TISH: *BOWERING'S INFIELD POSITION*

Ellen Quigley

The *Tish* movement began when Charles Olson and Robert Duncan were invited to read and lecture at the University of British Columbia. Olson, Duncan and Robert Creeley were all involved in the Black Mountain school of poetics, and *Tish* was an outgrowth of Black Mountain. The poetics of Black Mountain and *Tish* writers stem mainly from Olson's essays, "Projective Verse" and "Human Universe," and from *Tish*, the newsletter that was printed at U.B.C. in the 60s.

George Bowering's poem, *Baseball*, is one of the finest examples of poetic theory and practice in the *Tish* movement. *Baseball* is an extended metaphor for life, art, and poetic theory. The physical particles of the poem are diminished, then magnified. Sound particles move about like baseballs, on the page or in the air. The writer's and the reader's movement in the field is directed by the continuous activity of the ball and the other players. The excitement of particle movement is structured on natural and baseball seasons, but Bowering lets language control the structure or anti-structure of the individual poem fragments.

The intensity of Bowering's language is technically created by an application of the specific poetic theories that were endorsed by the *Tish* movement. *Kinetics*, *principle*, *process*, *proprioception*, *universism*, and *objectism* are the specific elements that compose "field composition" and "projective verse." Simply, the *kinetic* of the poem is the energy transfer from the writer to the reader. Energy is created by the time, the space and the quality of sound. The qualities of sound locate the tone and create the meaning of the poem. The *principle* is that "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT."[1] The *process* is that "ONE PERCEPTION MUST

[1]Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in *Human Universe and Other Essays*, by Charles Olson, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p. 60. All subsequent references to "PV" are to this edition and are textual.

IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION" (Olson, "PV," p. 52). The theories of *universism*, *proprioception*, and *objectism* refer to the philosophical stance of the poet in the world of objects. The poet is an object, the poem is an object, and the other objects in the world are participants in the creation of the poem.

Bowering does implicitly create the excitement of kinetics, principle and process, in *Baseball*, but the entire poem also creates overt structural and thematic puns on the general theories of "projective verse" and "field composition," in which language and nature, not the individual's rational rhetoric and ego, direct the poetic process. The concrete diamond shape of the open book forms the infield of a baseball diamond. Since Bowering's poem is inscribed only on the infield of the diamond, he puns on the personal breath and emotion, the personal infields, that create form in "projective" and "open verse." As a baseball field, the page creates a pun on the theory of *principle*. *Tish* poets consider all pages to be concrete fields or graphs on which language can be precisely and scientifically placed to map the poet's kinetics and individual breath. Movement in from a justified margin shows that breath is to be held for the length of time it takes to utter the phrase above the space, and movement between lines takes only the short period of time for the eye to travel to the next margin.

Bowering's pagination puns on *principle*, *process*, and the general term, "open verse." The traditional method of counting pages is replaced by an unpaginated text, but the corners of the pages are numbered as bases. The movement from one open or double page to the next is a movement to the next base. The phrases "open page" and "open verse" become humorously interchangeable by the necessity to consider the verse on each side of the open page for each base. "Open verse" is a structure that disregards the traditional set formulas for poetry, such as metrics and verse form. Both metrics and verse form are created by various mathematical formulas. A sonnet, for example, consists of fourteen lines; iambic pentameter consists of a two-unit foot that must be repeated five times. Bowering's disregard for set mathematical formulas is humorously emphasized by his "open" and "basic" pagination. The numerical movement from "1" to "9" creates the poem's movement through the time and the space of the nine innings in a ballgame. Physical movements puns on the theory of

process. The time and the space of the nine innings parallels the process of time and space in the evolving poetic perception. Each fragment of the poem is directly perceived as a base, as an individual step that occurs between the beginning and the end of the poem, not subjugated to, but a part of the whole. The position of the numbered bases also shifts to the corner where one would traditionally find them on a baseball field. Such physical movement emphasizes the *principle.* Since each base contains different emotion, movement, and content, the physical movement of the bases on the pages clarifies the different stages that evolve through the process of the poem.

Bowering also includes overt verbal puns on the technique of "field composition." In the second inning, at second base, Bowering writes,

> I was the official scorer, they knew
>
> I had the thick rule book memorized.
> Sweat all over my face, eyes squinting
>
> thru the chicken wire, preparing
> batting averages and story for
>
> the Oliver *Chronicle.*[2]

The narrator writes the scores and the story for the newspaper when he is at the game, on the baseball field. The "rule book" could mean both the rules of baseball and the poetic rules that were written in *Tish*, the newsletter produced at U.B.C. Bowering was directly involved with the production of *Tish.* His persona, a baseball player, and his numerous visual and verbal references to the "field" and to the "ballplayers" create a humorous and mildly satiric play on some of the critical theories and metaphors for the reflexive, automatic, and instinctive movement of language in "field composition," but also clearly postulate the poetic base of "projective verse" and "field composition" in his poem. In 1965, Warren Tallmen wrote, "the fielding has to be catch-as-catch-can, in the dark, out of the blue. The story reads that some magicians, jugglers, ballplayers, jazzmen and dancers can do it, and among writers, Creeley often does."[3]

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[2]*George Bowering, baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number 9.* (Toronto: Coach House 1967), n. pag.

[3]Warren Tallman, "Robert Creeley's Tales and Poems," in *Open Letter,* 3, No. 6, *The Godawful Streets of Man,* by Warren Tallman (Fall, 1976), p. 162. All subsequent references to *OL,* 3, No. 6 are to this edition and are textual.

Frank Davey and Frederic Wah called the poetic fielding a "marginal locus." Wah quotes Davey and then expands:

> If I can get/to come up to what Frank Davey speaks of as LOCUS *(Margins, Tish 3)* then I can concern the question as being primarily one of STANCE, the actual 'batting stance' taken in readiness of what might be coming. . . .
>
> LOCUS is the "physical/psychological/physiological
> position of the poet
> "margin" on the page
> "REALITY (to the poet)"
> "LINE" of the poem
>
> beginning of the breath/sound/articulation
> which is solar plexus
>
> beginning of the intelli-sense articulation
> of sense perception which is brain.
>
> In other words, LOCUS is the medium between (the overlapping place of) the poet's STANCE and the poem, on the page or voiced. It includes both realities and is central, therefore, as an area of high energy preservation.
>
> From STANCE through LOCUS into the poem. If "lines are vocal connectors, bridges, tram lines, that make the poet's LOCUS directly accessible to the reader"[,] then LINES must take on an energy-preserving characteristic. The LINE is born into by/pushes out from LOCUS. As Olson: "contemporary workers go lazy RIGHT WHERE THE LINE IS BORN." And if the poet is lazy in his LOCUS then, by the equilibrium set up by the poem as an energy preserving thing, his line will reflect his laziness.[4]

