A Way with Words re-presents some found in Curious and Delayed Mercy: Margaret Atwood, bpNichol, David McFadden, John Newlove, Allen Ginsberg, Gwendolyn MacEwen and Frank Davey, to name a few. Many of these figure sandwiched in Craft Slices, as well. Recurring figures, like rhyme, remind the mindful reader of contexts other than the immediately present one and create a textual concurrence: a palimpsest drawing books together. "Keyserling" and "Kesselring" conflate A Place to Die and Caprice; similarly, the

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[1] I have perhaps created elements where none were intended by the author and, similarly, I admit to privileging certain aspects of the books under discussion to the detriment of others. All criticism engages texts in this fashion.

coincidence of George, Vancouver, Burning Water and Caprice is forged with several connectors, one of which is the recurrence of Menzies (GB has claimed, in conversation, that "Minjus" is a phonetic transcription of the Scots pronunciation of the Scot's name). This is not unusual, but it has the effect of making the work interrelated thereby building its own world by accretion, rather than by analogy to an already-existing world outside of the writing.

In discussing GB's novel A Short Sad Book I made clear the simultaneity of prose and verse—the blurring of genre—that is characteristic of his work. Delsing, referred to by GB as a "novel," has been printed in parts labelled "short story" by Queen's Quarterly and "essay" by Raven. I don't think it untenable to argue that A Short Sad Book is an essay, no less than each of the portraits of Curious. With The Mask in Place, I have the subtitle to tell me it is essays, but the reliance on personal anecdote in, say, "The Three-Sided Room," reminds me of A Short Sad Book whose subtitle declares its status to be that of a novel. Form, in GB's work, is consistently idiosyncratic and often the tension of indecidability between two mutually-exclusive labels makes of the text a site cohabited by two genres where the reader sees one text one time, another another time. GB gave up a hit to bpNichol in 1982 when he wrote: "bpNichol says I write fiction like an essayist, and criticism like a fiction writer; and I think he is right" (letter to Eli Mandel, 31 Oct. 1982). Nichol himself, in his blurb on the cover of Errata, defines GB's idiosyncratic form: "In Errata, Bowering has taken the essay form and pushed it over into poetry, into the prose poem, and along the way reclaimed the lyric voice for the intellectual life." And GB, too, considers rigid formalities of genre misapplied to his work. In the interview with Eric Eggertson, GB says that in his fiction "I still invite all those things that we have traditionally ascribed to poetry—the care with the vocalization, the rhythmic interest, the rhyming interest, and so forth. And the prose is less referential, its more self-reflexive, as they say, than the prose I was going to write twenty years ago. The conditions with which I write it are very similar to the conditions with which I used to write poetry." And when asked to describe those conditions, GB remarks: "when you sit down and write your attention is not toward the thing that you're writing about, you're not writing something that will provide a window through which the reader can see the world, but the attention is to the page that the words are going down on. If it is a window it's a window that you look at for its own sake, like a cut-glass window. I mean, writing is writing," that is, it "doesn't try to pretend it's not there." Such writing admits its artifice, even flaunts it: GB will "confess it: I like to make the craft visible and the referent invisible" ("32," E), regardless of the formal generic category of the work.

What presents itself as craft thereby emphasizes itself as constructed, and structure is, as I have noted, another element whereby collected texts as palimpsests re-present the work. That is, the parts intermingle simply by accretion and spatial proximity, making each "collected" text a structural paradigm of the accreted whole. To illustrate this textual indiscretion consider the lines: "Why given round heads / if not for immortality?" two lines of several collected to form "Round Head," a poem selected in Touch

(96). In "Chapter 21: Come," from Autobiology[1] the final paragraph reads: "Why given round heads if not / for eternity I said. Taste my / tongue in your ear she said" (48). When shored up in The Catch (65), the paragraph reads: "Why given round heads if not for eternity / I said. Taste my tongue in your ear she said." Collected between the covers of The and there isolated as a lyric unto itself we read: "Why given round heads if not for eternity I said. Taste my tongue / in your ear she said." It is not the idea behind the text which is constant but the lines, and the content changes with the context. This is evident in the "Reconsiderations" series: re-writings of well-known GB lyrics ("Moon Shadow," "Inside the Tulip," "Driving to Kelowna" and "The Grass") in burlesque. The careful reader will find these lyrics recalled elsewhere in GB's work as well—"The Grass" informs "Cereals for Roughage" in The Catch; "Inside the Tulip" and "Tongue on Pollen" in Smoking Mirror are related by reiteration. Thus continuity through the identity of structural components rather than theme is mapped in GB's work; each re-occurrence of the lines re-collects the other texts in which the lines figure. There are numerous such examples of textual interdependency; indeed, as I suggested previously, Concentric Circles may be the lone "discrete" GB text.

You'll recall that, in the second inning, GB hit upon signs as mistakable ("think of all the times when the sign has to be mistakable"). Meaning, where words are unmistakably mistakable is certainly not referential, but structural. A word functions synchronically within the immediate textual plane and diachronically insofar as it re-situates absent texts in the present one. Reference is like—to use a simile, appropriately—the ball in the air between catches: in play, directed, but out of control's hands. Words lead out of the text by leaps, as unexpected objects without guarantee of reference as collateral. "*Has not writing been for centuries the acknowledgement of a debt, the guarantee of an exchange, the sign of a representation? But today writing gradually drifts toward the cession of our bourgeois debts, toward perversion, the extremity of meaning, the text...*" (Roland Barthes 18). Perversion depends upon rules, barriers the crossing of which foregrounds both the limit and its transgression. Another version, another take recalls its model in its perversion and a mis-take gives the reader access to original avenues, but within reason—there are rules. "This will be serious, literature" (GB, AM 84), you must be careful. The young Delsing is "Concerned that the game be played seriously by everyone, with no lax observation of rules" (D 492). The game of poetry is metonymically related (by the identity of their syntactic function) to baseball in "Poem & Other Baseballs," the title given the volume of collected poems which featured Baseball; and, as Allophanes admonishes, "Neither baseball / nor poetry / is for fun" ("XX").

There is certainly temporal as well as spatial distance separating each occurrence of quoted lines but temporal address quickly becomes "past" without calibration as to more recent or distant past. This is so for several reasons. Few readers will follow a writer's work chronologically but read a particular text because it is not one they have read before (ie. is physically distinct); hence, readers make of any writer's

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[1]GB has repeatedly asserted that A is prose; by indicating the variant line-breaks I am not challenging this but simply demonstrating the significant alteration of meaning in the textual display.

work a temporal collage. Also, if a writer is concerned with her work as temporal, there is a gap between conception and publication which devalues the currency of opinions expressed in the text. For instance, the manuscript of A Way with Words was offered for publication nine years before it was printed (by another publisher) and Sheila Watson and *The Double Hook* was similarly delayed. Any text is a time capsule, even if the delay is merely a few months. But even more extreme, the act of writing itself is temporally double—what is written is past the moment it is reified spatially, even to the extent that, as Michaux claims: "A gap appears between what he is writing and what is in his mind [...] a gap in time" (Major Ordeals 76). Any writing is past, an archaeological deposit the reading of which is always presently fashioning a palimpsest.

GB frequently draws attention to this past-made-present of which Craft Slices is a prime example. But also, in Errata, there are two passages dated "Aug. 1964, Mexico"; the book was published in 1988. The reader is presented with this temporal palimpsest and invited to treat these passages as expressions of former opinions simply because that date has been announced where it might not have been—has not been, elsewhere in the text. Taking the first of these two, the one entitled "Ninety-Seven" (which is the ninety-sixth, there being an illustration *in lieu* of the fifty-second), it has been inscribed in company with evidently recent passages; spatially continuous yet anachronistic, this passage signals the structure of a discontinuous function, a structure made temporally present when the writer includes (dated 1964), "In twenty-five years I will agree with that language." Presumably he does, it being now the projected twenty-five years. Presumably, however, he has chosen to make the reader infer where he could have directly referred to his present agreement. The reader is forced into writing, filling the gap left by the text, forced to present their own principles of order upon which reading is based.

The reader must be careful, curious and playful in her synthesis when directed to "shore up the fragments for yourself" ("XXIV," Al) and contain the *jouissance*, as in The Catch with "a net dropt into a river or spread upon the sea" (9)—this is a net wherein the definition of its interstices (principles of selection), determines what gets shored up. This is a network where the lines measure what they contain and also determine what perverts the structure.

Links in the textual net are, if anything, at times too numerous. Delsing is a recurring figure in most of GB's work. Delsing's function is that of a signature rather than a simple figure. Recalling Hitchcock's signatory presence in his films, Delsing is one of a mass of sailors or one storeclerk among many victimized by bushwhackers. Mischievously peeking out from the tapestry, Delsing "authorizes" the Bowering text without providing stability. Delsing establishes the mystique of the writing; the pieces do not fit together as in a puzzle but maintain an irreconcilable interdependence.

The paradox of an irreconcilable interdependence is created by GB's work when it is, simultaneously, two mutually exclusive things. The reader sees one thing one time and another, another;

the work itself is inconclusive, refusing to lead the reader. As Kroetsch insists—quoted by GB—quoted by me—"'The minute you ask answerable questions, you're beat as a novelist.' There's hope in that" ("30," E), GB finds. Answerable questions are addressed by GB in structuring his stories. In a letter to Allen Weiss (7 Mar. 1983) GB writes: "the stories I write are made up to solve a problem rather than being based on 'life,'" and the sort of "problem" solved is craft-related: "My stories are concerned with problems in narration," he writes in his 1983 cv. Soluble problems suggest closed form and insoluble ones the open form of mystery, as differentiated in <u>A Place to Die</u>. That GB compares writing lyrics to "snipping off sausages" in a letter to Margaret Randall (21 Feb. 1976) also suggests a closed form, but like a pattern of snowballs thrown on a wall, one can be self-contained and yet, in a collection, form a mystery which invites the reader to connect the dots. The careful reader does not ask what the dots are but what can be done with them; GB tells us that "critical readers, including the author, avail themselves of little if they seek the meanings of the author's narratemes. Rather they should piece out the ways by which he *produces* meanings" ("73," E); that is, investigate order.

Spencer articulates a theory of mobile structures, wherein parts are interchangeable, as investigating order:

> Discontinuity provides a mode of attack on the traditional concept of the book as a medium whose physical properties impose upon its contents a certain type of order. This desire literally to take the book apart and to reorganize its spatial dynamics is the extreme example to date of the spatialization of time. The destruction of the sequential progress of the book from one numbered page to the next represents the abandonment of conventional chronology. The new order, if, indeed, another is substituted for the one that has been cast aside, is based upon the combination of various perspectives on the subject, arranged spatially [202–3].

Continuity is confounded by such structures, but reasserted in the reader's writerly interaction with the text, as GB maintains: "When people talk about discontinuity, disjunction, disruption, and so forth, they are really remarking a break with habitual reading," since, if the reader's attention "is given to the progress of the sentences rather than the events befalling the referent, there can be no question of discontinuity. Sentence follows sentence. There is no meanwhile, no later the same year, no in another quarter of the city. The next sentence is the next sentence to read, continuity, conjunction, narrative" ("11," E). The next sentence to read may land the reader back where they have read in the re-presentation of a previously-published text with, at times, some novel appendage (or not). <u>Craft Slices</u> is evidently such a spatial, and temporal palimpsest—quoting from himself, GB puts the reader in mind of another publication, another time synchronized with the one present. The potential for this quotation to be a recurring compositional method extends the work into the future as it captures the past as well. Finitude, either spatial or temporal, is not here; here the work is open. Open, that is, in terms of its content which is open to revision; but open in terms of structure, too. Consider the construction of the text in alphabetical order which is, according to Butor, the "only way to create a truly amorphous enumeration, to suspend all

conclusions which might be drawn from the relations of proximity among the various elements on the page" (47). Remarkably, this amorphous construction figures in my text as a palimpsest, a discontinuous function, and the mysterious pattern of snowballs, figuring differently under revision of perspectival criteria. Perhaps, then, any text is a potential collection of writings by a reader—writing beyond the open book. But connecting (with) the pitch can't be done from the batter's box—the reader must leave the box to assist in the pitch and is put out. I who order the game am ordered out in this anarchic play.

Seventh Inning

Defining identity is no simple matter; in this inning the terms which language offers for its composition, more particularly the terms GB the writer uses for its composition, come into play. Every entity is a collection of roles, but the question is whether the collection itself is the identity or whether some substance makes the roles incidental to it. The composition of identity is a primary concern in Delayed Mercy & Other Poems and Kerrisdale Elegies, but is not confined to these texts.

Visitors

Ronald Hatch scores a base hit claiming that, in Kerrisdale Elegies, GB puts emphasis "on the way language itself, with its infinite number of tonal shifts, constitutes the individual." The tonal shifts, from an awkward first-person plural to a self-conscious second-person address and elegiac third-person compose the multi-faceted "I" and this clearly *is* a basic strategy of the poem.

The "new autobiographical Kerrisdale Elegies" comes under the Edmonton Journal bat of Charles Mandel whose only direct quotation from the book is a misquote. Mandel claims that: "Once again, as in past books, Bowering falls back on images of baseball to describe life: '...God gives us extra innings...'" (sic). The text reads: "oh God give us extra innings," hardly description but, rather, an appeal for what is not. Completely misreading, and then misquoting, Mandel is easily tagged by the pitcher.

According to A. Vasius, Delayed Mercy consists of "single page poems addressed to other writers. The writers, both living and dead, include an unusual mix." How any writer can be both living and dead mystifies me, but that many are simultaneously capable of this shows them indeed to "include an unusual mix": a striking mix, for one thing.

Vasius is, understandably, wary of this pitch whose "words are not to be taken at face value, for example 'Boy' really means 'poem.'" Vasius considers that this "device" "quickly wears thin. The codifying begs the question: why not just say it? Obscurantism holds the interest only of academics." "'Obscurantism' seems to strike Vasius as a common term not peculiar to the academics among whom Vasius does not count her/himself, they being interested where she/he wants words used at face value. But the batter flails wildly in misunderstanding this "codifying"—it is not a game to mask a randomly chosen word but *shows* the arbitrary nature of all signification. GB shows how conventions, not inherent qualities of words, determine reference and how these conventions are established capriciously. "Face value" is itself a disguise. This is not a quirk of a single signifier in GB's poem, as Vasius complains, but a condition of language.

