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A PLACE OF RUPTURE: THE LIFE AND POETRY OF BRONWEN WALLACE

By

Gloria Demasi Nixon-John

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

A PLACE OF RUPTURE : THE LIFE AND POETRY OF BRONWEN WALLACE

By

Gloria Demasi Nixon-John

This work is a result of research into the life and poetry of Bronwen Wallace. Once I examined her work it became clear to me that Wallace's political and literary work is a place of resistance and rupture. Wallace resisted limiting herself to the comfortable middle class venue of her home in Kingston, Ontario Canada. She resisted the ivory tower of the academy and she resisted the more formal tenets and trends of the larger literary community. More specifically, her work manifests itself in working class cultural expression that is rooted in the oral tradition, a tradition that continues to be especially honored by women of the working class. While her poetry is clearly connected to the Canadian tradition, her use of non-literary forms such as story, gossip, and song, sets her apart. By doing this Wallace breaks down the definition of, and the cultural assumptions about, the working class and especially working class women who were, and still are, held within the larger culture of dominations. Her poetry is a place of rupture because it illuminates the ordinary language and the artifacts and tools of the working class, particularly women. This work also illuminates the negative consequences

of capitalistic system and the inherent patriarchal underpinnings of that system. Her work clearly functions as a sociopolitical act.

It is also evident that Wallace believed that women's oppression predates the Marxist critique of what we might call "the nuclear family"-the household unit containing a woman, man and children, with the woman carrying the burden of child rearing. While it is clear that Wallace saw the capitalistic structures as a way of exacerbating and validating the patriarchal structure, she believed that the patriarchal structure itself certainly predates Marxist analysis and further clearly continues under socialism.

It should be made clear that Wallace also worked directly to improve the conditions of working women's lives. She organized groups and activities to address the needs of working class women. I speak to these efforts in their work as well.

Much of the biographical information gathered for this work was obtained through interviews of friends and family of Bronwen Wallace. I have also compared Wallace's poetry to the poetry of some of her key predecessors and several of her contemporaries. Then too I have looked at home, the land, her family, politics, and key female friends who helped to shape her life and her work.

Letters that Wallace wrote, along with letters that were sent to me by her friends, are included along with photographs of the poet and her immediate family.

Dedicated to the memory of
Bronwen Wallace and to other strong
women, but especially to
my loving daughters,
April Dawn Nixon-Wiater,
and
Reneé Helen Nixon.
Also to my granddaughter,
Angelina Helen Wiater,
also
R. Michael John for his
love and encouragement

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Special thanks to Anita Skeen who pushed me in the direction of Bronwen Wallace,

Ferd and Peggy Wallace, Cameron Wallace, Ron and Jeremy Baxter,

Darlene George, Debra Green,

Joanne McAlpine, Joanne Page,

and

Carloyn Smart.

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PREFACE

I was born in Detroit in the pre-feminist forties and grew up in the fifties and sixties in a blue collar family headed by a dominant European father. While endearing images of my father are called up when I read poems like "Those Winter Sundays" it is more frequent that images of my mother surface in my own poetry, and it is her "backyard view" of the world that most often surfaces in my own writing even today. Measure this view against the torment that I found when I read the works of Plath, Sexton and Rich, or measure it against the transcendent images I found in the work of Carolyn Kizer, Mary Oliver, and Sharon Olds (to name a few), and you will understand why I felt I had no "poetic territory" in which to place my life or my mother's life. Then one Saturday afternoon I crossed over to my sister city of Windsor (as I did with my parents so often as a child), and strolled into a tiny bookstore called South Shore Books. There in the modest poetry section of the store I came across a few collections of poetry by Canadian women. The first was Gwendolyn MacEwen's The Early Years, which I opened and read the first few lines of "The Magician":

> finally then the hands must play mad parable
> finally then, the fingers' genius
> wave out what my poems have said
> finally then must the silk occur
> plus rabbits...

Brilliant, I remembered thinking. Still, I put the book down. Roo Borson's collection Night Walk was my next find. I opened " The Photograph":

> The last car lights are making their way along the edge of
> California hills,
> one pair heading one way, another the other,

and the first big planet is beaming
beautiful coded lights at us, variations on a theme...

I finished reading this piece and was momentarily spellbound. I knew I would read this poet's works again, yet I felt that I did need to remember the images in this poem. I thought I was going to be able to leave South Shore Books without purchasing one new collection of poetry when I came across Signs Of The Former Tenant, a 1983 collection by Bronwen Wallace. I opened to "Women Sitting" and read:

Somewhere right now a woman
sits in the silence of her kitchen
and silence her family leaves
when they brush past her into the day
intent on their own plans
and as she sits there
her hands shaking around
the coffee cup, the cigarette
a dream comes back to her...

I had no words for the experience of this poem. I did not label it brilliant (though I would later), perhaps because it flowed so easily. Instead, I moved into it. I saw my mother in that silent kitchen at her formica table. I saw myself sitting at my refinished oak...saw my individual tableau, saw that we were all strikingly similar in our sitting. As I continued to read, the poem seemed to swell into the ethereal.

...in the comfortable
dark of her own living room
she finds she can move things with her eyes...
...as she feels herself about
to plunge she touches the rim of waking...
(Wallace Signs of The Former Tenant, 52)

Then the poet easily returns to the familiar shrill voices of her children demanding breakfast, clean underwear, her husband's words, and a dirty windowpane. More than an hour later, actually sprawled on the floor of the bookstore, the proprietor suggested that I

might consider buying the books I had found. And so I left South Shore Books with the three collections of Wallace's poetry they had on hand, Signs Of The Former Tenant (1983), Common Magic (1985), and The Stubborn Particulars of Grace (1987). I also ordered her two other collections, Marrying Into The Family (1980), and Keep That Candle Burning Bright (1991), published posthumously.

Months later, once I had read all of her poems, I had the sense that through her work, Wallace had negotiated herself into the ordinariness of my life and the lives of all ordinary women so that we might rise up to tell each other stories, not as speech makers for one another (not the "I'm nobody, who are you" set), but rather conversant across a table. There was also something very personal that moved me toward Wallace: dishes piled in my sink, the radio in my daughter's room playing Generation X version of "Highway to Hell," student papers calling for attention, and my own poems brewing somewhere like a deep trickle under the frozen February earth. I could not help feeling that Wallace was giving me permission to use the dilemma of modern womanhood and the painful history that has gotten us only this far to make the poetry I must make even if some may claim my experience and my work as ordinary.

I knew I would look at the works of Bronwen Wallace time and time again, but knew that doing only this would not be enough. I wanted to know the people Bronwen Wallace knew and loved. I wanted to know about the difficult decisions she had to make and how those decisions played out in her life and her work, and so I set out to do so. After many phone calls, letters, and excursions across Canada to conduct interviews of her family, friends, co-workers, and students, I began to gain a better understanding of what drove the work of Bronwen Wallace. But it wasn't until I was well into my journey that I

realized that there were some unmistakable parallels in our lives. I wish I could say that I let my conscience move my life and work to the degree that Bronwen Wallace did. And I wish I could say that when I had to pick a course of action, that I picked the course less personally gratifying and more mindful of the needs of others the way Bronwen Wallace did. But I can't say that. What I can say is that we share a life history that is similar. I can say that we were both active politically and that although we were working on different sides of the Detroit River, we had a common vision of validation, empowerment, and security for women of the working class. We both cherished our roots in the working class and did not see the academy as a place where we might be able to forget or disown those roots.

As I set about this work that is part literary biography, I heed what feminist social scientist Barbara DuBois has suggested. That is, I have placed paramount value on the method of inquiry that opens up our seeing and thinking to perceptions that are actually derived from women's experience (DuBois 21). In so doing, I have decided to try not to look either up or down at the subject of my inquiry, but rather to look straight on. As a result, and as is the case with any biographer, I know I open myself up to ridicule and labels. First, because I fail to look down I may be labeled idolater. Yet I know that it is impossible to look completely straight on, to be completely objective. Canadian biographer, Elspeth Cameron, who has taken enough grief for her biographies, put it this way:

> The definitive biography is an impossibility, as is the "scientific truth" it supposedly seeks to incorporate. As feminist scholars in any number of fields have been maintaining adamantly, truth is multiple, subjective,

> relative, complex in a word, personalized. (Cameron in Sheier, Sheard, Wachtel, 80)

I also know that no matter what I reveal in this work, I will most likely make others, especially those who knew Bronwen Wallace, only a little bit happy with me and more than a little bit angry, as well. I do take seriously what the people close to Wallace have told me, and I have listened and continue to listen to what they have to say. In fact, one of the primary sources of data collection has been the interviews I conducted with friends, family, and colleagues of Wallace. But I also know that what they say is only part of what I must consider. Along with their words I know that I have the baggage of my own assumptions, and I am both aware of and wary of this baggage. I also have information from many diverse printed sources including the author's own literary and non-literary works. What motivates me is that the information I have collected from all of these sources illuminates a very special life and a breathtaking and unique collection of work. And foremost, I hope to call attention to this life and this work. It is as if I am holding a searchlight that has lit upon a remarkable feminist writer and activist, and I imagine that the light I shine on Bronwen Wallace allows her, in turn, to pick up her more powerful and more multi-directional searchlight and to shine it on the lives of many others, particularly women who might have otherwise remained in the shadows. It is my hope that this joint illumination will show some common social plight of women, particularly women of the working class, so that we might then begin to emerge as the important collective Wallace envisioned us to be.

Before I move on, I would also like to say a few words about the order of the chapters in this work. The section entitled Labor, Class and Literature serves to contextualize

Wallace's life and work, so it seemed appropriate to start with this overview. Of course it was important to place Wallace in the Canadian tradition so that I could then compare her and set her apart. It is clear as well, that she was political before she began to write. I believe that in the more traditional academic work one might have focused more on literacy criticism and might not have moved on into the biographical form I have used. I refer to my discussion of the specific landscape in which the poet lived, her immediate family and friends, as well as regional and local politics. These things are in a sense responsible for her work. Doing anything less would have been contradictory to the weight and importance Wallace gave these factors. The rather unconventional conclusion is my way of letting women speak for themselves. If possible I would also have placed the video tape of the dinner party I gave for Bronwen's friends with this conclusion, because the words and the actions of the women on that tape are symbolic of the way Wallace's life and work goes on through the life and work of other women.

Also, one idea seems to lead quite naturally to another idea in my mind but the reason for my choices may not seem as obvious to the reader. The shifts I make are quite natural to the way I work and the connections I make. I believe that I have placed importance on the things that Wallace would have and have ordered them the way she might have.

INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1991, The Open Letter (A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory) dedicated a whole issue to the memory of Bronwen Wallace. In the introduction written by Susan Rudy Dorscht and Eric Savoy, we are informed that the Who's Who of the contemporary scene in Canadian poetry spoke highly of Wallace, but we are told that Gary Geddes "had to argue with little support from other academics or writers, for the inclusion of Bronwen Wallace in 15 Canadian Poets, 1988" (Geddes in Open Letter, 5). Many of the articles in this particular issue of The Open Letter discuss why Wallace cannot be pegged into any particular trend in contemporary poetry. Geddes tells us also that Wallace was "skeptical about recent developments in critical inquiry..." (but nonetheless) the academics were intrigued by "the affinities between her innovative poetics and the tenets of feminist and post structural theories" (Geddes in Open Letter, 6).

I therefore began this work with the following research questions in mind:

What were the reasons that Bronwen Wallace's poetry did not get the attention it deserved early on?

Why was Wallace so skeptical about the developments in critical inquiry?

What are the affinities between her innovative poetics and the tenets of feminist and post structural theory?

Where might we place Wallace's life and work in regard to Marxist Theory?

How does Wallace's poetry reflect, as well as break from, the Canadian tradition?

What were the literary choices that Wallace made that set her apart? How do these choices reflect the life of working class women? What impact do these literary choices have on contemporary poetry and our view of, as well as our opinions about, the lives of working class women?

How did Wallace's family history as well as the larger social-historical context in which she wrote effect her poetry? How did her community of Kingston, Ontario help her shape her work?

How did her relationships with other women effect her life and work?

In my search to discover the reasons why Wallace did not get the support she deserved, why she was skeptical about developments in critical inquiry, as well as why the academics were intrigued with her innovative poetics, I began to look specifically at discourse theory and other theoretical discussions of the time. I looked also at whom she represented in her poetry and how she crafted this representation. I was also interested in why she made the literary choices she did. It wasn't enough for me to read what the critics have said about her work, especially since many of them balked at the significance of that work. And it would not be enough to limit my inquiry to the realm of literary criticism. Without the social-historical context, I would be looking at this work in a vacuum and that is so contrary to what Wallace would want me to do.

The essays and newspaper articles that Wallace wrote, especially the articles she wrote for the Whig-Standard Newspaper, suggest many things to me. Most importantly, they reveal her concerns for the plight of the working class in general, and more specifically, working class women. These articles made clear that although Wallace could have removed herself from the working class, she chose to continue to identify with the

struggles of the class, and to speak for and with this class. Wallace also knew that for the most part, no matter what work women did outside the home, they were still saddled with the work of home and she believed housework was work. I knew that the theoretical underpinnings of class struggle as they relate to work and power were important as well. I needed to look at Canadian labor history, at least the history that shaped the lives of her parents' generation, as well as her (and my) own. I also needed to look at how Wallace saw herself in this history, what social and political groups she felt she belonged to, and to what degree she saw herself as a passive or active participant in these groups.

I wondered too about other influences on her life and her work, and I sensed, simply as a result of reading that work, that the geography of the Kingston area was significant. I knew I had to travel there and see it for myself. I have made five trips there so far.

It is seldom that an unknown researcher/writer is privy to the kind of personal history I hoped to secure. But I needed to learn about the influences on Wallace's personal life and I was determined to try to arrange interviews with her surviving immediate family and friends in order to do so. Therefore, I boldly sent out letters and made calls. Then I waited and prayed.

Bronwen Wallace's brother, Cameron Wallace, was my first contact and without him this work would have been impossible. He supplied me with names and addresses of his sister's male life partners, as well as her closest female friends. He also got me in touch with her son, Jeremy Baxter, and Jeremy's father, Ron Baxter. To my amazement, many of the people I contacted granted me interviews and further gave me permission to share what they told me (I regret, however, that Bronwen's surviving spouse, Chris Whynot,

would not grant me an interview). I hope to weave the comments of those who did grant interviews into the tapestry of this work.

Along with the interviews they granted me, Cameron Wallace (Bronwen's brother) and Peggy and Ferdinand Wallace (parents to Bronwen) gave me copies of family documents, letters, as well as a few family photographs. Images in this dissertation are presented in color.

Bronwen's closest female friend, Carloyn Smart, led me to other female friends who were, very willing to talk with me. Of particular help were Joanne Page, Joanne McAlpine, Debra Greer, and Darlene George.

On a return visit to Kingston in 1996, I invited many of the women Wallace worked with at Interval House, a shelter for abused women and their children, to a dinner that I prepared for them. A local Kingston photographer, Uve Schroeder, filmed this dinner party. I encouraged those who gathered to talk about Bronwen Wallace while I served them a dinner that I prepared. I have the film of this dinner and refer to the comments made at this dinner herein.

I also have e-mail correspondence/letters from Tom Waymen, Al Purdy, (although Purdy's letter was a disclaimer of his influence on Wallace), and Gary Geddes.

At one point, I flew Jeremy Baxter from Vancouver to San Diego to meet me for an interview. We talked and toured the San Diego area together and have corresponded by letter and phone since this meeting.

During my 1997 trip to Kingston, Cameron Wallace gave me a map to the Wallace homes in and around Kingston. He also gave me directions to the lake where Bronwen

spent many a summer day. I visited all of these places and took photographs of many of them.

What I found as a result of my journey and research was a remarkable life that emerged from a unique and remarkable family history. I discovered the person Bronwen Wallace: progressive, energetic, compassionate, talented, sometimes stubborn and skeptical, yet visionary. And like all of us, she had a few regrets. I also discovered that Wallace's life was one of resistance. And although she was very much a proud Canadian, and although it is easy to see her work as clearly Canadian, she resisted much that went with this title. She resisted limiting herself to the comfortable middle class venue of Kingston, Ontario. She resisted the ivory tower of the academy and she resisted the more formal tenets and trends of the larger literary community. She saw the work that women do both inside and outside of the home as important work that is rarely adequately appreciated or compensated. She did not see the past as "classic," but explored it as a place where memory is kept, the memories of women, as well as men.

And while her poetry is somewhat connected to earlier Canadian poetry, her poetry is a place of resistance that manifests itself in working class cultural expressions. Specifically, she used non-literary forms such as informal story, gossip, and song. The immediate landscape of her life and women's work were frames of reference in her poetry, work that includes, of course, child rearing and housework. She also looked at woman's views of their own experiences, past and present, so that their testimony might speak for the collective. She didn't mask the working class landscape she saw. She didn't disguise her anger or the anger of the working class in a lyrical form that could diminish that anger. Wallace tells us directly about the specifics of women's work and

she places value on the ways in which women use language to talk about their lives. She breaks open the high art form of poetry (of language in general), and facilitates the specifics of ordinary working class lives in this poetry. By doing all of this, Wallace broke down the definition of, and the cultural assumptions about, the working class and especially working class women who were, and still are, held within the larger culture of domination. This was no easy task and it was a risky effort, particularly in the area of language and literature, because it pitted Wallace against those who saw a great divide between "ordinary language" and "literary language." Still there is even more for us to consider here. We must consider the larger historical and political context that lead to this work.

In The Challenging of Feminist Biography, Alpern, Anther, Perry, and Scobie discuss both the larger questions about approach, as well as the more specific questions about the impact of this work on the biographer's life. The more general question they ask is how does having a female subject change the nature and practice of biographical craft? The answer, we are told first and foremost, is that because a different type of person (different, from male) is being studied, a different kind of achievement is being celebrated. Feminist biographers tend to make "invisible" women visible. The women they showcase don't fit into the usual biographical hero-type. Of course many of these women are mentioned in other works as muse or catalyst, but the feminist biographer tends to see subjects as individual creative forces. Secondly, when the subject is female, gender moves to the center of the analysis. Feminists contend that women's lives differ from men's lives in profound ways and that a woman's gender may exercise greater constraints on the way her life evolves. Failing to consider this difference distorts, if not falsifies, any account of

a woman's life; there is an effect (We can, of course, say the same thing about class, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and place). Another difference is that the feminist biographer moves beyond the "marriage plot" to consider all stages of a woman's life even the mature adult years and old age as that is when many women finally are "allowed" the time to contribute in ways they were hampered from doing so earlier in their lives (Alpern, Antler, Perry and Scobie, 6-7). Also when a woman writes about a woman, and there is much documentation to suggest this, there is a very close relationship between the subject and author (even when the subject is dead). And furthermore, "each biography uneasily shelters an autobiography within it, and this autobiography inevitably alters the biographer's material" (Kendall, P., x). When the biographer is female, there seems to be other factors as well. We (female biographers) tend to develop an attachment to the subject in three stages. First we tend to delve into the non-biographical questions, then the social science approach, then the final stage being an enveloping personal connection, (Sklar, in Alpern, Antler, Perry, and Scobie, 17). Having read Sklar's work only after I completed the primary work on my biography of Wallace, I can tell you that my process did, surprisingly, occur in these stages. The final enveloping personal connection is something I hope to look at more carefully at some point in time. For now, I can say only that at times I sense the presence of my subject, that I have had some spiritual experiences that I believe are related to this work, and that I often become extremely joyous, as well as melancholy when speaking about Wallace or even when listening to others speak about her. That these feelings embarrass me and anger others (what right do I have to feel this way about someone I never knew?) are also some things I must investigate further.

However, my inability to take a neutral stance seems not just natural to me, but necessary. For how could I not be moved by the contradictions I find in Wallace's life? How could I not be saddened by the fact that I will never meet her but will carry around bits of her life with mine forever? How could I not be angered by the ways in which her work and her subversive energies were suppressed? It is obvious also that this suppression occurred because of her gender and her class, because of the gendered forms she used, because of her class identity, and the forms and structures of that language of this class, as well as her economic plight - the plight of working women.

That her work gained some notoriety even in the institutions that tend to suppress by gender, namely the publishing houses and the academy, is a remarkable and revolutionary feat. Literature is a form of production and we need only read Woolf's essays on material propositions for the insight that writing is not "spun in mid air" by incorporeal creatures, but is based on material things that govern the writers "angle of vision" and perception of society (Woolf, in Newton and Rosenfelt, 71). The constraint that Wallace felt and expressed on the part of working class women is obvious. Her preoccupation with the material artifacts suggests that her vision is direct. Her style and choice of genre are all part of her product, which is imposed by gender and class, as well as despite it.