The "marginal locus" is the structural translation of thematic and conceptual constructs into poetry. A poem is a graphic and verbal energy creation. The placement and the length of graphic and sound lines, waves, on the page or in the air, must enact the excitement of the artist's "stance" in the world. The "projective" and "proprioceptive" poet, who works in an "open" field where form equals self, must give the reader a concrete method or a graph to relate to this position and kinetic rhythm, and to facilitate the recognition of

[4]Frederic Wah, "Margins into Lines: A Relationship," in *Tish 1-19,* ed. Frank Davey (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975), p. 82. All subsequent references to *Tish* are to this collective edition and are textual.

individual structural techniques, such as the juxtaposition of sounds or meanings. Bowering's stance in the poem does shift, like a juggler's or a ballplayer's, each time a new series of objects is introduced. The shift of stance, tone, and subject is rhythmically and visually activated by a shifting margin. Total adherence to a justified margin does not allow for a shifting rhythm, and creates a "closed" and static form.

Before examining Bowering's poem any further, the more philosophical theories of *proprioception* and *universism* demand explanation. *Proprioception,* as opposed to simple perception, is the act of "subjectifying," internalizing, taking outside objects into oneself to create the personal growth and movement of the poet Tallman exemplifies this action in both Duncan and Olson:

> Ask Duncan a question about Plato and you will not get a perceptive answer, which would focus on your Plato as the *object* of interest. . . . It is not *your* Plato that interests him, but *his*, the Plato-in-himself. . . . Thus, he was not discussing Pound Williams, H. D., Olson, Zukofsky, Creeley, Levertov, Ginsberg, or Spicer and Blaser of Berkeley days — chief figures in his literary environment — perceptively, as objects. He was speaking of them proprioceptively, assimilated into himself as subject. Duncan was talking Duncan, and *there* they all were — after his fashion. ("The Wonder Merchants," in *OL*, 3, No. 6, 169)

Similarly, of Olson's *Maximus Poems,* Tallman writes,

> Self of Gloucester. Thus gradually, intermittently, but under steady pressure of a desire to root all roots in, Olson takes on in his form a form of the city.
>
> Eventually the city looks out through his eyes, speaks through his voice, remembers through his memory, has its meetings in her person ("WM," in *OL,* 3, No. 6, p. 179).

Tallman also says that Creeley describes "muttering" as a way of counting one's proprioceptive objects, such as history, time, mementos, whatever. Such counting over is a way of measuring where we came from and where we are going. When the artist's manner of measuring is in tales, the effort goes into the voicing. Recounting leads to an expansion of the voice and expansion leads to discovery as more enters into the voicing. The direction is "from self, toward others, into the world." The final voice is what Olson

calls "The Man in the World," the proprioceptive voice (Tallman, "Robert Creeley's Portrait of an Artist," in *Tish 1-19,* p. 145).

The *universist* stands in direct contrast to the *humanist.* Davey, who coined the term "universist," writes,

> The differences lie primarily in world-view and concepts of form. The universist writers tend to see the universe as vast, divine, mysteriously structured, and essentially ungraspable by human reason. The humanists see it as finite, orderly, and manageable by man. The universists regard form as active and alive; the humanists as a manipulated showplace for the human mind. To the universists the poem involves the poet in recognition and surprise, it leads him to more than he knew or planned. To the humanist it is a culture-object, moulded and chisled to a shape preconceived by its author's intelligence and will — expressing *his* ideas, bearing the stamp of *his* style ("Introduction, *Tish 1-19*, p. 10)

Although the universist and humanist views on the relationship of humanity to nature are philosophical and ideological, the relationship bears strongly on the nature of poetic composition. Olson believed that the poet should stay "inside himself" and in a non-egotistical relationship to nature:

> If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of artificial forms outside himself. But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and in his hearing through himself, . . . his shapes will make their own way. It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than man. (Olson, "PV," p. 60)

The poet whose ego is in the "wrong" relationship to nature, who sings of himself, will be forced to work in artificial forms, such as surrealistic images, isolated tropes, and metrical patterns. The mystical and proprioceptive approach to nature gives rebirth to the old theory of negative capability and postulates the writer as an instrument of the greater body of nature and language. Hence, the writer must open himself, clear himself of all egoism and merely personal influence, so that the larger order can work through him.

The rejection of the individual personality seems to run contrary to the emphasis on an "open" form that is created by the

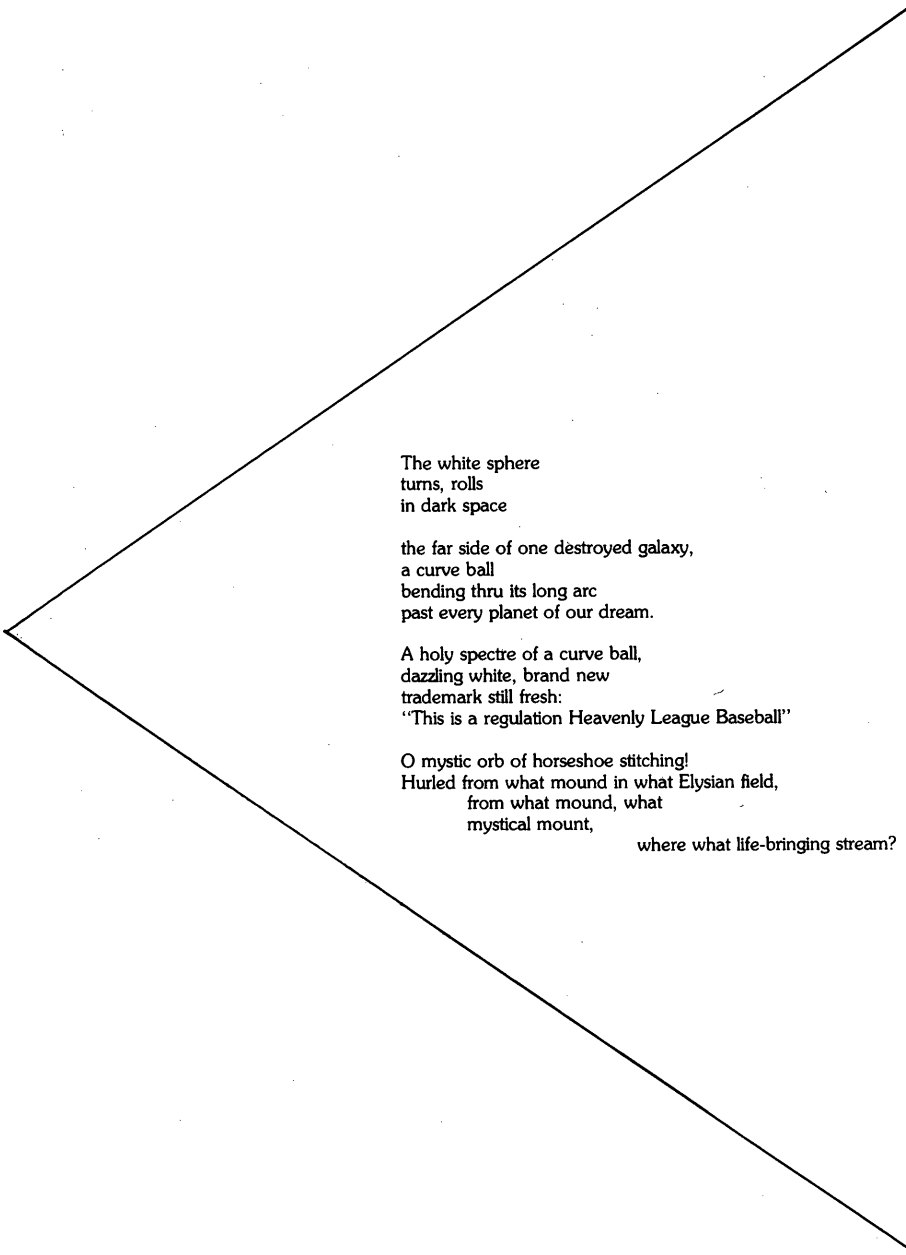
individual's breath and a proprioceptive centring on the "self." However, it seems that Olson and the others want to dispose of only the purely intellectual, rational, and ordering self, as well as the intellectual self that is given to creating shockingly unique and unnatural images, as in surrealism, not the individual. Davey writes,