The team's heavy hitter, the Globe & Mail reviewer cracks Delayed Mercy across the field. "As usual, George Bowering tries to have it both ways: the referential poet pointing at particular objects and

mental states, and the inhabitant of a self-sufficient universe of words. Always a trickster figure among Canadian poets, he is at ease in both modes": at home, one might say.

With two out Mary di Michele is up to bat, faced with Delayed Mercy. "If the book concludes with a section called 'Irritable Reaching,' it may be because the fictive dream is constantly interrupted," she writes, interrupted in her reading as the book *doesn't* "conclude" with "Irritable Reaching." Having struck wide of the text's borders she next defines their composition, again wide of the mark: "The poems are clever and playful, but not organic. The apparent randomness of association of images and the use of *non sequiturs* does not release the unconscious because the poems are so self-referential." Nobody claimed they were organic, and as for releasing the unconscious, GB doesn't think it exists so isn't trying to "release" it. di Michele repeatedly guages the pitch by obviously inappropriate measures, and even admits to being unfamiliar with the pitch's context as she doesn't recognize all of the names heading the "Delayed Mercy" poems—although she presumes they're writers.

Identification is a problem that has shown the measure of this team, counting three out so quickly. Their efforts at definition serve only to define themselves and that may be as far as we get when the home team comes to bat. But here we are sure at least of *where* we are, in the seventh inning stretch, and the demand that places upon us—that Baseball places upon us: "Take me out / to the ball / game" ("1"). We situate ourselves by many measures. In "The Scars" (A 100) GB wonders: "How hard is it to be increasing the distinguishing marks as we near the ending of this." I's, yours and mine, are dis(tin)guis(h)ed in parallel lines, and how rigid is it, being delineated in parallel creases, I ask you as we near the ending of this, too.

Home

In "Syntax Equals the Body Structure" (bpNichol in conversation with GB and Daphne Marlatt), bpNichol referred to the structure of composing—the order in which poems are written, or the syntax, cadence, even characteristic diction—as "armouring of the body" (25) because it is the structure itself which "permits some contents and excludes others." The writing, then, is the trace cut by its own figure, itself, against—what? Perhaps cut against the self, as GB maps in "A Mask Over the Eyes" (DM 19): "Build a wall around the self & dont go / in. Stay outside in the cold night air, / of any story's beginning." Outside, where you are and the self is not, a figure is cut where the ground (uni)forms the figure. But, of course, the body shapes its armour, too—bpNichol goes on to explain the correlation between the body and the writing which Marlatt and GB are also aware of; he says, "I've always seen a connection between the breathing I do and what comes out of me, the words I do, so syntax/body structure, sequence/body structure, but also the body of the poem. I don't know if that makes it clear or muddy, what I've just said. Muddy, eh? George, explicate that [25]!" And he does, in "The Body," where "The body is not now nor has ever been muddy, that is clear. I am in the middle of a stream & my body is the stream & what is the

boat" (A 101). The body is the stream and "I" am in the middle of it—a figure in the writing which streams from the body, etched upon it but separate from it—a construction making muddy what is clear, opaque what is transparent. "I" *am* (in) the naming, in the wall built.

Autobiology is a non-realist writing of the first person which demonstrates, as you can see in "The Body," separation between the speaker and the textual body. This separation has the structure of self-consciousness, an awareness of oneself as if external to the stream and, hence, needing a boat. The reader of the first-person narrative is even more distant from the stream, the written body, than if it were written in the third person, as GB describes in "Syntax Equals the Body Structure": "If it's written in the third person, you and the composer are looking perhaps at the same angle at the thing, with a little parallax; whereas, if its written in the first person [...] the reader is made into a second person who is being spoken to, and therefore distanced" (38). "Point of View," in "A Short Story" defines the point-of-view in the same terms, indicating this to be a well-considered stance persistent in GB's writing. With the distance he finds affected by the first-person point of view comes disavowal of responsibility and a challenge to margins. As GB goes on to say in the discussion, if "I'm writing in the first person, that means I get to say whatever I want," to which bpNichol responds: "So for George, 'I' means the license to kill [39]!" Sharon Spencer summarizes the cosmological consequences of this voice in following the development of Michel Leiris' Aurora, where the narrator "announces that he will drop the impersonal third-person pronoun and henceforth use only the first-person." Spencer notes that "eventually this narrator is nothing but an immense sensitivity let loose upon events and perfectly capable of wrenching reality into the shapes of its desiring: 'I move on,' he boasts, 'and it is not I who change my position in space, but space itself that is changed by my movements'" (34). Even the "I" whose curious eyes chart the landscape make of it their own writing, as does Menzies in "George, Vancouver" (Catch 35), making:

> no charter
> but the eye's charter, the diary
> of Menzies, botanist, illustrator,
> practical man,
> curious.

The curious eyes charting the land are not armoured by the dictates of fancy but are responsible for fictionalizing the land, editing it and cataloguing it according to structures which determine its content. As Saussure remarked of signs, "it is the viewpoint that creates the object" (141).

In Kerrisdale Elegies and several of the sequences in Delayed Mercy the voice is predominantly in the first person[1] but sensitive to the precarious world view that creates. Certainly, space itself is changed by the eye's altering, but one eye sees another "I" seeing differently and the world becomes uncertain. In "Ordinary Blue" (DM 52) the cat is afraid to look up, restraining his curiousity, *afraid / something might*

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[1]The variations upon this and their role in the constitution of a first-person singular identity in KE have already been described.

be looking back." But the man on the facing page "lookt up," filled with the intelligence that his "I" fathers the boy's (poem's) point of view, determining the direction of the looking and its finding as the body's armour limits its composition. But while the eye makes the scene possible it also makes possible other scenes, other seens. One eye's object is another "I" looking back because, you will recall, "a man is at once subject and object, is at once and always going in two directions [...]—at every point of action or decision a man is binary" (Olson, Special View 32). Arpad Kesselring demonstrates this binary identity when, being addressed as "You," he responds with "I?" (C 97.) But any creature capable of self-awareness is binary as addressed in the implicit language of consciousness. The self-consciousness which enables a measure of self-definition creates distance between the articulated "I" and the articulating being, an alienation of the "boy" from the Law of the Father in which terms the "boy" must find expression. The intertextual echoes reinforce the estrangement of the speaker within his own words—they are always prior to and other than him, yet are the substance of his writing/life. This estrangement from language, within language, is primarily a recognition of its appropriation by the Father and its inappropriateness for self-expression.[1]

> *We*
> *are, I remembered, estranged from that with which we are*
> *most familiar.*
> *The farther it is from the ground, I reflected, the less quickly*
> *nature works its changes. That bird is not a week older in its*
> *feathers a year and a half later [...].*
> —"Fenders in New Condition" (DM 54)

For the writer the corpse of the bird, reified as an icon, has become a symbol; abstract from dynamic "nature," the referent's dead, the word, ungrounded. In Genève the House of God as depicted destroyed by the lightning of God's holy fire occasions the comparison between God and the poet, killing "what he makes / in order to make." Order is crucial for "making," but often itself kills as regulation critically inhibits expression. In "Delayed Mercy" the "I" is restricted by "the house firmly attacht to my back" (54); the structure which encloses and defines him also imprisons him. Correspondingly, the objects of his eye's focus he contentedly labels while at the far reaches of his yard, his pace, lurks the undefinable. The verse of the sequence returns predictably and safely aware of its margins, but where that pace is lengthened by the wide prose on the page "my unusually wide peripheral vision" becomes aware of movement too quick to name, too quick to be fixed by a word:

> *I exited the*
> *house, patrolled the back yard, [...].*
> *At the edge of my unusually wide*
> *peripheral vision I caught movement; it was either a cat or a*
> *symptom of age, or some pronoun. I scanned the back alley,*
> *then re-entered the house.*
> —"Fenders in New Condition" (DM 54)

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[1]Jacques Lacan outlines this inherently alienating structure of language but this is a concern expressed in the writing of Jack Spicer, Luce Irigaray and others.

Safe and sure, "my" is "a pronoun we can trust" (DM 27). But "my" names an object in relation to the namer—proprioceptively appropriating its identity. "As soon as I name, I am named" (Pleasure of the Text 30), Barthes says. The writer articulates his locus and armours himself against it simultaneously, building a wall defined by the self.

Like The Sensible, Kerrisdale Elegies blends the intertextuality which characterizes Allophanes and Curious with the poet's personal refashioning of a mythic, universal story grounded in his particular locus. But making it the eye's charter, making it "my story" is making it "mine": space itself is changed by the subject's pronominal re-naming, the pronoun altering possession. In "Delayed Mercy" the figure of the poem wrestles with the narrator for possession. "*The black & white killer cat*" walks "my way," but that means both challenging and imitating the viewing "I" who seeks to control the situation with pronouns: he sees the cat is "*intent on / patrolling my, not his, yard*" (51). The speaker's need to assert his ownership shows that ownership to be in doubt, as does the ambiguity in the pronouns where both cat and man patrol a yard as if they owned it.

The attempt to tell "my story" is every inch the (im)position that the official (hi)stories are. The writer, thus caught with his hand in the codification of culture, can only draw the reader's attention to this artificiality; inextricably linked with this is the sacrifice of the author's authority, his self-identity as challenged by his own text. Hence the irony in Kerrisdale Elegies—the writer's appropriation of a cultural monument he demythologizes maps his own self-effacement. In thus quarrelling with its pretext, the text becomes, in Foucault's estimation:

> the link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer; the quibbling and confrontations that a writer generates between himself and his text cancel out the signs of his particular individuality. If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing [117].

The very activity of writing, regardless of the content, signifies death in the attainment of composition and identity, the fixing of a living text in a formal system which creates a signifier independent of life: the dead bird, ungrounded. And the writer, in completing the course of writing ceases to be a writer. He leaves the trace of his passage burning, as in "Elegy Six" (89): "When they saw him raise his arms at the tape / he was no racer but erased; / in his place the blinking corner of a constellation." That is why, as GB writes in "Kites in the Water," "all death writing is self-referential" (DM 45). So, the text signifies the death both of the referent and the author, but, come to piece together immortal signs, the reader becomes a clairvoyant writing and re-animates the inscribed subject. Where the pronoun is "I," clearly that refers both to the author and reader, and where "the boy" says "I," it/he refers to the text, as well. Because of this integration

> when 'the poem' ends I die. We always
> say 'the poem' in quotation marks,
> sometimes invisible; it is a way
> of disclaiming parenthood. 'The boy'
> would do as well. When 'the boy' is over
> I die. So I will write 'the boy'
> for as long as I can.
> > Kids come & go,
> I call them all 'the boy.'
> > —"Not an Equinox" (DM 25)

Dead figures and the void of death that establishes distance from the reader allows the desire and longing which actualizes the reading and, too, the writing.

> > We need the mystery, we need
> the grief that makes us long for our dead friends,
> we need that void for our poems.
> We'd be dead without them.
> > —"Elegy One" (19)

In "Syntax Equals the Body Structure," bpNichol mentioned the connection between breathing and writing that recalls Olson's equation of the heart, by way of the breath, to the line. In "It's Another Miracle" GB reminds us that: "All this breathing & blood flow & sometimes / speech; all this becomes a fiction / when you are in a poem" (DM 46). It is the body which determines the parameters of the poem, becoming itself fictional in that inscription. Named by its naming, the inscription locates the body:

> *Separate from let us say the trees & all that may be living*
> *hardly significant lives in them, I stood at the back door, [...].*
> *Separate from the boy I am reading and the boy I am writing, I*
> *would be nothing but a hairless pronoun cat drinking coffee, I*
> *decided, empty of intelligence like a cup stained by old brown*
> *acid.*
> > —"Sequestered Pop & a Stripe" (DM 55)

All of GB's texts present burning mo(nu)ments, but none so intensely as Kerrisdale Elegies; although Rilke is no fan of GB's nor is GB of Rilke the genealogy is clear, but no sooner has GB made this evident than a quotation from H.D. appears, or Mallarmé, or Eliot, or La Forgue, or Keats, or GB's own writings.

> I follow one scent,
>> sure of my appetite,
> but am distracted by a crossing spoor.
>>>> My nature
>> is torn,
>> I am a trespasser,
>>> I promised to
> steer clear,
>> stay in my own territory,
>>>> but love
> makes intruders,
>>> I am not I here,
>>>> but the burglar
> of your past.
>>> —"Elegy Four" (52)

Intruding upon "past" texts "I" defines itself in stolen words. This "I," any "I" depends upon appropriation of the "constant formula" of *langue*; defining itself in *parole* "I" forges space and time "stealing the text," as Smaro Kamboureli describes Kerrisdale Elegies. But this thievery is the source of identity. As we are all subjects defined in our self-conscious narratives of daily activity this is hardly surprising—the "I" is defined by its movements in this infinite text, by its relationship to its context.

> Sitting down, I can travel
> nearly as fast as my mind,
> but beneath me is the highway
> made of a constant formula. It sticks fast
> to the surface of the earth, not
> to slow me down, me & us.
>
> all you pronouns I dont know, faces
> behind the glare of eastward glass.
>> —"Motel Consideration" (DM 36).

The constant formula which forms the very ground that supports the subject is an armour, but it is also a necessary vehicle whose parameters enable the author to anticipate and play off them. "The author is looking a little way down the road his sentences are becoming, and gliding with a kind of hip *gnosis*. Not to get somewhere, let us say, but to be getting there" ("29," E). To *be*, in getting there, "I" is creating itself, is creating pronouns in which it finds expression and which sometimes appropriate the very identity they present, as in "Facial Massage" (DM 37), where "Now I is this other, I is / a pronoun riding & writing / & mostly writing." This "other" eyeing you, the named, naming, is a structure GB articulates in "Syntax Equals the Body Structure," where he says that: "Any time you write, there's an understood 'I.' So if you're talking in the first person presumably either those two I's collapse or there are two distinct "I"s, one ironically beholding the other one" (41).