While Wallace found the practice of placing her work (or anyone else's work) within Marxist theory distasteful and unnecessary, I feel the need to contextualize her work in this way so that when others take up this discussion, they will place Wallace in it and will recognize her works' relationship to it. I do this also because texts are not mediations upon themselves, but instead gestures toward history and are in themselves actions that have political effects. As Newton and Rosenfelt suggest, I wish to see this literature (and

this life) as an act of political intervention, to look at the cultural use to which the writing will be put (Newton and Rosenfelt, xv). And Wallace would approve despite her aversion to the Marxist chatter.

Wallace, I believe, felt that woman's oppression predates the Marxist critique of what we might call "the nuclear family – the household unit containing a woman, man, and children, with the woman carrying the burden of child rearing." In this structure the woman must also absorb the anger and frustration of the man. Her own anger thus becomes illegitimate (See Sanders-Comer in Rich, 54). While I believe Wallace saw the capitalistic structures as a way of exacerbating or validating the patriarchal structure, the structure itself certainly predates Marxist analysis and further it clearly continues under socialism. Even as socialist countries work to break down the division of labor, we do not see the role of women in the home really changing. The rules of patriarchy seem untouched. And this undaunted strand of oppression shows itself clearly in Wallace's poetry. In fact, when we examine the early poetry she wrote for political publications, this oppression is very clear.

I think it is also important to look at Wallace through Gramsci's definition of hegemony. In fact, her work might serve as a place that helps make this term clear or helps to illustrate it. Defined in Gramsci's terms, hegemony is... more than political rule or domination. It is a complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces, either this or the active social and cultural forces, which are its necessary elements. In her work, Wallace expressed an understanding that persons do not define and shape their whole lives. In an actual society, specific inequalities develop that work to shape their whole lives. In a class society there is clearly dominance and subordination. For the working

class (the subordinate class), the ideology of those who own/control the means of production impose their ideology on the working class. This working class struggles to sustain its own ideology, values and morals against the "ruling-class ideology" (Gramsci in Williams, 108-9). Wallace's work is a *place* of struggle against this ruling class ideology. Her poetry is a point of rupture because it illuminates the ordinary language and the artifacts and tools of the working class, particularly women. It illuminates the negative consequences of a capitalistic system and the inherent patriarchal underpinnings of that system. Wallace's poetry also survives despite the tenets of formal criticism that Wallace knew her work contradicts, tenets to which she would have to answer. This work, therefore, functions as a sociopolitical act. Her art is a product of the class and subgroup she represents.

I also see a point of departure from Marxist theory for Wallace when we look at Wallace's work against the various theses of Marxist aesthetic. While Wallace's poetry can be clearly identified as art of the masses, I doubt that she saw the working class, particularly women, as an ascending class; I will illustrate this point later. Also, while she saw her aesthetic as political, she was not as concerned with expressing the needs and interests of the working class as she was in holding up a mirror to the lived reality of this class, and expressing this reality in the naturally occurring linguistic constructs. Then too, along with her realistic portrayals, Wallace often veered off into the surreal – which she expressed as the only escape of the underclass (even of the proletariat) – especially women. In moving into the more surreal realm the subconscious becomes an important reality and detaches itself from the "true reality" of the Marxist definition.

Herbert Marcuse argues for me, and perhaps for Wallace, when he submits the following thesis toward a critique of Marxist aesthetic:

> ...the radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image (schoner schein) of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimension where Art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby, art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible; the world formed by art is recognized as reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality in the name of truth normally denied or even unheard... (Marcuse, 6-7).

Also, when Marcuse speaks about the beautiful as belonging to the imagery of liberation, I think of many Wallace poems in which there seems to be a constant regrouping and dissolving of beautiful or profound moments, each irretrievably lost when it passes, but then quickly becoming another such moment.

The more traditional Marxist approach sees its role as that of shedding light on the "bourgeois writers of decline" such as Green, Proust, and Joyce, and sees its role as breaking away from the archaic methods of nothingness in praise of realism. From a Marxist point of view, the classical formulas, when viewed as the only genuine form, are narrow-minded and dilettantish (for further reference see the works of Gottfried, Keller, Lenin, Lessing, and Williams in order to argue this strict Marxist view). To a great extent Wallace would agree. However, while Wallace's work leans toward the realistic, it is

clearly more philosophical than historiographical because it does deal with the not just with what happens, but what might happen. Wallace was also clearly influenced by a few of the more traditional male poets in Canada such as Earl Birney, Oliver Goldsmith, Alexander McLachlan and later Al Purdy. She does not detach herself from them completely. Her work, however, is the waking dream of the essential that does not die because of "truth" in the Marxist sense (though it does contain much truth), because truth is more than facts; it is a process that points to both latency and tendency (Bloch, 160-61).

Wallace deals with that which lies dormant in the minds of many others, as well as the propensity toward one type of action over another. Keep in mind that when Wallace first began writing poetry, relatively little attention was being given to the way women know and think. In institutions of "higher" learning, writing that was emotional, intuitive, and personalized was not valued (while this is changing a bit on the surface today, I have personal stories to share, as do my female friends, that indicate clearly we have made only marginal gains). While other women and men, especially feminists, were trying to show the importance of the female voice, particularly in the modes mentioned above,[1] Wallace was including these ways of knowing and speaking *in* her poetry. She was parting the patriarchal waves, so to speak. Also, in the late 1960s, a renewed interest in Marxist theory allowed many to begin to discuss both "the ordinary" and "the literary" in a single area of discourse. I am sure Wallace was aware of this because of comments she made and because of things her friends said to me in interviews I conducted. Marxist theory suggests that labor is the single effective origin of language. Washburn and

[1]See the work of Bernard, 1973; Gilligan, 1982; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Rosenberg, 1982; Sampson, 1978; Sherman and Beck, 1979.

Lancaster's work in the area of anthropology suggests (in their materialistic theory), that "laborer and language, as practices, can be seen as evolutionary and historically constitute" (Washburn and Lancaster in Current Anthropology, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1971). As I mentioned earlier, Wallace was more in the camp that looked at the historical underpinning exasperated by industry. She was very wary of academic talk around poetry as a form of rhetoric and was suspicious that it led to dialectical discussiveness first, then moralization later.

Despite the renewed Marxist focus, the great divide persisted and many perpetuated the notion that literature in particular was a special province of those of certain classes and sensibilities.

Wallace saw things differently as evidence in a passage about her thoughts on literary analysis (which follows in another chapter here). Her letters to Erin Mouré (in Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974), make this point even clearer. What was also evident to Wallace (and evident to those who read her prose and her poetry), was that the "rules" of the patriarchy that organized the role of women as that of biological reproduction, and devalued the work of women in the home, then also limited the voice and compensation they were given in the workplace whether they had factory jobs, clerical jobs, or service jobs (teaching, nursing, clerical and the like). And Wallace considered all of these women in her definition of working class. She saw her mother, a teacher, as part of the working class. Wallace did clerical work and worked for women in shelters and she organized activist councils and committees as well.

There is, of course, a body of literature that agrees with Wallace. If we look at Maureen MacIntosh's review of Claude Meillassoux's book, Femmes, Greniers et

Capitaux, MacIntosh argues that it isn't enough to take the Marxist view that tends to conflate women's role in the biological reproduction of the species with the historically specific question of their role in ensuring the reproduction of male laborer power and in maintaining the relations of dominance and subordination of capitalist production. She argues that the Marxist view in Meillassoux's book might well include a discussion of gender relations, even of "patriarchy," into the analysis of social reproduction, that is, a discussion of the use of domestic production of a pre-capitalist type (Barrett, Women's Oppression Today, 27). In the words of Mackintosh: "...the characteristic relation of human reproduction is patriarchy, that is, the control of women, especially of their sexuality and fertility, by men" (MacIntosh in Barrett, 2).

The prose, but more importantly the poetry, of Bronwen Wallace makes the link Mackintosh suggests. In doing so Wallace creates a rift in two ways: She actually used discourse models of the "ordinary" (making them extraordinary), and once her poetry began to gain attention in the academy, she did not give in to pressures that would have her change. She also made the jump from suggesting that it is more than women's role in biological reproduction, and the reproduction of male labor power, necessary for capitalist production that holds women down, but is instead pre and post capitalist patriarchy that does so. Wallace points to this in the literature she made by using topic, style and structures that are unusual in the "high art" form of poetry. That is, she was expressing the needs and interests of the working class by expressing this reality in the naturally occurring linguistic constructs. She also clearly showed the oppression of women within the content of this poetry.

It is clear where Wallace stood in all of this. When Wallace left her formal program of study (Ph.D. at Queen's), she was resisting the formalist view of literature that sees literature and literary criticism as denied from history. I found a very interesting political pamphlet written by Wallace when she was 24 years old published by Hogtown Press in 1969 (this pamphlet was distributed as an "underground" publication) entitled The Exploitation of Experience; Some Thoughts on the Study of Literature. In this pamphlet Wallace discusses what she felt was wrong with academic approaches to literary analysis:

> This is not to say that literary analysis is not an important and worthwhile function. For one thing we are not all literary geniuses and a certain amount of analysis and dissection may be necessary to understand the workings of something which we could never create. The process is somewhat similar perhaps to dismantling a fine machine and its purpose is not to classify the separate parts, but to understand more fully how the whole works. This is even truer of literature where we are dealing with human expression and all analysis must be directed towards a fuller understanding of what is expressed. The purpose of the exercise is not to 'do' a poem, or play, or novel, but to gain an insight into the experience it articulates and to relate it more fully to our own.[2]
>
> The study of literature now, however, does not accomplish this end, but rather results in a situation that is diametrically opposed, a situation which has dangerous and far-reaching implications. For at present the study of literature is an esoteric cult; it has its hierarchies and its mysterious rituals; "understanding literature" has become an exclusive, complicated art which only few can master. To discuss a poem, or a novel, one must know the 'proper' terms, the requisite approaches; any deviation from the rules set down is regarded as 'unscholarly'. The result is that not only the method of studying it, but also literature itself is regarded as mysterious and complex. Any student who naively believes that there is some common element in all human expression will soon discover, after a few years, that he shares

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> nothing at all with these semi-divine beings who write literature. "The poet", wrote Emerson, "tells us how it was with him," but we, it would seem, require complex skills or at best, a middle-man in the person of a critic, to comprehend what he was telling us.
>
> The effects of this attitude are extremely dangerous for both students and non-students. Because the study of literature is removed from any experiential context, the student gains the impression that all literature is written in a vacuum. In my many years of study, I remember only two professors who sincerely tried to explain the political and social back-ground of what we were reading. Those who take this approach are known among academics as "history of ideas men" and are regarded as a lesser breed by many. I particularly remember one professor, who, during a discussion of this approach, swept its merits aside with the angry comment, "After all, we are teaching literature and not sociology."
>
> (Wallace, B., The Exploitation of Experience, 3.)

That ideas, culture, and literature are socially constructed is clear. That much of our mental oppressions is rooted in the material conditions of our lives, that much of our literary theory implies a version of the world in which women are oppressed for the most part, by literary constructs, or in which female counter-myths are more powerful than (or as powerful as) economics[3] (Newton and Rosenfeld xvi] is also clear.

While Wallace had the privilege to go from her working class roots into the academy, and while it seems the trend even today not to discuss one's roots once social and economic changes occur for the upwardly mobile, Wallace remained by choice, a part of the working class that she believed molded her as much as ethnicity and culture. She looked at the dark side of these class struggles and the economic hold that the capitalistic patriarchy had on women in this class but she didn't dismiss the pre-capitalist history of patriarchal oppression that made its way into the lives of her grandmother, her mother,

then into her own life. She remained in tune with the values and struggles of this class in order to affect change. Clearly her doing so was a sociopolitical act. Perhaps a brief look at literary history is valuable here.

In the 1920s, processes were set in motion that continued to impose themselves even well into the 70s and 80s, that virtually eliminated black and white females and all working-class writers from the cannon. Institutional, as well as theoretical and historiography factors were involved in the exclusion (Newton and Rosenfelt, 19). The result was an invisibility of these groups in the literature studied in secondary schools and in college courses. I was affected by this in the United States, as was Wallace in Canada. It seems to me that Wallace was addressing this invisibility in her life and her poetry. She was addressing invisibility of the place where many women dwell: the experience, the culture, the systems of oppression under which women "operate." Of course, bits of that oppression surfaced in North American Literature during the life of Wallace, but even these bits seem to ignore the notion of women as victims physically than emotionally. Many of Wallace's essays and articles confronted these questions head on (as did many prose works of the second wave of the Feminist movement). In Wallace's regular column in the Whig-Standard newspaper, she wrote about how family violence is perpetuated, and she wrote about the children who are the ignored victims of this violence. She wrote about volunteers working in the slums of Guatemala. She also wrote about the feminist Alice Chown, calling her "a women very much like myself, a strong feminist, an

[3] It is here that we see first begin to articulate how we must deconstruct, later she refuses to talk about deconstruction with theorists. She claims that the act and nature of her poetry was in fact the act of deconstruction.

outspoken anti-war activist, a laborer organizer, a sometime writer" (Wallace, Whig-Standard. June, 1987, 16).

I think, in turning to poetry, Wallace recognized the need for a non-hostile form that could also be explicit, ergo poetry, with its images and narrative, its time and place. Also her poetry was accessible, not only by the academics- not exclusive. In this way and others, Wallace dismissed the traditional canon and worked towards forging a new canon that reveals inequity rooted in patriarchy, a cannon that questions social power. One would think that institutions of higher learning in North America would have been doing so as well. However, a 1950 National Council of Teachers of English survey shows that one could study American literature and read no work by a black writer, none by women except works by Dickinson, Marianne Moore, or Katherine Anne Porter, and no work about the lives or experiences of working-class people (NCTE, Report of Committee on College Study of American Literature and Culture, 27). Lillian Robinson once said that the most important question we can ask ourselves as feminist critics is, "So what?" Implied in that question is a view most of us share, that the point of our work is to change the world. But to begin my work here with this question is to take on the task of asking other questions as well, questions about the relation of literature to the social and economic conditions of our lives. Bronwen Wallace saw her writing/literary text not just as meditation upon itself but also as a question toward history, a question with political effect.

One of Wallace's poems, "A Simple Poem For Virginia Woolf," featured later in this text, (in tribute to the author of the first major work of feminist literary criticism- Virginia Woolf) is a spoof on Wallace's own attempts to make literature while wearing the yoke of

motherly and wifely responsibility. What rings constant in Wallace's poetry is that gender is socially and politically constructed and that its construction has created and perpetuates unequal relations of power. That "the product" a woman offers (be it literary or other), is often not valued, was a source of anger for Wallace. She therefore created a product that focused on the particulars of a woman's life that used the words and structures common to women in general, and working class women specifically.

LABOR, CLASS, AND LITERATURE

I believe a brief departure into Labor history is important here. According to David Bercuson and David Bright in Canadian Labour History, Canadian labour history was revolutionized in the late 1960s and 1970s, (just as Wallace was beginning to write poetry), by a group of young historians, loosely associated with one another, who argued that workers should be studied in their totality, not just in their institutions, but instead in the context of working people's lives. And while unions and politics remained the mainstay of this new labour history (more often called working-class history), this history was set within a wider cultural context, a context that brought together workers' experiences at work, at home, and at play (Bercuson and Bright, 21). Because of this and compared to earlier studies, our picture of the lives of working class people throughout Canada has been modified and enriched by detailed and meticulous studies of men and women at work. Add this to the backdrop of the 1980s in Canada, a scene much like that of the 1930s, with rising unemployment, a surge in welfare recipients, government inaction, right-wing populism, and a political listlessness on the part of the working class, and one can see why new efforts on the part of the working people were necessary for their survival against the hostile interests of business and the indifference of government. The gap between the poor and upper class was widening. There seemed to be no middle class.

Wallace, having been raised by working class people, could not wear the blinders that others around her wore in the late '70s and early '80s (especially those at the University). The stories her father told her about the 1930s must have seemed all too familiar. While

government institutions would have her/us believe that the working class was making gains – ascending – Wallace knew that such was not the case. This was also a time (the '70s) when women began to recognize the important economic role they possess, based in part on their ever-increasing numbers in the wage work force.[4] It was most certainly not based on the value placed on their work in the home. (Ironically, however, occupational oppression and segregation continued to increase and for much of this recent history both labor unions and even feminist groups have ignored the role that women play in the work force beyond the home.) Linking this to Marxist thought, if there is an ascending class, then it certainly isn't working class women. Largely, it is easy to find research and writing about the massive working class in North America and Canada, but difficult to find research and writing (including literature) about the oppressed sub-group called working-class women.[5] No matter what the ideology when men and women in both majority populations are linked (not separated out), there is first the danger of idealizing the existing culture within working class life and secondly, a danger in seeing the wealth produced by the labor force, but not seeing the divisions between those who own the means of production (be it the government or industry), and those who are workers. There is a danger for sub-groups (women, minorities) if we see the advances made by the unions and do not see that women and minorities made only marginal gains via those unions when compared particularly to white men. And lastly, there is also the danger of

[4] " In fact women today are the fastest growing segment of the wage-work force, and the growth of industrialization has spurred this trend. It is not an overstatement to claim then that there has been revolution in work in the last three decades and that the increase in female wageworkers in the labor forces "is the single most important change in the labor force in this century." (Abzug, Bella in Balser Sisterhood and Solidarity, 61)

[5] Although there has been some work done on song-poetry related to folklore, there is scant interest in the song and lore of American/Canadian workers. And today folklorists recognize urban-industrial settings as appropriate study sites. However, the working class has yet to generate significant attention.

not seeing that the unions themselves have a history of racism and sexism. And so it follows that there is value in class analysis within groups, such as working class and within the unions, the value being that such analysis "...allows us to comprehend our oppression not as timeless, not as biologically or psychologically fixed and determined, requiring endless individual adjustments, but instead as a historically specific and changing result of economic and social structures no matter who or what puts those structures in place. These (economical and social structures) are, in shorthand form, the patriarchal family system and its various forms through class society and unequal economic class relations. [It is] determined by divisions between those who own the means to produce wealth and those who are the producers" (Diamond in In The Feminine, 32).

When we look closely at working women's lives we begin to see the lives of working women as oppressive, difficult, and tedious for many. In the introduction to Working Women: An Anthology of Stories and Poems, Nancy Hoffman and Florence Howe remind us that "woman's identity has often been based on her relationship to others-daughter, wife, and mother. But such starkly stereotypical definitions are inadequate for both women and men, because work and relationships are essential aspects of human identity" (Hoffman and Howe, xvi). There are, of course, many ways that we can set the work that women do apart from the work that men do. One of the obvious ways is to look at the work women do that is unpaid work. In this category, we can include domestic work, community work, social activism, and the like. In the domestic realm, women have responsibilities that impact the welfare of others (and whole communities), yet they do not have the power to really negotiate their working conditions, or to leave those

responsibilities without dire consequences to others, as well as themselves and, very little had/has changed in this regard in Wallace's lifetime or my own. If we look at the work that women are paid to do outside the home, we must still look mostly at jobs in factories, restaurants, offices (as clerical),[6] hospitals, and schools. And in most of these places men are still in charge and still make more money than their female co-workers. And still (and this is true around the world) "most of our mothers and grandmothers, and most women today- which now make up nearly half of the paid labor [still] work at low paid menial jobs" (Hoffman and Howe, xviii). And even as women become more educated and more invested in work outside the home, they are still the slaves in the workplace of home. They still, for the most part, do the menial work there.

The above inequalities are glaring if we move from analysis of the work place to analysis of women's writing. In doing so, we see the absence of working class women as writers. Bronwen Wallace has raised a red (maple leaf) flag in order to first examine working class life of and for women, to examine the reality of this life within the culture of domination, then to write about the reality, and furthermore to write in a way that reflects the form and structure of communication that working class women use. She was aware of how this domination was at first conceived in the power structure of home and family, then made its way into the workplace as women moved into the labor force.