> The universist seeks meaning in the local, the personal, the multiple and idiosyncratic — the universal resides in the particular. The humanist is a cosmopolitan; he seeks meaning in the 'order' of generalization . . . . For the universist mythology is particularizing — myth forever springs alive in new circumstance; for the humanist mythology is generalizing.[5]

One of the major traits of the universist philosophy is localism. Nationalist theories of writing give way to a personal localism. By concentrating on a personal and local poetics, the fundamental base for the theory and the voice can constantly shift, depending on where the locality is. The shift in voice, which is created by personal localism, enables *Tish* theory and practice to move beyond continental borders to a world-wide base, hence the terms *universist* and *particularity*. The simultaneous and paradoxical use of the terms "universist" and "particularity" emphasizes the synechdochic relationship between the poet and the world. The poet is able to move into a larger dimension only by concentrating on his own small part of the universe, personal localism.

Bowering's stance in the *universist* and *particular* world is initially postulated in the first inning, at first base:

[5]Frank Davey, "Introducing Tish," in *The Writing Life*, ed. C. H. Gervais (Coatsworth: Black Moss Press, 1976), p. 158. All subsequent references to *WL* are to this edition and are textual.

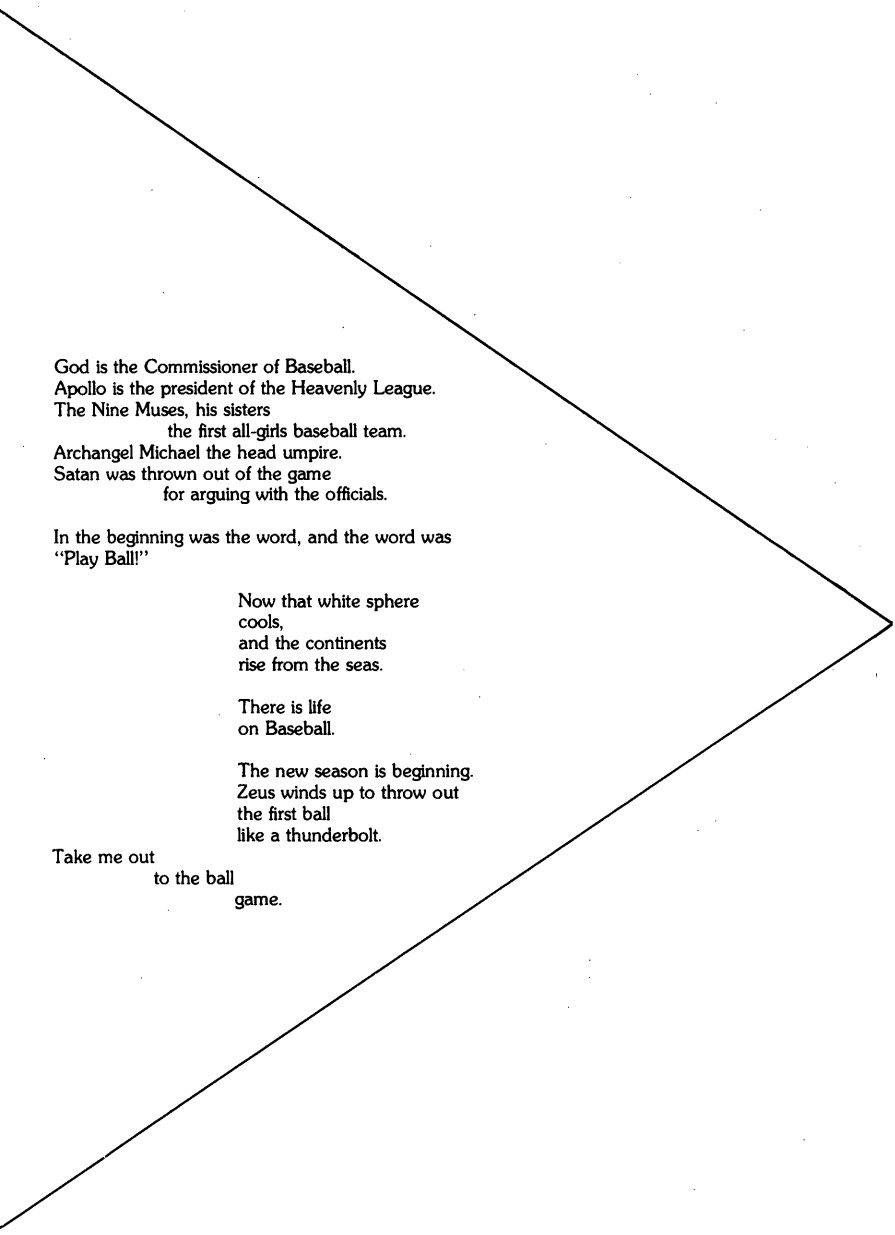


The white sphere
turns, rolls
in dark space

the far side of one destroyed galaxy,
a curve ball
bending thru its long arc
past every planet of our dream.

