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Postmodernist Reading of George Bowering's *Allophanes*

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Abstract:

Recurrent metaphors of suffering, death and resurrection are rooted in the mysticism of ancient myths and mystery-cults. The notion of alchemy as largely monolithic in character comes partly from the rhetoric of early modern alchemical writers themselves. Oft repeated mottoes such as “the Sages all say one thing”, the drawing of mythic histories and genealogies of alchemy to stress its supposed antiquity, and the desire of aspiring alchemists to uncover the secret knowledge known to and hidden by their predecessors. George Bowering in his poem *Allophanes* (1976) employs the ancient art to interfuse with new age postmodernism to express the idea of transmutation of our perennially redundant ideas homologous to the idea of dismantling all the serious philosophy and all the supposed mysteries. Bowering has utilized postmodernist tools such as unconventional language, fragmentation, Iconoclasm, skepticism and has rejected master narrative. He has also strewn many literary allusions as a subterfuge for the ostentatious intellectuals and academics as an aid to break the drudgery of the need to dig deeper into the literary enigma in order to demonstrate their erudition. This paper attempts to examine the postmodernist elements and the correlation between alchemy and postmodernism as the poet intends to use.

Keyterms: Alchemy, postmodern narrative, metafiction, fragmentation, skepticism.

Introduction

In an interview with George Bowering, Laurie Ricou asks Bowering to talk about pedagogy, "about teaching in your books, if you do" It is a question to which Bowering never replies or reacts directly. Bowering continues to be intellectually and emotionally concerned about "teaching" the reader, how to respond. Postmodernism is an umbrella term that is used in different ways by different speakers. As a result, this term defies easy summation. Typically, however, speakers discussing “postmodernism” are committed to exploring the complicated web of power, knowledge, and discourse. Additionally, postmodernism is entwined with various other perspectives that challenge the boundaries of the “norm”. Postmodernism, in turn, describes a series of breaks and continuities between modern and contemporary conditions. It may sound cliché but it is indeed not only changing or challenging, but also stretching and sometimes having no boundaries. Although the relationship between modernity and postmodernity is often cast as a dichotomy, this image does not serve its purpose. It implies that each entity is independent and unique, when in fact both are marked by contingency and variety. For example, observers have categorized varieties of postmodernism that differ based on their proponents’ reaction to changing conditions. Some postmodernists, for example, affirm and embrace change, Other postmodernists are more skeptical, seeking to direct change toward the

subversion of modern rationality. In this way, it's best to think of modernism and postmodernism as existing in a symbiotic relationship. Neither form of life or an object or a theory or knowledge is separate or a whole; each contains the particle and residues of the other. In fact, each requires the continued existence of the other in order to exist—through opposition—precarious and coherent. It uses the strategies of blankness, irony, and reflexivity to enhance our awareness of paradox, ambiguity, uncertainty, fragmentation and difference.

George Bowering, in his poem *Allophanes*, in which he says “ follows no system” in fact goes against the system, constructed by the academics and intellectuals. Bowering's interest in creating a sensation of cognitive bewilderment in his volumes, are closely related to his rejection and deconstructing the hierarchy of the literature; the desire to evoke a sort of mental amazement in his readers is at the very core of his intention as a Postmodernist writer. The title of the poem, according to Bowering, means "all appearances" and "the scientific usage of the term attends the shifting colors of mineral formations, such as stalactites, lights in a cave". He adds that "the word could also be translated as those things which are other than what they at first appear to be, all taken together". Things are not what they appear to be. It is another challenge to the reader. Find out what he "really" means, not what appears on the "surface." The idea of "appearance" is a factor in the very first line of the poem: "The snowball appears in Hell." But in this poem there is only "appearance." The meaning is well hidden on the surface. The surface is like the "shifting colours of mineral formation . . . lights in a cave." The poem functions as an illustration of Bowering's theories about language. There is no "hidden" meaning to art (or life) only a series of changes. Language and literature are both constant reconstructions and reframing, like pieces of glass in a mosaic. The “snowball in Hell” image is a mixture of ephemerality and permanence — what things appear to be versus what they become. The many allusions in the poem, play a similar function. The allusion is an example of permanence, but the wordplay usually included in the allusion shows the fluidity of language. The 'hunt the allusion' game seems, on the whole, pretty apparent to play. The reader quickly finds references to Kerouac, Sophocles, Yeats, Pope, Descartes, bp nichol, Poe, Auden, the Bible, Eliot, Emerson, and many others. But the object of the poem is not merely for the reader to win the game by tracking down all of the references. The game is a part of the poem's function as illustrated. Faced with so many references, echoes, allusions and other voices, the reader concludes something about the nature of literature. The poem debunks the narrative mode. It defies the traditional narrative mode of having a structure of a beginning, middle and an end.