Wallace's writing might then serve as a form of critique on which to base women's real experiences of family and workplace set against the larger, more idealized version of

[6] While it seems that clerical employees have an ambiguous social-economic status, I have included them in the definitions of working class because of their wage position growth in unionization and factory like conditions in many offices. Harry Bavesman speaks to this in Labor and Monopoly Capital, (New York, 1974), 293-358. Also see "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office." by Graham S. Lowe in Canadian Working Class History.

these experiences. The reality is that most women still wear the yoke of patriarchy imposed by industry. I would like to go beyond the flag-waving analogy that I made earlier and imagine Wallace's work in a boiling pot. This pot is filled with the experiences of working class women, filled with their dissatisfaction, their struggle and anger, expressed with their words, their style of speech and conversation, all in their own voices. (The boiling up in this pot is a culture of resistance. When the lid, having been placed on top by the more dominant culture of patriarchy and capitalism pops open, the contents spill over into the patriarchal-capitalistic "reality," a forming place of rupture by a culture of resistance.) In the more specific case of Bronwen Wallace, it is not just her social-political activism that boiled over, but her writing and literature as well. It is not that she was watching the pot, she was in it and as it boiled over she was mindful of the lived material reality of the patriarchal history and the culture industry into which it flowed. In so doing, Wallace is contained within and validates this resistance. In her work there is a collectivist sensibility different from the individual's sensibility of bourgeois art. She was a witness for the silenced, mainly because she had a public audience, an audience both in the academy and outside of it. Sara Diamond, in her speech at the Women and Words Conference in Vancouver, B.C. on July 3, 1983, was speaking to and urging on the likes of Bronwen Wallace when she said:

> Cultural production is essential in order to validate resistance, to develop an understanding of our experience, and to raise questions. There are many forms that our writing can take. While some of this production was not by working class women, it was linked to working class movements and based on the documentation of working women's experience. (Diamond, Women and Words Conference, 1983)

The fact that much of Wallace's writing is in the form of poetry is significant too, as this form is most often attributed to the academy and far removed from the working class experiences at home and workplace. We know that poets have by and large ignored the working life for one reason or another. Historically, the Romantic poets saw only the barbarism of industrial society.

> For the moderns, poetry was what Eliot's hollow men needed but could not hear. In John Ashbery's "The Instructional Manual," the poem is an occasion for an imaginative vacation from work: the technical writer/poet gazes out of the window of the office in which he (operative is "he" here) sits trying to write "the instructional manual on the uses of new metals" and conjures in its place a "dream of Guadalajara," ...It may be, however, that the traditional resistance about work is not so much the poets themselves as of those who collect and edit their work, since to write about work is to write about issues of politics and class, which remains unpopular topics for literature textbooks" (Coles and Oresick, xv).[7]

As I informally survey American and Canadian contemporary poets who were writing and publishing when Wallace was writing about the working class in general, and women of this class specifically, even those who write/wrote about post-industrial service jobs, the list is short and predominantly the shape, tone, and voice of these poems is decidedly male. And the few females who were writing about similar issues when Wallace was writing, wrote in forms and in style more likely to be anointed by the academy. Marilyn Krysl's poems about nursing, Leona Gom's "The Women's Committee, and Judy Grahn's "The Common Women Poems" are all good examples. (All of theses poems can be found in Coles and Oresick <u>For a Living</u>.)

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[7] Also while forms of work in the post-industrial era has changed less has changed the way people view/feel about their work. Also many of the jobs (service jobs and 'pink collar' jobs) of this postindustrial era as repetitive and boring as work on the assembly line.

According to Janet Zandy in Calling Home: Working Class Women's Writing, " What is true is that economic circumstances of working-class life offer few opportunities for expression. Also, the life experiences of working class women are not affirmed or valued in the dominant culture or considered fitting for literature" (Zandy, 1). Zandy also suggests that class identity is easier to obscure and deny than gender and race identity so that if you are born into the working class and are willing to change your speech, your questions, your appearance- in essence, to deny the culture of your home and working class self of your childhood- then you might "pass" as a member of the dominant culture. But, (she warns) you will never belong there (Zandy, 2).

Wallace seemed to know that class knowledge comes from experience and story, history and memory, and that knowing is grounded not in the academy but instead in social history, and inclusive of her story (and that choosing class as a perspective is also a way of avoiding ghettoizing women by race).

It was not really new for women to write about work (see the works of Naomi Replansky, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Willa Cather, Margaret Walker, and Zora Neale Hurston, to name only a few). True, however, is the fact that much of this earlier writing about work is in the form of prose. What is new, in terms of approach regardless of the genre, is the way in which contemporary women writers seem to be able to analyze the situation in which they find themselves. That is, they are aware of the restricting and oppressive natures of their working lives. If we look at the body of work by contemporary women writers, it is clear that most of the poetry written is more about the personal relationships that women have and their individual feelings rather than about the work they do and the specifics of the lives they lead. For examples of Canadian poets we

need only to look at Lorna Crozier's work, the work of Mary di Michelle, and Susan Glickman. Also, there has not been much work done that uses the raw material of working class women (interviews of them, discussions with them, diaries and the like), to shape poetry or any imaginative form of writing for that matter. The exceptions are writers like poet Ranice Henderson Crosby (see "Waitresses") or Rikki Lights (see "Medicine Man"). Crosby writes about being a waitress while in college, and Lights, one of seven children from a poor black family, writes a diary-like account of her struggle to become a doctor with the double handicap of being black and female (Hoffman and Howe, xxi).

It seems strange too, that there are very few stories or poems about the relationships that women have with each other in the workplace. I know from my own experiences, as well as the accounts of my friends, that the alliances women have in the workplace are a source of great comfort, dissipation of anger, and subversion in the patriarchal world of work[8].

When I compiled a list of poets who actually did the "footwork" of those marginalized both by the fueling powers of capitalism and by factions within the working class itself, poets who were accepted into the circle we call the academy but then dismissed that acceptance as secondary to the larger goal of using the authentic forms and concerns of working women, the list is very short and not a list at all. That list is Bronwen Wallace.

Later in this work, I will discuss the ways in which Wallace's writing is "Clearly Canadian." But I will also show how she ruptured the dominant discourse in Canadian

[8] I have had jobs as a waitress, shop clerk, and secretary prior to college and during college. Men supervised even the professional jobs I held directly or indirectly.

Literature by way of topic selection, narrative style, and use of the particulars. I will also show how she distanced herself from the Marxist aesthetic by delving into the surreal as a temporary escape from the particulars of a women's life.

Wallace's political life and her work in the academy was also a place of rupture. She was not anchored to or in the working class, but instead chose it. She didn't dismiss the working class landscape for "higher pastures." She returned to the landscape of her roots, albeit a patriarchal landscape, and included that landscape and those roots in her poetry. She did the footwork for, and was also a spokesperson, for the working class. She moved the speech of this class into "high art" instead of giving into the pressures of literary analysis of the day to do something different. She saw the plight of the working class, women specifically, as tied to the ownership of the means of production that is both part and parcel of patriarchy.

The other women poets who wrote about working class struggles when Wallace did are few and are not well known, or they have their feet firmly planted in the academy and write in styles anointed by the academy. I am thinking of Marge Peircy, Tillie Olsen, Helen Potrenbenko, Sue Doro, Judy Grahn, Susan Eisenberg, Chris Liewellyn, Julia Stein, Hazel Hall, and Carol Taren (Taren approaches the narrative style of Wallace but the comparison stops with topic and narrative style. For an example see "White Trash"). Even less well known grass roots Canadian poets like J.B. Joe, Maxine Gadd, and Kate Braid do not meet these criteria. It is not just the conditions under which she wrote, but the uniquely political voice and apolitical style that sets Wallace apart.

The question of class rears its ugly head in this work probably because class identity is easier to obscure or deny than is gender. Most Americans and Canadians think of

themselves as middle class because we have a picture of the working class as a man in work boots or coveralls (or we think of Rosy the Riveter when we think of women.) This view tends to keep us calm, makes us forget that real control and wealth are still in the hands of the few (even with the new opportunities for investment and gain in the New York Stock Exchange). The same is true when we look at socialist structures. There is always someone hiding behind a ruse of bottom-up leadership, controlling those who have less money and education – namely women. Certainly in Bronwen Wallace's time (1960s-1980s), the division was even more obvious. We are "conditioned to consume, compete, and compare... In this economy a liberal arts education is a luxury. But even this more privileged group is not immune to the deskilling of labor familiar to industrial workers of yesterday and to worker-adjuncts to the machines that process the food, words, and services of today." (Garson, Barbara The Electronic Sweatshop ii). In a way, Wallace saw the working class woman as one who does not have the privilege to relieve depression by going on a vacation or buying gadgets and hiring household help (and this help is usually other women). Instead this group must trudge along dealing with mounting bills and male-dominated institutions. "For these working-class women, writing or telling one's story, breaking the silence, the privacy of home and kin, is an individual act of courage and a means of collectively resisting class oppression" (Zandy, 6), not just class oppression, but male dominance despite class and political affiliation.

In a letter dated February 27, 1987 to Erin Mouré, Wallace articulates her fear when theorists like Xavieré Gauthier use "they" rather than "we" when talking about women. In doing so, Wallace contends, Gauthier creates a distance. Instead Wallace would have us listen to a story her Great Aunt Nettie told her:

> My Great Aunt Nettie, age 94, is telling me a story.
> In it her father dies when she is three, leaving her mother
> alone on a farm with children. That winter, she discovers
> she has breast cancer, but since she cannot leave the farm
> work, she persuades her doctor to come out, chloroform
> her on the dining room table and remove her breast while
> her oldest daughter holds the oil lamp. A few days later,
> she is back in the barn. She goes on living for another ten
> years. This story, out of all her stories, was the one my
> great aunt chose to give me at the end of her life. I put it
> in a poem once. I tell you now. So it becomes History.
>
> But - and this is a Great Big But- regardless of what is
> recorded, the farm exists, the taxes were paid, the kids
> raised, the crops planted and harvested. My great grand-
> mother can never be outside of these. She exists, she
> persists, she moves events as surely as her cells shape my
>
> hands, whether they write about her or no. What are we
> saying about ourselves, about millions of women like her,
> when we deny her that?
>
> (Wallace, Two Women Talking, 77-8)

When we analyze only by class, it is clear that we erase the contributions of women; we deny their contributions, their sacrifices, and their place in history too.

It is clear that Wallace saw an historical approach as somewhat valid. She was well aware of this approach with regard to issues of gender and class. Of course, she knew the effects that the transition into capitalism caused, that this led to the separation of home and workplace and the location of women as responsible for work in the home. But what she also knew was that this division existed prior to capitalism to some degree. Clearly many of her poems in Marrying into the Family speak to this.

> MARRYING INTO THE FAMILY
>
> In the early snapshots

Flanked by his beautiful sisters
she smiles apologetically
for small breasts
thin hair
Even the wedding portrait
is different
although her gown is quite becoming
(his mother wore a mink)

When the children came
she denied any resemblance
For years they believed they had
only one grandfather
and were not present
at her father's funeral

Christmases they spent
with his people
the children of course included
in the family photograph
She held the camera
(until his brother married then
she stood to the side
encouraged the children
to smile)...
(Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 35.)

FINDING MY REAL ANCESTORS

I can only trace
the family tree
through two generations
before stepmothers
insinuate themselves
like characters
from the Brothers Grimm
blocking my way
to the real ancestors
whom no-one now remembers
not that it's uncommon
I've seen family plots
in old church cemeteries

one big patriarchal stone
surrounded by smaller female ones
the dates of their deaths
a neat progression
across his longer span

even in my grandmother's stories
her stepmother's arrival
when she was three was
just another detail
like her first party dress
or her wedding
stories I half heard
or later asked for simply
to humour her

and her diary's mostly dates
the births of her children
weddings funerals
then on a separate page for
April 1920 (she'd be 35 or so)
her one memory
of her real mother

lies in my hand
like the key to an old trunk
scraping against the lock
lid thrown back
the questions
I never thought to ask
spilling into the room
(Wallace, Marring Into The Family, 22-3).

When Bronwen Wallace died at the age of 44 she left us over 130 poems but more importantly, in the words of her student and friend Joanne Page, " She left us other things. A moral presence to measure ourselves against...In much of her writing she charted the cluttered landscape of a working women's life (Page, "In Other Words" n.d.).

While reviewing Arguments With The World, Mary di Michele makes the political connection in Wallace's work when she says, "What is astonishing about Wallace's work

is how much these two arguments (arguments we have with others and arguments we have with ourselves), inform one another, producing a uniquely political voice in this country, a voice at once personal and public. Her insight and brilliance was in linking the personal experience of individual women to the political context in which it happens" (di Michele, "Author's Large-Spirited Feminism Will Be Missed," 18). Clearly this is how women see the world and it is how women speak. They speak to the personal and the public in the same breath.

As Zandy summaries in Calling Home, working class literature often comes from a material existence rather than canonized literature. The former creates an on-going dialogue between owners who control work and the actual workers' lives. That is, the work comes from a specific context and not a personal failure, and also, as a body of work, it is not about despair, but about possibility (Zandy, 23). Wallace would say that it is also about despair and the heavy yoke of patriarchy that limits possibility and keeps us from exceeding our usual limits or our imposed station in life.

It is clear Wallace's poetry can be generally/clearly defined as literature of and for working class women, but her work extends and exceeds this definition as well. Wallace's social political activities and her personal life inform the work as she began to forge a new tradition.

In Mary di Michele's essay, "Conversations with the Living and the Dead," she relates the role that Wallace played in making the literature about our lives and us.

> Poetry has been called an ivory tower. But imagine
> a different kind of dwelling for it. Imagine a home with
> rooms which do not belong to a gallery; imagine rooms
> where the traces from frying eggs are more lasting then

> the tempura of painting. You enter, Tom Waits is singing
> and the room smells of diesel ...in such lived-in rooms I
> hear a different music of the centuries; in such rooms,
> I, a woman, excluded by gender from Eliot's Tradition,
> can nevertheless write poetry. The cooking smells,
> which didn't penetrate the Tradition, have left their
> traces nonetheless, those signs of the former tenant
> (echo from Bronwen Wallace). And voices of those
> who prepare the food are being recovered by women
> writers, writers like Wallace.
>
> (Sheard & Wachtel, 100)

A note about my affinity and connection to what Wallace said and did:

When I was an undergraduate student majoring in English I was trained in a certain method of literary criticism. Literature was to be examined in a rather scientific way and context was not discussed. There was always something more than shame going on in me when my male professors suggested my contextual approach was shallow and that my personal experiences were of little importance to my interpretation or reaction to a work. I am sure now that it was anger and confusion that I was feeling. If literature moved me, wasn't it moving the earth on which I stood inclusive of my gender, ethnicity, and class? I find great comfort in a letter that Wallace wrote to Joanne Page dated October 6, 1988. Wallace writes:

> One of the people I am reading and loving is Elizabeth Bowen,
> her novels now, her short stories later. She's someone I
> read as an undergraduate- a novel called The Death Of
> The Heart which got destroyed for me by a professor who
> referred to it as "sentimental women's writing." As it
> turns out (surprise, surprise) my current re-reading of it
> reveals to my delight that she is anything but sentimental,
> though she's a woman in all the ways that professor, a
> man who loved Lawrence and Durrell could not see. She's
> wonderful, amazing, ironic, funny, moving, intelligent. Wow!"

I also remember that in high school we read biographies before or only until we got to the real literature which was, of course, fiction by men. I find it amusing then, that my work here is literary biography. I am also a little disappointed that it has taken me so long to allow myself this kind of work.

In the words of biographer Elspeth Cameron: "It would be difficult to find a genre that was more ... 'integrative' or ... 'interdisciplinary'... than biography. Nor one that emphasized more fully the value of 'the particular' or 'lived experience'...Many strands must be integrated in biography to produce a convincing sense of a particular life in motion" (Cameron, in Scheier, Sheard and Wachtel, 76).

As Cameron warns, women scholars also cannot have a "view from above" even if that view is rooted in the early feminist movement (Cameron in Scheier, Sheard and Wachtel, 76). As Wallace put it in her interview with Janice Williamson in 1989: "I'm really excited by all the different and valuable ways women are writing. I am also interested in the development of feminist theory because writing is very, very lonely. You put out this stuff, but with theory it comes back to you connected to the world in a different way." (9)

But Wallace had her limits with academic feminism: "What really burns my ass is when a few academics try to tell me there's only one way to write, or one way to think about the world or that all my writing and thinking has to be post-structuralist. I react to this in the same way that I reacted to male Stalinists telling me that there was only one way to read Marx. I say bullshit to that" (Wallace to Williamson, 9). When asked in this same interview about her personal approach to poetry Wallace, said:

"The first two books are intensely autobiographical as well as confessional. But in Stubborn Particulars, I am creating a persona who is the best or bravest part of me. She does the talking and has more courage to explore things than I do... When we tell people intimate things about ourselves, we are in some way asking for, if not absolution, at least support, inclusion, something, a healing gesture from the other person... This goes far beyond the confessional as we've understood it in autobiography." (Wallace in Williamson, 10).

Work and the Women's Movement

If we look at the way wealth and power were and still are distributed in North America and Canada we see that only a small percentage own the wealth. The vast majority (which includes small property owners, technical workers, low-wage service employees, uneducated and unskilled, even many educated/professionals) seem to be working against one another and are in real competition with each other. In Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States, he explains that the dimensions in the capitalistic economics, as we know them, pits the small property owners against the property-less, black against white, native-born against foreign born, intellectuals and professionals against the uneducated and unskilled (Zinn, 571). Zandy adds that we also pit men against women and says that we need only look at occupational segregation, sexual harassment, unequal pay, and inadequate childcare as proof (Zandy, 3).

Of course the women's movement from the 1960's on resulted in a social political awareness, and so it followed that along with the other things women began to challenge, they began to challenge the literary standards that were established and guarded by men.

The Beats of the '50s gave way to the Confessional poets of the '60s. And while Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, (icons for the feminist movement), along with Adrienne Rich, have made it possible for women to deal directly in their poetry with areas of intimate experience that were previously said to be taboo, (Levenson, xi), Wallace has emphasized the social, political, and economical conditions of women as did/do
Roo Borson, Susan Glickman, Erin Erin Mouré, and others. This is not to say that contemporary male poets were without this consciousness, in fact "...some poets such as Patrick Land and Don Gutteridge seem almost consciously to be fighting a rearguard action against what could be perceived as the literacy encroachment of the best younger women writers such as Roo Borson, Di Brandt, Susan Glickman, Claire Harris, Patricia Young, and the late Bronwen Wallace and, at least until her later, forbiddingly ideological work, Erin Mouré " (Levenson, x).

It is clear that Bronwen Wallace was well aware of, and concerned about, the plight of working class women. She was born into a working class family and community in Kingston, Ontario Canada in 1945 with strong female role models, women who worked hard and worked somewhat against the patriarchal version of the world. Born also to parents who gave her permission to observe closely and to question everything, she was bound to lead us in the direction of political action whether in the socio-political arena or in her own writing. She was moved to do both. Wallace's friend, Joanne Page, put it this way, " What I respected most about Bronwen's public writing was the profound moral context from which she wrote. She believed that a writer is not outside the world, that she must address the thorniest issues, fight for what is right, however, risky that might be. She spoke clearly and with compassion, understanding the weakness and fear and

miserable circumstances that drive us to do things we are ashamed of" (Page, "In Other Words Legacy and Challenge" n.d.).

In an interview with Wallace on February 22, 1985 in Edmonton, Janice Williamson suggested to Wallace that her poetry "ranges over...contradictions between a language of transcendence and a concrete appreciation of the everyday. The everydayness of things provides a poetic and politic in your (her) work." In the same interview with Janice Williamson, Wallace said, "As an academic feminist, I imagine my engagement with the world as, in part, trying to change the academy itself. I want to work with others and make it a place where alternate programs like Women's Studies or alternate pedagogues within traditional disciplines can stimulate students and others to think critically about feminist issues, and to act, and to change" (Wallace and Williamson, February 22, 1985, 11).

In a conversation between Barbara Godard and Mary di Michele on June 12, 1990, at Barbara Godard's home in Toronto, Mary di Michele said that Wallace "...was politically active before she actually wrote. Political activity was something she did when she was very young, and then she started to write...it was a matter of incorporating all she knew politically into her writing." (di Michele in Open Letter, 24) This political work seemed to move her out of the third person and seemed to mandate the narrative voice; it changed her work from a more general political statement to an on-going, open-ended dialogue with the reader. That this dialogue with the reader flows like the conversations women share is important because it reveals the natural occurring language of a class previously dismissed.

What is clear is that Wallace's sociopolitical work, as well as her writing, which focuses closely on specific ways that we marginalize women of the working class, and her poetry reveal the deeper cultural story and injustice of which Zandy and others speak.