In Kerrisdale Elegies the subject maintains substantial ironic distance from his context. Discontent with the subject matter and structural mimicry of its pre-text measure the subject's disaffection. GB wrote to the Mandels of Kerrisdale Elegies as "a hopeless long poem made of long lines about the beyond and

the before and the meaning of life" (27 Jul. 1982); these long lines by their very length and density (single-spaced in exam booklets) insist upon their ponderous weightiness. The published version has staggered and broken the once prose-looking lines, but the Williams-like variable foot used in the poem effectively shows a subject searching for definition, for margins; searching in an alien world where Kerrisdale is a landscape as separate from the eye as the space between the stars or the text of the Duino Elegies itself. Measuring his pace hesitantly yet with the grand scope of a self-conscious Prufrock it is identity itself that the poem's subject seeks and which is the poem's subject. Gertrude Stein wrote, "what can a master-piece be about mostly it is about identity and all it does and in being so it must not have any" (151). Posing for his own self-evaluation, his own eye, the subject measures himself against the masterpieces of the past, changing them by his re-vision.

Featured prominently on the cover for the reader's eye is the book's mask: the writer, posed. Kerrisdale Elegies, like Curious, has a photographic margin. Both texts are examples of what Kroetsch calls: "Canadian books of poetry with, obsessively (madly?), their photos and illustrations that do and do not fit. The phenomenology of erasure: replace language with image. Or, documentation: the presence of absence" (Essays 103). There certainly is documentation in the cover photograph of Kerrisdale Elegies, but with its torn edges, white paper encroaching upon GB's dark features and even his name partially obscured by the white, the photograph itself overpowers its content. What is seen is decay and the document as an artifact which has replaced its own subject, the spatial record of—certainly temporal, but spatial, too—absence. Thinking that a god could have scampered across the lawn during a moment's inattention, the narrator dwells upon missed things that likely never could have happened at all. The awareness of absence and the decay of what once was present leaves only pretense: "We hang on," in "Elegy Six," "scotch-taping our blossoms to/ our already browning stems" (80). The absence of blossoms, like the absence of Marilyn Monroe, is a bereavement made legendary out of all proportion to the (lost) presence. She "made silly movies," but, dead, becomes a greater star—so, too, the heroes who have become the "gruesome gone" were not ever of the Herculean variety. It is not the absence of greatness which occasions the poem—it is not simply mock-heroic—but the self-effacing pretense itself. Certainly, as the missed joys become the more tawdry the poem mocks its grandiloquent tone, but the subject is composed by those very measures of imperfection, as in "Elegy Five" (72):

> how dark in my heart is the place where we all
> could not make the play,
>   fell to earth crooked,
>   swung a bat too late,
>   threw far over the fielder's head,

acts executed short of ideal. But measuring oneself against what did not happen makes oneself a construct as related to absent (possible) worlds. Building one's identity upon scenarios of perfection which may or may not have been, like the fall of Hephaestus from Olympus or Satan from Heaven, makes crafty forgers, perhaps even artists of the lapsed ones.

Pronouns refer to an antecedent, a prior "baptism" validating the pronoun. Photographs, too, are signs of the prior spatial arrangement which composed the subject. As structures of signification, then, both pronouns and photographs depend for reference upon prior contexts, in their present context signifying the absence of their antecedent. In their present context they are placeholders documenting absence. Just as the cover photograph of Kerrisdale Elegies has itself replaced its referent, pronouns derive an identity from their particular context independent of reference. They also re-situate their prior inscriptions in the text with each subsequent one, in a regress culminating in the initialization of the variable (for pronouns are variables), within the text. They are counters which replace a subject, but the replacement is such that the prior existence of the subject is incidental to the sign. Nostalgia for what never was, as in Kerrisdale Elegies, corresponds to the pronominal ambiguity where the inconsistent point of view shows the reader, attempting to reconstruct a subject, the multiple perspectives from which the subject eyes itself. The pronouns themselves, like the cover photograph, construct the identity of a speaking subject as a contextual placeholder—a subject as variable as the sentences in which "I"/"you"/"she"/"he"/"we"/"they" appears. So there are two distinct functions of pronouns, like photographs: to reconstitute an absent figure and as figures themselves, as word-objects or contextually-defined placeholders.

In "Irritable Reaching," part of which was published separately as Ear Reach, the referent of each "reach" is a word-object broken more precisely into a design of letters. Having a pretext like that of "Delayed Mercy" and Curious which requires that each part of the poem identify a particular artist, Ear Reach re-constitutes that identity graphically within the text of the poem itself. Visually, the name of each artist is apparent in the left margin of each acrostic—their name designates the length of the poem and the first letter of each line—here an "armoured body" whose structure determines its content. But that game has rigid rules whose arbitrariness itself makes the game self-mocking. The catalogue structure of "Irritable Reaching," like "Delayed Mercy," shows an arbitrarily ordered site to the reader which, consequently, invites re-vision where not even temporal linearity is prescribed. In the sixth inning, Craft Slices was shown to have a similarly arbitrary, yet rigid, structure. Craft Slices is an arranging of GB's history as an "I," as a textual eye on the literary world—not his story but his writing's—the history of his "I"'s observations.

As the text's structure defines its content, and the body defines the self, identity is itself forged by the terms of its expression—by the particular mask, or skin, which formulates it. But, then:

> Does a mask
> feel the touch of a mask;
>   does the face
> beneath the mask feel the mask?
>   —"Elegy Two" (32)

That is, is the self covered by the mask conscious of its limitations, and if so, how are the margins defined?

In Craft Slices the (understood) writing "I" stages another "I," another writing "I" whose mask is both mimicked and worn by the writer. And when the stage set by the eye, figured by the "I," determines the direction of the I and the "I," then how, and why, is one to distinguish between fictions? In "Elegy Eight" "I know / the fiction of my past and expect to walk / straight into my fancied future" (112), as the armouring of the body directs its course. The writing is both the stream and its course, the composing present from which sources are extrapolated as in Genève where "with each turn of the wrist / I confront the present," while "I learn to create the past / I live in." He eyes the ancestors (like Rilke and Vancouver), there in that "past I live in"—a view of the stream where what's past is not passed but presented as figures made masks for the writer. The question of the existence of the "past," then, as independent of its present re-membering is closely related to the question of the independent existence of the writer or his sources. In Kerrisdale Elegies he even creates his readers, as in "Elegy Seven" where the speaker looks for "a listener who has not announced herself" (93), while addressing his own voice as itself a being who has outgrown poems "on this street of leaves"; the voice learning a new language draws a new audience reflexively identified with its own speaker.

> You speak a language you are only now learning,
> hoping she will hear you,
>   knowing she is yourself
> out there.
>   —"Elegy Seven" (93)

Gertrude Stein wrote that: "When you are writing before there is an audience anything written is as important as any other thing," ("Master-Pieces" 153). but, "After the audience begins, naturally they create something that is they create you, and so not everything is so important, something is more important than another thing" (154). The audience creates "you," the subject of attention, by focussing upon "you" in a role. The poet of Kerrisdale Elegies is being created in the roles he writes, the terms of his expression—the pronouns. Measured by his own text, the poet's identity is not affirmed there but, rather, consumed. In section "VII," from "Delayed Mercy," the pronouns form a constellation shifting with the subject's grammatical identity—a kind of parallax—showing the absence of any absolute perspective external to the context; showing, too, the ability of variables to subvert referential equations. "When you are both lying dead, / having lost at length, she'll be there, / she'll be you" (70). Or, "When you are both lying dead, / having lost at life, it'll be there, / it'll be you" (71). As variables initialized by a viewer's perspective, these pronouns have a syntagmatic identity like the re-placement in a causal chain referring back to an antecedent. But they also have a paradigmatic component which depends upon a reader's replacement of the placeholder, the suspension of disbelief by the text's addressee (you) so that "I'll be you" (69); "we'll be you" (75); "you'll be there, why, you'll be home" (76).

Eighth Inning

This inning's lineup is composed of newspaper reviewers from the nation's foremost journals: The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star and, for geographical balance, the Winnipeg Free Press. The pitch, which perceptive eyes see is a curve ball, is Caprice.

Visitors

The first batter is Morley Walker whose address to the pitch is curiously contradictory. He accuses GB both of padding and abbreviating the text. It seems that Walker finds "Lots of white space to give the impression of bulk," yet writes that Bowering "drops the apostrophe in contractions such as wouldnt and couldnt to save you from reading all those extra characters." Switch hitting is a clever way to keep the field on its toes, but this batter is flailing in two opposite directions. He's got his back to the pitch, which is probably why he misjudges its path so ludicrously in attributing the lack of apostrophes to sparing the reader. Thus flailing wildly, Walker makes a sweeping statement but doesn't connect: "Because Mr. Bowering wants to be judged as a Canadian novelist with a historical conscience, he makes his heroine bilingual." Replay that swing yourself; see if there's any connection to be found. Strike two.

It's uncharitable to mock such a weak player and perhaps not worth the effort, seeing as that effort exceeds Walker's own, finding as he does that "The most charitable thing you can say about George Bowering's new Western [sic] novel Caprice is that it's an easy read." Given a perfect pitch, Mr. Walker stands there—he doesn't even see it go by. Strike three. The batter is out.

Maggie Helwig steps up to the plate. Eyeing Caprice, Helwig writes: "Caprice seems to have stepped onto the page straight from a fantasy of Bowering's." Well, if a character steps onto a page, whose fantasy is that, and what is fiction if not the fantasy of an author? That is certainly a swipe Helwig took, but at what? Certainly her next swing is directed, but like Walker's, it hits against her own first premise when she sweepingly pronounces that the "few occasions when Caprice begins to seem human" are "when she is not directly present, but in the mind of her lover." It seems that Caprice is human when she is a fantasy which, we just saw, is a terrible thing to be. Strike two.

This non-linear swing may be appropriate considering the context. Caprice as a form is noted by Helwig in spite of herself, claiming as she does that "Caprice and her mission are often only the pretext for a succession of vignettes and eccentric characters that don't really have much to do with her." But that Helwig offers this as a strike against the novel indicates that she has not considered the relevance of the title to the work. Strike three.

A heavy hitter is what this team needs, and here The Globe and Mail[1] presents a reviewer:

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[1]Charles Mandel, "Horsing Around," Globe and Mail (23 May 1987).

Charles Mandel. Strikingly, Mandel no sooner steps to the pitch than he loses his balance. A faulty parallel construction causes him to take a strike over "Caprice's impulsive decision to search out and avenge the death [...]" of her brother. There is no "searching out" of any death to be done here—we know quite well where it occurred and no indication is given in the book that it is a migratory death. Evidently off balance, Mandel trips again. He mentions Caprice's "boyfriend Frank Smith," but as anyone who has read the novel knows, her boyfriend is Roy Smith. And as anyone who has read the liner notes knows, they were misprinted and say her boyfriend's name is Frank Smith. Are we getting a review paraphrased from misprinted liner notes? Is that possible in a respectable organ like the Globe? Oops. And the batter trips again, taking his third strike in making a claim that is contradicted in—had he bothered to read—the novel. "Caprice [sic] gives Bowering the latitude to range over a variety of subjects. For example, he laments the loss of the frontier." No, GB writes that the frontier's loss is the beginning of its creation as myth, as story. He even emphasizes this by placing it at the end of a chapter:

> In the little shrinking strands of the west that are still left, stories are being written. They are usually called the last of something.
> The last of the Mohicans
> The last of the curlews.
> The last of the cowboys.
> The last western hero.
> In the absence of a complete silence we hear a voice saying come back, Shane. And hoofbeats. The hell with us. We are all Europeans now. Now we can write the books and plays and operas. We just have to look around in the past and find subjects. There we will find a cowboy rather than a business man. The west has shrunk so much that we can get it inside us [...].
> Some of us wouldn't mind seeing the last of it [110].

Three up, three down—lots of swipes with no hits: not even a glancing blow. So it goes. It's probably less the pitch's improvement than the easy disprovement of the batters which made for such a swift inning half. GB himself laments the sorry game played by so many reviewers, due possibly to the lack of training they get: "one too often looks to the papers and magazines to see how badly taught are the youths who seem to move from an unsuccessful year in grade 10 composition to a reporter's desk at the Bugle" ("English, Our English" 9). To remedy this, a "methodology could be introduced, perhaps beginning with the admonition that the reviewer read the book to be reviewed," GB suggests. Surely that is not unreasonable. GB's advice is particularly relevant seeing that he has viewed book reviewing from, as it were, both sides. Occasionally he points out how disillusioned he was upon discovering the procedure at the Calgary Albertan whereby books were piled on a table to be picked up by anyone who cared to make extra bucks reviewing—no expertise required—neither is any shown by the majority of reviewers in print. "Will we always have the unlearned judging the learned?" GB laments in "Balancing the Books." It would appear so; as long as reviewing is poorly done and gives itself a bad name, serious writers will tend to avoid such "menial" jobs. Which is certainly unfortunate, though by no means the universal situation of reviewing; interpretive readers come to view Caprice, too. And she is no easily-penetrated site. In fact, she is a rather challenging field.

Home

On the face of it, <u>Caprice</u> would seem to be a historical novel, sequential to <u>Burning Water</u> and set in the wild west. In fact, one of the characters is a journalist who writes, he says, "history" (97): the term he gives to his "story of the wild west. Facts about life in the big country, for people who are tired of their own stories" (96). "Fact," "story" and "history" are shown to bear an integral relationship to each other in this narrative, made increasingly problematic as the "facts" are shown to be less representative of the world than the story, and history the most artificial creation of all.

Facts are the domain of the eyes where "seeing it with your own eyes" is the ultimate verification. But eyes are fallible and their capacity varies among viewers whose competence may be related to their background. "If you had Indian eyes you would see the hawk's head bent to look below him with eyes even better than yours. But if you had ordinary eastern eyes you might be satisfied or even transported by the lovely morning light" (34). Besides the Indian eyes and the ordinary eastern eyes through which, as I have said, the viewer's background is related the textual ground itself is spotted with eyes, like the "ordinary English eyes" (1) which are blind as the eyes of an eastern greenhorn, less perceptive than even "ordinary human eyes" (203). There *are* perceptive eyes (21) elsewhere in the text. They are eyes that would see beyond the facts before them, see perhaps with the mind's eye more clearly than even with the extraordinary eyes of the eagle. There are, as well, the "dangerous eyes" (242) of Frank Spencer which become, when relaxed, "ordinary Yankee eyes" (103). It is evident that the variety of eyes itself signifies within this text, and where different eyes are said to set a different scene upon a single site, that scene is shown to be indeterminate; the ground itself changes and subverts any presumption to points of reference or "facts" in the historical narrative.