As a postmodernist, Bowering conveys whatever he has to in a disjointed sections which does not follow any meticulously well thought through structure of earlier literatures. The ideas which arise in the poem are scattered and disseminated. The poet uses the technique of alchemy to deconstruct the constructed notion relating to war, myths hierarchy with literature and life. In a postmodernist vein, he views through the lens of skepticism and subtly and humorously questions the traditionally held perception of war, the concept of literature that academics and intellectuals have and life.

Terry Whalen in *Discourse and Method: Narrative Strategy in George Bowering's West Window* says,

“Allophanes can be read as a Postmodernist exercise in the unwriting of aristocratic literature and in its preoccupation with "untying" the reader from enslavement to

authoritarian structures — it is ostensibly about freedom.”

Narrative and Fragmentation

Lyotard argues that all aspects of modern societies, including science as the primary form of knowledge, depend on these grand narratives. Postmodernism then is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. In other words, every attempt to create "order" always demands the creation of an equal amount of "disorder," but a "grand narrative" masks the constructedness of these categories by explaining that "disorder" is chaotic and bad, and that "order" is rational and good. Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favors "mini-narratives," stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability. J.F. Lyotard suggests that all forms of representation rely upon narrative in order to validate themselves, and it could be said that all knowledge is primarily narrative as, no matter their medium, all artistic and cultural representations require some metanarrative to explain, validate or justify them. Frederic Jameson explains this in terms of the history of the sign between the eighteenth century and the present day: from the realistic reflection of the sign we have moved through the modernist rupture of the relationship between the sign and its referent (although the belief in some relation still remained), to the present day "pure and random play of signifiers which we call postmodernism. In The Postmodern Condition (1984), after Lyotard has signalled the breaking up of grand narratives, he explains:

“This breaking up of the grand Narratives leads to what some authors analyse in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening.”

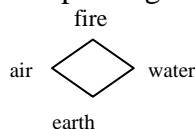
George Bowering uses various images and symbols and advocates writing as a play, spontaneity, free association, freedom in the narrative. He uses the metafiction mode of narrative. The narrative as we can see is disjointed, fragmented and is deconstructive. *Allophanes* has a fragmented narrative structure. It is divided into twenty six sections and none of the sections synchronize with the other. He clearly goes against the grand narrative. He uses allusions to literary works, poets, Greek mythology, alchemical images and symbols as tools for narrating the predicament of mankind and other ideas he intends to put forth such as subverting the pedantic notions about the world of intellectuals and academicians. He quotes poets right from the 17th century to the era of postmodern and in the same breath, he refers to Greek gods in order to substantiate his engaging discussion on pressing concerns the world is facing in terms of politics, art and spirituality.

He starts out the poem by the picture of a “snowball... in hell” and mockingly questions the view of God founded on one of Yeats’s poems, “ego Dominus this?”. We find recurrent images of “hell” so as to mention his concerns on earth. Bowering uses many images of Greek mythology and tampers with it in order to define the chaotic postmodern world. Such as “Have a seat on my language, and here we go lecherously, thru the flowing world of Hera’s Clitoris.” Hera is the sister of Zeus and worshipped for her virginity. The poet is calling out the attention for breaking

the In section six he mentions Dionysus, who in the mythology is known as the god of winemaking and wine and of ritual madness says, “Dionysus is the power in the tree –Like a Louisville slugger. There is safety in derision read either way.”, in a way attacking the pretense and derision that surround art and literature. He mentions in passing “Oedipus in Kelowna”, which the readers can assume the painting of seduction of Oedipus, who committed an incest with his own mother placed in the gallery of Kelowna. In section seven, he mentions coupling of Hermes and Aphrodite, who gave birth to a hermaphrodite (half human and half woman) might be derived from the following line “ I have loved you better than my soul...” as a symbol of symmetry. On the other hand, Hermes means interpreter which most intellectuals are busy with and Aphrodite, Goddess of beauty and pleasure which is deceptive in this upturned world, “You’ll join in burying my poem at some crossroads” and he goes on to say “Aw narrative is a telling blow. Tell the story of men, their progress on Earth, a cancer on her body”. He presents the visual representation of the story of mankind as a degenerative disease like cancer insinuating the degradation of value system. He makes strong sentences which could be considered blasphemous by fundamentalists.

