



## My Darling Nellie Grey

*George Bowering*

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In December 2005, stalled on a novel he was writing, George Bowering thought he needed a challenge. By the end of the year he had made a New Year's resolution: write a poem a day for the 365 days of 2006. While working on *Crows in the Wind*, in January, he decided each monthly sequence should have a rule: something for the writing to attend to. So for February, each day's piece had to have one sentence and two stanzas, then off he went; inventing ten further formal monthly compositional frames. As it happened, 2006 became fraught with personal challenges for Bowering—including a second marriage and a death in his new family—but he kept going, never cheating. The result of this uncompromising personal and formal discipline is one of the most fascinating books of poetry ever written.

Initially lacking a “subject,” the book’s metanarrative almost inevitably took the shape of an exquisite poetic autobiography that is at once both intensely personal and profoundly public. In it, among many other astonishments, we discover the deeply ambiguous roots of his father’s favourite folksong; we catch a fleeting childhood glimpse of Bowering’s young mother, graceful as a gazelle, frozen in mid-stride like a Keatsian art-deco statue by the poet’s innocently Oedipal gaze; a complete history of Cuba in the context of US foreign policy in Latin America that gives an entirely new, but older, meaning to the date September 11; and the roots of tragedy that led to the “Balkanization” of Yugoslavia.

Throughout, the poet’s narrative personae assume the guises of a lifetime, reeling in and out of an ever-shifting “present”: a fluid “here and now” that swirls over the gravel of a stream alive with recognitions, as all of the events of that imagined life become simultaneously present in their voices.



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