Wallace also removed herself from the academy to become an active agent of change on a very grass roots level, and has left us with a cache of literature that helps us understand class difference and gives us a rather finite view of the manifestations of these differences. That she does this in the form of poetry is significant.

Clearly Canadian

While Wallace's poetry can be defined as different, it is also very clearly Canadian. In the introduction to the Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, Margaret Atwood tells us that Canada is most certainly not a utopia for women, but that it has historically and for mysterious reasons, favored the production of good women poets to a greater extent than have England, the United States, or Australia (Atwood, ix). Perhaps the notion that Canada was settled by the displaced made/makes the acceptance of poetry by and for women (the most displaced of all) more possible. The early Canadian poets, such as Oliver Goldsmith, Alexander McLachlan, Standish O'Grady, and Joseph Stansbury seemed to secure into this tradition a mourning of homes left and things lost (The Elegiac), as well as a bitter account of the dismal nature of the geographic and social surroundings (The Satiric). This is true of Wallace's work as well. In her poem "Into The Midst of It," for example, The Elegiac is expressed through a road trip. The driver on this trip goes unnoticed, yet things change as quickly as the driver moves past them. Returning to what Marcuse says about the beautiful as belonging to the imagery of liberation, many of Wallace's poems, like this one, show an imagery of liberation, while expressing that the beautiful moments pass, and that we are not in control, that things larger than ourselves regroup and dissolve around us. The sense of placing oneself in the changing landscape is important in Wallace's work:

> .....A man comes up on your right-blue shirt
> patched from the sky-solid and
> unsurprised. He doesn't turn his head
> at your passing and by the time your eyes move
> to the rear-view mirror, the road has changed.
> But it's then you begin to notice

other people: women hanging clothes from gray
porches, a clutter of children on the steps...
this country you're traveling through,
where the farmlands draw their nourishment
from the ancient mountain range,
and houses rise, insistent
as the rock and almost as indifferent,
making all your questions
about why people came here,
what they like about it,
why they stayed,
as meaningless as questions you might ask
of the trees and earth itself... (Wallace, Common Magic, 21-2).

With Wallace, the moment of losing and the losing of oneself in the changing tableau create a sense of loss that functions as a sort of reluctant momentum in the poem. She feels the loss as it is happening, but is powerless to change it. She doesn't ascend to a "better place."

Wallace made reference to the effect that Al Purdy's "The Cariboo Horses" had on her. In many of her interviews, she said that once she discovered this poem, it changed her life and gave her permission to write about the landscape she saw in southeastern Ontario.

The Cariboo Horses

At 100 Mile House the cowboys ride in rolling
stagey cigarettes with one hand reining
half-time bronco rebels on a morning grey as stone
-so much like riding dangerous women
        with whiskey coloured eyes-
such women as once fell dead with their lovers
with fire in their heads and slippery froth on thighs
-Beaver and Carrier women maybe or
        Blackfoot squaws far past the edge of this valley
on the other side of those two toy mountain ranges
        from the sunfierce plains beyond-

But only horses

Waiting in stables
hitched at taverns
Standing at dawn
pastured outside the town with
jeeps and fords and chevvys and
busy muttering stake trucks rushing
importantly over roads of man's devising
over the safe known roads of the ranchers
families and merchants of the town-
On the high prairie
are only horse and rider
wind in dry grass
clopping in silence under the toy mountains
dropping sometimes and
lost in the dry grass
golden oranges of dung-

Only horses
no stopwatch memories or palace ancestors
not Kiangs hauling undressed stone in the Nile Valley
and having stubborn Egyptian tantrums or
Onagers racing thru Hither Asia and
the last Quagga screaming in African highlands
Lost relatives of these
Whose hooves were thunder
the ghosts of horses battering thru the wind
whose names were the wind's common usage
whose life was the sun's
arriving here at chilly noon
in the gasoline smell of the
dust and waiting 15 minutes
at the grocer's-

(Purdy in Geddes 15 Canadian Poets, 25-6.)

What Wallace does in "Into The Midst Of It" and many other poems that is clearly different from what Al Purdy or Dennis Lee might do is the way she refuses to take the landscape to some profound point or grand answer. Instead, the only grand answer, if you will, is the next poem or the immediate circumstance in which we are left. This is not just a stylistic move by Wallace, but a political move as well because we can't really escape the specific people or events in the poem. We can't escape the uncomfortable

social condition or the nitty gritty of class. That we do not shape or define our whole lives is illustrated here. What is sustained in the poem above is the daily struggle and the indifferent landscape, a landscape that is both natural and made of social-political constructs.

At the center of Wallace's poetic structure and themes lays the idea of compassion, especially in the sense of experiencing the feeling of others as if they were our own. In doing so we reach the vision for which the meditative poets strive, but we do so through the particulars of experiences (Bennet in The Open Letter, 76). And when there is a brief surreal escape, we are returned to the stubborn reality (unlike the hallucinations of Leslie Fielder). This is evident in many of the poems in Signs Of The Former Tenant, poems like "Inside Out," and in "Toward Morning," but especially in "Woman Sitting," which is featured elsewhere in this text. This move toward the surreal in several of Wallace's poems further removes her from a traditional Marxist approach or the "true reality" in the Marxist definition of literature for and by the masses. I would like to move to a more international look for a moment. Having studied the work of several French, German, and Latino poets who move beyond the immediate scenario of their poem in some way or move into the surreal in order to escape the toil of house and home, I see similarities and differences in the way Wallace escapes or uses the surreal. The work of Joyce Mansour (1928-1986), is a case in point. In "Desire As Light As A Shuttle," Mansour moves from the French style tradition and "the beautiful disorder on my (her) table" to stealing from shop women, then to jumping "the ditch with no skirts or blinkers" (Arkin and Shollar, 784). Mansour transcends or exceeds the usual limits only a bit. Stylistically Mansour ends with memories and tears – not with concrete detail, as does Wallace.

DESIRE AS LIGHT AS A SHUTTLE
Léger comme une navette, Le Désir

Why weep on the hairless skull of tedium
Odious or otherwise
Esthetic
Argumentative
French-style tedium
I know very well how to sew false eyelashes
onto my eyelids
Agate expels hate in the pallor of a glance
I know how to imitate the shadow that closes
doors
When love
Clicks its lips standing in the hall
Rereading your letters I think of our walks
The promises of summer lingering Place
Dauphine
Yawn under cover
It is already five o'clock
Gone are the kites the docile pawing stones the
careless dust

Jumbled is the flower-bed squared like a
kerchief
Bogged down the lewd glance
Wool piles up on the clothes rack
Night gurgles inert
A beautiful disorder on my table
Why weep over a bucket of blood
Why forage between the old man's thighs
Venice
I'm ready to cover you
With my woodland hollyhock tongue
Ready to chisel at my pelt
Steal from shopwomen
Jump the ditch with no skirts or blinkers
To sink still moist in your gimcrack arms
Why keep afloat make up have fun
Why answer
Why escape
The memory of your icy sleep
Follows me step by step
When can I see you

Without shedding tears
On me

Translated by Mary Beach
(Arkin and Shollar, 783)

The German poet, Marie Luise Kaschnitz (1901-1974), escapes the limits a bit more than Mansour in "Frauenfunk" (Broadcast for Women). First, we see Kaschnitz giving a talk on the radio. Then she does what a good wife does, rebels, and escapes – advises us to put paprika on peaches and then meet the one with the bagpipes inside the mountain." This poet moves away from the tools and toils of the kitchen, but unlike Wallace, remains there.

BROADCAST FOR WOMEN
Frauenfunk

I give a talk on the radio
Toward morning when no one is listening
I offer my recipes

Pour milk into the telephone
Let your cats sleep
In the dishwashers
Smash the clocks in your washing machines
Leave your shoes behind

Season your peaches with paprika
And your soup meat with honey
Teach your children the alphabet of foxes
Turn the leaves in your gardens silver side up
Take the advice of the owl.

When summer arrives put on your furs
Go meet the ones with the bagpipes
Who come from inside the mountains
Leave your shoes behind

Don't be too sure
Evening will come
Don't be too sure

That God loves you.

Translated by Lisel Miller

(Arkin and Shollar, 391)

The Latino feminist writer Rosario Castellanos produces a momentary type of escape that, like Wallace, returns to the trivial in "Autorretrato" (Self Portrait). Castellanos dreams of caressing the bark of trees. She knows she should escape into music and she does escape into her own thoughts from time to time, but ends the poem by saying "I cry when I misplace the statement for my property tax or when the rice burns"

SELF PORTRAIT
Autorretrato

I am a Mrs.: an appellation
hard to come by, in my case, and more useful
in dealing with people than a title
appended to my name by some academy.
So, then, I display my trophy and repeat:
I am a Mrs. Fat or thin
according to the movements of the stars
and the cycles of the glands
and other phenomena I don't understand.
Blonde, if I wear a blonde wig.
Or brunette, according to my whim.
(In reality, my hair is getting gray, getting gray.)
I am kind of ugly. It seems to depend to a great extent

on how I put on my make-up.
My appearance has changed with time.
-but the change is not as great as Weininger
says there is in the appearance of a genius.
I'm mediocre.
Which, on the one hand, spares me enemies
and, on the other hand, wins me the devotion
of occasional admirers and friends
who are the kind of men who like to talk on
the telephone
and send long letters of congratulations.
Who slowly sip their whiskeys on the rocks
while chatting about politics and literature,
Girlfriends...well, sometimes...rarely,

and in very tiny doses.
In general, I refuse to look in mirrors.
They would only tell me the usual things:
how badly I dress and how ridiculous
I look when I'm trying to flirt with someone.
who one day will become an inflexible judge
and maybe also an executioner.
In the meantime I love him.
I write. This poem. And others. And others.
I contribute to journals in my field,
give lectures and classes,
publish weekly articles for a newspaper.

I live opposite the Park, but almost
never look in that direction. And I never
cross the street to take a walk
and breathe and caress
the corrugated bark of the trees.

I know I should listen to music
but frequently avoid it. I know
It's good to see pictures
but never go to exhibitions,
nor theatrical openings, nor the film club

I prefer to stay here, reading
or, if I turn out the lights, thinking
absent-mindedly and puttering a while.

I suffer more out of habit, by inheritance,
like others of my kind,
than for concrete reasons.

I would be happy if I knew how.
I mean, if they'd taught me all the gestures,
the speeches, the scenery.

Instead what they taught me was to cry. But
me crying.
mechanism doesn't function as it should
and I never cry at death beds,
nor on momentous occasions, nor when faced
with a catastrophe.
I cry when I misplace the statements for my
property tax.

or when the rice burns.

(Arkin and Skollar, 707)

Moving back to North America I'd like to look at an Ann Sexton poem. In "Housewife" Sexton begins: "Some women marry houses/ It's another kind of skin; it has a heart/ a mouth a liver and bowel movements/ The walls are permanent and pink...." (Sexton, The Complete Poems Of Ann Sexton, 18). Here Sexton seems to imply that not only is she in the house, but that the house, like her own pink biological walls, is placed inside of her. How then can she escape? The ultimate force and escape in the poem comes at the end when she says, "Men enter by force, drawn back like Jonah/into their fleshy mothers (as if consumed by some monster)." In her final lines "A woman is her mother./ That's the main thing." The transcendence or temporary escape here, is inward and outward at once but it serves also as an inescapable place. It is a genealogical escape that cannot occur because it is rooted in womanhood.

In Consorting With Angels, Sexton is more direct in her non-compliance, her anger, and her transcendence:

CONSORTING WITH ANGELS

I was tired of being a woman,
tired of the spoons and the pots,
tired of my mouth and my breasts,
tired of the cosmetics and the silks
There were still men who sat at my table,
circled around the bowl I offered up.
The bowl was filled with purple grapes
and the flies hovered in for the scent
and even my father came with his white bone.
But I was tired of the gender of things.

Last night I had a dream

And I said to it...
"You are the answer.
You will outlive my husband and my father."
In that dream there was a city made of chains
where Joan was put to death in man's clothes
and the nature of the angels went unexplained,
no two made in the same species,

one with a nose, one with an ear in its hand,
one chewing a star and recording its orbit,
each one like a poem obeying itself,
performing God's functions,
a people apart.

"You are the answer,"
I said, and entered,
lying down on the gates of the city.
Then the cabins were fastened around me
and I lost my common gender and my final aspect.

As Maxine Kumin points out in her introduction to *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton,* Sexton has a remarkable sense of particularities, of detail that is psychologically telling and leads to some grander landscape of mind (Kumin, xxxiv). And if time were to permit, we might look at her poem "Flight," a poem in which Sexton only tries to escape (wearing the red coat and new white gloves of her station), but remains grounded like gulls in "a pool of glue" and like insects "who had nowhere else to go."

In "The Consecrating Mother," Sexton dedicates herself to a womanly consecrating role: "I am that clumsy human/ on the shore/ loving you, coming, coming,/ going,/ and wish to put my thumb on you like the Song of Solomon" (Sexton in The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton, 554).

In this poem, Sexton's commitment endorses an experience that seems compatible with many recent feminist formulations; "it demands no closure, refuses authority and

exemplifies continuous human process" (McGrath In McDowell's poetry After Modernism, 162).

For women like Sexton who feel caged in a world that imposes dominance and compliance, perhaps the ultimate defiant gesture is suicide. Perhaps this may seem (as it might have also seemed to Plath, Rich, and Morgan) the ultimate liberating act.

One might question whether or not finding a state of grace in the particulars of a woman's life returns us to where we started (at the kitchen sink again), but in the case of Canadian poet Bronwen Wallace, it seems that she was able to escape while at this sink, despite particulars or even because of them. These particulars may even serve as the vehicle like Alice's door to Wonderland. In any case, this is the debate Wallace opens up for us by returning from the escape to the particulars.

There is no manic persona or extravagance in Wallace, no confession, no volcanoes, and while her large literacy choices link her to other female poets, choices with regard to the subject and scene within their poems, her specific style and her focus (even after a brief surreal escape) on the things of working women lives, separates her from them.

I would like to turn to the poem "Burn Out" from The Stubborn Particulars of Grace to look at both Wallace's specific style and her focus on things of the working class. I must include nearly the whole piece here in order to reveal the maternal patterns of narration and dialogue, as well as the focus on ordinary concerns and objects of working class women:

Burn Out

is what happens
when you work too hard
in one of the *caring professions*

they're called these days.
it has definite symptoms
and most workplaces now
offer seminars to discuss it
distribute burn-out pamphlets
in the staff room.

For me, though
it's my old apartment on West Street,
after the fireman turned to where
I was standing on the sidewalk
and said "OK" we'll take you in now
for a minute. "How the place was
colder then I'd thought possible
the broken windows, the walks
smeared with soot and the wet
grit under my feet. And the smell
the smell I couldn't get out
of even the few things

I wanted to try to save.
Beyond that, it's the door
to the staff office at Interval House,
a shelter for battered women and children.
I'm sitting in there now,
the walls around me plastered
with kid's drawings, notices, telephone messages,
and photographs, at a desk littered with coffee mugs
and matchbooks, ashtrays, a telephone...
and I am only four hours in
to a twelve hour shift...
Tonight,
I have eight more hours to go
when Linda comes in, shuts
the door, lights a cigarette...
"...it wasn't
alive, I mean, but it was
something you know, I was maybe
five months along, and afterwards
he got a kitchen knife to cut the,
you know, the cord and put
it in a garbage bag..."

(Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 76)

Because Wallace was involved politically with women's issues, she knew that women had much to say, and she saw the women's movement focusing on the personal experiences that women were having, Because of this her poetry moved toward the personal and, of course, the particulars as well. Perhaps Purdy, Lee, and Birney helped her to realize that place was important. Perhaps Tom Wayman encouraged her to speak in her own voice, but she seemed to turn first toward a form like Virginia Woolf's internal monologues as a vehicle toward style, then toward her own style, a style that captured the form of the natural speech around her. These influences, along with her own view of women's lives and work, resulted in a poetry that reflected the everyday life of her class and gender, specific to the objects in those lives, and specific to how those lives flow inclusive of the inability of women to escape these specifics. Donna Bennett expresses the differences between Purdy, Lee, and Wallace: "The difference arises partly because her (Wallace's) writing is woman-centered, her poems have a female perspective- in strong contrast to the male-centered viewpoint of a Purdy poem like 'At the Quinte Hotel' or even of a Lee poem like 'The Death of Harold Ladoo!" (Bennet in Journal of Canadian Poetry, 59). But, it is easy to see Wallace as clearly Canadian too, as Bennet explains further: "One of the important qualities they (Purdy and Wallace) share is the way they locate their poems in the larger tradition of the meditative lyric, the kind of poem that records the mind's activity as it seeks meaning from a single, still image or point of experience."

In "Mexican Sunsets," Wallace disrupts the elegiac tradition a bit when she moves first to Fall, the season of natural change, then to the change in government economic policy. She ends by pointing out that that which we believe in and hold fast to is part

imagination, nostalgia, and fable. She goes from the landscape to the political in a multiple sort of rupture in the tradition:

> ...It's November, but no-one believes it.
> Winter's a crass rumor like the threat
> of a layoff or a government's economic policy.
> And the people inhabiting the lavender streets
> have the stature of fabled creatures
> from that land we all believe in, somewhere
> between imagination and nostalgia... (Wallace, Common Magic, 23)

The Satiric swarms about us in many of her poems. It is often mixed in with the Elegiac. But it isn't just the distant landscape that is dismal; it is also the more immediate landscape of city neighborhood, workplace, and home that is dismal in a way that is fashioned by class and politics and womanhood. While McLachlan's work left us lost in the forest, Wallace has us lost in the industrial landscape. In "Reclaiming The City," (this whole poem appears later in this text), she reveals the dismal landscape of Windsor (a city in which she spent a considerable amount of time):

> The sign says, Windsor, City of Roses,
> but anyone who's lived here knows it's a city of hands
> and dark metal, necessary as blood.

And speaking about her friend, Mark,[10] she continues in the same poem:

> He moved here (Windsor) in 67', just before the riots started in Detroit, his balcony a ringside seat that summer from which to watch the low hills of smoke peaked occasionally by sirens or gunfire... (Wallace, Common Magic, 69)

We are lost in this dismal landscape even when we look across the Detroit River to see how Detroit had "rebuilt itself" around the Renaissance Center:[11]

[10] One of my interviews with Ron Baxter took place in Mark's apartment!

What we study tonight is how Detroit has rebuilt itself,
its skyline dominated by Ren Cen, that space-age castle
a city within a city, when tracks of light are elevators...
(but) block after block, as people move out to the suburbs
the grass moves back, bushes crowd factories
and trees grow through the rooms of burnt-out houses.
In a few years, Mark says,
Ren Cen could be stranded in the middle of a forest, ...
tonight and even the freighters on the river move with more
then their usual weariness... (Wallace, Common Magic, 69)

Kingston is also described in a dismal sort of way in several of Wallace's poems. In "My Mother's Favorite Story," a little girl is lost in the "...unexpressive face of this town" (Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 13).

In "Invasion" Wallace show Kingston changing, while the dismal landscape of prejudice doesn't seem to be changing fast enough:

...Each change is an invasion
though usually it's more indefinite
careless as dandelions discarded
toys that sprout on our front lawn
pushing aside their older memories
of Mrs. Tate's meticulous shrubs
the shifts no instrument can measure
how a child's ball breaking
a rose bush hurts them almost
as much as the news that the family
moving in on the corner are Pakistani...
(Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 71)

And in many of her poems it is the home, the place where woman is caretaker that is dismal, dismal in appearance, in mood and expectation:

... a woman
sitting in that kind of silence
with sunlight falling
through the dirty window pane

[11] The Ren Cen is four large towers containing offices, restaurants, and shops. It was built on the river's edge and touted as a sign that Detroit was/is in a phase of renewal.

to spill itself like smoke
around her
(a place where) "...
her children's growing
and in the thicker silences
that sometimes clench like fists
beneath her husband's words...
(Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 53)

And in "Renovating" from Marrying into the Family:

It takes months before
you understand what is expected
begin to accept
the limitations of other lives
like the layers
of thick dry paint on the woodwork
impossible to remove
stains on the bare floors
scratches worn places become
incidental as wrinkles or thumbprints...
(Wallace, Marrying into the Family, 49)

That Wallace is clearly Canadian and also different from many Canadian poets is evident in her use of the narrative and anecdotal. As we know, there has always been a tug toward the narrative and anecdotal in Canadian poetry, has always been a pull in the direction of the historical, the use of local incident and vernacular speech. If we look as far back as Isabella Valancy Crawford, we can see this narrative tradition (but the work of Crawford is decidedly masculine and conscious while Wallace is decidedly feminine and often moves into the surreal and back again). Wallace does often focus on nature, as did the Confederation Poets (Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Wilford Campbell, and Duncan Campbell Scott), but her use of narrative, rather than lyric styles, moves her away from them and more toward the narrative poets like E. J. Pratt and Earle Birney.