“ Oh sages standing in God’s holy shit”

He makes direct reference to Auden’s Essay on Yeats “Yeats as an Example”. The tone of the poem shifts to attenuating the idea behind Existentialism and the Absurdists. He says “fragments of the exploded gods” referring to the nihilism. In section ten the scene jumps to Jewish mysticism symbolizing Ezekiel’s wheels, where the wheels are entwined reminding us of the time and the image of the shadow cast by the wheels. He also mentions the devil Eblis to be in every human path hinting at the fact that gods, human and the devil exist together in this world. Bowering often makes a pun the word exile to the alchemical symbol of the egg and says “the egg-ziled gods” The poet is calling out for a spiritual and intellectual revolution by the omnipresent and ubiquitous alchemical concepts and philosophy. He repeats the phrase “ Burn the books”; “Wear your best suit when you jump into a volcano”; “why should men die & books live?”. He takes privilege to put a small drawing



He minces no words to make his ground about his religious views clear saying

“I had gathered about me all gods because I believed in none”

Bowering says “There is no system”. It is very clear from his narrative that he follows no particular narrative strategy. Just when the readers were taken on the heady road of mysticism alchemy and mythology, he trivializes it by bluntly putting “What I want is baseball, jazz & Viennese food.” We can infer that the poet is mocking at the pedantic preoccupation of the intellectuals on the subjects concerning life, death and eternity. The poet seems to be talking about the ephemerality of life and debunking the endless quest for the meaning of life, saying “Al Rose intent on suicide, his meaning left in the lines on the melting snow.” The recurring image in the poem is “snowball”. The section fourteen of the poem is in the form of dialogue between Al Ross and Bachiller having a conversation on self with no concreteness. In the subsequent sections of the poem, the poet dabbles with the concept of mortality and

impermanence of life referring to Geronimo and his failure in his revolution just like the unstable state of a snowball. He says

“Culture tastes like well-cooked pig, the black pig in the valley”

He mentions Morphemes and again comes back to Al Rose, who ‘apparently sings and speaks in seventy languages’. He briefly comes back again to the conversation Al Rose and Bachillor who hold a conversation about nothing substantial and seems absurd and repeats the phrase “The snowball appears in Hell every morning at seven” like a refrain in a song. He talks about poetry, thoughts, ideas that are in the cauldron and shaped into poetry, theology, baseball, language, and history. As we can see, Bowering speaks about all these issues in a random order, he says

“Shit, shore up the fragments for yourself, don’t expect a fullness here, I’m only one pair of ears”

One of the main tenets of Postmodern narrative is to play with the well established symbols and concepts. The idea of ontological critique is usually associated with the postmodern and metafiction, but it is not exclusive to it. The novel has always explored its possibilities despite a rising consciousness of the nature of the médium, the human activity of mediation and the inevitability of manipulation is fundamental in what we witness as its development. Discussions about postmodernism often centered on narrative, and a point that ought to be made is that we can posit an analogous relationship between poetry and postmodernism. Postmodernism can be considered as oppositional discourse, as both involve a relationship, or a variety of relationships of antagonism or opposition towards already existing kinds of representation which are studied and consider themselves to be valid, reliable, authoritative, or even realistic. In the light of what has been said, the postmodernist tendency towards metafiction in some cases can be considered as "an exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novéis: of frame and frame break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion". Roland Barthes:

“In this ideal text, the networks (reseaux) are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one...”

In the studies of postmodern artwork, fragmentation signifies the breaking rather than building up of information, to form a complex body part that would carry a hidden message rather than the obvious message to its consultation. In Hutcheon's terms, "postmodernism is a phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory". For her, postmodernism works to unmask or "de-doxify" the discursive politics, which naturalize humanistic ideals of centeredness, hierarchy and authority. However, in so doing, it is forced to acknowledge its own involvement in the very structures which it seeks to challenge:

“This is a strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own complicity with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine.”