Eyes are selective, they don't get the "complete" picture of the world and so their view is actually a revision, editing—as we are told Luigi does, seeing only what he privileges with his attention—Caprice. "If Luigi had been able to take his eyes from her he would have noticed that there were other people on the wooden sidewalk and in the dust of the street watching her" (11). Whereas Luigi does not appear to be conscious of editing the world, Caprice is aware of it. She sees that the earth itself is "a place to read," but knowingly chooses to divert her eyes in order to read another story. "It was not easy for a former poet to resist the opportunity to read. She chose, though, to read the writing on the thin road. She did not imagine that she was leaving a story for others" (252). The fact of that choice itself creates a story, should someone come along to read it, but the facts of the matter are not the whole story, not by half. The perceptive eye looking to see the real story does not read it by looking only at facts; one stares blankly at the raw data of uncomprehended facts. "You try to clear your mind and look at the country, and it looks back at you without thinking at all. If paying attention only to what lies in front of your eyes really worked, cows would be better poets than Frenchmen are" (226). Here interpretation of the facts, the literal ground, is a selective, mental recreation that is likened to writing itself. Arpad Kesselring, the

journalist who prefers the story to the facts declares that "I am a writer" (106). By which he means that his "principle responsibility is to the story and its reader, not to the repetitive details of the country I am writing about" (106). Indeed, in "his dispatches he often made things up, and in fact the parts he made up were quite frequently the best parts" (93). So much for history; this is the real story. "This is not history," Roy Smith says to Caprice. "This is our lives" (265). The second Indian sees it a bit differently. While agreeing that "this is not history," the mystery of it overwhelms him. "This is a spook story" (247) he declares. A story it is, certainly, but that in no way denigrates its relevance to the world. "Do you think a story is just a story? [89]" the first Indian castigates his pupil, while in town the bartender truthfully tells Kesselring there are "Lots of stories in this country [...]. Hardly any of them true." To which the writer, concurring with the first Indian claims: "The farther you get from the site, the more truth there is in the stories." "Is that a fact?" (97), responds the bartender. The fact is, getting away from the site may require abstracting the figure from the ground, truly interpreting the "real" story.

Caprice is a writer and an interpretive reader who can see beyond the evident facts of the matter to the story, the motivation and emotion that is the background of the fact. Like building a context for an isolated artifact she builds a world, and that is her real story: "if there is one thing I know how to do it is to find the real story among the rubbish that people deliver to you as facts" (158), Caprice says. Her interpolative ability itself reshapes what she sees with her eyes in reading facts.

The story of the ground is spatial. But the truly interpretive reader sees time itself expressed spatially, giving to the story the full context of spatio-temporal situation: "if you have another kind of eye," you "can turn away from the range and look millions of years into the past. You will read the first writing of the Thompson Valley, a story left" (34) where Caprice's eye picks it out. Her eyes read stories in time as well as space; looking at some rocks that tell the story of an avalanche long past (255) she also is said, by the narrator, to have the potential to "look into what she thought of as the future to see the death of Frank Spencer" (259). Similarly, Caprice carries two pictures of Spencer. One depicts "what he looked like" (42) in the past, with the Campbell crew at a picnic. The other is a "picture of him in her head. In this picture Frank Spencer was bleeding" (42). The "imaginary" picture is the one more striking for its physical detail; the "factual" picture shows the—identically posed—men as background for a plank table. Foregrounding Spencer from the latter requires an extraction from the ground, creating anew through extrapolating the *fact* of his looks. However, in the mental picture the strikingly visceral image facilitates the interpolation of a furious, fatal *story*. And story is what Caprice builds in her world—not just the factual detail. We are told that she sees "Vidette Lake, the last lake on the valley floor. It was probably filled with trout that would soon lie still in the high sun" (252). The fact of what she sees is not trout and what trout will do in time, but an aptly-named lake as a floor upon which she builds a story, the denser text wherein figures project.

Story is not here the final meaning of the text, but the text is a generative matrix—yes, matrix—drawn on by the viewers. Caprice's text is plotted as the ground or country, her story/history is interpreted. That interpretation indelibly bears the mark of its agent, the idiosyncratic interpreter who draws meaning itself from the unthinking country of facts. Interpretation is that "which does not proceed of its own accord; far from it. Now, *within it, meanings seethe*" (Michaux, Major Ordeals 142). Caprice and Kesselring, both writers, read the ground, the country they refashion in leaving their own prints upon it, their traces becoming a story for those who follow them. The story Caprice leaves is a sign read by bandits and schoolteachers and Indians—the first Indian in particular "was really interested in this story he had been reading in the soft ground along the creek bed" (246)—a story marginal to the mainstream which he sees to explain, not the fact of direction, but the rationale of that route within a larger order wherein he, reading, situates Caprice. But, of course, Caprice is also read by you and I: eyes setting sites differently, scores of ways (of) fixing the ground.

Doc Trump fixes the world with his static vision as does Minjus, whose photographs can transcend mimesis to art—"a kind of no-trump d'oeil," GB writes in "Match Boxes" (PD 46), striking foul. In conversing with Trump, Minjus says that the average outlaw and the average lawman see "themselves as acting out a story that's half drama and half history. They love getting their pictures taken. They are both already looking for the sympathy of the audience, even if the audience is going to be watching the story unfold, as they say, a long while after the players are all dead" (168). The characters watch themselves, even as they watch the reader who shadows them, looking for sympathy. Thus are the characters conscious of their image, composition of which implicates the gazer. Minjus' hypothesis would seem to be borne out as Groulx sees himself immortalized in a story; united with Spencer—the already "storied yank" (125)—Groulx "considered himself a possible character in a story" (105). Coincidentally, the first Indian also thinks of himself as a potentially textual entity, thinking if "he were a white man [or woman] he would probably resemble a book, a very thick book, in which the things that happen do not happen precipitately, but rather in a roundabout way" (129): warped and weft like Caprice whose namesake, curiously, does not conceive (of) herself this way. She does not, as do so many of the characters, look at herself doing what she does; she is not conscious of leaving a story for others. Neither is Spencer's vision self-conscious—Groulx can be seen "practising his mean look, but Spencer's eyes were always looking up and down the valley" (169).

Groulx wants to look the part of a bandit thinking thus to become a bandit, as the image one composes of oneself to present to the world situates one within that world. Our place is allotted as drawn. As a parallel, the first Indian knows he must appear to be wise to maintain his place within society. Others think him to "look wise, he knew, and he was not above a little wise-looking" (190) in keeping his place. His visibly well-trained pupil, the second Indian soon "produced what he thought to be a rueful grin. He had been sitting up straight on his horse at the edge of the bench, trying on a pose he had seen in a

magazine painting on a barbershop wall" (229). The town's banker, coincidentally, is also "interested in the image he would present when he appeared before his employees" (196), presenting himself as composed with interest. Composed like a photographic image (a snapshot, like the "eyeshot" which Caprice's presence fixes), the banker, the Indians, Groulx, and most of the characters thus are self-created in their own images, projecting their own consciousness as perceived. And I do mean that the consciousness actualizes the physical being, as Lacan believes when he states in "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze" that "I would prefer to call the seer's 'shoot' (*pousse*) something prior to his eye" (72). But paradoxically, the eye locates one materially in their environment as well, composing such an "eyeshot."

Hence, projection constructs a world wherein your situation is inscribed by your self-conception, the perception of which creates its (related) objects. Indeed, any perception creates a world, as it appears to the viewer. We read that there "was not another building in eyeshot, just the quiet train tracks leading away across the brown flats to their meeting place out of sight" (226-7) and we see the world described—where tracks have a "meeting place" or, indeed, are attributed with the activity of "leading"—to be a fabrication of the description. So, too, a world is made by Roy's perception while on a train that for "a second before he blinked the train was sitting still and the moon was racing on the lake. Then the train was moving again" (77). Caprice, like her namesake, builds such a world when she "looked up and down the valley, and now she transformed it in her mind. She planted long vineyards on the higher slopes, and created fruit orchards as far as she could see" (32). Here creation and sight are related, with the peculiar twist that neither make reference to material phenomena, yet the textual world thus imaged has definite spatial features. In fact, the sight of the material world is not necessary at all to the wise Indian, who "could remember seeing a lot better than he could see, but he could also pretend he could see a lot better than he could see" (2). Pretending to see, and doing it convincingly, suggests that the fact of seeing the site is not necessary to its perception. Pretended though it may be, the sight realizes a world, even populates that world in naming the beings of that world, witness the first Indian who has "heard of cases in which fathers have pretended to see an elk at the birth of their children so they can call them things such as Running Elk, or Elk Who Fears No Hunter" (56). Making the whole story up still reifies a world in its description—or name, as the case may be.

Both the names that differentiate creatures and their self-consciousness are related to/by their eyes. Consciousness itself is shown by the physical eyes in this text as they are more or less alert, confusing conventional distinctions between abstract and concrete. Metaphor and literalness wind together in a country where one can throw "memory to the ground" (251) and then read a story from that ground. In this place physical eyes can fix, abstractedly, on an absence—as Spencer's eyes are fixed in attention to a door that isn't there. The narrator says Spencer growls at Groulx "without moving his eyes from their attention to the rectangular hole in the wall where a door had once been" (162). Then, when Caprice has been assaulted and is dazed, her "eyes were not in control of their seeing. She looked utterly vulnerable"

(185). What she looks at is not sharply delineated in her present state of mind, so her looks have become abstract, become "utterly vulnerable" as compared with the usual graphic precision of her appearance. But soon her "eyes were back in the present where they belonged" (186), where the added dimension of time all the more precisely fixes Caprice. But the textual concreteness of eyes is used to show the relative alertness of other characters, too. Smith's practical state of mind changes with a vision of Caprice. His pupil, expecting a scolding, "saw that his teacher's eyes were not there" (174). And Spencer's thoughts are also shown in terms of the spatial location of his eyes—they are a "long way off," then, in a flash, "his eyes were right there in the room" (126).

The idiosyncratic expression of this text features a striking number of words that denote seeing, though at times their use idiomatically connotes non-visual activity—as when Caprice's attention is said to be "focused" (256), or when, preoccupied, she brings her food to a "blind mouth" (21). Such peculiar metaphors countenanced by the narrator show seeing to be more than an abstract activity; eyes figure in the physical expression worn by the text. Consider the expression "pop your eyes out," which connotes awe, but the literal denotation of which is enough to make any reader squeamish seeing that the banker's wife is not going to "stand here and watch you [her awed spouse] pop your eyes out at a tramp"; so she nags him until the saddle tramp and horse fade from "eyeshot" (196).

Eyes are matter—they are a physical feature of a body, even the body of this text, Caprice. Their material sense is denoted when a stagecoach, intact despite the worst intentions of the bungling Spencer & Groulx is "followed by four eyes staring with disbelief" (94). The four eyes metonymically situate the outlaws within the text. Syntactically, the "stagecoach" within the text is followed by the "four eyes," but of course, this is a metaphor. Eyes don't really "follow," if you follow me. Both the literal and figurative "eyes" open this text for reshaping, reviewing through the (admittedly) ordinary eyes of the follower. "Ordinary eyes were always following Caprice wherever she walked" (119), and "wherever she walked," it's spatial, though the eyes' trail is figurative. Thus is an ordinary "eye" metaphor made into a pun: a characteristic of Caprice. Elsewhere, the outlaw who follows her in his gunsight shoots and flees "over the ridge and out of sight" (59), the conjunction of these structurally-similar prepositional phrases syntactically paralleling position in the landscape with position in view. Thus eyes are here part of the ground, they (are) matter in the text, creating what they lie on. One of Caprice's followers is Luigi, the "Eye-talian," who is "always following her around with his big gooey eyes" (152). On the face of it this is just a metaphoric expression, but since eyes have elsewhere been equated with the entire body, through synecdoche, this expression has an erotic aspect as Luigi's eyes are *on* her—he can't "take his eyes from her" (11), figuratively speaking.

Although material in this story, eyes both see and show abstractions. And it is important that they show as well as see. In seeing Caprice they show Caprice, foregrounding the face of the text through its expression. "There was no scarcity of eyes turned her way as she walked, even though she didn't bounce

at all.. There was no scarcity of minds and mouths making comment, either. As she passed before them, the men and women in the shops and in front of them found sentences or fragments of sentences shaping inside their heads or directly in front of them" (25). Whether in books or in front of them readers, too, find sentences shaping directly in front of them, here the tight, black lines of Caprice; whatever lines were already in mind are displaced in focusing on her. Roy's attention is drawn from his (prepared) text to her, as "when he was a little too much convinced of his role as teacher and wise moral guide, she would put on an accent and a demure feminine whimper. That would always stop his paragraph" (39). Even the townsfolk, whose dialogue is connected through diction and metaphor rather than sense, drop their babble of referential personal narratives, stories which are just stories, to eye Caprice. "Looky here" (155); and look, we do.

Evidently it is not only the quality of the eyes that are looking, or even the quality of the look itself, but the mere word "look" sets a scene the indeterminacy of which is seen even through the word's usage. "Look" functions within Caprice as a verb—both active and passive—as a noun, as an interjection and in idiomatic constructions. Its appearance images characters equally with chattel in this context, addressing them with characteristics based upon their visual appeal. A "teacup looked wonderful" (40) but Groulx apparently does not, as Spencer insults his looks (200), on the face of it seeming justified in his jabs. Nevertheless, take a look at these ugly characters, who look to the narrator as if they are "not looking for trouble, at least not yet, not looking to be the recipients of any trouble" (219) while riding through the Cherry Creek Ranch. And "see," like "look," constructs both a world as perceived and a contextual world, each of which is revised when the material word becomes an idiomatic part of speech. Caprice wants to *see* that Cabayo is fine at the hostler's, knowing she "could probably trust the man, but she liked to see for herself, to see her horse" (25). An idiom become a verb, "see" here changes before the reader's eyes though the word appears to be identical. It is the context which indicates the version of the word in play; thus is the field itself a signifier, figuring in the composition of the word.