A holy spectre of a curve ball,
dazzling white, brand new
trademark still fresh:
"This is a regulation Heavenly League Baseball"

O mystic orb of horseshoe stitching!
Hurled from what mound in what Elysian field,
from what mound, what
mystical mount,
where what life-bringing stream?



God is the Commissioner of Baseball.
Apollo is the president of the Heavenly League.
The Nine Muses, his sisters
the first all-girls baseball team.
Archangel Michael the head umpire.
Satan was thrown out of the game
for arguing with the officials.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was
"Play Ball!"

Now that white sphere
cools,
and the continents
rise from the seas.

There is life
on Baseball.

The new season is beginning.
Zeus winds up to throw out
the first ball
like a thunderbolt.

Take me out
to the ball
game.

Bowering satirizes the humanist tradition of metaphysical poetry with his abstract and intellectual references to the "white sphere," the "long arc," the "mystic orb," and the mythological overseers of order. Such references, though satiric, also paradoxically place "baseball" and the poem in a universal world: "This is a regulation Heavenly League Baseball," where the structure of the game is beyond the human poet's rational order. Simultaneously, Bowering invokes the particular. He is not just speaking about metaphysics and the movement of the spheres, he is speaking about baseball: "A holy spectre of a curve ball / . . . / O mystic orb of horseshoe stitching!" In the whole poem, Bowering also concentrates on the "local" and "particular" aspects of baseball, the "minor league green fence baseball playing" (5). He places more emphasis on local leagues, such as the Kamloops Elks (2), and on local history, such as Manuel Louie's Indian baseball games (3) and the history of baseball in the Pacific Northwest (5), than on the National League and the national history of baseball. When Bowering does speak of the National League, he immediately juxtaposes it to either the local leagues (4), or to his own personal pre-occupation with baseball (6 and 7).

In the fourth inning, Bowering speaks of the decline in the National League. One often forgets that all this theory about life and death in local and national perspectives is actually about baseball, since baseball and poetry become theoretically and actually interchangeable. Baseball does become actual poetics, because the word and the act itself is an extended thematic and structural metaphor for life and art:

> The New York Yankees
> are dying this year
> . . . . . .
> Michey Mantle is a tired man with sore legs,
> working at a job. Roger Maris is forgotten
> on the sports pages, a momentary spark
> turned to wet ash
> . . . . . .
> in the National League
> where no pitcher's mound
> is Olympus.

The energy of the game is created in the local leagues (5), the local history (5), or in the games where no specific place is defined, but the action clearly occurs in the poet's location, either in front of him,

or in his imagination (6). The National League is beyond the poet's personal and geographical location. But even in the National League, Bowering also takes a "particular" stance:

> And Willie Mays is after all
> sinew and flesh
> as a baseball
> is string and leather,
>
> and when baseballs get old
> kids throw them around,
> torn horsehide flapping
> from that dark sphere. (4)

A tension is created between the "particular" statement about Willie Mays and baseball as an object and an action, and the larger statement that is created by the stance against nationalist writing, Mays's employment by the National League, and the death of energy in the National League. Bowering is not initially speaking about anything larger than the particular. The New York Yankees are dying because their players are human, mortal. Specific people have a life-span and occupy a specific time and space, just as a specific baseball and a specific game occupy a specific time and space. But, as Olson says, concentration on the particular and on the poet's proprioceptive stance in the natural world of objects "leads to dimensions larger than man." As in their theory, Bowering's comments on the mortality of the National League create a tension that alludes to the dissipation of artistic energy when the poet moves outside of the *particular-universist* stance. The larger referent, the conceptual or national game of baseball, is dying. The *Tish* poets believed that nationalist and humanist writing was dying. But Bowering's writing retains the kinetic impact that he overtly describes in the local baseball games, even when he does speak about the National League, the World Series, and the larger issues of poetic theory, since he does, paradoxically, concentrate on the "particular" aspects of baseball.

In the seventh inning, Bowering overtly creates the idea of the *proprioceptive* poet who, in this poem, writes about the ballplayer-in-himself:

> When I was 12 years old I had a baseball league
> made of a pair of dice, old home-made scorebooks,

National Leagues, American Leagues, Most Valuable Players!
. . . . . .
. . . I bought Sport Magazine and Baseball Digest, and knew all
the numbers. Ty Cobb's lifetime batting average was .367, I
/ remember now,
Roger Hornsby's lifetime batting average was .354. In 1921
/ Babe Ruth hit
59 home runs.
Ty Cobb was better than Babe Ruth.
Ted Williams was better than Joe DiMaggio.
I like the Boston Red Sox who are in 9th place.

I still play that game, I think.
I'm sitting at my desk in my bedroom right now.

An overt comparison is made between his childhood games of imaginary baseball and the imaginary baseball games that he plays as a poet in general, but also as a poet who is specifically writing about baseball. Bowering puns on Creeley's statement about counting and recounting the objects in one's life. The narrator counts scores and recounts his interest in baseball, but, as Creeley says, in the process of recounting a story, the emphasis goes into the manner of voicing. Many people are interested in playing baseball, but that does not make what they do a poem. The intensity of Bowering's poem is created by his manner of recounting and retelling. Bowering creates a number of ballplayers, in the overt content, but he also creates a covert ballplayer-in-himself in the high *kinetic* energy of the poem and in the *process* of language that the poem develops. The page is the field and language is the ball. Neither the poet nor the ballplayer can sit down and logically contrive where the ball will go or what the next play will be, but must play as best they can in a continuously active field.