Alchemy and postmodernism

Alchemy possesses both a practice and a theory. The theory can appear as a speculative nature. Philosophy of Greek origin, or as a metaphorical code for processes of purification and initiation

occurring both in the alchemical work and in the soul of the alchemist. Such recurrent metaphors of suffering, death and resurrection are rooted in the mysticism of ancient myths and mystery-cults. It is no accident that these stages of the alchemical work are already present in the first available alchemical text from the 3rd century A.D., the *Physika Kai Mystika* of Pseudo-Democritus, which derives from Bolos of Mendes in the 3rd century B.C. A further variation of the concept “alchemy” concerns the alchemist’s quest for the panacea, which heals both men and metals like a medicine. One cannot simply speak of “alchemy”, but must distinguish its practical, theoretical, philosophical nature, mystical and medical aspects. Among alchemists, there are, correspondingly, scientists, medical men and mystical seekers after truth, and even charlatans. The West took over the concept of “alchemy” from the Arabic (*al-kimiya*) and its Latin forms include “*alkimia*”, “*alquimia*”, “*alchimia*” and “*alchemia*”. The prefix “*al-*” is simply the definite article in Arabic, but the etymological root of “*chimia*” is controversial. Its attribution to a mythic hero or prophet cannot be taken seriously.

Postmodernists are always interested in alchemy because it echoes their own tendencies and pursuits. Alchemy is driven by myth rather than history, poststructuralists favor myth over history as history claims lay to an objective truth, which they do not think exists. Alchemy has generated a host of archetypal mythic images and ideas. Jung tells us that Astrology and Alchemy have always been driven by archetypal myth and mythic pictures from the collective unconscious, which is in direct opposition to the orthodox modern concept that the real meaning issues from the rational mind of exceptional individuals. Postmodernist also perceive alchemy as a global paradigm. Alchemy has no chronological limits or geographical boundaries. They persist from before history to the present. The alchemical and postmodernists emphasis on investigating reality from both micro and macrocosmic point of view. The Philosopher’s stone is a metaphor for finding value in the “other” the disenfranchised who are often ignored or discarded. Alchemists believed the Philosopher’s stone was “the most precious of all things, constant overlooked by us all.” When past societies favored one group, they often discard others are worthless. When postmodern society finally began to perceive value in once discarded groups, it echoed the metaphor of the stone.

The title of the poem *Allophanes* literally means “other appearances” has many a reference to the alchemical symbols. The recurrent symbol is the snowball, the others include rose, Athanor, fire, cup, egg and the four elements of nature. Bowering starts the poem with the imagery of snow.

“The snowball appears in Hell, every morning at seven”

Further down the lines, he says

“The snowball says it: All sentences are imperative”

And this image of snowball occurs many times in the poem. The image “snow” and “white” in alchemy refers to purity and innocence and snow refers to impermanence or ephemerality of life. Bowering seems to be referring to this mortality of life. Next, he brings in the imagery of rose which is a sacred symbol of regeneration, purity, virginity, fertility, sexuality, secrets, and most of all, love. The poet acknowledges the duality of reality which consists of beauty in an impermanent world. The most important symbol in alchemy is Athanor. The Athanor is the furnace used by the alchemists to the perfect murder. Built of brick or clay, the Athanor usually was shaped like a tower with a domed roof and was designed to keep an even heat over long

periods of time. The alchemists considered it an incubator and sometimes referred to it as the "House of the Chick." Symbolically, the Athanor is also the human body and the fire of bodily metabolism that fuels our transformation and metamorphosis. The poet seems to be calling out for a revolution, change and a break from the old traditions and norms. In the sense of cleansing, purification and total change of attitude towards life, intellect and spirituality. He decenters the established norms. The poet says,

"Al Rose speaks seventy languages fluently,

Sings in seventy languages,

His words fall into the sun, athanor too"

Postmodernism can be considered as oppositional discourse, as both involve a relationship, or a variety of relationships of antagonism or opposition towards already existing forms of representation which are considered and consider themselves to be valid, authentic, authoritative, or even realistic. The poet says,

"No place on Earth, is the center of the world"

Another pertinent symbol is fire- which Fire is one of the Four Elements of alchemy. Fire in the alchemical sense carries the archetypal properties of activity and transformation. It is associated with the operation of Calcination. In section XI, poet calls on,

"Wear your best suit, when you jump into a volcano"

In subsequent sections, the poet uses epimone to stress his point,

"-Burn the books, burn the books"

Bowering makes use of Jewish expression to get his point across to the readers. "Black fire on white fire," he says,

"There was black fire writ on white fire,

The poem blazed before my very eyes.