The eyes of a careful reader, looking here at the text's tight lines—which do not bounce at all—see "right now there was no one moving except Caprice on her horse slowly walking down the middle of the gravelly road" (11). Caprice on her horse is "one," the only one moving and there are not—look carefully—two beings in motion. The conflation of Caprice with her horse clarifies that it's not Cabayo's trail we're watching—though that's who's walking, not Caprice—Caprice is united with her conveyance. Thus is the message one with its medium, the figure with its ground. Notably, it is in mentioning the (abstract) *cavalleria* to which he attributes his (physical) pain that Luigi confuses the second Indian who knows that horses are involved, but is uncertain whether Luigi is thus referring to Caprice or to *where* she was. "But was he thus referring to the young woman, admittedly coltish, or the site of his humiliation?" (35). It's easy to see, the answer is "yes."

The figure and its ground configurate to form a texture the fabric of which is the face (in which) Caprice shows the world. It is scarred with a C (11). One sees Caprice rides Cabayo and eats at the Canadian Cafe, which features "Chinese and Canadian Cooking" (19), repeatedly. She meets a woman in the American Cafe, details of whose name she recalls only a "C" and who becomes "Mrs. C" (21), defeats Spencer at the falls named for Charette—Deadman Falls—that she beat Constable Burr to, he deterred to the Campbell Ranch, the "LC" (the Spanish Cabayo may hear "el C") owned by L. Campbell where it all began. But that's not far from the Cherry Creek Ranch or Frugal Criss Creek or Barricade Creek, through which she rides in the heat from Canada to California. It's certainly in the country under Coyote's eye and "agriculturalists did complain of coyotes" (81). Her countenance clouds, even before we encounter "Red Cloud" in the text, upon returning a book by George Colman, reprinted by John Camden Hotten from the Cadell & Murray publication, which occasioned her exclamation: *calice* (16). But that's not the half of it. One of the Cornwalls is in receipt of the assorted company's currency—H.P. Cornwall, whose brother "Clement Cornwall, by some measure the more forceful of the brothers, was a graduate of Cambridge University, and so became the County Court Judge of the Cariboo region" (79). The dense texture of the C's seen creates a world, (on) the surface of which seems animated not by correspondence but by internal coherence, independent of any reference to a world outside its own conception.

The world created, like a "C," curves, circling back on itself. There are several ways the textual surface foregrounds itself and subverts the logic of another world, logic which an unperceptive reader tries to order it by. Indeed, the inattentive reader may never see beyond their own preconceptions to this text which shows preconception to be misconception—the misconception which blinds the puzzled trailriders when faced with a mystery they can't understand. "But we understand it as a narrative of fate, and we have always understood it. They have been late in understanding it because they have been trying to understand it in terms they are accustomed to" (248), the Indians know. Those who would see merely a conventional revenge quest ignore the serpentine texture of Caprice. Caprice's story is snaky. She rides south and north, then back again; Spencer & Groulx go south and return. So the story's characters wind about the west, their trails turning back upon each other. In fact, their trails reverse almost as much as the trail of the reader's eye does in travelling down the page then back up, right then left and back again. Caprice's trail, followed by the Indians, Smith and us, is itself not absolutely original, like writing. She follows the outlaws' trail, not killing Groulx when she could have but preferring to play her line to hook Spencer, too, and so winding back and forth.

The narrative is as circuitous as the contorted story. The narrator relates that story non-chronologically, subverting the puzzled reader's efforts at piecing together a linear time sequence. What order there is comes from the text's necessary placing of one word after another, which creates synchronic, rhymed relationships within the text beyond the usual logical, linear development of writing. When we read that "Roy Smith moved like a cougar" (58) and on the facing page Caprice "moved like a

cougar" (59) their relationship becomes *inscribed*—written into the text without being written about. So, too, the character of their relationship is shown in textual play with sexual connotations and not through description. "He held her in [his arms, one would expect, but the reader is teased for their expectation] the park until a pack of boys came by and began calling wise cracks [...]" (234). From the rhyme one reads a symmetry and delight in(to) their romance, which contrasts sharply with the sinister quality imparted to the text through the elision of a pronoun antecedent in reporting Strange Loop's syntactically simple, straightforward thoughts. He plans to "go and get a new shirt. He thought about how he would make her pay for it. He was going to make her beg for it" (29). The strange loops his simple syntax takes the reader through show the order which connects his thoughts to be caprice—curving snaky lines whose material words are themselves the connectives—though their context changes as "pay" changes its denomination with a vengeance, and "it" speaks its unspeakability therein.

Correlation between characters as established by the narrative's path links Caprice and the 10-year-old baseball fan through more than shared interests. She becomes a part of his world. In one scene the boy with spectacles watches eagles whose extraordinary eyes watch the ground. "If there were no eagles up there now he would be [...] looking at something else." In the next paragraph his view is blocked, by Caprice, so looking up he sees no eagles. "Then he was looking at something else. It was an upside-down face with light freckles" (144). Thus it is in the words on the textual surface that characters and their relationships are forged; those words do not describe a (prior) world.

The structure becomes its own subject, and vice versa. Following Caprice's trail the reader watches her ride through the west that is disappearing to a point where it remains only in writing, remains only her trail—the text. "So why was she following this trail with no known destination? She recognized the feeling. She was writing because she was looking forward to the last stanza" (226): the final stand where she "tied the lines" (254) of her reins to a tree then cast the unfinished lines of her poems into the gorge, drawing her riding/writing to a close. Riding to what must be the end because, one can see, there are no more pages brings the story to depend largely upon the structure within which it is expressed. Hence the form of the novel is reflexive, mirroring itself, turning back on itself like a "C." The narrative focuses on its own rationale as the characters, coincidentally, focus on theirs. The Indians, following the trail they recognize as a "narrative of fate," yet wonder why they are where they are. It is the second Indian who has the audacity to voice the fundamentally self-examining question which the wise first Indian silently reviews: "Why are we doing this" (231). Groulx is also unable to figure out why they're there, seeing as the police are looking for them. But Spencer's reply voices (unintentionally) the difference between a puzzle—which Groulx, thinking this to be, wants answered—and a mystery, which is a quality of this eccentric world. "'Far as I can see,' he [Spencer] said, 'them things you can't figger out are most of the things there is'" (223). The thin trail of writing, riding traversing the ground of the text leaves its sign—not just for those who can see it; for those who can read it.

Caprice herself has trouble figuring out some things, but the one thing we are told she ponders most is a passage from a text, from Faust:

> Then did I in creations of my own
> (Oh, is not man in every thing divine!)
> Build worlds—or bidding them no longer be—
> Exert, enjoy a sense of deity—
> Doomed for such dreams presumptuous to atone;
> All by one word of thunder overthrown! [21.]

Despite having memorized the lines, the "raw data" of the text, she stares at it, uninspired, and it stares back, unthinking. She needs to read with more than her eyes to find the story she senses to be staring at her. After all, eyes are fallible and pick out primarily facts, whereas Caprice looks for the real story behind the facts, the other meaning. Even, yes, her eyes are fallible, and their error itself signifies within the text: "Build worlds? The first time she had read it aloud she had read and memorized 'build words,' and so was surprised to find 'worlds' when she looked again last night" (21). That such a careful reader should fail to distinguish between "world" and "word" tells the reader that perhaps their difference is not as marked as "l" would make them out to be. Since elsewhere we are told that a pupil learns as well from a "narrated mistake as from his own" (131) the words are the equal of the world in practical terms, indeed.

When Minjus' photograph of Caprice appears in the text Minjus is, deservedly, proud. "He knew it was good, as good as the world" (149). As good as the world: the simile at once makes the comparison and draws distance between the terms simply by demarcating them. So, on the one hand the photograph is, too, a creation and he saw that it was good; on the other hand, it is not a mimetic picture of the world. Caprice looks a long time at the photograph. "It was the first time she had looked with someone else's eyes at this creation in the west. It looked like an invention. It did not look like a cowgirl" (149), thereby emphasizing its composition. In a setting where characters self-consciously define themselves by (their) looks, creating themselves through their images, Caprice is said to view the image she perceives not as herself, but as a "creation." The photograph is an "invention," disclosing to the reader that art shows its own face; it is artifice, it is not mimetic. This opacity presents the creations of Minjus as, like Caprice, art—both are written art forms. "Shadows on silver" (100) is the writing with light ascribed to Minjus. Caprice is shadow on the ground.

Caprice and her horse move as one configuration in the shadow, in the story read from the ground. The reader sees the movement of shadows as Cabayo's "shadow with the woman's shadow above it reached to the round edge and over into the general shadow" (211). Repeating the word "shadow" makes the reader aware, not only of the shadow that appears to the imagination, but of the "shadow" emerging from the text here present to the eye. "You paid attention to shadows" (1) we were told as the first rule of the book's doctrine. Shadows are where the intelligent life—that will stay alive—lives. That's where breathing animals lie at midday, where preying animals and their quarry hide and, in general, where all life

exists in a desert landscape. Shadows are not only marked absence, they foster life itself. And here the textual ground wherein figures disappear is itself invented, discovered: discovered by being covered in shadow.

Casting about, one sees that the articulation of shadows is also pronounced *within* that text. They are looked to both ·for facts and life. The fact of temperature, one way by which one calibrates one's environment, is told in shadow, but its impracticality is evident when we read that if "Caprice had had a thermometer with her [which she didn't] she would have been able to see that it was 96 degrees in the [nowhere-to-be-found] shade" (201). Caprice watches Roy from the shadows (119), an appropriate place for her, and the fearsome outlaws, knowing that Caprice is in the shadows of the livery barn and wanting to lure her after them, "peered into the darkness, not confident that·they were seen" (240). Peculiar indeed, this looking in shadows for the real story.

Shadow and light are a binary code, the rudimentary language of which is used by computers to write this text, eyes to read this text, and eyes to read *that* text, Caprice. And in reading that text our ordinary eyes see it is the photographer who can "decipher the script of the sun, a language that caused all others to be possible" (167). So fundamental is the play of light and dark that GB ascribes life and death itself—as an integral contrary—to their interaction. We see that Minjus' photographs are "fossils," each one "a shadow that spoke from dying lips" (147). Here a photograph is vital and dynamic as art, but its subject is reified, fossilized as the image of its past is created. So the death enables the life and is, though from a negative, developed and printed. "Down Long Black Stems" (DM 42) reveals that "Dark holds no absence, writing is dark / on what was light, a death / brought to life." A death brought to life in making that death into art—into a matrix, mothering speculation by a reader—that is a text. The words are reified, taken from the universal *langue* and made particular, concretized, in *parole*. But that reification of the dynamic, daemonic *langue* is itself a death: a death revivified in its perception anew, perception (beyond the fact) being creative. I mean to confuse you. I mean to make you wonder: are we dealing with *words* or *subject matter*, as of the photograph; what is it that "dies"? What is it that becomes (a) shade? When Caprice rides away from Roy she writes "*Je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins*" (266), which is how another written life[1] finishes. Yes, of course you see now. The world created—the text—nurtures its inhabitants as it grounds their lives.

In the world of Caprice, the characters she meets are often addressed by their location within the text rather than by any uniquely personal name. The two Indians do not call each other "first" or "second"—these designations refer to their relative origins within the text. Graphically then, the appellation "second Indian" would imply its synchronic relation to a "first Indian," and each reiteration of "second Indian" goes back diachronically to the introduction of the character within the text. Thus does

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[1]Stephane Mallarmé's "L'Apres midi d'un faune" ends with these lines.

their relationship make of the text a grid, their continuity within it lines drawn as on a graph. Further, these lines draw <u>Burning Water</u> into the matrix of <u>Caprice</u>, appropriately enough, since the two will form a trilogy with an as-yet-unwritten volume.

A danger of making the "first Indian" and the "second Indian" habitual features of the textual landscape is that readers may treat their names as mere eccentricities in a society where Indians are marginalized—where Anglo-Saxon names are "normal." Well, and such is the case, but in <u>Caprice</u> whatever sociological implications can be read into the Indians' naming don't explain the similar naming of the white folks. They too come *en masse*, differentiated by their textual precedence. There are the first and second constables, the first and second bushwhackers—also denoted as the single unit, "Spencer & Groulx"—but when the baseball players are designated as "the first first baseman," "the second first baseman" (48) etc., this absurdity cannot possibly be unnoticed by even the most unseeing of eyes. These characters are identified, are named, by their location in the text. Like the Indian children whose names—hence whose totems and fate—derive from reported vision the characters, textual creations, are named by which creature we see first in the narrative. The connection between naming and creating is significant here as it shows the text to, literally, create its characters. "Places & characters don't seem like the real—they are what they are, beings fashioned of words" (GB <u>MP</u> 116). Invented concurrently with their site in the text characters, the "objects" of perception, have no existence prior to the text—no existence prior to their annunciation within the text.

Given then, that names are words whose signified reality is their situation within their text, they nevertheless draw upon other texts in which they have figured. So then, the store clerk Delsing connects <u>Caprice</u> with previous of GB's texts; Arpad Kesselring reminds the reader of D'arcy Keyserling whose name was itself the subject of "Four California Deaths." George Atwood, John Kearns and Doc Trump pick up threads from GB's previous inscriptions of writers within his work, showing that his texts are shaped partially by what he appropriates from other writers. Then it comes as no surprise to find "the rising fire" (85) in the text's ground, or "mist on the river" (266), too, rising from that ground. When Lilly Traff steps from the <u>Double Hook</u> to give birth in <u>Caprice</u> Tay John (138-9) the reader figures the written network to be dense. So much so that the allusions one is aware of missing outnumber those one perceives; a curious sense of seeing without knowing what one is seeing comes from <u>Caprice</u>—Caprice, you will recall, stared blindly at a text herself. This recalls the structure of a discontinuous function and makes one fear that behind every word lie, not bushwhackers, but other texts. This is a doubt voiced by the second Indian who, aware that there is more than meets the eye in the behaviour of these crazy people, figures if "I have to observe them anyway, I might as well know what I am looking at" (247). Since we have already been told, quite early in <u>Caprice</u>, that "seeming is a different matter from being" (4), one recognizes that the "seemingness" of things is as variable as there are various sightings, yet "being" is a different matter. The isolated quotation, as fielded in the fourth inning, is an archaeological artifact whose

context changes the artifact itself. You will recall that earlier this inning I pointed to several words which, although identical in isolation ("look," "see") became different words when their context (was) figured in their meaning.