Archibald Lampman's hallucinations focus on details in poems like "Heat" which only slightly sets the stage for the surreal approach of Wallace, as noted earlier. Wallace's surrealism is transforming only in a temporary way, not at all celebratory in the way that Lampman's work is. Both "Woman Sitting" and "The Lost Dreams" support my point here. In "Woman Sitting," a woman with coffee cup and cigarette in hand finds she can move things with her eyes:

> in the comfortable dark
> of her own living-room
> she finds she can move things
> with her eyes its fun at first
> the way a heavy chair
> slides easily from one wall
> to the other tables dangle
> from the ceiling lamps
> swirl drunken arcs
> in every corner
> then
> the darkness splits wide
> open walls and ceilings
> pulse and she can't stop
> the liquid shift but just
> as she feels herself about
> to plunge she touches
> on the rim of waking
> shrill voices of her children
> demanding breakfast
> clean underwear... (Wallace,
> Signs of the Former Tenant, 52)

And in "Lost Dreams" awakened by her son's cry:

> ... she imagines her lost dreams
> distributing themselves
> among the neighbors
> imagines the banker across the street
> dreaming he dances barefoot
>
> in a field of flowers

the retired schoolteacher next door
moaning as she turns toward
a gold and honey-eyed lover
but in the morning

they nod over their hedges
complacent as the sunshine
and she knows that at dinnertime

the kitchen counter will begin to crack
before her eyes
the potatoes she peels
will cry out like hurt children... (Wallace,
Signs of the Former Tenant, 54)

We know that many nineteenth century poets who wrote in English wrote in narrative style. Canadians continued and continue to do so. Jay MacPherson's "The Boatman," Michael Ondaatje's "Billy The Kid," Gwendolyn MacEwen's The T.E. Lawrence Poems, and P.K. Page's "The Stenographers," are a few of the most important. But these poets were more or less stringing together short lyrics with well-controlled line breaks. Some of their poems contain narrative, but little, if any dialogue. Their portrayals of women are different as well. They refuse to make their focus the working class and the particulars of that class and certainly not the particulars of a woman's life. When Ondaatje leans toward the narrative, that narrative seems held together with lyric, with image. He does push the familiar into the surreal, (See "White Dwarfs") as does Wallace at times, but he doesn't move us back to reality and the particulars the way Wallace does. He doesn't show us the dismal and stale nature of our plight as Wallace often does.

Along with MacPherson's controlled narrative, notice her inclusive statement here of "both gnat and camel." Bronwen Wallace would certainly applaud her decision to do so:

...you might suppose it easy
For a maker not to lazy
To convert the gentle reader to an ark.

But it takes a willing pupil
To admit both gnat and camel
...Quote an eyeful, all the crew that must embark.
(MacPherson "The Boatman" in Stouck, 423)

In Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy The Kid the poems are either prose-style narratives or short controlled lines and stanzas, and are nothing like the longer lines of poetry in the more uncontrolled (but still fashioned as poetry) stanzas that Wallace gives us.

In Ondaatje's "On Her House/Angela D's," witness this last stanza:

> Halfway back to the house, the building we move towards
> seemed to be stuffed with something yellow and wet. The night,
> the dark air, made it all mad. That fifteen yards away there were
> bright birds in cages and here John Chisum and me walked,
> strange bodies. Around us total blackness, nothing out there
> but a desert for seventy miles or more, and to the left, a few
> yards away, a house stuffed with yellow wet light where within
> the frame of a window we saw a woman move carrying fire in
> a glass funnel and container towards the window, towards the
> edge of the dark where we stood.

Keep the above piece in mind for later when we discuss at more length Wallace's Keep That Candle Burning Bright & Other Poems. In this collection, Wallace writes prose poems. While her poems in this collection look like Ondaatje's on the page, she accomplishes a more natural rhythm than does Ondaatje. Here are the first two stanzas of "Bodily Fluids."

BODILY FLUIDS

> I'm working on this theory that the way we think is
> directly related to the brain's being 80% water. It's
> an ocean up there, thoughts drifting, shifting on the
> currents of scent and sound, past lives surfacing like
> drowned bodies when you least expect, poems

nuzzling idle in pools to see what light makes of those
hours in the middle of the afternoon, the whole mind
coming up, just once, in a splash of sun and air, eyes,
lungs, a single organ in the glare of a Big Idea.

and then there are those schools of slithery thought
where most of us spend most of our time, just
swimming along like the other day, I'm giving blood
at the Legion Hall, for the Red Cross, and I drift
into that woozy part of it – you know, after they've
taken the needle out, but before they let you up for
the doughnuts and coffee, when you're lying there
holding the gauze to your arm, like at the dentist,
after he's packed your mouth, whipped off your bib
and said *okay see you in two weeks* and you're still
trying to concentrate on standing up. Well, I'm
floating there, surrounded by all these bags of blood
and naturally I start meandering along the routes it
will take from here, mine flowing into some guy who
cuts his finger off in his Cuisinart, say, some banker
who thinks nurses are over-paid and everyone on
welfare is a lazy slob, while the guy beside me here
could be pumping his pint straight into the arms of a
radical feminist who figures if they can put one man
on the moon, why not all of them, it was almost like
drowning, how the possibilities came rushing through
me. Even the nurse said to lie down for a while more
and someone else brought me a Coke. One sip and I
dive into how much of it is drunk by Canadians in a
single day, enough to fill 2 Olympic swimming pools
and how the friend who told me that – who knows
where she gets this stuff – also claims that the semen
ejaculated in one year, in heterosexual intercourse
alone, would fill another one and a half and that's
just in England and Wales, while the water that
evaporates from the earth's oceans in one day, fills
five. I could feel it, surging around my heart, the
nurses smile wobbly, like the sun in a puddle, no
telling where it would flash next, as she launches me
toward the doughnuts. (Wallace, Keep That Candle
Burning Bright, 45-7.)

Let's look at a more traditional stanza in an Ondaatje poem, "The Diverse Causes."

I have selected the ending of this poem so that we might see where Ondaatje takes the particulars (winter cobwebs, baby bottles, mice prowling):

> ...We clean buckets of their sand
> to fetch water in the morning
> reach for winter cobwebs,
> sweep up moths who have forgotten to waken.
> When the children sleep, angled
> behind their bottles, you can hear mice prowl.
> I turn a page
> careful not to break the rhythms
> of your sleeping head on my hip,
> watch the moving under your eyelid
> that turns like fire,
> and we have love and the god outside
> until ice starts to limp
> in brown hidden waterfalls
> or my daughter burns the lake
> by reflecting her red shoes in it.
> (Ondaatje in Geddes 15 Canadian Poets, 252)

I delight in the sharing of this next stanza from MacEwen's "Memories of a Mad Cook." Notice that the poet stands in her kitchen and "moves out" from there. Again, I have included the way this poem ends because MacEwen leaves us in a metaphorical place, a kind of dreamscape about friends dying of hunger, a lean lover/wolf.

> ...Wistfully I stand in my difficult kitchen
> and imagine the fantastic salads and soufflés
> that will never be.
> Everyone seems to grow thin with me
> and their eyes grow black as hunters' eyes
> and search my face for sustenance.
>
> All my friends are dying of hunger,
> there is some basic dish I cannot offer,
> and you my love are almost as lean
> as the splendid wolf I must keep always
> at my door. (MacEwen in Geddes 15 Canadian Poets, 196-7)

In P.K. Page's "Stenographers," the poet moves us ever inward as the Stenographer goes from her Sunday bivouac back to work:

> In a felt of the morning the calico-minded,
> sufficiently starched, inserts paper, hit keys,
> efficient and sure as their adding machines;
> yet they weep in the vault, they are taut as net
> curtains stretched upon the frames. In their eyes
> I have seen the pin men of madness in marathon
> trim race round the track of the stadium pupil.
> (Page in Geddes 20th Century Poetry and Poetics, 233)

And now Wallace. I have selected the poem "Signs Of The Former Tenant" from the collection of the same name because of the natural flow of the narrative (speech) here.

> Signs Of The Former Tenant
>
> Whatever she did all day
> it wasn't housework and
> the lady downstairs says
> the kids were always filthy
> it takes me a day to remove
> their fingerprints from the walls
> and hours of scrubbing before
> the tub gives up its dead-cell scum
> and the oven is free of grease
> even the smell is stubborn
> windows open for days against
> dirty diapers and stale food
>
> The place is livable now at least
> though some things can't be fixed
> the broken latch on the bedroom door
> and the worn pattern of the tile
> from the kitchen sink to the front window
> where just at eye-level
> faint smudges cling
> like breath clouds
> sobs imprisoned in glass. (Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 196)

Notice how Wallace ends with a scene in her kitchen, the worn tile and smudges on the window. The smudge becomes the source for the metaphor.

During an interview for ARC magazine, when asked about a connection to a tradition, Wallace said,

"...we do have to create our own tradition in a sense, a tradition that gives us permission to talk and write about the things we write about ...I think I can write about things I write because of Margaret Atwood, Dorothy Livesay, P.K. Page, Elizabeth Brewster who have given me permission to do that (Cantar, ARC, 53)."

Wallace gives some credit to Atwood so we might pause here to discuss Atwood. Her (Atwood's) figures are often pioneers, explorers, or exiles of one sort or another. In "Roominghouse Winter," she says survival is the first necessity for exiles. "...At times she (Atwood) presents her startling, surreal images in a prosaic, matter-of-fact manner that is dislocating to the reader of traditional verse; at other times she assumes absurd points of view, shifts back and forth between reality and fantasy, and uses a variety of other alienating devices including parentheses" (Atwood in Geddes 15 Canadian Poets, 266). With Wallace, I venture to say that the "prosaic" does not seem at all dull, but rather integral in the (often used) first person point of view. The trivial is not viewed as trivial to the writer and therefore not to the reader. While Atwood's is "...her line-lengths seem haphazard, questionable, convincing as units of neither sound or sense..." (15 Canadian Poets, 266), Wallace seems to break the lines quite naturally even when the lines are alternately long and short.

Let's look at an Atwood then a Wallace piece in which they both speak to immigrants/pioneers. First we will look at "The Immigrants" by Atwood.

...I see them coming
up from the hold smelling of vomit,
infested, emaciated, their skins grey
with travel; as they step on shore

the old countries recede, become
perfect, thumbnail castles preserved
like gallstones in a glass bottle, the
towns dwindle upon the hillsides
in a light paperweight-clear

They carry their carpetbags and trunks
with clothes, dishes, the family pictures;
they think they will make order...

With Wallace, we see a linking of self to immigrants and pioneers through her own ancestors, particularly women, even while society at large wants to diminish the importance of these women. The lines are limited to five words here, but they flow like narrative just the same:

Finding My Real Ancestors

I can only trace
the family tree
through two generations
before stepmothers
insinuated themselves
like characters
from the Brothers Grimm
blocking my way
to the real ancestors
when no-one remembers
not that it's uncommon
I've seen family plots
in old church cemeteries
one big patriarchal stone
surrounded by smaller female ones...
(Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 22)

Obvious in the poem quoted earlier, P.K. Page gave us a look at working women's lives in "The Stenographers" and "The Landlady." Perhaps Wallace also drew from her the idea that there are limits of human perception. I find it particularly interesting to look at the first stanza of Page's "The Landlady," then at Wallace's "Freeze Frame:

The Landlady

Through sepia air the borders come and go,
impersonal as trains. Pass silently
the craving silence swallowing her speech;
click doors like shutters on her camera eye.
(Page in Geddes 20th Century Poetry and Poetics, 233)

And Wallace:

Freeze Frame

Imagine this kitchen
as a scene for a film
the remains of breakfast
scattered on the table
light falling in precise angles...
something that holds them
for a moment- the exact
moment when you enter- suspended
(Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 45)

Perhaps Wallace credits Livesay because Livesay dared to be political early on and Elizabeth Brewster for her narrative voice and poems about ancestral women (see "Great-Aunt Rebecca"or "The Night Grandma Died") and her return to the small town as focus (see "The Future of Poetry in Canada"). Brewster also seemed to see her landscape as both beautiful and dismal and most certainly inescapable (see "Road Between Saskatchewan and Edmonton").

While Wallace credits the aforementioned poets as influential on her work, what is clear is what she included in her poetry that they did not, particularly the stylistic decision

Wallace made to include dialogue (not parenthetical as does Brewster), but as a "mainline" in the flow of the poem (see Brewster's "In Wellington, For Katherine Mansfield" and compare it to "Joseph MacLeod Daffodils" in Wallace's 1987 collection The Stubborn Particulars of Grace).

I wish also to look at the work of Lorna Crozier here as she was writing when Wallace was writing, and also because I see some of the characteristics of Wallace in Crozier's earlier work. I truly admire Crozier's work, but unfortunately it seems that Crozier's more recent work (her 1999 collection) moves away from the characteristics that her work shared with Wallace and back toward the more lyrical, the more traditional style that seems rooted in the established academy. In a 1987 anthology entitled A Sudden Radiance in which Crozier is featured, I notice "The Child Who Walks Backwards." In this poem, Crozier relates a story a neighbor tells about a child who has suspicious injuries but Crozier does not take the political leap Wallace would take into cause and effect, nor does Crozier extend the gossip or include the gossip in the form of dialogue (see " Intervals" in The Stubborn Particulars of Grace).

In Crozier's 1992 collection Inventing The Hawk, I see a touch of Wallace in the poem "Repetition For My Mother":

> I want my mother to live forever,
> I want her to continue breaking bread,
> hang the wash on the line, scrub
> the floors for the lawyers in town.
> I want her fingers red with cold
> or white with water... (Crozier, Inventing The Hawk, 77)

In "The Kingdom of the Fathers" by Wallace, we also see women at work:

> My grandmother sat
> in the stiff heat of afternoon

and stitched/... but the family focus,

Wallace tells us sorrowfully, that it was her grandfather who

> "... carried children out/from burning farmhouses
> or saved a crop in a hard summer
> the same grandfather who put ..."
> stains on his kitchen wall/ marks his rage
> unsatisfactory pots of tea whole plates of meat
> thrown over the heads of wife and family. (Wallace,
> Marrying into the Family, 30)

Wallace insists on commenting about the inequality in life and she focuses on the artifacts and the use of the language that is part of that life.

It is a different kind of grandmother that we see in Crozier's "The Older Sister; Grandmother's Bedroom" from her 1999 collection, When The Living Won't Let Go:

> ... The last day we saw her
> I pincurled her hair. It took no time at all
> to twist each strand, cotton fluff without the seed.
> Her scalp pink as baby mice beneath my fingers
> frightened me, and the smell that rose
> from her old women's lap
> like something she's forgotten
> to throw out. (Crozier, Where The Loving Won't Let Go)

Crozier approaches the narrative style and focus of Wallace, but we see a different grandmother in Wallace's "Grandma Wager's Double Bind," one that is a victim of the patriarchy, but one who is strong nonetheless.

> ... my grandmother
> use to say
> she had nothing to show
> for her years of teaching
> because she gave all her salary
> to her father..."
> (and later in the same poem)
>
> ... There's a photo of my grandmother at 25...
> her famous skill with horses

her grace as a dancer distills here
in what could be
the cover for a novel
where despite her father's objectives
and a young man's poverty
the heroine marries
the one she loves

Not far from the truth
given my grandfather
who began their marriage spending
all the wedding money on an opal ring
which she wore all her life
though year after year
he wanted to pawn it...
scorned her for begging
credit from the grocer and
taking in mending... (Wallace,
Marrying Into The Family, 27)

In the early 1990's some critics believed that Canadian poetry was in crisis, and that the crisis began in the '70s. Judith Fitzgerald, in an article printed in both The Toronto Star and The Canadian Author said that "poetry in the late 20th century has ended up in the cultural morgue" (Bookman in West Coast Line, Winter 1990, 154). Cary Fagan quickly corrected Fitzgerald and her following, as he believes that poetry in Canada has just become more specialized, and therefore, has found many small audiences. He said that there is the poetry of feminism and the poetry of anti-colonialism and the like. He did note that women are still sifted out. He also suggested that Canada needed a poetry that was "spacious enough to embrace us (Canadians) all," and in so doing, he invoked the notion of transcendent humanity (Fagan in Canadian Poetry, Spring/Summer, 1992, 7).

It is difficult to discuss all of this without discussing the politics of publishing in Canada. Is there a good old boy's network in Canada? You bet. If we look at the major

anthologies, we might believe that the national canon of Canadian poetry has changed very little since 1970. Any move in the direction of change is taken very slowly and is forced mostly by the increasing pressure of feminism in the universities. Geddes and Bruce seem willing to add women to their collections, but they are usually the older female poets like Margaret Avison, Margaret Lawrence, and Dorothy Livesay who were already acknowledged as canonical in the '70s. I have discussed this issue with Gary Geddes over the telephone, and he says he argues for younger women poets, but that he has had to fight at the "business level of the presses."

The difficult economic situation that Canadian presses often found themselves in is partly the problem, as are the demographics of Canada. It seems as if the regional presses kept to themselves early on and that there were regional followings. There was fierce competition by region. People in Canada talk about the "poetry wars" (the McGill Group vs. The Maple Leaf, for example). But it seems, as Margaret Atwood put it in her introduction to The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English, 'regional' has changed from a bad word to a good word as it relates to Canadian poetry. The early regional emphasis has helped us to recognize that good poets show a tendency to live in places other than Toronto (Atwood, xxviii). We must not forget also that there have been, until just recently, only two underlying ideologies in modern Canadian poetry. One is the aesthetic/humanist that believes that the writing of poetry reveals and celebrates human creativity and the spiritual dimensions of a common humanity (Smith, Woodcock, and Frye in Atwood xxxviii) and the second is nationalist ideology in which it is not merely a shared humanity that joins Canadian writers, but a common humanity as Canadians. Also, the nationalists are critical of the aesthetics for being apolitical. But if

we look at the recent and current Canadian women poets, for the most part, do not wish to be categorized. They try to ignore or at least circumvent the material models for metaphor/image. When Dionne Brand writes, for example, she is writing to a much different audience than was Michele Lalonde. Canadians seem concerned with differences and not with identity or they seem to see differences within smaller structures. Perhaps this shift away from nationalism was one of the reasons Wallace and others moved toward the narrative form, perhaps because the narrative form is a better vehicle for looking at a specific place or scene and also results from the oral tradition. None, however, have moved as far in this direction as has Wallace. None have made those narrative forms decidedly *working class* and *female*.

When we look at the trends on the West Coast, there were: George Bowering, Frank Davey, and Daphane Marlatt (all had teacher Warren Tallman). In Ontario, there were the experimentalists: B.P. Nichol, Joe Rosenblatt, David McFadden, and Victor Coleman. Also, though not attached to any particular group, were: Gwen MacEwen, John Newlove, Patrick Lane, Bill Bissett, and Michael Ondaatje. All of this moved toward the adoption of personae or a lyric of sensibility. There was also Christopher Dewdney, condensed surrealism; Pier Giorgio di Cicco, inventiveness; Marilyn Bowering, biting lyricism; Roo Borson, understated figuring.

When we look at Canadian women's writing, Canadian poetry seems to be flourishing. The difficulties mentioned earlier might be solved by finding a way to get circulation going between regions of Canada, or to stop the segregation that is going on in these smaller compartments of the reading/writing population in Canada.

The boom that began showing itself in the '70s was a boom in poetry by women. Let me start with Sharon Thesen who is known for her soft tone that speaks of the moment, a tone that does not impose any authority and focuses on a moment. She looks at her work as improvisation and the sudden twists and turns she takes attest to that. I especially like her "Loose Woman Poem" because it seems to speak directly to me. In this poem, she writes: "...I'm fed up/ with the wages of sin/ put on some Mingus/ & hepcat around/ How come/ it's always a question of loss, being sick of self/ displaced & frantic, chopped out/ of the World of Discourse/ waylaid/ on the Bridge of Sighs..."

Also her poem "Women Like Me" shows the collision of time and of cultures. It is superb, yet accessible. Still it speaks, stops and starts more like modern lyric than narrative.