Objectism is directly related to the proprioceptive and universist idea of the appropriate relationship between the poet and nature. Olson writes,

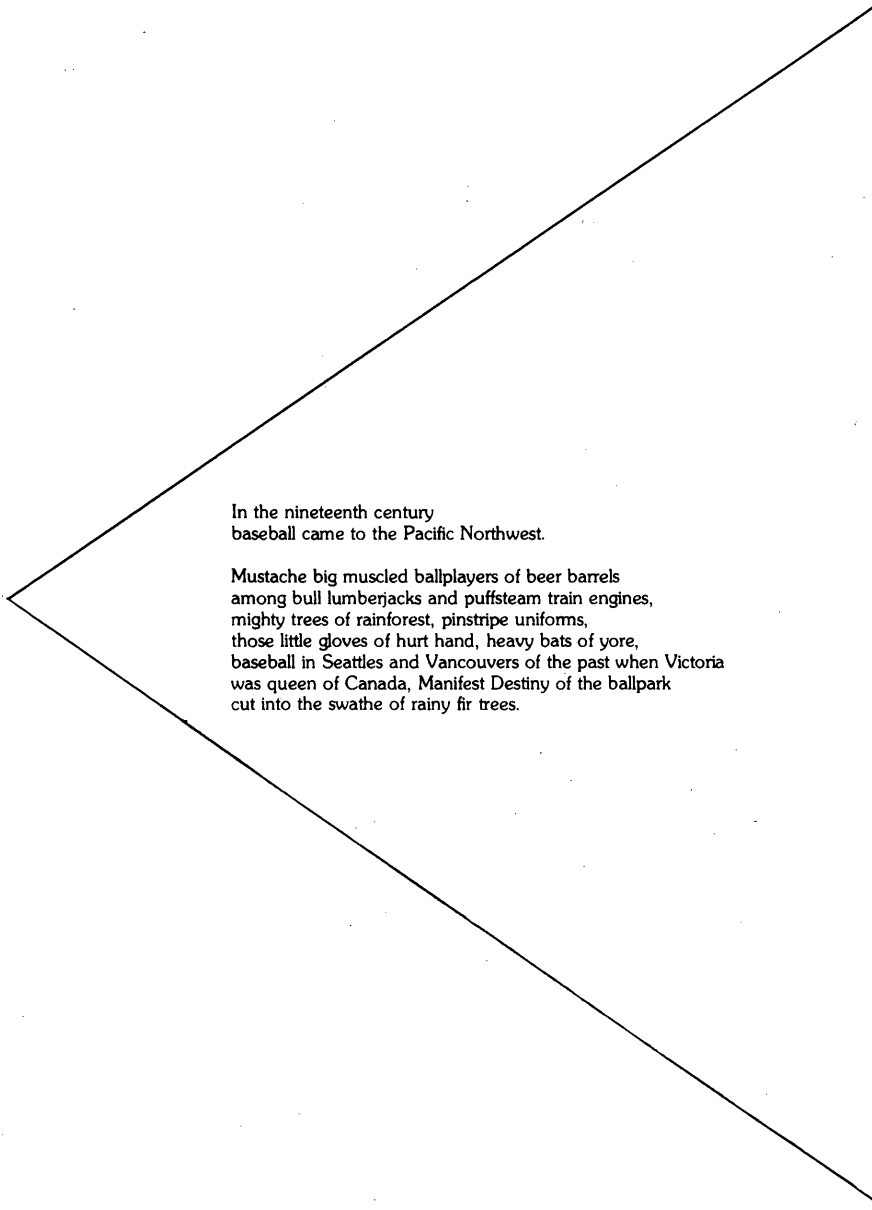
> Objectism is getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creation of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those of other creations of nature which we may with no derogation, call objects. For man himself is an object. (Olson, "PV," pp. 59-60)

Davey clarifies Olson's explanation by writing that objectism is

"nothing less than a personal and literary existentialism" (Davey, in *WL*, p. 125). In objectism, man as object is equated with other natural objects to create stronger tensions within the projective and proprioceptive poem. The poem itself is an object, not merely referential to reality, but a reality in itself. The proprioceptive centring on the "self," in *Baseball*, does create personal *objectism*. The narrator is clearly not the subject of the poem, but another object which can be manipulated in "field composition." The narrator is no more the subject than is Ty Cobb, Ted Williams, or Joe Di Maggio. All are objects, ballplayers, of sorts.

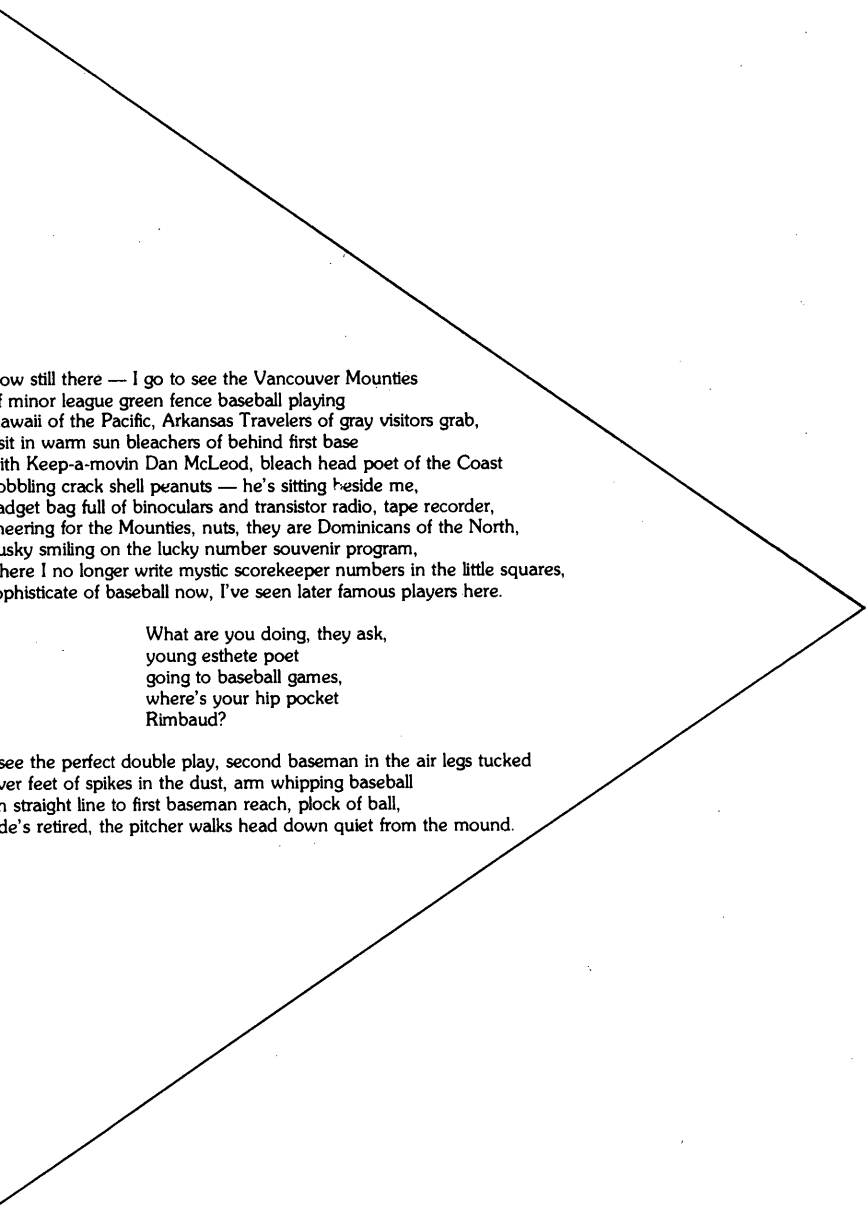
The *process*, in which language acts as a verb, in which nouns and objects are activated in the kinetic transfer of energy from the poet to the reader, is initially the overtly stated in the first inning, at first base: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was / 'Play Ball!' " The word of energy creation is not a noun, is not "God," but is the energy of objects activated by a verb: "Play Ball." Bowering also covertly lets language develop in the active energy field where "one perception immediately and directly leads to a further perception." Although the poem does have a type of linear structure in the physical movement of fragments through nine innings, and in the conceptual movement from genesis to death, the movement within the nine innings is not a logical or causal development. Fragments 2-8 do not necessarily follow a narrative line, but develop different ideas and perceptions on the subject of baseball. Bowering becomes the "co-respondent." The writer is the subject, the writing is the verb, and the reader is the object to which the action is directed. The reader must put the fragments of the poem together, since Bowering does not create an authoritative narratorial order in the larger movement from 2-8.