Intertextuality links/makes prominent scenes in <u>Caprice</u>. The passage which so intrigues Caprice is repeated and she stares, trying to see, not what it says, but what it means—to her. She looks beyond its "seeming" to the "being" whereby the words become animated, delightful: she "looked hard, the way she sometimes did just before the other meaning edged past her eyes into her delight" (21). That "other meaning" suggests that which the wise first Indian knows how to perceive; though going blind he "could still see better than most people because he knew what to look for" (128). So, then, what lies before you depends on how you see it, how you re-create it in your mind and you do—Caprice does, her recreation consists of reading from <u>Faust</u> on the building of worlds and the passage is revised, presumably by Caprice although certainly by <u>Caprice</u>:

> Then did I in creations of my own
> (Oh, is not woman in each thing divine?)
> build worlds—or bidding them no longer be —
> exert, enjoy a sense of deity —
> doomed for such dreams presumptuous to atone;
> all by one word of thunder overthrown!
>
> Over-throne! The rumble of those words
> is my sport, a seizing of His speech
> for my dire purpose
> and my duty [86].

The author changes "man" to "woman," habitual capitalization to lower case, except where syntactically, not marginally, justified, and appends several stanzas more than here quoted which Goethe or the divine inspiration which guided him might not have authorized. Presumptuous dreams, indeed! To thus seize His speech, usurp authority and invest it in creations of your own, and all for recreation—a sport, no less—is the author's—any author's—game. It is Coyote's game too, and the narrator's, although you may think that the narrator *is* Coyote upon seeing that a "*déjà vu* slipped quickly into the room and back out the window" (172). Such fleetness of foot is reminiscent of Coyote himself, changing shape from an abstraction (a participle of *voir*, as we see) to the concrete in building a world. Coyote is, too, a creator, and the story of the Word Eater introduces a level of narration into <u>Caprice</u> where words themselves have substance, actualizing a world in their pronunciation of it rather than labelling an already-existing world. Thus do words annunciate the coming of their referent but if, as we are told, in "the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh" (58), then it would seem that which-came-first is a chicken-and-egg mystery. The imagination creating the word which, in turn, creates the world wherein, presumably, the imagination figures is a tangled web, indeed. A web not unlike the interlacing woven by the eye and consciousness in fabricating each other.

Caprice is evidently playing with this interdependent dynamism. The text does not depend upon the antecedent for a proper noun of its creation, as an hypothetical Indian is called "Harry-Charlie" (235), and when Spencer shoves a woman named "Clarice," perhaps his reaction was to the name and not its referent. Caprice herself is called a variety of things, among them "Capreese" (152) and "Cabeese" (224). Luigi calls her *Capriccia* (68), though with his jaw shot off, thanks to his *cavalleria*, he "ain't going to ever say Kapeesh or Capreesh or anything again" (152). As a single entity is designated by so many names there is no unique or necessary relationship between the name, which is "an object you have attached" (Michaux qtd. as epigraph, Imago 20 7) and the entity. But each name, each word, shows something of its attacher; it shows how they see their object and reifies a construct which is the creation of the namer. In defining its objects (what is seen as other–than–itself), the perceptor is, too, pronounced. So when the character we know as John Kearns is called "Tenny"[1] (53) for the first time, we recognize the speaker as being new to the text, not having heard this nickname before. Where an object is variously designated words cannot be primarily mimetic. They are not disinterested reports of the facts of the world and their narration is opaque, not transparent.

Reading sign identifies the signator, of course, but in reading, the sign identifies the reader, too. When Constable Burr finds campfire debris with old cans and a crackerbox he determines the signator's identity to be other than the outlaws he is trailing, because "they would not leave that kind of sign. That kind of sign was left by newcomers from back east" (179). But, clearly, he is reading more than the facts of the garbage and in doing so implicates himself in the created sign. That sign could mean a lot of different things to other interpreters. Caprice herself leaves a similar sign, taking care in its writing. Here she knows that she is leaving a story for others, a story written as much by light and dark as by Caprice: "black smoke in the day, and a fire at night. A camp that can be seen from a hawk's flight in any direction" (205). But whereas her sign's similarity with the debris might be read as showing her to be a newcomer from back east—which she is—now the reader interprets her sign differently. The Indians, reading, interpret her sign as a lure, not carelessness, thus interpretation creates the sign. There is even a necessary selection involved in deciding, as the Indians must do with the story in the ground, is "that part of the story, or is that the part of a story that is not just a story?" (90). Thus a similar sign means different things depending both on who is writing it and who is *reading* it.

Where a single signifier can designate many stories, and a single entity can be signified by several words, there is no simple relationship between the signifier and the signified, or the word and its referent. They create each other, but more than that, in fixing such an equation the personalities of both writer and reader become implicated therein. The Indians, considering what label to apply to worldly phenomena uncover a pernicious element of the word/referent relationship where they make it clear to the reader that

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[1]Tenny's son may be a literary father to the character from Curious, "Lionel Kearns." Perhaps.

words are tools of authority used, at times, for subjecting what they objectify. "'What white man's word—' 'White man's word?' 'All right. What word used by the white man do you think should properly apply to such a phenomenon?'" Later, the voice of the narrator approximates the Indians' discourse: "That was a white man's word. Tribe" (4). By identifying the Indians with this term an "other" is created, an object which identifies both the named and the namer. But the naming of an object is also the creation of its relation to the subject, a relation in which the "object is a presence, primarily presence, and from presence, what demented movement might ensue [Michaux, Major Ordeals 60]?" Demented movement indeed, when what you seek to contain as an object insists upon existing in relation to and defining its subject. The object, in refusing to be marginalized by the subject exists in a dynamic, mutually–identifying game: "when you can no longer prevent things, objects, parts of objects from becoming faces, people, beings," then the "offensive of things begins, [...] the glass wants to drink drink me. The raisins, the tube of glue watch me" (Michaux, Major Ordeals, 52–6). Such a critical game is the course of reading, is Caprice, is this.

The interplay of subject and object is best seen in the dynamic of the gaze. Lacan considers the subject to be split by the gaze and explains this, positing the subject as between the pictured object of their gaze and the gaze as an abstract, disinterested faculty:

> The correlative of the picture, to be situated in the same place as it, that is to say, outside, is the point of gaze, while that which forms the mediation from the one to the other, that which is between the two, is something of another nature than geometral, optical space, something that plays an exactly reverse role, which operates, not because it can be traversed, but on the contrary because it is opaque—I mean the screen [.... I]f I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen [96–7].

The screen, of course, distorts its projections. Thus the subject is constituted by their gaze which, in this metaphor, corresponds to the play of light and dark upon the screen. Yet again, which–came–first, the subject or the gaze is an inappropriate question given the interdependence of the two.

To read Caprice is not only to see her lines—Caprice is *between* those lines. And so that's where the careful reader reads—between the lines—in the absences that reveal selectivity and in the synapses which connect according to the characteristics of the text's composer. Such eyes *interpret* what they see and read a story therein, evincing an attitude toward the objects they perceive and the underlying attitudes which they, hence, notice. "To notice is not only to perceive. It is to take a snapshot—not only a visual snapshot, but a mental one. More than that, it is to have an attitude toward reality, once it is understood" (Michaux, Major Ordeals 60). And the prints are not the whole story, often reading the negatives between the lines, even those lines themselves are a story: the story wherein the narrator figures as creator, the reader figures out. Thus who names—or narrates—plays at creating a world the face of which is the delightful texture of words and their ludic potential. "You cannot look at someone without feeling a relatedness. You are looked at and feel the weight, the new, excessive weight of the glances which concern you" (Michaux, Major Ordeals 138), the glances which hold you in their gaze. Thus does the text elude

objectivity and make of passivity a delusion. The focalizer through whose eyes (perspective) we see the world is never innocent; those eyes are, as Kroetsch said, the language itself.

The spectacle thus conceived plots its creator within, and the explicit inscribing of the textual world is plotted, as I have said, by caprice. Coherence is of the sort that defies logic. Links are woven—between chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words and even between variant denotations of a single word token—whimsically. This was shown earlier to foreground the surface of the text. But when these links are fused between levels of narration, it is not merely the textual surface which is emphasized, but the compositional interaction between creator and created. Consider this linkage between the described, mimetic level of the narrative and the diegetic, ordering level created by the word "seen." Luigi is asked, "You ever seen any Amazons in your grub-lining around the world?" In the next chapter the narrator is immediately seen to respond. "There was only one saloon bar left in the town of Exodus, and it had seen better days [161]" (the narrator never mentions where the other saloon bars have fled). Within a chapter, similarly punning textual coherence links paragraphs where children as symbols of change are contrasted with cowboys, those "other boys [...] riding away from girls and mothers, riding away from the Provincial Police, eager for the end of changing." The next paragraph begins, too, with changing children: "Seems like I have to change you every half an hour" (144), a mother says to her child. Such literal cohesion is evident throughout the book, and establishes concurrence between certain of the characters as well—you will recall Roy and Caprice's literal conjunction—but the more interesting conjunctions are fused between the characters and the narrator. Appearing to establish a causal antecedent for Spencer's drinking of Foster's liquor, the narrator describes the life they led at the ranch as "a life of eating and drinking. All this musing made Frank Spencer desirous of a reward himself, and that last word, 'drinking,' did it" (16). Thus the narrator integrates direct and indirect discourse, thereby blurring distinctions between levels of narration. Indeed, the narrator and characters are shown to be interdependent again when the townsfolk buy Caprice a horse from H.P. Cornwall who acknowledges receipt of what he calls "assorted currency" attributed to what the narrator calls "assorted company" (263). The narrator also appropriates the Indians' narrative conventions, mentioning that to lure Caprice it is not enough to "sing the Caprice words" (100) as Coyote lured his prey before the Word Eater ate his words. Clearly, this is not the usual course of a narrative where the narrator is expected to stand aside and, with an effort at objectivity, report the events of the story. This narrator makes the reader very conscious that the narrative is artificial, seizing the speech of its characters—and vice versa—for sport—a world playfully composed before our ordinary eyes.

Having fashioned the habit of remarking on the ordinary, the narrator continues to draw the reader's eye to this habit, thus displaying the narrative diction. In fixing the point of view we have seen that "ordinary English eyes" characteristically watch Caprice, but when the narrator watches her drink sometimes Chinese tea, sometimes "ordinary English tea" (141) the diction focuses attention on itself rather than its object. That attention to its own display becomes self-referentially critical when the diction

is shown to be absurd. The narrative, through litotes, mockingly subverts its own description in remarking upon the unremarkable nature of "the ordinary earth [...] the ordinary horse" (251). Even the dialogue—reportedly in the speaker's voices, of course—participates in this ludic self-mockery, mimicking the habitual diction of the narrator. Kesselring mimics the narrator, telling Cyril Trump the newspaper man what he would see if he "had the eyes of an extra-ordinary journalist" (182), and the first Indian speaks to the second in the narrator's voice: "You have ordinary Indian ears" (90), he says.

Upon first glancing at <u>Caprice</u> it is evident that the narrator is a trickster. Creating a scene and reshaping it under the reader's eye, the narrator shows the text to be artifice, but artifice the face of which is revised in being seen from different perspectives. The narrative is a game played by the narrator within which that narrator reflexively figures. Thus in foregrounding the text itself as figure the traditional stance of the narrator—as outside the story—is made impossible; in showing <u>Caprice</u> the writing narrator is seen. This is the real story: not what the story is about, but what it is, and perception becomes proprioception when the narrator is, too, part of the story. "When Caprice showed up she put a stop to narration" (156) but, as we have seen, she inspires as many stories as there are eyes upon her: proprioceptive stories.

The creator takes/makes note of material, as a writer or reader does. Minjus is a creator within the text. So is Caprice, who says "I am writing it [this adventure], that is what I am doing" (76). But this discourse is reported by the narrator in free indirect style; that is, it is the narrator's voice in which the "I" is expressed, though purporting to be in the character's voice. Identities are not only confused, they are *fused* in Caprice's "I." But also evident is the status of the narrator as a *characteristic* of this text, not a character but a pervading quality. Given the narrator's unsystematic omniscience, telling us occasionally what characters think and, selectively, how they behave, the focalization is itself consistently erratic, showing the ordering principle to be caprice. That focalization is highly personalized—idiosyncratic, even—in choosing where to cast its eye. Thus is caprice a characteristic of <u>Caprice</u>'s narration, an implicit ascription from the explicit inscription of the world the eye creates.

So, too, readers like you and I create this text in refashioning it through our perspective, and our status is comparable to that of the capricious narrator/writer of the text. "Now, or rather a then that we call now" (38) situates the reader in temporal relation to the diegetic and mimetic levels—the facts which the narrator composes become "then," as the "now" through which the blithe reader might identify with the characters is altered, seen as the artifice of a narrator whom the reader is on firmer ground in identifying with. "Now, or rather the kind of now you are persuaded of in a black-and-white surface" (100) makes you stop and stare at that, kind of, now. But what you see is a narrative that situates you as contemporary with the characters then palinodically retracts that statement. "So this afternoon, or rather that one" (161) the narrator was being demonstrably precise in the narrative's temporal address, yet showing only that the narrative is distinct from its story. There are at least two separate time frames composed by this narrator, and the reader's place is concurrent with the narrator's. "Then" is spatially

present only, as data to the reader and narrator. What is temporally present to both, simultaneously, is the narrative. The reader is implicated in the narration as a compositor ordering its details in a—perhaps novel—way. "In the post-modern novel you do not identify with the characters. If you are to identify with anyone it is likely to be the author, who may lay his cards on the table & ask for your opinion or even help in finishing the book. In any case you are offered a look at the writer writing" (GB, MP 30). You may even see a story made before your eyes, depending upon whether you have normal reader's eyes or curious reader's eyes. "If you have normal reader's eyes you will see the Europeans here sitting down to pull the small cactus off their trouser legs [...]. If you are a curious reader you will see a familiar crumbling of rock, and look closer, to find what you more than half expect, light blue agate, opal, jasper. Once you are pretty sure you found some garnet" (33-4). Who found the garnet? Not only is the reader actively involved in setting the scene through their perceptive capacity, they are inscribed within the text itself. And not by describing characteristics, as eyes, but with attribution of thought, expectation, and even desire: "if you were there you would have liked to feel that [Cabayo's] hair with your fingers" (6). Thus is the reader read by the text which bears witness to that reader's perception.