WOMEN LIKE ME

Women like me
who are nevertheless married
despite effeminate behaviour, PMS,
threatening to run away
with just an address book
a couple of recent snapshots,

some blue silk pajamas,
Rehearsing the initials
of old boyfriends on the loose
who want them back now,
two decades of house payments
behind them. They quit
smoking, or light up
guilty in fragrant cars
as they turn slow corners
or wait for children
to cross the road.

in the Japanese restaurant
she begins to confess

that sometimes they go
for more than a week without-
& a faint sexual odour
of kelp is on our hands
as we lean toward a mutual place
filed with deep-fried tentacles,
things floating in soup,
a bit of carrot here & there-

& our big empty shoes
parked like cabs full of secrets
outside the shadowy screen
of our talking, the turning
& returning sustenance.

(Thesen in Geddes, 20th Century
Poetics & Poetry, 737-8)

Lorna Crozier, whom I discussed earlier, intrigues me as well, and she too, is a force in Canadian Poetry. I like her for some of the reasons I like Thesen. Crozier also speaks directly to me, and I think this is what she wants to do most of all. I think she wants me to recognize myself in her work. I especially see myself in her poem "Fathers, Uncles, Old Friends Of The Family." This poem speaks to the things we try to hide from even ourselves. This poem exposes all of unwanted touching that happened to most of us long ago, the touching that still evokes the secrets and the shame that I/we held on tight to in childhood. This poem is like a whisper across a table between two women finally at ease with each other.

FATHERS, UNCLES, OLD FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY

Uncle Peter always told me
to wash my hands before breakfast
because I didn't know where they'd been
in the night what they'd touched

and his hands

lifted me from the paddling pool,
young seal, all wet and giggly,
his farmer's hands
soft in the towel,
my mother's
youngest brother

pulling aside

my swimsuit.

Then there's the father

of my friend

who did it to her
till she ran away from home.
On his seventieth birthday

she visits with the grandchild
he's never seen
and before she can pour their tea,
he reaches out,
grabs her breast,

then cries, says he can't help himself
and she cries too,
what's there to say to him now?

One is always
the best friend of the family.
He makes her a fishing rod
from a bamboo pole
and with hooks with bait,
rows her to the middle of the lake.
Shh, shh, I won't hurt you
Shhhh.
Years later
Your flesh crawling,
you try not to turn away
when someone you love lays a hand on you.
Where did he touch you?
Here and here,
those places no one ever named.

In "Mother and I, Walking," I see the communion of the generations of women moving toward some awareness and some protection together, so beautifully stated in the last stanza: "When I lower my eyes, I see/ our feet, mine between hers/ the tracks of one animal/ crossing the open/ strange and nocturnal/ moving towards home" (Crozier, in Geddes, 20th Century Poetics, 681).

Roo Borson seems so vast that I cannot think of her in any other landscape except Canada. She captures all that is Canada in her work. People are never separable from the land in her world. What I see in her poetry is a strong sense of image and not the flowing narrative that I see in others, particularly Wallace, but clips of narrative instead:

ABUNDANCE

The moon: hoof-print in ice.
Someone's shoes chewing an icy path.
The wasted intricacy of each snowflake.
A field without a man in it.
A rusted plow filling the snow.

In "Talk," Borson moves into a more flowing narrative.

The shops, the streets are full of old men.
who can't think of a thing to say anymore.
Sometimes, looking at a girl, it
almost occurs to them, but they can't make it out,
they go pawing toward it through the fog...
(Borson, in Geddes 20th Century Poetry, 690)

In Borson, as in Wallace, we see a resistance to poetic theory. In an interview with Peter O'Brien, Borson says, "Writing by theory is too much like painting by numbers." She does experiment with styles and rhythms in her work. In that same interview, she said "our rhythms are based on street corners, in poetry, and also on individual

temperament. We each have a cadence, or several related cadences" (Borson interview with Peter O'Brien in The Open Letter, 10).

Atwood calls Borson's poetry "minor key figuring" which is interesting because Borson often talks about the music, the rhythm and the arrhythmia in language. In an interview with Peter O'Brien, Borson talks about first having difficulty listening to jazz because she could only hear "a big mass of disorganized sound...she (I) began to hear individual instruments within the welter, and oh, the pleasure when all conflicting strains are (were) drawn together into melody again" (Borson, "So To Speak," 14).

What Borson captures is not just landscape, but the mood of place. She captures the diverse Canadian mood and landscape. The power of "A Sad Device," (1981) is a good example here.

A rat, his eyes like glycerin
like galleries of landscape painting
genitals like a small bell, he
siphons of smells....
The grey warehouse of gothic stars,
the gleaming artillery of water
the flowerbeds like Arabic scrolls
all of it.

I think my heart is a sad device
like can-openers...

Her other poems do veer across the Canadian landscape and the seasons as in "Waterfront" (1981), "Spring," (1984) "City Lights," (1989), and "Rubber Boots," (1989).

I wish to take a longer look at Phyllis Webb than I have the others. Webb illustrates the transition of woman poet from some kind of God centered worshiper- toward a self-

realization as a woman, and as a writer. Because her life was filled with emotional turmoil that she had to come to terms with or die (she did contemplate suicide), she learned to praise the totality of femaleness. Webb joined numerous religions and then shifted her allegiance to feminism, which served as a religion for her. She admits never having questioned the patriarchal order early on, but learned that men dominated Canadian Literature, and that to move forward she had to shed her privileged position in that patriarchal world. She did this with courage in the face of her critics. What she gives to the feminist movement is the vision of woman as a mystic seer. She views the landscape of patriarchy as one of an arid wasteland. She transforms the vision of woman. In her poem "Poet" she expresses her new vocation as a poet in Canada fighting against the male tradition:

> I have promised
> I have taken the veil
> I have made my obeisance
> I have walked on words of nails
>
> to knock on silences.
> I have taken the veil
> to my face
> mouth covered with symbol... (Webb, Naked Poems, 29)

In her first two volumes, Webb speaks to her marginalization as a poet, and doing so caused her a great deal of scorn from the critics. This seems odd to me, because when men write about alienation and despair, they are considered existential poets. When women do it, they are considered melodramatic and bitchy. Webb did it just the same, and I applaud her for it.

There is something in Webb that remakes the landscape. First, she descends and then she re-emerges into a new and more acceptable world. I see this particularly in " Sprouts

the Bitter Grain." Here, she says: "Sprouts the bitter grain in my heart/ green and fervent it grows as all/ this lush summer rises in heats about me..."

Webb also dislodges the male version of ecstasy with her own version in her poem "Marvell's Garden." She declines Marvell's invitation to his place of solitude because it would mean "leaving brothers, lovers. Christ/outside my walls/where they wept without/and I wither." She sees his garden as part of his attitude in that "he did care more for the form/of things then for the thing itself. (Webb, Naked Poems, 12) She also takes the ecological plunge that so many Canadians take; she shows the violence against the earth in this poem. If we look at her volume Naked Poems, we can also see how she focuses on the construction of a different, female voice. She talks about "long lines, clear and syllabic" and the "knotted bamboo" like veins linking female utterances. In that same collection, she expresses her hatred for the vertical metaphor and calls them crosses or the "raised gods" that symbolized man's ascendance. The fact that Webb moves into the haiku form intrigues me, too. Perhaps she was looking for a form in which to best express her new way of looking at the world and her own progression in that world. While Wallace clearly shared Webb's feminist views, Wallace's poetry expresses itself in a form closer to actual utterances.

I wish to move on to Mary di Michele. In her introduction to Anything is Possible she explains:

> This collection represents a new generation of women writers whose language is a kind of truth serum, asking pointed questions of the speaker, as well as the words themselves spoken, with deep feeling, but without sentimentality, these poets describe the world as they see it. Because they are women to whom the world of feeling has been abandoned by many men and because they are

> incisively intelligent, their work has a special integrity and a facility to illuminate some vital areas of experience, which have been ignored by our literature to date. (Di Michele, *Anything is Possible*, 5)

It is clear that di Michele is talking about more than poetic voice, but also about values. In her work, her commitment to describing the world as she sees it is very clear. She explores her family and herself in a form that is tough instead of flat and moody. She expresses her feelings directly. But even in these personal poems, we see her moving toward some of the bigger issues. In "Born In August," she goes from her own birthdate to Auschwitz and Hiroshima. She sees poetry as something that grows out of the personal into something beyond and more important. Unlike Wallace, she escapes or transcends to something beyond. I also feel a personal connection with di Michele because I am an Italian-American and she is an Italian-Canadian. Like di Michele, I was the silenced girl in a very patriarchal family. I was also the subject of the gaze that di Michelle expresses in "Beauty and Dread in 1959." When she writes "My body was changing/ in a human way/ but it felt grotesque/ I'd already been told/ by Freud and the boys/ what I didn't have."
(di Michelle, *Anything is Possible*, 7). Di Michelle was a friend of the late Bronwen Wallace, and Wallace studied her poetry. Wallace said of di Michele that " ...those two problematic terms 'confession' and 'integrity' meet in di Michele's work through her sense of 'connectedness' with other women." Wallace suggests that di Michele speaks not only to integrate herself into a community--one goal of the confessional mode--but because she already feels that she is integrated into a community (Letter from Wallace to di Michele dated September 26, 1984).

The fact that the narrative style has been a constant in Canadian poetry says much about the will of the Canadian poet. Allen Grossman says it is this way in Summa Lyrica: "There is no poem in the realm of autonomy as there is no story or narrative. Narrative is produced by, and repeats, the situation of the impeded wills, the will subject to law other than its own, subject to anatomic laws. Narrative is omnipresent poetry. Because all speaking is action which has a history." (Grossman, 49) What I am trying to make clear is that narrative is more than the anecdote. It has more to do with the social and psychological and the way in which words and the particular subject they illuminate come together as part of history. This is the history that Wallace wanted to make- a history that is her story of the working class.

The narrative kept on coming out of Canada despite the likes of William Carlos Williams and others who believed that fragmenting sharpened our sensory perception by divesting objects of their conventional meaning. The fact that Canadian poetry survived the modernist attacks is probably one of the most important observations I make about Canadian poetry in general, and Bronwen Wallace specifically.

In Dennis Lee's essay, "A Geography of Stories," in "Open Letter," No. 9, 1991, he puts it this way:

> This unofficial tradition of storytelling is something most men notice long enough to walk around, while women know it so intimately they might never describe it as a tradition. It's the common female practice of telling each other stories from their daily experience, continuously, as they occur. It amounts to "imagining" their own lives, outside official codes of meaning. Replaying them orally, scrutinizing them with a friend to find their inner emotional meaning. Such a personal narrative is never finished, of course, because there's always another installment to be lived and recounted.

> This is a very different model of storytelling from the high-art kind. When two women take up their shared narration--on the bus, over coffee, on the phone--they're already aware of the major plotlines. For one, it's the dumb colleague or boss, the new man in her life, the operation; for the other, the dying mother, the sick child, the restless husband. So at each session they just drive into updates, with no sign of a formal beginning. Nor are there many endings, since the story always breaks off--at the point the narrator has reached in her life today. Mostly the plots consist of vivid, unresolved middles.

He further suggests that this is a sort of folk art form and that Wallace was learning to 'play it,' and in so doing, was leading the way.

> Wallace was in the camp of many younger women writers, such as Roo Borson, Di Brandt, Susan Glickman, Claire Harris, Patricia Young, and Erin Mouré. These women, of course, emphasized social and political needs of women and that proved to have a beneficial effect for men, as they would no longer be imprisoned within the traditional male stereotypes.
> (Lee, Dennis. A Geography of Story, 14)

Although Mouré is sometimes a bit more ideological than the other females I mentioned above, I want to discuss her briefly before I move into more specifics about Wallace. I believe that Mouré was moving toward the way women speak, and more importantly, the way women listen, because you have to "listen" to Mouré carefully to understand her. She likes to break down logical connections. She expresses this all beautifully in her poem "Post-Modern Literature," as well as in "Public Health," which I must quote here:

> ...This man talks of
> the enterprise he finds
> in sickness, accidental caresses, the roughed-up
> wife, a cirrhosis
> He proclaims his courage, his love & how
> the government wants it, or gives back
> too little.
> The limbs of the woman mute with anesthetic.
> Pay me, he says. (Mouré in 20th Century Poetry, 709)

I would like to conclude this section with two poems, one written by Bronwen Wallace's best friend, Carolyn Smart, that Carolyn read to me at one of our meetings and another that Wallace wrote. I wish to share them because I believe both poems say a lot about what Canadian Poetry was and is. Carolyn Smart's poem speaks to the transcendent, meditative spirit, as well as the vastness of landscape that is Canadian, yet she brings the vastness home (The fact that Carolyn has accepted this male child and is in wonder about what she has done is also telling). Wallace loved and respected Carolyn Smart. They were the best of friends and shared this kind of wonder and fear about their sons. The poem places Smart clearly as creator, but only to the larger creator that is time and sky, a creator who is not always protective and good, but is creator nonetheless. The poem also hints at how Smart needs to separate herself from her son early on:

POEMS FOR NICHOLAS, MY SON

The yolk of the earth is what you wake to:
owl crying through the dark of the house
where we are only resting, now:
your father nestled in deep dreams,
his body shadowed and long beside mine,
carrying all the past in his silence.
Waiting for your cries I know the night
about me, ten long months of it: the calling
of a midnight train to Montreal, endless roll
of a freight's wheels at four, then the dull
winter light in the hour before you wake,
my head full of sleep but unable to leave
the feat of your death behind.

Still heavy with the feel of you
who they plucked from my cage
with a mouthful of mother inside.
Nightly I stagger close to hear your breaths,
watch your chest rise and fall away
as I lean back into safety. back to
your father's warm side, sleeping, apart.

On your tongue the drops of my milk
like a second skin. Your eyelids flicker
with the swell of your own darkness: rocking,
holding you close, under the shell of the sky.
(Smart, Interview, November 11, 1996)

This is a good poem to compare to Wallace's "My Son Is Learning To Invent":

MY SON IS LEARNING TO INVENT

My son is learning to invent
himself. Today he tells me of a time
I took him to a hospital and left him
alone there. He describes how he shook the steel
bars of his crib and cried as I left the room
without looking back.

(He was there. He had pneumonia
and I was alone. For a week,
I slept in a chair by his bed.
I only left once to buy him a book
when he was asleep.
The child in the next bed
had tubes in her throat and no-one
came to visit her at all.)

My son holds up his hands. If he could,
he would show me the desperate
welts the crib bars left and the black
square of my back cutting the light
from his eyes.

But I shake my head.
Stalemate...
My son is learning
(Wallace, Common Magic, 17)

While both poets accomplish a smooth narrative style, we hear both the son and the mother's version of an event in the Wallace poem (Early on the male version/story is different from the woman's version in Wallace's poem). Carolyn Smart stops the

narrative flow for an image. She constantly reminds us that we are reading poetry. Smart ends with the sky, that is she moves out, she transcends. Wallace sticks to the narrative, does not interrupt with an image until the end of each section with "square of my back cutting the light/ from his eyes." Wallace does not move up to sky but to her reaction, "But I shake my head/"

"Stalemate/"... My son is learning/.

In The Journal of Canadian Poetry, Carolyn Smart tells us that "If Birney, Purdy, Lee and Wallace all write meditative poems, they also do not. They may begin with the meditative structure, may even preserve it as a way of organizing their statements, but they also violate it--Purdy by subverting the logical expansion of the initial image; Lee by subjecting it to recursions of possibility that always leads back to the original image itself, to doubt that anything larger can be obtained; and Birney mostly by refusing to surrender the concrete." (Smart in Journal of Canadian Poetry, 2.) Wallace is a special case in this Canadian tradition or the way in which she breaks from it. While her poems do dramatize the mind moving outward from a core of silent stillness, the structure she uses points to the choice she makes, a narrative choice, and also points to the focus, the particulars despite the desire for something larger, something transcendent that might diminish where she is and what she must do.

Before I move more into Wallace's work I wish to mention three more of her contemporaries specifically because they seemed to be moving toward a more narrative style.

First is Gwendolyn MacEwen. When we look at The T.E. Lawrence Poems we see a more natural flow of language (more like speech), and interesting is the fact that

MacEwen ends many of the poems in this collection with a line about herself, her placement or condition. This is true in "Void," the last three lines of the poems reads: ...Where does the great dream end?/ With my right wrist recently broken,/ I write this sad, left-handed poem.// (MacEwen in Atwood, Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, 390.)

In Patrick's Lane's "Stigmata" (for Irving Layton), Lane starts with a narrative voice: What if there wasn't a metaphor/ and the bodies were only bodies/ bones pushed out in awkward fingers?/ Then later a more personal narrative: I bend beside a tidal pool and take a crab from the sea./ His small green like twists helpless in my hand/. Then like the MacEwen poem above his last line reads: I open my hand. The life leaps out. (Lane in Atwood, Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, 292-3.)

While the typography of Gary Geddes (b1940) poem "Transubstantiation" seems to disguise the narrative flow, the poem is narrative in nature however. The first "stanza" makes that obvious: "The pig stands squarely/ in the boarded stall, looking/ stupid and out of his element./ My rope is tied in a slip-knot/ around his thick neck.// Then the use of "speech" follows: My father asks/ if I am ready./." At the end of the poem the author moves to his view from his window: "I can see it from my window./ It has become meat.//" (Geddes in Atwood, Oxford Bank of Canadian Verse, 378-9.)

Mary di Michelle's poem "Hunger" is worth mentioning here as well. This poem, published in the 1984 collection entitled Anything is Possible flows very much like a Wallace poem but does not end like a Wallace poem. This poem is also significant with regard to the way in which di Michelle uses ordinary objects to move the poem along. The end of the poem, however, makes it clearly di Michelle in that it ends on a tragic, philosophical note. It is important to share the whole poem here.

HUNGER

For some the afternoon light is a mess
of leftover porridge,
a graying, clotted mass,
to be eaten again for dinner,
or the rye that stains the bottom
of an unwashed glass.
A room with a 1000 walls cramped.
A man can't take two steps
without running into a corner,
assaulted by tongues of peeling plaster,
dry chips and a fine white dust
shifting through the wool
any room makes of time and traffic.

A man loses his hand in the jungle
of the top drawer of his dresser.
He pulls out glossy pages
stiff with semen,
the legs of sex with
those glistening organs for sale
like fruit in a pint boxes
exposed through plastic net.
Disguised as a child, a 24 year old model
in Penthouse, December issue,
only partially clothed and provocative
poses in Buster Brown shoes and ankle socks.
Above her white pleaded skirt,
the nipples of her bare breasts
are red cinnamon hearts.

A man opens a magazine and enters
the steaming and ruthless
rainforest of his origins,
something dry and slithering
coils and squeezes out every other
thought.
He flips through the pages and grows
a third and murderous arm.
He did not kill the pianist,
like that character in the late night
horror movie on TV,
who murders a magician to borrow
his hands and a talent

to perform in concerts
for all those who are attentive
in white linens, pearls, and furs.

There's appetite and then there's hunger.
Bob Guccione didn't intend his magazine
for the man employed in a sweat shop
on Spadina. Even a work horse knows this
as he barters with his boss
for the remnants of light
through basement windows,
barred, as if life itself
were a prison sentence.

Daily the only weather
he experiences through footwear.
With shoes he imagines
returning to home filled
with bitching or laughter,
discovering his arms abundant with
the warmth and clean laundry smells
of a wife. Through her soft shirt he can feel
the three tiny hooks holding up her bra.
Bob Guccione designed his magazine for men
who are bored with this.

Sunday in freezing rain,
March with its stranglehold on light,
a sun somehow more intimate,
more chilling. A child, a girl,
a female person, lingering in the park,
rubber boots squeaking,
kicking in the ice
in soft spots with her heels.

lured by her pleaded skirt,
by the flash of light
on her shiny black boots,
by her soft brown eyes,
turned inward and brooding,
he approaches when Sibelius
is the only witness,
and the disinterested blinds
of rooming house windows.

He is a man with large hands
and dry, unblinking eyes.

Hypnotized by his stare,
unable to scramble for even an idea
of escape,
lips quivering in the nightmare,
she silently calls to her mother.

In no time at all
his eyelashes must flutter
break the spell
so that she can wake
up and stop
herself from being pulled along,
where?

Breathless in plastic wrap:

she is dressed for outdoors
in the pleated skirt
her mother gave her for Christmas,
and a brown sweater, whose bulky knit
camouflages her sex,
breasts a boy might have,
tender breasts,
pink and sweet as cinnamon hearts:

in a fridge, like a fetus folded
into that white space
where all dreams end
including this one
where she has been made to be
of man unborn.