Narrative order is also not necessarily created within the individual fields. The language play in inning five, for example, opens perception to a multi-directional energy flow. The left side of the field develops the history of baseball in the Pacific Northwest, while the right side of the field develops the present perception of a baseball in the Pacific Northwest:



In the nineteenth century
baseball came to the Pacific Northwest.

Mustache big muscled ballplayers of beer barrels
among bull lumberjacks and puffsteam train engines,
mighty trees of rainforest, pinstripe uniforms,
those little gloves of hurt hand, heavy bats of yore,
baseball in Seattles and Vancouvers of the past when Victoria
was queen of Canada, Manifest Destiny of the ballpark
cut into the swathe of rainy fir trees.



ow still there — I go to see the Vancouver Mounties
f minor league green fence baseball playing
awaii of the Pacific, Arkansas Travelers of gray visitors grab,
sit in warm sun bleachers of behind first base
ith Keep-a-movin Dan McLeod, bleach head poet of the Coast
obbling crack shell peanuts — he's sitting beside me,
adget bag full of binoculars and transistor radio, tape recorder,
neering for the Mounties, nuts, they are Dominicans of the North,
usky smiling on the lucky number souvenir program,
here I no longer write mystic scorekeeper numbers in the little squares,
phisticate of baseball now, I've seen later famous players here.

What are you doing, they ask,
young esthete poet
going to baseball games,
where's your hip pocket
Rimbaud?

see the perfect double play, second baseman in the air legs tucked
ver feet of spikes in the dust, arm whipping baseball
n straight line to first baseman reach, plock of ball,
de's retired, the pitcher walks head down quiet from the mound.

One logically expects Bowering to write "beach head poet of the Coast," since the phrase "beach head" was used by the *Tish* poets to describe their geographical position. Instead, he abandons logic, lets language take control of the ball, and repeats the word "bleach," adding more emotion and content to the line than first expected. The convolution of syntax and the concentration of two sentences into one, in the phrase "gobbling crack shell peanuts," moves language into a more realistic perception for the reader. When watching someone eat peanuts, one does not think in such logical and linear syntax as "he is gobbling peanuts. The peanuts have shells which must be cracked open." Instead, one thinks in the direct perceptual manner that Bowering creates in his syntactical convolution. The phrase "gadget bag" is also not a traditional use of language, but it does create precision in the energy, meaning, and perception of the narrator and for the reader. The near redundancy of the word "gadget," when followed by a list of objects, "gadgets," verbally creates the clutter and, perhaps, the absurdity of the objects.

The phrase "the perfect double play" creates a formal ambiguity that parallels the meaning of "double play." On the most literal level, the field play strikes out the ballplayers running to first and second base. But, on another level, the "perfect double play" is the poet doubling as a baseball fan or player and the form of baseball, the poem and the game, as an art. Baseball is a beautiful, fast-paced and exact art that is highly dependent on time, space, movement, and the interaction of objects. The interaction between the pitcher and the batter parallels the interaction of the writer and the reader. There is a literary "double play" in Bowering's verbal development of perceptions, such as "gadget bag," and, particularly, the word "nuts," which puns on the "peanuts" that McLeod is eating and the expressive word "nuts." The pun centres energy and perception from different directions into one word, sound, or signifier. The use of verbal puns does not show one perception immediately and directly leading to a further perception, but develops two or more perceptions simultaneously. Bowering does not negate *process* in the pun, but further develops it. The more traditional function of process, as movement between spatial fragments, is also seen in the structural "double play" between the rhetorical question about what the poet-narrator is doing at the baseball game, the game as an art form, and the phrase "the perfect double play."

Bowering creates an overt comparison between the exact placement of the baseball in the baseball field and the exact placement of the line, the *principle* of "open verse." Just as the ball must be in the exact position over the plate to contact the bat at the right angle and position, the poet's line and "margin" must be in the right position to make contact and create the energy transfer from the poet to the reader, from the pitcher's energy to the batter's, to create the intensity in the *kinetic* of the ball or the poem:

> his narrow baseball bat
> level-swung, his knowledge of art,
> it has to be perfect, dont swing
> at a pitch seven centimeters
> wide of the plate. (4)