Passivity is not possible in the face of a text wherein you are situated. The reader shapes the story. This is a direct result of the writer's foregrounding the text itself as figure since, according to GB, if "the writer thus becomes attentive to the surface upon which he must work, two conditions are likely to come into effect: the literal prose will be more interesting, & the reader will be called upon to actualize the work" (MP 120). Hence "we" follow Caprice's writerly trail together, having a hand in writing that text. "We can look back to what they looked forward to"—which you may look back in this text to find, reminding yourself that this is a spatial, not a temporal art—and where our glances weave with theirs the interpreter and the story material fuse, making dynamic the fact of what is seen. This creates the storied "being" of objects beyond their "seeming," where they generate a sensibility within the perceptor: not of domination, but of interaction. The real story is in being, this ontological relatedness wherein objects refuse to be reified as only black-and-white, coming alive and answering who would subject them in shadow. So, although you do not identify with the characters, you order them about, pose them in order to read yourself in their situation. The writer/narrator becomes part of the story; you cannot notice detachedly: not even the narrator can, not even at their own perceiving because the "illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself,* in which the gaze is elided" is the moment where the viewing subject manages "to symbolize his own vanishing" (Lacan 83). You cannot look disinterestedly, not even at your own looking. So, one recognizes that the structure of the gaze is such that it creates an Other which is the attitude through which the object is viewed; a value-laden *langue* inseparable from the perception of its particular data.

The particularity of the viewer is as important in setting the scene in Caprice as is the general structure of the gaze. Where who is doing the reading conditions what is read it is not surprising that the

narrator is very careful to distinguish among readers. "If you had the eyes of [x] then you would see [y]" sets a scene where the condition of the antecedent consequently determines the site. But in the case of the narrator, the reader knows what is seen and must construct an "I" who is the seer. The narrator is never identified within the text. The narrating eye addresses "you," implying an "I" in thus writing to the reader while refusing to reveal where he stands. "No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture" (Lacan 96). I am, if anything, the screen upon which it is presented, you will recall. GB concurs with this metaphor, agreeing with Lacan that the convention is to ascribe clarity, transparency even to the medium of perception. But that is not the case with the—perhaps proprioceptive—post-modern novel. GB claims that "Post-modern novels, on the other hand, are in a way decorative. If they are windows they are stained-glass windows or cut-glass windows that divert light waves & restructure the world outside" (MP 25). In a text where the viewer's identity determines the content, the effaced narrator is the implied subject whose gaze creates an object which is the text.

Thus the text is the ground, the screen of the reader's speculation wherein can be read various stories according to your lights. The most wary eyes will be aware of editing in their reading, re-shaping the ground in order to ascribe therein figures of their own making—making, as it were, figures from clay, flesh from words. "Oh, you are just playing with words again" (87), I see. Playing with words is its own object when words are themselves the world, the totality of what *is* which so puzzled Strange Loop. There is nothing outside the game. Roy himself wonders "if what Caprice and Frank Spencer and Loop Groulx and even Pete Foster were playing, if that too is only a game [77]?" This is a game where scoring is not the object, but whose object is circumscribed within the game itself. The object is not an abstraction beyond the game, in whose name both sides beat the most direct path to, the game is complete in itself; there is no external goal and no described referent. In this game you want to defer closure for the pleasure in the playing. Indeed, making the same plays over and over again—or the same infinite, strange loop, as Douglas Hofstadter calls it—itself signifies an insistence upon the continuity of the game. Thus repetition, which "is turned toward the ludic" (Lacan 61) insistently draws attention to itself, to its existence as structure. You don't want to get to the finish when your existence is defined by that game.

When you don't know who set the rules of the game, with what background, competence or perhaps even mischievous—not to say, dire—purpose is to see yourself in a godgame situation: "Even God, some people would say, has his game" (80). One of the rules God drew, you will recall, was that his face would be obscured yet the substance upon which He moved (the waters) had a face. In terms of reference, the Creator's name would be unspoken—perhaps why "I" never appropriates the identity of the creating narrator, with the intriguing exception of the ambiguous statement by Caprice (previously quoted) where "I" would seem to designate both the character and the narrating writer—perhaps even the interpreting reader.

I see a line in the text recurring regularly which I construe to be significant—make its significance, perhaps—though it would be blind indeed not to notice a quotation in a language other than the text's primary one. So, having noticed that the narrator is not reified within the text I see a line which, by its repetition as a unit, is. That is, the line itself reminds the reader of its previous occurrences so projecting from the ground as a sign. Lacan claims that repetition signifies *itself* and whatever "in repetition is varied, modulated, is merely alienation of its meaning" (61). Thus is the repeated line self-contained, extracted—an artifact perpendicular to the surface of the ground. That projection (perhaps the reader's) is *"toujours le bon Dieu reste muet"* (83, 118, 169), becoming a liturgy in repeating, *toujours*, and invoking, perhaps, the ultimate Author. After all, "God is the Commissioner of Baseball" ("1," B̲), the commissioner of B̲a̲s̲e̲b̲a̲l̲l̲, and His identity is mirrored in His creation: a resounding "I am."

Within this text there are a number of creators, by their activity imitating God Himself. The French symbolists, whose presence shapes C̲a̲p̲r̲i̲c̲e̲, saw creation by the artist as an emanation of the god inside, the artist was *"le mage divin, le Mage créateur"* (Téodor de Wyzéwa qtd. in Lehmann 47) and they meant it literally, not figuratively. Mallarmé wrote that man, who is the symbol of God, is duty-bound "to observe with the eyes of the divinity; for if his connection with that divinity is to be made clear, it can be expressed only by the pages of the open book in front of him" (Mallarmé 40). Clearly this is no abstract integration, but one spatially locatable within art itself. "L'art est le souvenir de la présence de Dieu" (Ernest Hello qtd. in Lehmann 53). Hence, man as maker forges his own integration with Who made him—yet a grander paradox, repeating the structure found in C̲a̲p̲r̲i̲c̲e̲ at several levels. Well, repetition is said by, again, Lacan to be a game where structure itself is the object signifying perpetuation independent of the particulars of content (67). There evidently is repetition in the structure of C̲a̲p̲r̲i̲c̲e̲ and it is amplified formally, finally drawing the reader and their context into the world designed by C̲a̲p̲r̲i̲c̲e̲. I'll remind you that this integration of creator and created was noticed on the narrative level of the characters with self-image, on the level of the narration with the narrator implicated in the story, and on the level of what I will call meta-narration, where the reader is called upon to actualize the narrative, as GB put it. A divinely all-encompassing structure, it draws everything into the game, into the generative text: a post-modern game playing with boundaries, indeed.

Ninth Inning

"Nine. / Is a baseball number," we know from the ninth inning of <u>Baseball</u>. GB's game is itself one of calibration since "The season / cant help but measure." The season measures the body's decay as the body is burnt out; the game measures the material body, the writing's body as armed by the writer: "my nose was broken twice by baseballs. / My body depends on the game." That game, however, depends upon the sacrifice of its players as "the game / isnt over till the last man's / out." One game leads to another, however, and the best measure of a game, like a work of art, is its inspiration of others. So, here, we see another game, in another ballpark, being played where GB is not the pitcher but the pitch.

Visitors

The scene is a gathering of "Canadian poets and Buffalo literati" where "George Bowering, poet, novelist, third baseman in the Vancouver sandlots" and character in Joel Oppenheimer's "A Likely Story" (40) takes his stance. "Secure in the knowledge that he was one of the guests of honour, he could sit downstairs for the whole game, and people would just ascribe his behavior to poetic needs. Besides, he had turned—or at least started—a triple play just a month or two before, after a lifetime at the hot corner." Here is a new mask for GB—as a character in the fiction of another writer. (The inevitable question as to whether this may, indeed, be GB himself writing under a pseudonym I don't even want to think about.)

Perhaps "Splurge Sowering" is one of his pseudonyms—as "A.A. Grassnake," his reported "protegé," may be—at any rate, this Splurge Sowering "was associated for some time with the energetic group of young poets in the West who produced the bright little magazine, <u>Dish</u>. Since 1963 he has managed to turn out at least one volume of poems a year, two of which, <u>Pock Markings Soot</u> and <u>Fangs Colossus</u> have won the Governor General's award" (Geggie and Whalley 38). A sample of Splurge's talent is included: the lyric "Inside the Pickled Walnut," from which I quote the immortal: "where I kiss you / cinnamon my tongue / cloven to the roof of my mouth"; and the tender "Let me share you / with this nut [...]" is worthy of Sarah Binks herself. The debate may rage regarding attribution, but clearly some respect for the rules of GB's own game shapes this parody: it is a game that is a double of GB's own.

David McFadden has scored a triple play himself with "History of Poets: George Bowering" (in the tradition of GB's own "History of Poets" series), also "George Bowering (for Donna)" and "The Black Mountain Influence (for George Bowering)." The latter mentions Robert Creeley which occasions the writer's outburst: "An American! I quoted an American! Please don't kill me, Al Purdy, Milton Acorn. You silly buggers" (<u>NMFG</u>). Following this strike commonly made against GB McFadden finds the real influence to be intellectual, not national, as to be a writer is to "Take any memory, personal, racial, literary, and try to relate it to the present moment, the things around you." What is seen from a personal point of view is not truth but creation, and McFadden goes on to admit that the poet is called upon to wear the

mask of God at times. But, "It must be awful being God all the time, those wounds in hands, feet and side never healing." When the writer creates, plays God, he also assumes the penance which is the destruction complementary to the creation; when the creation is of self-identity, the destruction is, too, of the self.

Home

Creating art from art, or one text from another, is fertile de-composition: a process of rebuilding integral to the act of structural decay which we find in Baseball ("9"):

> I know I feel my own body
> wearing down,
> my eyes watch
> that white ball
> coming to life.

I made this interdependence within GB's own work evident in the fourth and sixth innings. In "Working and Wearing" (A 43) the subject "discovered the working was a wearing away." That is, "The sun is dying to keep us alive. The fire in its place is dying to keep us warm. What is working is being worn." The workings of the writing are a "wearing": a wearing of fine raiment, skin, or armour, depending upon how you look at it. Spicer sees the containing wall as that of a temple, writing that "Where one is is in a temple that sometimes makes us forget that we are in it. Where we are is in a sentence" (175). But GB replies in Allophanes, where "all sentences are to be served," that "Sea spray crashes on the temple / & sets it aflame" ("XI").

The burning of the temple, from within, makes one's existence both coterminal with that of the structure and separate from it. The body separate from its identity is the stream and it burns, it burns the "I" who confronts and perishes in holy fire, as in Yeats, Novalis, Allophanes and "Delayed Mercy." Orphic voices torch the structures, the bars, as they sing themselves in "Elegy Six" (81): "But we know a few who sprout flames in the dark before morning, / lighting the air we've only learned to breathe / their godlike voices singing from their still skinny bodies." Their song is self-referential, it signifies its own creation because, as Allophanes ("X") voices, "*Et verbum cano factum est* ." The creation of art(iculation) is the burning of reference, of its bridge to life. We have come, Barthes claims, to "this precarious moment of History in which literary language persists only the better to sing the necessity of its death" (Writing Degree Zero 75). When GB tells us that "the language is burning," this reflexive destruction is a transformation, too—a transformation of the re-membered words in their present flaming constellation.

> There was black fire writ on white fire,
> the poem blazed before my very eyes.
> I wanted to dive into the flames,
> save my furniture,
> rescue my 'beloved books'.
> —"XVI," Al

In Kroetsch's essay "For Play and Entrance" there's a subsection entitled: "Or, against the poet's book, the poet's life." Here, Kroetsch posits an ontological dissemination of the poet throughout the world as language becomes a means of, not communi(cati)on of the one with the other, but of seeding one's traces in that world. He says: "We write poems, in Canada, not of the world, but to gain entrance to the world" (Essays 107). Hence GB's image of the writer's baptism in Allophanes ("III"), where "The free-standing flame is seen in the pool / you enter with your last wet page." This self-immolation by which the writer enters the world maps his (and this clearly *is* a phallic enter-prize) passage as surely as Vancouver's naming, though the self as graphed here is a provisional address, not a metaphysical truth. "As we come to the end of self, in our country, we come again," Kroetsch writes, "to the long poem. We become again, persons in the world, against the preposterous notion of self. We are each our own crossroads" (Essays 107). As that "crossroads," we locate ourselves by our divergences (from others, from death, from our remembered selves, etc.), thus mapping our situation with the structure of difference whereby the subject disappears.

The burning water Vancouver entered baptised him anew, affording him a place in another context where he has a plot—"ploughshares" it is called in A Short Sad Book—where he is put away and, if the story be told, he is dead. The storyteller is not dead; he is always about in the story or it wouldn't be there where he is, but he doesn't have a plot; he has a location but not a plot, although his story does. What is plotted is prior to the writing in which it is dead; what is being mapped by the writing itself, not prior to it, is burning in the reader's presence. "To write is to *produce* meaning and not to *re-produce* a pre-existing meaning," as GB writes (after Raymond Federman) in "The Painted Window" (116). That is why art must be "thinking, not thinking about" ("18," E). When art is "about," it is secondary, Stein says. It is descriptive; copying something it is not, such art reifies its object. Such art may, however, create something in place of the life lost. Such art may create a story, not a story *about*. "As soon as one looks at life, reads it, and then writes *about* it, it is a corpse. That is a great story. The novelist, then, lives the rest of his deaths, and may dedicate himself to the life of our language" ("26," E). "Why have a story about me instead of me?" he has said, you will recall. What it is *about* turns to ashes in the telling; ashes, however, are material created by death in which art can be read. That is a great story, great for what it *is*, rather than what it is about.