(di Michele in Anything is Possible, 30-2.)

Her Work Gives Power To Our Voices

Of course, when we look at feminist literary theory, a formidable body of such theory has argued that female experience is systematically excluded from all forms of public

discourse.[12] It is also very clear that the power to speak (or to be heard) is linked to economic and political power. (Women also still are, for the most part, excluded from public discourse.)[13] Absent from much poetry by women is familiar speech rhythms (perhaps because this style might open them up to criticism and vulnerability) or when familiar speech styles are used they seem stiff. When women writers use substance of their daily lives to move their style along they in effect "release imprisoned strata into the daylight of language... Nineteenth century poetry legitimize children, the poor, and the insane; so the moment has come for what one anthology calls "ordinary women" (Miles, Sara et al. Ordinary Women, ii.). Wallace does just this and her use of story (often in the form of gossip) is one of the obvious forms she uses to do so. And of course the use of story and gossip in its material form mandates a narrative style. In keeping with the remarks in my introduction to this work, Wallace was expressing the needs and interests of the working class, particularly women, by expressing their reality in the naturally occurring linguistic modes and constructs. Her work then serves to sustain the ideology of the class and subclass.

In the Introduction to the Open Letter, written by Dorscht and Savoy, they put it this way: "Wallace's work impresses us because of its interrogation of representation, its critique of patriarchy ideology, its call for social change, and its insistence on the strength of women's voices (Dorscht and Savoy, Open Letter, 5).

In an August 26th issue of The Globe and Mail, Dennis Lee describes Wallace's

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[12] See Carolyn Burke, "Irigarary Through The Looking Glass," Feminist Studies, 7 no. 2 (Summer, 1981): 228-306, Mary Daly, Beyond God The Father (London: The Women's Press, 1986).

[13] The ways in which this is perpetuated are many. See Nancy Chodorouis, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, 1986

narrative style: "She wrote with human gusto, a large spirited feminism, and a deeply innovative approach to storytelling. Yet her craft doesn't point to itself; it's always there to reveal the ordinary, luminous lives she portrays ...Often the narrators perform virtuoso feats of jump cutting, which leaves anyone who overhears completely dizzy. And so the structured principles of this narrative are digression, interruption, free association, cross weaving, speculation, re-examination" (Lee, The Globe and Mail, August 26, 89,C8). I like to think of this "activity" in her work as the bubbling up of before the rupture. Lee also suggests that this "structural form" rooted in folk art took some nerve and was a deliberate attempt to do just that, to create a truly female narrative form. And Wallace's letter to Mouré confirms Lee's observation and interpretation (Lee, C8). That this was intentional is clear. In a letter to Erin Mouré dated March 12, 1986 Wallace writes:

> The given, of my life, the starting point of my poetry has always been the stories of women, the voices of women discussing the world. From as early as I can remember it was my grandmother, my mother, my aunts, my girl friends, my women friends, female teachers and mentors who spoke the world for me. My grandmother and my mother were incredibly powerful women, both of whom worked very hard, the former of whom saw to it that all four daughters got an education...and saw to it- through her work- that it was financially possible for me to go to university. They were both subject and object, powerful and powerless. And when they talked! They used gossip, confession, anecdote, jokes - but they used them to tell the experience of the world, to create a world in which female was the metaphor for the universal." (Wallace, Two Women Talking, 31)

And later in the same letter, Wallace says "in fact the essence of my narrative-style has come from these women's lives and the stories they told. What I try to do is to recreate their voices, their views of things, and their way of telling a story. When I do this I am 'facing the question of language.' I am looking at language politically" (Wallace, Two

Women Talking, 32). In an interview with Liam Lacey for The Globe and Mail, Wallace said that she composed the poems on a tape recorder before committing to print. (Lacey L. Globe and Mail, n.d.)

The use of informal story and gossip really moves Wallace's poetry along, and she did this deliberately so as not to distance herself from the experiences of her community, class, and gender. We get a sense here of both individual involvement and the collective responsibility. The personal and the public merge, so to speak. In this way Wallace helps the working class sustain its own ideology. In the poem "Bones," for example, Wallace takes a terrible life experience about which she is telling a friend, the friend is then able to use the life experience (from the story) in order to heal herself. That all of these things made their way into a poem is very noteworthy. We have not just a narrative, but a comment about the power of narrative as well. And the narrative functions as a way to hold a mirror to the lived reality of a class and a gender:

> Everywhere I went, my work experience
> drew me through confessions I couldn't
> stop,
> I couldn't stop talking about them
> so you had to listen
> but, being you, in that way that listening
> can be active, when the listener
> re-enters
> the country of her own damage
> from a new direction. (Wallace,
> The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 81)

Of course there is a large body of literature that examines the oral tradition. This body of literature would have us look at earlier cultures. For example the work of Pronsias MacCane reminds us that:

> ...Oral literature did not cease

> with the coming of writing; on the contrary, it continued as abundant as ever, independent of the written literature although not necessarily unaffected by it. In the nature of things, however, we can know it only in so far as it is reflected in the written texts.
>
> (MacCana, 145.)

We are blessed that Wallace, like the clerical authors of old, seemed equipped, somehow, by instinct, training, family and gender to hear the orally transmitted mythology and her story with both understanding and sophistication. Most importantly she reflected this oral literature, the stories particularly of women, in her texts.

Later, when I look at Wallace's gravitation toward country music, especially the work of Emmylou Harris, we can see another signal that there is a connection to the oral tradition. "Country blues singers are working within a tradition similar to that described by Milmar Parry and Albert B. Lord in their account of certain oral tradition." (Barnie, 39.)

Wallace clearly reflects the oral tradition in the written text of her poems. She does so often, and uses dialogue that is sometimes rather ordinary. In "Getting The Words For It," when the poet relates her mother's reaction to her daughter's first menstruation: " 'This is different,' my mother said/ 'you need your strength; you never know.'" (Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 17.) It is curious that Wallace uses italics to relate dialogue of the past. In some instances they are short narrative. "That Story You Told" is a clear example. Starting on line 5 in the first stanza Wallace shares the story two of her friends told her about a curious old woman:

> *...like a young girl*

whose been told how pretty she is you said
until that's all she thinks about. Only with her
it seemed as if she'd stopped
there somehow stuck in a moment
of being admired till it froze the body
to this awkward posture, these continual
nervous tics. The only gestures that she knew
became grotesque and laughable

(Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 25.)

Some of the other literary choices that Bronwen Wallace made are not so different from the writing of other feminist poets. Use of the surreal attempts to transcend in images of flight or daydreaming are evident (as we see in "The Cancer Poems"). The dominant motif about the urgency women feel about time or lack thereof is certainly present as well. What makes Wallace's work different is how she uses the particulars, the actual things, specific tasks, and objects of the working women's experiences in many of her poems, and particularly in poems that others might not interrupt with talk about the labor and the artifacts of the working class. Wallace also takes the time to give life to the objects that serve to give meaning to their lives. As I mentioned earlier in this work, she doesn't try to escape these objects, but instead gives meaning to them. In "Women Sitting" Wallace moves from the ordinary to the surreal and back to the ordinary. But even in the surreal mode she is moving ordinary things with her eyes:

...the woman in the comfortable dark of
her own living room
finds she can move things
with her eyes... (Wallace, Signs Of The Former Tenant, 52-53)

As the poem progresses, heavy chairs are displaced and lamps swirl. And just as the walls begin to open and the ceilings pulse, the woman returns to the reality of her children and all their demands. The dream (the transcendence) slips away from the woman and she is left with sunlight falling through the dirty windowpane. Interesting here is the fact

that the dream transcends, but not the woman. There is no ascendance out of this situation. The working class woman in this poem is, in reality, stuck.

In "Tuesday Morning":

> ...something
> in the kitchen shifts
> as if the light from the window
> had been split somewhere and the flat surfaces
> it touches peel away
> to where the adults in your childhood
> even your parents flicker
> like figures in an old movie
> ... the kitchen settles again
> you sit where you did a moment ago
> hearing the hum of the refrigerator...[14]

If we look also at her 1980 collection Marrying Into The Family, specifically the poem "Marriage" is telling as well. In the poem, we learn about a new wife who has moved into her mother-in-law's home. This new wife brings her mother's crystal, grandmother's china, and her aunt's quilt into this home. And clearly the things that these women share are what bind them together in the patriarchal system:

> ...but what the women own
> they carry with them
> and in their husband's homes
> perform this marriage
> of things touched and shared
> woman to woman
> back and forth across the country
> they save beyond blood lines
> the stubborn pattern
> of their own
> particular ceremonies. (Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 10)

[14] When I looked at the way in which other feminist poets transcended the work of house and home (and my look was an international look), I found that many of these poets project themselves into a remote time and place and away from the objects of the house, and away from women's work. The work of Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Rosario Castellanou, Joyce Mansour, and Anne Sexton are cases in point.

And like the things they hand down, the stories are also handed down. In "Connecting," a china fruit bowl connects us to a good story about a great-grandmother. And it is through the particular of this bowl that the story follows, and calls up the great-grandmother who dared to walk into a bar to fetch her husband, then..."the triumphant flashes of a (her) smile/ beside her husband's silence/ on the dark walk home." (Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 14)

To point to a dominant motif in literature by and about women, a motif that deals with the urgency women feel with regard to time, how torn women feel between what they wish to do and what they feel they must do, I turn to the poem Wallace most liked to read for an audience, "A Simple Poem For Virgina Woolf." This poem starts with the author's desire to write a poem for Woolf when images of women's work and the object and tools of that work distract her. The poem ends brilliantly with this last stanza:

> This started out as a simple poem
> for Virgina Woolf
> it wasn't going to mention history
> or choices or women's lives
> the complexities of women's friendships
> or the countless gritty details
> of an ordinary woman's life
> that never appear in poems at all
> yet even as I write these words
> those ordinary details intervene
> between the poem I meant to write
> of my children faces of friends
> of women I have never even seen
> glow on the blank pages
> and deeper than any silence
> press around me
> waiting their turn.

"Woman At The Next Table" from Common Magic is a long narrative poem that starts out with the poet listening in on a woman at the next table in a restaurant. This

woman is criticizing a man. The poem meanders between what the woman does and feels then to what the observer/poet has in common with her and to tableaus of the men these women might rightfully criticize. Right in the middle of this poem is a description of the mundane work that seems to connect one event to another and one woman to another:

> ...tomorrow
> when she'll be right back
> where she started, waiting on tables somewhere
> or cleaning someone's house,
> getting home late and ironing the kids' clothes
> while she watches TV... (Wallace, Common Magic, 42-43)

In "Intervals," Wallace attacks the conditions of our lives and the work we are forced to do when she says:

> And maybe it can't be helped.
> Maybe it's only what any job
> on this planet makes of us.
> The shoulders rounded over fifty years
> at a sewing machine or a desk, the lungs webbed
> with black dust, the cells of fetus
> altered by an eight hour shift at a computer terminal
> day after day. How we've made it seem normal...
> (Wallace, Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 64)

I would be remiss if I didn't spend some time discussing the social function and value of a few of the forms Wallace used, forms that seemed to move her style and craft. There are the naturally occurring forms and patterns that the talk of woman takes. I will start with gossip.

In Women's Talk: A Social History of Gossip in Working Class Neighborhoods, 1960-1980, Melanie Tebbutt reminds us that women's voices are hard to hear in history. Their so-called "loose tongues" and sharp talk were often criticized, but remain largely silent in the written record. Where women's voices are documented they tend to be patronized as a second class version of "real" language. Further, Tebbutt tells us that

"talk about other people- gossip- is a significant feature of human language, and that its observations about behavior performs an important integrative and socializing function" (Tebbutt, 1).

It is easy to see why gossip played a significant part in many communities like Wallace's hometown of Kingston, Ontario. Wallace's grandmother, mother, and aunts depended on the social network of their community (be it block, neighborhood, church, etc.). Because of patriarchal social structures, women of their generation and class had limited access to recreation and interaction with the world beyond the home and immediate community. In this sense, many supportive aspects of women's language (which have been observed in socio-linguistic studies) were apparent in the gossip of working class women reflecting in part, the reciprocity of this form, which was such an important aspect of life (Tebbutt, 3). Roberts' work also points to the well-understood role of gossip in a closed society and actually identifies it as a source of *matriarchal power,* a way to order and establish a system of values and norms, and a way of ensuring that accumulated knowledge and wisdom is not lost to succeeding generations. Furthermore, Roberts shows that talk about people helps to define group identity by "recycling fragments of the past and relating the present to earlier experience. It provides the reassurance of continuity"(Roberts in Tebbett, 6). It reminds us of the forms women used to have some power in their powerless station. It is an attempt at creating a story and an attempt at ascendance.

In using gossip in her poetry Wallace in a sense elevates the importance of this form of communication, validates it, and creates a schism in the traditions of the high art of doctrine called poetry. She also illuminates a class so that we can see the ancestral tie to

what commands, that their work both outside and inside the work place is significant as well.

Two of the most direct references to gossip and two of the most obvious indications that Wallace was aware of the function of gossip appear in her poems, "Places of Origin," "And All That Uneasy Spring." In "Places of Origin" Wallace is explaining why she stayed in Kingston, and in her meanderings, she enters into a discussion about geography, as well as the difference between how men and women know land and wealth:

> For most places, there are two kinds of geography
> and it's no different here.
> The men know land and weather,
> who owns it and for how long,
> what to prepare for when you can.
> Being men, they have access to maps
> and county records, almanacs.
> Their wives know it differently.
> Not just who married who
> but what it was like and why,
> how the kids turned out in the end.
> This may be gossip,
> but that doesn't make it unimportant.
> You can't have your daughters marrying men
> who beat their wives, raising children
> who will tear all over the countryside
> making fools of themselves.
> "What's bred in the bone," my grandmother said,
> "Comes out in the flesh." (Wallace, Common Magic, 12)

And in "All That Uneasy Spring," the gossip that neighborhood women share is ritualistic, as neighborhood women would leave their garden chores to gather over coffee:

> I leaving their mud-caked shoes
> on steps outside
> and all that uneasy spring
> our gossip came in whispers

But once they returned to their own singular lives and houses with husbands and children, it wasn't until late night turning toward sleep that they would:

> remember
> our morning conversations and sounds

of our voices coming back to us
suddenly precious even in the smallest details

Wallace also incorporates gossip into her poems as part of the natural flow of life, as a coping mechanism. In "Joseph MacLeod's Daffodills," well into the poem, after talk of gardening, wars, and photographs of freaks, she tells her friend

...look at us,
practically wizened with worry, hunched
over coffee cups, whispering of cancer and divorce
(The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 32)

In "Intervals, IV Short Story," her friend tells her about a fight she overhears between a husband and wife, talks about the bottles in the neighbors garbage and the dirty children on their porch. The storyteller inserts, "... maybe that's how those people want to live." This neighbor even relates the verbal abuses they hurl at each other (Wallace doesn't clean it up for the poem either).

So a four year old stands in the doorway
Yelling at his mother. "Cunt," he screams
"cunt face! nothin' but a funkin' cunt face!"
his words, like the life he's been given...
(The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 67.)

In a letter I received from Wallace's friend Joanne Page, she characterizes Wallace's work as "nods to other women writers, artists, other women thought to be ordinary; the over-coffee conversational tone; the solid ideas, philosophical questions, placed casually without bells and whistles." Wallace was careful not to overlook (a poem)... they begged to be read aloud so we could here women's voices in them" (Page, Letter to Gloria Nixon-John, October 31, 1996). In begging to be read aloud, these poems became a platform of sorts – a platform about the lived reality.

The Country of Bronwen Wallace and Emmylou Harris

In the introduction to Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality, Susan McClary tells us that: "Like any social discourse, music is meaningful precisely in as far as at least some people believe that it is an act in accordance with that belief. Meaning is not inherent in music, but neither is it in language. Both are activities that are kept afloat only because communities of people invest in them, agree collectively that their signs serve as valid currency." Furthermore she tells us that "Most members of a given social group succeed in internalizing the norms of the chosen music and are quite sophisticated in their ability to respond appropriately." (McClary, 21).

When Bronwen Wallace made clear her affection for country music, she was also making clear her affiliation with a particular social group, gender, and class. Because she was clearly "of the academy" and moving in literary circles, this was a telling move. R.W. Hodge says that country music signals the psychological and entertainment needs of a primarily "blue collar working class audience" (Hodge in Seeger and Reiser, 535). And further, Charles Gritzner adds: "It is this class of Americans which has given birth to the art form (country music), established its commercial popularity, and continues to derive the greatest satisfaction from its 'down to earth' mode of communication" (Gritzner, 857). As one author notes even further, "(the) mundane themes result from the fact that the modern world is sadly lacking in proletarian heroes" (Landy, 68). Clearly country music has often been cited as the folk music of the working class. It is a product of this class and a form of reality based communication. It is the literature of this class set to music, a kind of subversive way to get the word out about the lived reality of a class. It

does so because it provides a very revealing self portrait of the blue-collar working class, and the voice of that class is often female. What is even more significant to mention here is the fact that most country performers have lived the life of which they speak in their "country narratives." That is "most performers, it would appear, have 'paid their dues'. With but a few exceptions, the majority of traditional artists either write their own material, or adopt material authored by others within their relatively small, closely knit, professional community. (And) this appears to be an extremely important link in the folk chain; the message emanates from within the tradition itself" (Gritzner, 859). But it is even more than all this. The fact that country music has a female musical tradition is of great importance to our connection with Wallace and to the social political waves she was making:

> We find women's voices ringing loudly in our (country) folk culture. There was a female musical tradition in America long before the advent of entertainment industries. Women's activities as collectors of songs and as singers reflected their central family role as provider and mother. As music, work and leisure intermingled, women also had an important community role as bearers of tradition. And because women were so central as teachers, and keepers (of country music), a distinct female point of view was passed through the generations. (Bufwack and Oermann, x)

When Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline became extremely popular in the 1950's and 1960's, they opened a post World War II door. At this time, men were writing sagas and songs about their travels and women were writing about a "bigger" world too, a world of cheatin', alcohol, abuse and divorce (Oermann, Robert K., 315).

In the 1970's, most male country singers were still writing about mother in the home, rambling men, prison, hard work, disappointed love, and traditional religion. Similar to

what was happening in poetry in the 1960's and 1970's, there was an elitist attitude toward country music while there was also a push for the university to study country music.

It is clearly obvious that saga and narrative are both a part of the country music tradition from "The Wreck of the Old 97" (about a 1903 train wreck) to the 1960's, "The Ballad of Francis Gary Powers," and "The Ballad of Patsy Hearst" (both written by Red River Dave McEmery).

When Bob Dylan walked onto the stage with an electric guitar he was believed to have betrayed the folk community. He did not reaffirm what his followers expected. He, therefore, made a political statement (McClary, 27). He created a rupture of sorts. His followers responded politically. He was believed to have made a mistake, believed to have breached the expectations of some social groups, the groups in which the established community placed him. Wallace did the same with her style and focus in poetry as well, and while she was writing in a "high art form," her public affection for country music was a symbol of that "breach." She was also pointing to the nature of her decisions with regard to the style her poetry took.

When Bronwen Wallace wrote the poems in her collection Keep that Candle Burning Bright & Other Poems and dedicated this collection to Emmylou Harris, her move was intentionally political. She said that she hoped the poems conveyed the voice of the ordinary, as did the songs of Harris with their dropping g's; she also hoped the poems caught the pedal-steel sounds of that music and the spaces between longing and what is. Erin Claire Mouré tells us that she believes that the poems in this, Wallace's last collection, are "resisting the urge to compress further into 'the word'. Resisting at the

same time the urge to expand the connection between individuals into 'characters'... a melody linked here to the most ordinary" (Mouré 40). This resistance, of course, is an expression of Wallace's insistence on the reality base of her writing, a need to keep the political function clear/pure in that poetry. It denies the spin the capitalist or patriarchs would put on it.

And "just as women have repeatedly refused to split their lives, to separate hand and heart, private and public, feeling and action in their struggles, so it is with their songs...a political song doesn't have to be explicitly militant to be a song of resistance" (Henderson, Kathy and Frankie Armstrong, 12). Emmylou Harris knows that. Wallace knew that as well. That Wallace saw the need to affiliate with this musical form is significant to say the least.