I wanted to dive into flames,

Save my furniture,

Rescue my 'beloved books'"

The ancient Rabbis spoke of the Bible as having been written in *black fire* and *white fire*. The black fire are the words on the page, the black ink of the letters which each of us can see and read. Though written words are, like all words, slippery and capable of meaning many things, the words stand before us as given; they are fixed in the canonized text. The white fire is the space between the words on the page or scroll, the space around the words, even the space between the letters. Postmodernist narratives advocate plurality in meanings and interpretations. The next alchemical symbol he uses is the egg. The egg is symbolic of the hermetically sealed vessel of creation. Stopped retorts, coffins, and sepulchers represent eggs in many alchemical drawings. The oval frame of the image stands for the Egg of the Philosophers, the alembic in which the

alchemical process is taking place. The poet mentions egg often indicating the soul or the world as the place where transmutation should occur. He writes,

“The egg sits there, it does not rot itself” and *“the egg-ziled gods”* making a pun on the word ‘exiled’.

In section VII

“The egg sits there, it does not rot itself”

In section XXI the poet writes,

“Looking for an oblate snowball on Eggs Isle. Inside the real composing. A permanent place down in the universe over which history has no dominion”

In postmodernist narratives, decentering the established is part of the narrative. Bowering dethrones the god by referring to them as the egg-ziled(exiled) gods insinuating the toppled spirituality in the growing cosmopolitan life. Bowering mentions a very important four elements as its symbol of unification and oneness of energy. According to Aristotle, the prima materia conjoins with the four qualities of dryness, coldness, moisture and heat, thus developing to form the four elements. By manipulating these qualities, it was also possible, so he thought, to change the elemental combinations of materials, thereby bringing about their transmutation. Accordingly, the work of the alchemist lies" only in the rotation of the elements. For the material of the stone passes from one nature into another, the elements are gradually extracted, and in turn relinquish their power. Until all are turned downwards together and rest there ". (J. d ' Espagnet, " Das Geheime Werk",in: Deutsches Theatrum chemicum, Nuremberg, 1728) Bowering uses many concepts, allusions and reference to call out for a change, transformation and break from all established institutions, faith, norms, intellectual world governed by pretentiousness, subverting hierarchy and hegemony.

Iconoclasm and skepticism

Among postmodernists, the tendency is to see all forms of representation as limiting and distorting our visions of reality, so that postmodernism is essentially subversive in its desire to make this inevitable distortion of reality and experience clear. Rather than considering reality as something representable, it is now seen as a fictional construct dependent on the ideologies implicit in existent modes of representation. So, the question becomes whether we are able to conceive of reality at all, or if all we know and recognize are the forms, traditions and conventions of a number of already existing realisms. We can say that postmodernism represents an extreme stage of thought in the development of attitudes towards the relation between reality and representation. Postmodern-ism’s extreme skepticism, subjectivism, and relativism are the results of a two-centuries-long epistemological battle. That battle is the story of pro-reason intellectuals trying to defend realist accounts of perception, concepts, logic, but gradually giving ground and abandoning the field while the anti-reason intellectuals advanced in the sophistication of their arguments and developed increasingly non-rational alternatives. Postmodernism is the end result of the Counter-Enlightenment attack on reason. Immanuel Kant is the most significant thinker of the Counter-Enlightenment. His

philosophy, more than any other thinker's, buttressed the pre-modern worldview of faith and duty against the inroads of the Enlightenment; and his attack on Enlightenment reason more than anyone else's opened the door to the nineteenth-century irrationalists and idealist metaphysicians. Kant's innovations in philosophy were thus the beginning of the epistemological route to postmodernism.

George Bowering questions the ideas surrounding the ostentatious intellectual world, religion, modern day spirituality. He presents his disillusionment in various sections of the poem.

In section V

*“Whatever I learned has run wild
I awake in a hospital
Under a patchwork quilt
I underwent the operation of language
& wake in the recovery room.
As the colours stitch together
Before my eyes.”*

Here the poet seems to be questioning his learning, epistemological knowledge, modern experimentation with the language.