This distinction is made again in A Short Sad Book where a "human shape slumpt" against the wall of the National Gallery in Ottawa draws notice, but notice of what; "is he alive or is he art," the narrator wonders. "He was a figure on the ground," that is clear, "So he must have been art all right" (35). This structural figure draws connections among GB's texts by the similitude of stance; rhetorical figures, too, draw one text upon another. For example, the free-standing flame rising from water is an image that the reader encounters in Allophanes, Smoking Mirror, Burning Water and Errata. This image arises during consideration of writing or mapping and the identity of the author therein but it, like the

life/art position, is a structural model of the writer's stance *vis à vis* the text. Immolation in the text is marked by such an axis. This blurs textual and generic boundaries, being a structural relationship holding between writer and text.

It is the perspective of the writer in conjunction with the text which adds a third dimension and thereby moves this matrix into the realm of matter and volume. Similarly, it is the perspective of the reader which takes the text and adds dimension to it in the world. Metaphorically, then, the writer and the reader are comparable, but the text is metonymically conjoined with either at the point of their entry. Two dimensions of the created volume will be inflexible parameters, the third will alter with the eye. Hence, the text dis–integrates upon withdrawal of the third dimension to be, again, animated by its re–integration into the world. To reiterate, then, on the other side of the text from the writer stands the reader. They do not meet in the text, but each meets the text in a stance that mirrors that of their counterpart. The text, that which mediates between them, is the trace of the other's passage.

> He looks away from the blaze
> & a black fire meets his gaze.
> A burning tree,
> that speaks thru thee.
> —"XVI," Al

The burning tree, or burning bush, is a sign whereby "he" recognizes the other—made present in the burning, made other in the burning, too—an other whose ontology is defined by, and animates, the fire. "Thee," the second person, also burns to ashes in articulation.

> Every star becomes a coal as he reads it,
>   figures
> turning to ashes:
>   the Archer, the Scribe,
> the one he's always called the Infielder, to the south
> the Triestino,
>   quickly followed by the Coyote,
> the Wine Glass, Erato, the three–armed Saguaro.
>
> Last to go,
>   drawing his reluctant gaze,
> the clear white diamonds of the Number Nine.
>   —"Elegy Ten" (143)

There is a Christian aspect to this schema which corresponds to its elements of creation, resurrection, baptism and absurd faith—"*Credo quia absurdus sum.*" Jack Spicer outlined a model of textual signification where the arbiter of meaning is perpendicular to the text and, while not superimposing meaning "on" the text, creates a provisional "cross" by coming down to make a play between words. "Whatever That is is not a play on words but a play between words, meaning come down to hang on a little cross for a while. In play" (178). Barthes, too, posits a structural relationship where a context is the extension of a word, but the site of the unexpected object, the word, receives the host. In poetry,

particularly, "connections are only an extension of the word, it is the Word which is the 'dwelling place'" (Writing Degree Zero 47). A "dwelling place" which, like the temple earlier, turns to ashes when the light of vision is withdrawn.

The specifically Christian narrative of creation is used by GB as a metaphor for artistic genesis in Caprice, where the young boy watches white balls rolling in the outfield which spark the "word":

> The instant of inspiration seemed now to be reflected from all sides at once, from a multitude of sunny and snowy circumstance of what had happened or of what might have happened. The instant flashed forth like a point of light, and now from puff ball to puff ball of vague circumstance confused form was veiling softly its afterglow. In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh [58].

That this paragraph is a "steal" from Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man makes the origin a fiction: a re-vision, whether the reader writes the genealogy or not. As Kroetsch remarks, like genealogy, "Art too is a ritual act, a recurrence, a recognition of continuity" (31), thereby the form itself makes artifice of originality. The reader may also fashion a matrix drawing Michaux's text in as well, the text which reads:

> As his writing advances across the page, the words, left behind, the loops and lines already drawn, have turned into little mounds, little tufts ... far away. He can no longer come back to them [...]. Yet he continues writing, but ineluctably, at the top of the page, the waste returns, invading, denaturing, covering the sheet where the words, shivering, fade away on their remote veldt [...]. He can no longer write without summoning into being a great natural sight, without this phenomenon spreading, taking over the page [...]. And as he writes, the meaning, first gradually, then rapidly, the meaning [...] doomed to disappear, the meaning dies away [Major Ordeals 74-5].

Doomed to disappear, the provisional meaning hangs on a cross, or chiasmus, in Allophanes where "Logos is true narrative, / wild logos, mad skier, Al Rose intent on suicide, / his meaning left in lines on the melting snow" ("XIII").

It should be noted that neither the reader's nor the writer's address to the text is unmediated. The reader views the text from a unique perspective coloured by, as we have seen in the fifth and eighth innings, capabilities and expectations. For the writer, mechanical tools of expression no less than formal ones act to clothe the writing. In a letter to Silver Donald Cameron (30 Mar. 1977) GB relates his post-lyric stage to composing with a pen, saying that "the [lyric] poetry and then the later events like Autobiology taught me to come at it from he the I mean, floor up, or the syllable up. So I am writing prose with a pen and black ink, instead of the typewriter, wch I may trust myself to later on, so everything is short & sparse. If you use a pen then you can not get the energy to make all those adjectivs [sic] and dialogue. Once rid of them, you can write prose." Similarly, in an interview with Roy Miki in Island, GB speaks of the resistance in the writing itself which he found crucial; that resistance was too easily overcome by the typewriter. A Short Sad Book was written in pen, and there clearly is an emphasis there on words at a more detailed level than even that of the syllable: "Back in B.C. we are careful about our letters"

(115), too.

When, in May of 1977, GB wrote to Margaret Randall proclaiming that he was "trying to get back after a decade of pen, to composing on the typewriter," he was a bit premature in the decade and also in his method. Kerrisdale Elegies was written with pen a few years later, although Caprice was written directly onto the computer. The dense prose in Caprice shows evidence of attention to words, certainly, but I think the focus is rather at the level of the sentence. In Errata, which was written with pen in exam booklets, again the level of words is operative in signification. Ear Reach, written in an oblong notebook with pen, makes letters its focus and the line a measure of its subject equally with its medium. The interdependence of subject and its expression is also made clear in "Elegy Seven" where the narrator identifies "a time I can measure / with half a line" (98).

The plotting of Craft Slices has little to do with what it is *about* and everything to do with what it *is*. When GB writes the editor, he specifies: "it is so arranged that in a printed book there will be two pages per observation, so that each new slice will show up on the rigt-hand [sic] page. This is important, because it is arranged alphabetically (as per the list of topics accomp. [sic] this letter), and that is explained in the introduction, which is called "ABC" and so comes as the first slice." The cost-efficient editor was less obliging than was that of Errata, the printing of which supports its play with numbers.

The various mechanical parameters GB devises for himself perform the same role in the composing as do the "baffles" he sets up as arbitrary structures. They are a limit of the composition, a limit which allows friction in the composing. They are also a limit which, because of its arbitrary nature (I mean, GB *had* a typewriter he might have used), constantly invites its own transgression. Thus do the limit and transgression co-inhere, depending each upon the other for existence itself and with the relative necessity of one proportionately reinforcing the other. Foucault describes this situation where the "limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (34). The obligatory thrust of the limit thus depends upon the temptation of (possible) transgression, an ethical stance GB inscribes in his writing; he wrote to David Young, in a letter of April 1974, that "we spend all our lives forging principles, but they aint annealed till we try something that runs break/away from them."

When Jack Spicer wrote "For Jack," he advised that the writer "Have guts until the guts / Come through the margins" (63)—the guts to test the limits of the possible emerging in the margins of the composition itself. The suggestion of the sacrifice of life itself—the transgression—in finding the ultimate limit transmutes the very structure of the limit and transgression. While dynamically opposed, the two complement each other; but, as Foucault says, "does transgression not exhaust its nature when it crosses the limit, knowing no other life beyond this point in time? And this point, this curious intersection of

beings that have no other life beyond this moment where they totally-exchange their beings, is it not also everything which overflows from it on all sides [34]?" This one point contains all of reality; when the one, in the process of becoming the other, was itself the other, as Kroetsch said, that moment is a structural "grain of sand." Spencer remarks upon this, too, saying that the "act of perception contains the instant of collision between the object and the perceptor. From this instant one derives, in large measure, his apprehension of reality" (93). Spencer also says, of open-structured writing, that it "testifies to its author's architectonic daring, for he, or she, has made an heroic attempt to thrust the reality of the work of art into the surrounding reality of life and to merge the two in an intersecting construct" (51). The "architectonic daring," where margins are violated with guts, clearly does bleed the two together.

One of the greatest absurdities of unexamined uses of language is the notion that mental concepts, signifieds, can be communicated, "realized," as it were, in objective form. Spencer draws attention to this fallacy and, attempting to explain the un-realism of this "realism," quotes from José Ortega y Gasset:

> if we deliberately propose to 'realize' our ideas—then we have dehumanized and, as it were, derealized them. For ideas are really unreal. To regard them as reality is an idealization, a candid falsification. On the other hand, making them live in their very unreality is—let us express it this way—realizing the unreal as such. In this way we do not move from the mind to the world. On the contrary, we give three-dimensional being to mere patterns, we objectify the subjective [10].

"Making them live in their very unreality" is what GB does in his writing. By emphasizing the artifice of language, the limitations to expression within such a formal system, it is the system itself which becomes the subject matter. The patterns signify their very existence as design pre-dating their content; the content is, therefore, immaterial. Jacob Bronowski considers this element of signification "the most important thought in the history of information," that "the information rests in the arrangement. What we measure essentially is the organization of the messages—not the meaning of individual symbols, but the structure of the whole. This is the most important thought in the history of information" (qtd. in Set 2: 32). This does not mean that a writer has no freedom to vary the standard arrangements of signification, indeed, she does. The *langue*, when appropriated in *parole*, is coloured by the writer's habits of diction, syntax and idiom which are themselves rigid parameters. "A language is therefore a horizon, and style a vertical dimension, which together map out for the writer a Nature, since he does not choose either" (Writing Degree Zero 13), Barthes says. GB's style is unique and readily identifiable, based as it is on structure. Each work has a new pattern, but the type of pattern is inflexible. The compositional armour and the work's composing of identity are a signature more identifiable than the trademark presence of baseball in his writing.

Baseball is not incidental to GB's writing; they are the same game. In Baseball, GB is not thinking about it but thinking it—doing it—in Baseball ("8"): "I still play that game, I think. / I'm sitting at my desk in my bedroom right now." When the younger second Indian alludes to his artistic inclinations he tells the first Indian that "A voice tells me it [playing baseball] might have something to do with my quest

for an art form" (C 24). The congruence of baseball and writing is based upon their patterns, their plays, and the separation of the structure from reference. "Baseball is postmodernism. It is just about all signifier, very little signified, at least in a metaphorical sense. We know that football is referential as can be—to war, to business, to sex life, to the years filled more and more with injuries and failing health" (GB, "Baseball and the Canadian Imagination" 119). Football is referential, but baseball is not. It is not *about*; it *is*. Here. But it is all about you. Just look around. "The universe falls apart and discloses a diamond," Jack Spicer tells us, "And there is nothing in the universe like diamond / Nothing in the whole mind" (22). No, there is nothing like it: no simile, nothing it is referential to; not even an ideal. Baseball is not a record of something prior to it, and GB's writing is not a replay of an already-plotted journey or a record of his assessments. The measure is in the actualization of the game. The play, limited and enabled by rules is all about those rules—all around them. The rules, of course, are not the writer or the reader, they are other than both yet define, limit, and create both writer and reader.

The map is not the territory, but is a territory itself in which the reader situates himself while finding the trace of the writer. In Kerrisdale Elegies it is a volume which displaces the reader, makes of him a star, burning:

And as all the light races skywards
to settle as tight calligraphy on the black dome above,
they walk with him to the school ground on the hill
and bid him read.

He sees,
             it is an unfolded road-map,
ghastly brother to the grid he's made of his life in secret,
a call to greater travel,
                  a total denial of abode.

When he lifts his eyes to look there,
                          he knows he is truly gone.
    —"Elegy Ten" (141)

This game has discovered a slate of rules whereby GB the writer marks his passage. In the first inning, we saw that verisimilitude was a constraint he affronted, a limit the physical confrontation of which re-situated him within the margins of text, seeing "in his head. His body stands / between the edges of print" (GB, Layers 10). As a textual entity, the world he inhabits is one of artifice as discerned from nature, and the second inning saw points scored against description in measuring locus. But place, and time, measures "as far as I, George, / have travelled" (Catch 42). Hence, antecedents come into play to define presence. Genealogies are fabrications of continuity, of personal history, texts which situate one as Allophanes does in filial, yet autonomous relation to/from history, here the history of literature. The fifth inning brought the history of events under the bat, as tradition reified apart from individuals has created marginalization. When the sixth inning pitched collections as artificial reification of unity, the constraints themselves were seen to determine their content; the implications for National unity were discussed in the

fifth inning but the implications for self-identity took shape in the seventh inning, where self-conception and its inscription armoured the body. Appropriately, then, perspective as a defining parameter structuring the very ground the subject is armoured against came to the plate in the eighth inning.

In the ninth inning—and here we are—I am—"I sit in section nine and sometimes wonder why, / but know I am at ground zero / where art is made" (KE 73). Here art is made; it is not found, neither is it describing what is found. It *is*. What was has burned off, the burning Delsing knows is writing leaves ashes—ashes the reader can coach to flame in new ground, giving a third dimension (but not a fourth) to the text. No fourth dimension, no temporal parameter, because the text is always here whenever it is in front of you. And, as Stein writes, "anybody who is trying to do anything today is desperately not having a beginning and an ending but nevertheless in some way one does have to stop. I stop" ("Master-pieces" 150). I stop without closing, however. I stop, as you do, hoping perhaps for "a ninth inning home run" to settle the score, as they so hope in "The Day Before the Chinese A-Bomb" (YB 36). I stop, perhaps asking, "oh God give us extra innings," as the speaker does in the fifth elegy (71). But, either way, stop I do. And GB does, too, although he does not close because closure prevents the reader's investiture within the text. He notes that, as himself a reader eager to respond, "I cant reply to the monolog" ("23," E) of a closed text. "It is not that I want to force my point of view, I just want to know that it's not over, not"

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