Of *kinetics,* Olson writes,

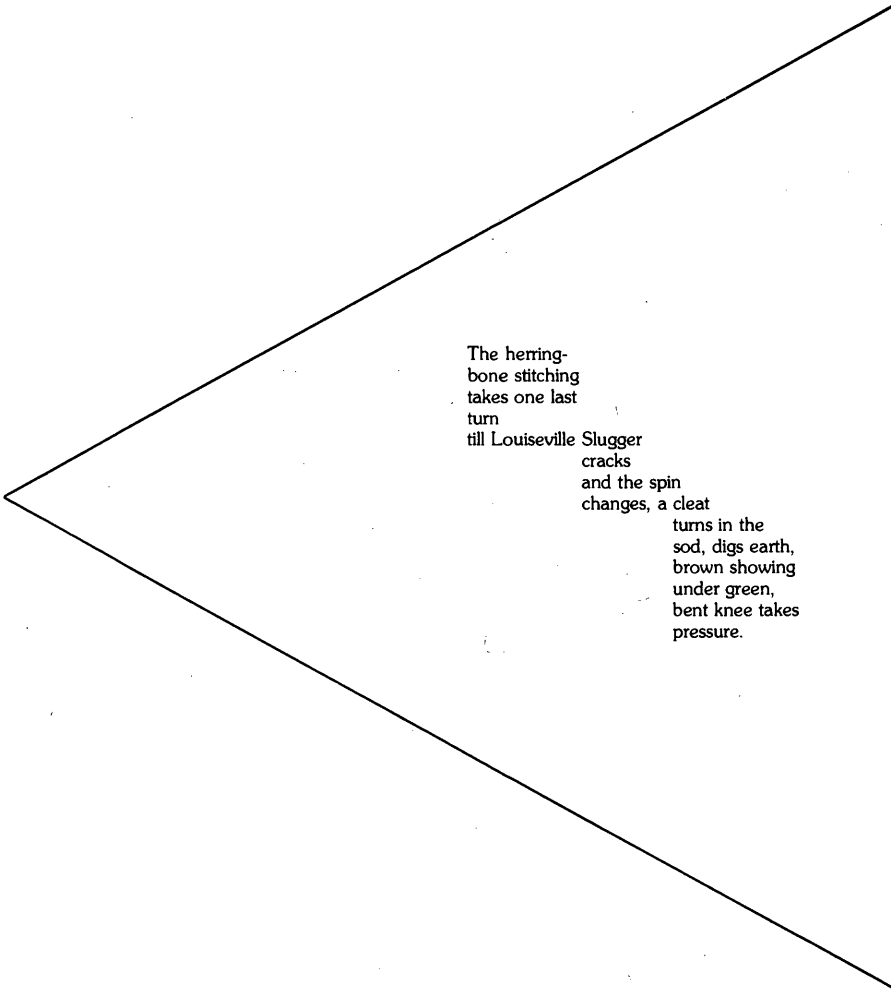
> A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to . . . the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy discharge. (Olson, "PV," p. 52)

Later in the essay, Olson expands his definition:

> (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense) must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality . . . because, now a poem has, by speech, solidity, everything in it can be treated as solids, objects, things . . . in their proper confusions . . . . The conventions which logic has forced on syntax must be broken open as quietly as the two set feet of the old line. (Olson, "PV," p. 56)

The interaction between the syllables and the line creates the breath or kinetic flow and tone of the poem, while the isolated syllables create the particles involved in the movement. The harmony and dissonance of syllables affects both the mind and the ear. In spoken language, sound creates meaning through phones, morphemes and words. The meaning is also further modified by the sound of stress, pitch and juncture. But poetry relies on sound for meaning and tone far more heavily than ordinary speech, and consciously mines the reader's various aesthetic and physical responses that are inherent to various combinations of sound.

Bowering's *kinetics* and *principle* do not stop at overt theory. His placement of lines, his syntax, and his sound create a contrast between the fast kinetic movement and the excited "stance" of the narrator, in inning six, and the exhausted kinetic movement and the depressed "stance" of the narrator, in inning nine. In inning six, we enter the World Series playoffs between the National and the American Leagues. The union of National and American Leagues



creates a rather humorous play on the "particular-universist" stance. The narrator is at the game, so the action is in the poet's location, and the content is not general, conceptual baseball, but the particulars of the game. Bowering's *kinetic* movement also reaches the excitement of a World Series game. Here, his content and high kinetic energy clearly show the ability of the poet to move into "World Series" poetry by concentrating on the "particular:"

Lungs fill
with air,
pump-
action legs, foot
pounds on narrow
corner of the bag, rounding,
the body leans
inward, eyes
flick up once
under cap, head
down, legs running,
buckle!

and the fire that breaks from thee then told a million
times

since 1903,
the first
World Series, white sphere
turns, the world again
spun around once, the sun
in October again sinking
over the pavilion roof
in left field.

This story is for you, Jack Spicer, who had eyes to see
a small signal
from the box
more than 90 feet
away.

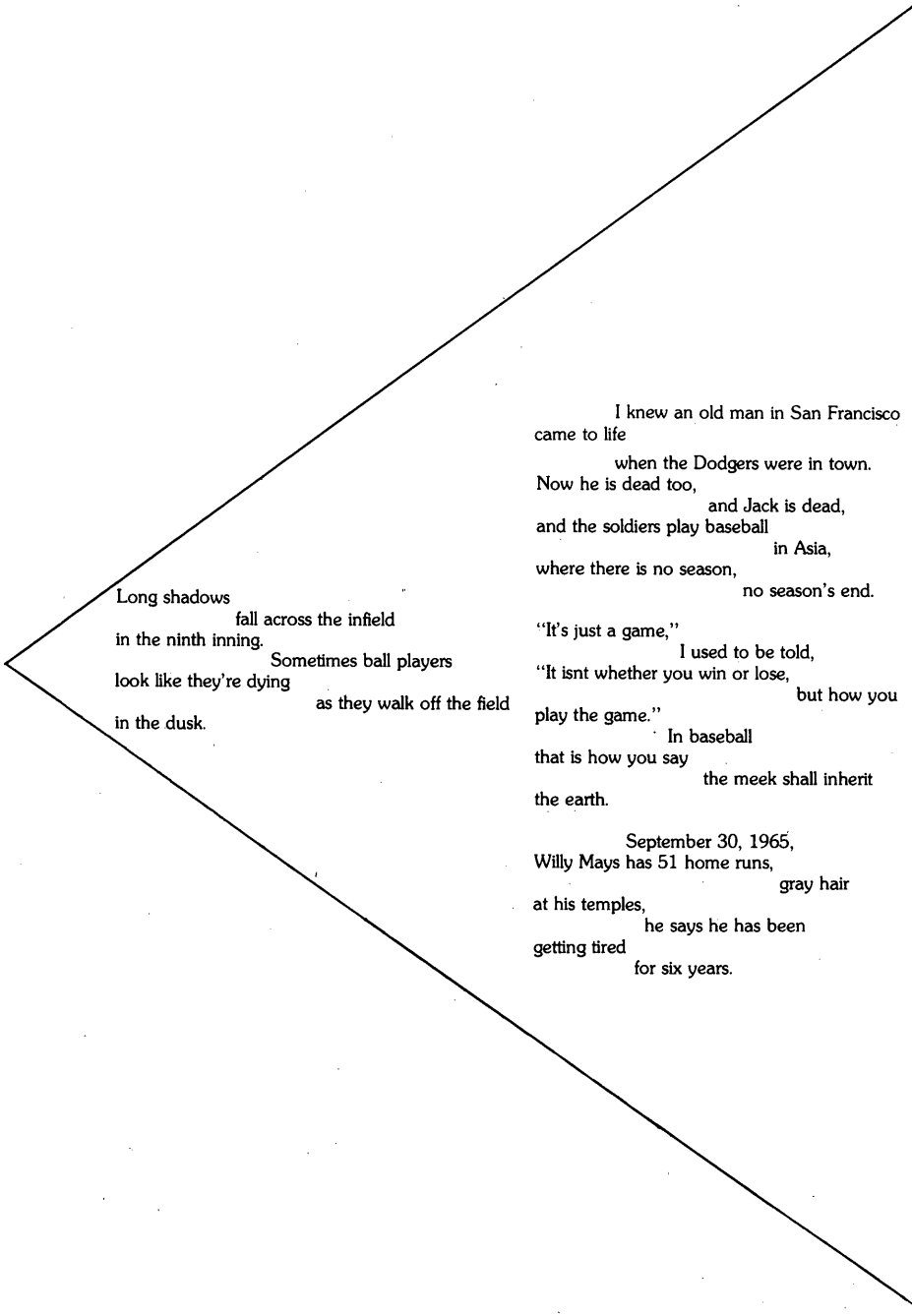
The short fast breath of the lines, combined with the absence of some syntactical connectives, create the fast pace and tension of the narrator's "stance" in the field. They also create the fast pace and tension of the batter's and the fieldplayers' breath and movement. Bowering's use of sound is highly kinetic. The batter does not "hit the ball," but "cracks." Onomatopoeic sound (also in "flicks," since the tongue "flicks" in the mouth) is combined with the assonance of tense vowels, as in "the body leans / inward, eyes," to create an emotive intensity in the rapid series of events.