In section X

-burn the books burn the books

In section XI

“I had gathered about me all gods because I believed in none”

In section XII

*“ Oh God, let's have war, fuck art, that
phony lastingness, shoot him in that belly,
Blood is vintage, there'll be another,
Crop, the vines will plunge into
The earth, fanatics will raise another.
Why should men die & books live?”*

In section XIII

“The iconoclast preaches in his best clothes,

The pedagog levels a burp-gun at his jacket buttons”

Contradiction is a psychological form of destruction, but contradictions sometimes do not matter psychologically to those who live them, because for them ultimately *nothing* matters.

Nihilism is close to the surface in the postmodern intellectual movement in a historically unprecedented way. Iconoclasm decanonizes cultural standards, previous artworks and authorities deny the authority of the author, discounting his intentions and his claim to act as spokesman for a period contradicts the expected, often deliberately alienating the reader subverts its sources by parody, irony and pastiche denounces ethnic, gender and cultural repression strips context, reducing content to an austere minimum brood on the human condition disclosed by radical literary theory. In their effort to eradicate the impurity of constructing truths, which we witness in iconoclastic acts of destruction directed at the idolatrous icon, the false idol, the dead statue, fundamentalists has expressed the felt wish to empty the world of all man-made simulacra, all human constructions or mediations. In the purified world, they believe, the transcendent truth will shine forth in all its glory. Postmodern thinkers hold that not just politics has failed—*everything* has failed. Being, as Hegel and Heidegger taught us, really has come to nothing. Postmodernism then, in its most extreme forms, is about driving that point home and making the nothing reign.

Iconoclasm expresses an urgent, deep-seated impulse to revive core values. For the iconoclast, idolatrous or illusory images and icons act as an impediment to the experience of higher or transcendent truths. False idols fool the unwary into treating what their eyes see as the real thing. In so doing, deceptive signs lead people away from true reality which, the iconoclast declares, lies elsewhere. For the iconoclast, true reality is hidden, but accessible by recourse to invisible signs which can be perceived by an inner eye, the eye of the soul. Postmodern iconoclasm meets fundamentalist nihilism — without the latter’s faith in a second order reality. For the postmodern iconoclast there is no transcendental truth to deliver us from the chaos of human constructions or to subdue the crisis of representation.

In section XIII, he eloquently dismisses the ideas that surround the concept of paradise, and expresses his worldly desire.

“Heaven must be another, a camisole,

Must be what we don’t want.

What I want is baseball, jazz & Viennese food.”

Iconoclasm also seeks to escape ambiguity by assailing it head on, iconoclastically — which is to say, by actively seeking to rid the world of useless fictions, fanciful metaphors, and other figurative form.

Conclusion

The title of the poem, according to Bowering, means "all appearances" He uses literary concepts like the anonymity of the author, hermetic tradition, occultism, reference to Donne, Jonson, Yeats and Pope, employs language, symbols, and references drawn from alchemy. The game of finding references of the literary texts which most intellectuals are busy with, Bowering dismisses this vain practice of literary deciphering among the so-called intellectuals. The poet is calling out for revolution, the revival of old values where it is needed, and transformation in the process of creation of an artwork.

Bowering provides yet another series of examples of books, speaking among themselves. He is an advocate of poetry as freedom from the "mind-forged garrison", and as exemption from structured discourse, discourse that has intimate affinities with systems and régime. Robert Kroetsch speaks for many Postmodernists when he says, "as a Postmodernist resist those overriding systems just as much as one resists religious or political ones", and Bowering will go so far as to say in *Allophanes* that "There is no system". Such comments serve in part to explain Bowering's interest in creating a sense of cognitive bewilderment in his books, and they are nearly linked to his rejection of the literature of hierarchy; the desire to extract a kind of mental amazement in his readers is at the very heart of his bias as a Postmodernist writer. There are other things which attach the poem in with alchemy: diagrams, especially the incomplete baseball diamond surrounded by the four elements; allusions to Empedocles, originator of the estimate of four elements, Oedipus, whose story was viewed as an alchemical allegory, and whom the ancient Greeks identified with Hermes, founder of alchemy. Thus George Bowering has successfully employed postmodern elements in his poem "*Allophanes*". George Bowering shares in this alert Postmodernist awareness that he has become one of the more vocal Canadian advocates of writing as freedom, play, spontaneous occurrence, happening, and process.

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