Bowering uses the line for breath, and the "marginal locus" for juxtaposition. In the lines "The herring- / bone stretching / takes one last / turn," Bowering is overtly talking about the spin on a baseball, but the spatial form of the poem is also in a visual herring-bone pattern. The indented sections create a verbal "turn," a shift in the content. Each section is placed under and expands upon the last word of the previous spatial phrase. The word "rounding," for example, creates an ambiguity between the player's movement on the field as he "rounds" the base, and the movement of the body which "rounds," curves inward, as he reaches the next base. *Principle* demands that spatial form be an extension of content. The movement of the margin parallels the action of the ballplayers as well as Bowering's shift in the emphasis of content from movement on the field to movement of the body. His sound parallels his content, but Bowering also creates content in the emotive sound of words. His homage to Hopkins, in the near replication of Hopkins' lines from *The Windhover*, "Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from three then a billion / Times told lovelier," adds such glory and emotive tension to the energy of the preceding spatial fragment that the next base seems to be homeplate, or heaven, though Bowering does not say overtly that it is.

A triple-barrelled poetic allusion to homeplate and heaven makes "baseball" an even stronger metaphor for life and art. *Tish* poets believe in image but distrust metaphors and similes, since one object is made relative to another. Metaphor is the mechanical interaction between mind and speech which diminishes two things into one vagary. Similes define something in terms of something else, set up comparative order, and detract from the uniqueness and reality of the word. The word becomes relative and referential to something beyond the language of the poem and diverts the reader's attention. Davey writes, "stated baldly, simile at its worst is

digression, and metaphor at its worst circumlocation — 'at its worst' being when the shock of identification is not immediate and exact" (Davey, in *WL*, p. 122). But, here, Bowering does create a triple-barrelled metaphor for baseball, life, and art, with no other reference point than emotion. Since the "actual" reference point is not a semantic word, but is purely allusion and emotion, the power of the metaphor is increased rather than diminished. Whether hard-line *Tish* poets would agree with such an allusive use of metaphor is questionable, but this reader feels quite free and delighted to associate the emotional lines with baseball, poetry, or life.

The "marginal locus" of the ninth and last inning creates a radically different kinetic energy and effect:



Long shadows
fall across the infield
in the ninth inning.
Sometimes ball players
look like they're dying
as they walk off the field
in the dusk.

I knew an old man in San Francisco
came to life
when the Dodgers were in town.
Now he is dead too,
and Jack is dead,
and the soldiers play baseball
in Asia,
where there is no season,
no season's end.

"It's just a game,"
I used to be told,
"It isnt whether you win or lose,
but how you
play the game."
In baseball
that is how you say
the meek shall inherit
the earth.

September 30, 1965,
Willy Mays has 51 home runs,
gray hair
at his temples,
he says he has been
getting tired
for six years.

I know I feel my own body
wearing down,
my eyes watch
that white ball
coming to life.
Abner Doubleday
lived in the nineteenth century,
he is dead,
but next spring
the swing of a
35 ounce bat
is going to flash with sunlight,
and I will be a year
older.

My nose was broken twice
by baseballs.
My body depends on the game.
My eyes
see it now on television.
No chicken wire —
it is the aging process.
The season
cant help but measure.

I want to say only
that it is not a
diversion of the intelligence,
a man breathes differently
after rounding the bag,
history, is there such a thing,
does not
choose, it waits and watches,
the game
isnt over till the last man's
out.

Though not as short as the high energy lines in inning six, Bowering still uses a relatively short line, but the placement of the line, in the first section of the ninth inning, creates a longer flow of breath. If space equals breath, then the spatial syntax in the first part of the fragment establishes a verbal flow that almost parallels sentence structure. The indenture of a new sentence only lengthens the period of time between sentences and does not radically disturb the breath. Although there are some intended lines that do not begin sentences, the breath is still not as heavy and lurching as it becomes in the eleven-line sentence at the end of the poem. Bowering's content is aging, death, the end of the game, and the end of the season. The game of baseball becomes a clear metaphor for life. A flash of high energy is recreated in the vision of spring rebirth:

> but next spring
> the swing of a
> 35 ounce bat
> is going to flash with sunlight,
> and I will be a year
> older.

The quick lines and the vision of spring rebirth someow lead the reader to expect the narrator to say "younger," but the pace drops and a space for reflection leads the narrator back to reality. The number of pauses for breath, in the last eleven lines of the poem, create the lurching and winded breath of the ballplayer and of approaching death. Finally, "the last man's / out," the game is over, the season is over, the poem is over, and the last expiration of breath is "out," life over.

Although *Baseball* is not a new poem, it was published in 1967, little has been written about this book-length poem, and, apparently, few seem to know that the book even exists, not an extraordinary feat for experimental Canadian poetry, but hard to accept, regardless. The poem is a game, but the game is magic, energy creation and depletion. Bowering has created the baseball-in-himself, as art and life, with many fine lyrical, meditative and humorous passages. *Baseball* is a masterpiece, in the field, on the page or voiced, that humorously educates its audience in the theory and practice of *Tish*, and demands recognition.

Toronto, Ontario