In her "Songbirds And Hurtin' Songs," Wallace says:

> Of course, when I'm listening to Emmylou Harris
> I'm listening to a whole lot of other people at the
> same time, like Gram Parsons, Rodney Crowell,
> Kitty Wells, Chuck Berry, Merle Haggard,
> Dolly Parton, and at least two busloads of
> church choirs. All that proves is that nobody
> sings alone, though it's equally true that nobody,
> not even Emmylou Harris, will ever sing
> "Sweet Dream of You" the way Patsy Cline
> did and that Jesse Winchester's rendition of
> "Songbird" can't hold a candle to Emmylou's.
> This is what I mean when I say that all lives
> weave that way, in and out, between all that we
> share and all that we don't, manners and mystery,
> History and the moment I get called on, as you do,
> to be nobody but me. (Wallace, Keep That Candle Burning Bright, 17)

If we look at music history/theory (classical or otherwise) more closely, there are obvious differences between what are considered to be masculine and feminine narratives

in most musical traditions. Not just in style but in placement as well. Of course the masculine narratives and characters are portrayed as active and are principle to the work. The feminine is contained, just as an easy obstacle.[15] This is not the case in country music. While this realm is thought to be geographically limited, the voice, the protagonist and "the Diva" are clearly female. Its history is female as well. This is strange when one considers that the country south of the Mason Dixon is, on the surface, slower to embrace feminism, slower to replace the skirt with trousers (Did they have to sing longer and harder to be heard? Did they have to be more plaintive?). The rupture here comes from within, within one woman's story, one woman's family, one woman's town and it is found where you least expect it. Wallace would say:

> I say there's nothing like country
> for a hurtin' song, something to do with steel strings,
> I think, and the way a country voice isn't afraid to let
> you hear the places where it breaks...[16]
> (Wallace, Keep That Candle Burning Bright, 17)

Like Wallace's poetry, country music is direct, honest, and close to home. In a 1996 interview that I had with Carolyn Smart, she told me that Wallace was concerned that the debate about narrative/narrative structure might move those who create literature toward an established status quo and that for the most part this would erase women's voices again and particularly the voices of working women (Smart, August 1996). Perhaps Wallace turned to country music for an example of where the working class reality was kept in view. I think Wallace knew that country music would not forsake this narrative

[15] See Teresa DeLauretis, "Desire in Narrative", or James Webster's "Sonata Farm," New Grave 17, 498 for a discussion more in depth and specific to music.

[16] Much like the breaks that occur in the capitalistic patriarchal structure.

bent. The fact that Wallace specifically picked Harris for the thread in her last collection of poetry is also significant as there are obvious parallels not just between these two artists but between their lives as well.

I am listening to Harris as I write this and it occurs to me that her songs move along (like the two-step, a slow lope, a train pulling in or out, a hammer on a nail). Also there is no disguise in Harris. She is clearly country, not "new country," not ashamed of the denasal voice. And she surrounded herself by honky-tonk rifts and slides. It occurs to me that perhaps I should try to sing a Wallace poem especially those in "Marrying Into the Family," and it is at this moment that the little clefts or spaces in the Wallace poems are like a deep breath that Harris might take or the hesitation in the two step before moving forward again. I'm looking at Wallace's poem "Great Aunt":

> Everyone says she's remarkable
> for 93 her mind so clear...
> and again
> Uncle Bill can remember her
> doing up tomatoes more jars
> than he could count as a boy...
> (Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 13)

At a dinner party in Kingston that I gave for many of Wallace's female friends, these friends discussed Wallace's love for folk music, but particularly country music. In fact, Wallace was very supportive of many of the local folk and country artists.

Wallace breaks open the ordinariness of the song, "White Shoes," by Harris and tells us that it is, in fact, a religious parable, that the ordinary is spiritual, and that it can take us somewhere. That is, the ordinary transforms us in extraordinary ways:

> I know I'll feel better, when I slide down into
> the leather sings Emmylou when she sings "White Shoes,"
> a song in which she wakes up from a dream and

> sees them in a magazine and goes out to get them
> and wears them out on the town that night and
> meets The Guy. A song that I now understand to
> be a religious parable, just like "Wheels" or any
> of those other songs she sings about truckers,
> heading home. (Wallace, Keep The Candle Burning Bright, 14)

And these "religious parables" sung by Harris or written by Wallace are about the working class or the artifacts of this class, about a tow-truck driver, billboards, truck stops, T-shirts, bourbon, or good corn whiskey. Or they are about the laundromat and folding underwear, and Jesus can matter-of-factly appear rolling a cigarette "in the old familiar dirt and sky" (Wallace, Keep The Candle Burning Bright, 34).

There is hopefulness in both Wallace and Harris and a pride about what the working class can do, as well as a sorrow about what the women in particular have to do to survive, and how it is that they are still held down by a structure that places man and machine above them. The folk wisdom of grandmother's grey sampler that appears in Wallace's "The Kingdom of the Father" would be at home an Emmylou Harris song. The old photographs, the bad times Grandma and Grandpa Wagar had in 1927, the mending, the recipes, the brown hay, all possibilities grist for Harris or for Wallace. There is most clearly, however, more to the connection then meets the ear. Just like Wallace was asking the question, "What is poetry?" with her work in the early 80's, music historians and popular culture theorists were asking, "What is country music?" This "new look" at country music history and its roots beyond Nashville, beyond contemporary hit records, and beyond male superstars (was an) "... attempt to place music in its social context and to explain why songs happen to do what they do. And it's (it was) an attempt to preserve

and appreciate the music of the disenfranchised, the overlooked, and the ignored. Most important, this look is a document of women's lives... the backbone and lifeblood of America" (Bufwack and Oermann, ix). When we take the time to look at the story of women in country music, we have a look at the lives of the majority of American women. More specifically, we can look to country music of this time as a music that gives us information and story about the working-class and a rich, often matriarchal tradition. "It stands as one of the only documents of working-class women's thoughts created by working class women for working-class women..."

> It describes poverty, hardship, economic exploitation, sexual subjugation, and limited opportunity. Sometimes it is self-defeating and reactionary, painful and despairing. But it also contains outspoken protest and joyful rebellion, shouts of exaltation and bugle calls of freedom. There is human victory as well as, sadness here, victory as well as, heartache. The history of country music reveals a rich vein of positive images, self-assertive lyrics, and strong female performers (and) There was a female tradition in America long before the advent of the entertainment industry. (Bufwack and Oermann, xi)

The connection here is obvious, but exciting enough to mention. The working of patriarchy evident in this music long before the advent of entertainment as an *industry* is well documented. That this form of music is dependent on the stories in the ordinary style of discourse is important to our connection between Wallace and Harris or Wallace and country music. What is also clear in the work of Bufwack and Oermann, as well as country scholar Archie Green, and discographer Will Ray Heathrose, is that country music was the *voice of alienation and loss of community in industrial mass society.* Richard Peterson tells us: "Among the recurrent elements of country songs is the strong

sense of the narrative. For this reason, country music has often been called a storytellers' medium" (Peterson, 2).

What is also true is that the chord structures are also kept relatively simple in country music. George Hay of the Grand Ole Opry used to tell his musicians before they came in: "Keep it close to the ground tonight boys" (Hay, George D., 12). Also, the penchant for stories that is in country music is not as prevalent in other forms of contemporary music. In jazz, the story is de-emphasized. Bluegrass, which evolved out of country, has more complex musical structures. Rock tends to focus more on a particular moment. Rap is a commentary that really features the artist rather than the story (Peterson, 2-3).

What is clear, particularly if we look at 1980 for example, is that men were still writing hell-raising redneck songs and women were exploring human relationships. What is also clear is that country music was and still is addressed to an adult working-class audience from both rural and urban backgrounds (Peterson, 8). Clearly Peterson believes that country music speaks mostly for the working-class but *does so in terms which do little to bolster the appeal of Marxist ideology because it is a part of the continuing cultural heritage of field hand and factory worker- both linked to the past.* This, it is clear, was the appeal of country music to Harris and to Bronwen Wallace. "In Bellyfull of Bluebird Wine," Wallace places Emmylou into a setting:

> the table is covered with arborite... smeared with cigarette ashes,
> chip crumbs, squashy bits of pickled egg. The band is
> playing "The Last Cheater's Waltz," someone's done
> you wrong, the bottle's let you down and there's
> nothing but Sunday between you and the rest of the
> week... (Wallace, Keep The Candle Burning Bright & Other Poems, 29)

Interesting too, is that when we look at postwar music by men, women are in part blamed for most of their problems. However, women answered this loud and clear. One of those women... is, Emmylou Harris. Harris, of course, was following the likes of Linda Hargrove and Dolly Parton when she sang "Making Believe" (1977), and women like Hargrove, Parton, and Harris moved country into the mainstream. Music that was hillbilly before, suddenly became "folk" and then "country-rock." Like Wallace's poems, these women moved country into a bigger arena.

But why did Wallace focus in on Emmylou Harris in her last collection Keep That Candle Burning Bright & Other Poems? Why not some other country diva? This was a nagging question until I found biographical information about Harris.

Harris was not a coal miner's daughter or a country waif. She was a middle-class music enthusiast who found purpose and meaning in country music. Born in 1947 to a middle-class family in Birmingham, Alabama, she moved frequently because her father was in the Marine Corps. Like Wallace, she left college in her case to pursue her music. She went from small club to small club in New York City, but the music industry took little notice of her. In an article published in Nashville Magazine Harris says about her life:

> My life, I suppose, has been a feminist one. I've dealt with problems that the movement dealt with...Like in my early days I was a working single mother and found that two girls, each with a child, couldn't share a house and each get food stamps at the same address. There needed to be and still needs to be a lot of consciousness raising (Harris in McLaurin and Peterson, 9).

The review Harris received in 1975 for her rendition of the classic "If I Could Only Win Your Love" calls this single a splash of mountain spring water on the Pan-Cake-

makeup face of Music City" ("Back to Country" in Bufwack and Oermann). That the maternal roots of country music were of concern to Harris is clear. As she said: "I don't see why on the Country Music Association awards show we can't see people like Kitty Wells performing...I think country music should take pride in its roots." Her return to her roots was met with the same skepticism that Wallace faced with her poetry. Harris said she trusted this form that is rooted in the history of country because "I trust the people; I really do... I believe there will always be an audience for pure country music. Uh, even if there isn't, I'll still be singing it." And after she won awards in the early 1980's, she brought back some of the oldies of both men and women like Buck Owens, George Jones, and Patsy Cline. When they expected her to go pop she gave the critics" Blue Kentucky Girl" and this, too, sold a million! (Harris in Bufwak and Oermann, 426-7). The following Harris quote is so much like something Wallace would say that I must share it. When asked why she didn't go pop she said: "You can probably find all I like in even the smallest town. To me, there's just so much... in country music" (Harris in Bufwak and Oermann, 427).

In Wallace's 1991 collection (published posthumously), she talks of Gram Parson's death (Parson, by the way, fought to get Harris notoriety), she talks of Harris voice blooming from his death. Most telling in this poem is Wallace's description of how hearing Harris sing affected her:

> Hearing her sing like that, my chest tightens, thick
> with all those voices I cannot name and never
> acknowledge. How I take whole lives in an afternoon,
> sitting around listening, drinking coffee, watching the
> light drift from pine tree to the garden, touching each
> thing it rests on freely, as we, sometimes are able to touch.
> How it was wanting brought me to these poems. (Wallace,

Keep That Candle Burning Burning Bright, 42-43)

And furthermore, let me share "Rhythm and Genes" from Keep That Candle Burning Bright:

> We all hear- though we may not be conscious of - the beat that thrums through every human conversation. Rhythmic synchrony it's called, our sync sense, which like the other five, conducts us through the worlds we make of each others stops and starts, digression, turns and leaps of thought, hyperbole, lies, warnings, lover's cries- we move to music... you could say that the music we use to heal ourselves or bury ourselves, send someone off to war or marriage is actually composed of tears or adrenaline or those gushy swooshes of the heart that push us into each other's arms. (Wallace, Keep The Candle Burning Bright, 41-2)

It was fitting, I think, that Harris' song "Boulder to Birmingham" from her album "Pieces of the Sky" concluded the memorial service for Bronwen Wallace. In this most somber, most traditional and formal of occasions, Wallace's last intent was for her mourners to hear the twang of guitars and the long vowels of Harris joined by voices of a country choir singing a story about love and despair:

> I don't want to hear a love song
> I got on this airplane just to fly
> And I know there's nothing for me
> but all that you can show me
> is a prairie and a sky.
> And I don't want to hear a sad story
> full of heartbreak and desire
> last time I felt like this
> I was in the wilderness and
> the canyon was on fire.
> And I stood on the mountain
> in a meadow watched a bird
> watched a bird... (Harris, Pieces of the Sky, cut 4)

A Different Voice

Discourse studies and numerous studies in the field of social psychology point to the differences between the languages used by men as compared to the language used by women. The research of Carol Gilligan suggests that: "The failure to see the different reality and to hear their (women's) voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation that class, race, and gender does not matter. " And further that "in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility..." (Gilligan, 173).

Of course, hearing and more particularly listening to women was important to Bronwen Wallace, and she was mindful of the form that their words took. She knew that women shared a different voice, and these voices made their way into her poems. At the dinner party that I hosted for many of Bronwen's friends, I heard over and over again how Wallace enjoyed hearing the stories of her friends. In fact, Wallace made it a habit to invite acquaintances over to lunch or dinner just to share stories. This was clear to the women whose lives she touched. Perhaps she did this so that women might have an audience toward whom they might air the details of the specific inadequacies that shape their lives in a patriarchal society. Perhaps she was perpetuating and encouraging the speaking of her story.

"Here I was just someone she worked with and I was invited over to lunch, and Bron sat across the table, leaned toward me, elbows on the table, and asked, 'How is your life going, I hear you are moving.' Then she listened to the whole dull story, commiserated, then added her own" (McCrimmon, Janet. Kingston, June 1995).

It is no surprise then that in the 1991 Fall/Winter edition of Canadian Poetry, Bronwen Wallace was named among the Canadian women poets who were launching an implicit attack on mainstream traditional poetry and re-embracing that which has been designated female forms of talk. She is cited as using the "inability topos," (a term I do not like), to do so. Wallace, like Libby Scheier (in her poem "A Poem About Rape" in di Michele Anything is Possible, 129) and Atwood (in "True Stories"), cuts short or diverts to the inability topos[17] (I like to think of this as rupturing the topos). In "Connecting," just as Wallace is about to escape from the family heirloom she is describing to move into what we expect will be myth or mysticism. She, instead, does this:

> That's about it
> Not enough for a poem really
> ...but both of them (family story and bowl) just kind of
> sit there refuse to relinquish
> the appropriate metaphor. (Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 14)

Metaphor is clearly not the aim here, the particulars that subvert traditional assumptions about poetry, language, and *gende*r clearly are (York, 17-24). Also, if we look at Wallace's poem "Connecting," it is important to notice that once the poet (and the fruit bowl) cannot relinquish the "appropriate metaphor," the poem goes on immediately to describe one generation of women taking care of another:

> And my mother can't give me
> much else only remembers
> sitting with her in the evenings
> her parents out somewhere
> and the old woman's hands too shaky
> to light a lamp so my mother
> would stick kindling in the stove

17 The inability topos is simply woman's inability to operate within male discourses. That is, there is no topos common to both males/females. Therefore, the notion of poetry granting access to universals is lost. In the poems

wave it in the room
like a torch
her grandmother never saying a word... (Wallace, Marrying Into The Family, 15)

I hear Gilligan's theory validated in the direction that the above poem takes because I clearly hear an ethic of care in the poem and a tie between relationship and responsibility.

The Poem "Particulars," something happens, as well as other things. "Particulars" begins at grandmother's table; the poet's father is stumbling over the blessing. It is suggested that he is stumbling over these words because

he was really asking for
...a blessing, on food they'd earned
casting metal, teaching other people's kids
or planting themselves in the fields...

Here it seems that the "inability topos" is one of class, and the formal blessing viewed as inappropriate words for those gathered.

In "Two Women Talking: Correspondence 1985-87," Wallace tells Erin Mouré that, on the question of language she is, "*bespoken by, determined by her society, by the ideology of a white, bourgeois, western, capitalist, patriarchal world view.*" (42) And also, that her experience has helped her to see that her language (which comes from these experiences) is not monolithic. She says that it is "impossible, perhaps to decipher all the small, private languages with which I am learning to speak what my culture denies. And in that impossibility lies the voice, which is mine alone, from which, on a good day, the poems come" (Wallace, Two Women Talking, 50-1).

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mentioned above, the inability topos is demonstrated within the text.

The Others (Contemporary Canadian 'Feminist' Writers)

Let's see where Wallace fits into some of the thinking and writings of other feminist authors (declared or reluctant with regard to the label), and in doing so, we will also see how Wallace breaks from the Marxist tradition and position on art and how the focus is on the patriarchal structure instead.

"Writing and isms are two different things. Those who pledge their first loyalty to isms often hate and fear artists... because art is uncontrollable... From the point of view of those who want a neatly ordered universe, writers are messy and undependable. They often see life as complex and mysterious, with messiness and loose ends..." (Atwood in Scheier, Sheard & Wachtel, 21). That Wallace would agree for the most part is obvious in her comments particularly to Mouré.

It is clear that their styles are very different, but Wallace admired Di Brandt because Brandt asks the question "how do you write yourself out of silence" and answered herself with:

> say to yourself each time lips vagina tongue
> lips do not exist catch the rising sob in
> your throat where it starts deep under your
> belly the tips of your breasts your secret
> flowing your fierce wanting & knowing say...(Brandt,
> "Questions I Asked My Mother")

In Barbara Godard's work on feminist reading of texts, she tells us "reality is a fiction produced (coded) by its cultural representations. (And) Currently, *patriarchal relations set the terms* for the forms of subjectivity available in reader-text relations, for women do not represent, they are is represented." Furthermore, the value of feminist criticism is that it "explores the gendered reader's construction of textual order, an order which has

hitherto been predominately patriarchal." Godard also believes that we must look at the historical situation formed by discourses of gender, class, and race, and that we must see the overlap of the personal and the political. This certainly aligns Godard with Wallace, and most certainly makes Wallace's text one over which we might have a meaningful discourse (Godard in Scheier, Sheard & Wachel. 114-117).

Daphane Marlatt warns us that what we need is "a recognition of real differences of life experience, privilege and accessibility to the center because without it, 'i' simply co-opt 'others' experiences in attempting to make 'my/we' cover their 'i'. (That is) we cross over many borderlines, we inhabit many borderlands." Looking at differences to "collaborate rather than assimilate is essential if we are going to learn not to dominate one another" (Marlatt in Scheier, Sheard & Wachel, 192-3).

What Erin Mouré says is of particular importance when we think about Wallace's work because Mouré's words call attention to the political (law)- that place where civil order, binary thinking, and hierarchical thinking all lie. She says that poetry precedes this- our voices have to "leak out" before it becomes law. However, the poem transgresses, but contains the law too. For this reason, Mouré insists it is vital to look at how the language of poetry privileges your voice, especially if the dominant order excludes you. Because if unwatched, it resolves itself in a binary way (Mouré in Scheier, Sheard & Wachtel, 202-3). Wallace corresponded with Mouré from 1985 to 1987, and this correspondence is available in the Living Archives of The Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets in a publication called Two Women Talking. These letters are most interesting and worth careful readings again and again. On many points, Wallace agrees with Mouré, but just as often she disagrees. There is also an on-going tension in

the correspondence. At one point in an on-going dialogue about Barbara Godard's work, Wallace says: "What really angers and hurts me (and this may be what I identify as dogma) is the feeling I've had both from your letters and our conversation, that my questioning of deconstructionism, means lack of openness. Anglo-Saxon mistrust of theory, lack of solidarity, etc. You say this is an open discussion but the parameters of it remain within deconstructionist theory." She warns Mouré that "what gets blurred (in much feminist theory), is that 'male' and 'patriarchal' get used as synonyms both pejorative." And clearly again and again Wallace says that her writing does not come from some compartment in deconstruction theory. And that posing it as a theory makes it just another compartment for many. She says most emphatically that:

> I write the way I do because I am lower-middle class
> white, heterosexual, because my father worked
> in a factory and my mother taught retarded kids,
> because my grandmother was without a doubt
> the coldest most repressed bitch I ever met-
> and one of the strangest most fearless women
> I have ever seen...everything I have learned
> of value I have learned from or through women
> and because I believe that gentleness is in the
> hands, regardless of gender. (Wallace, Two Women Talking, 36)

That Mouré answers Wallace with a history of the language amuses me. That Wallace answers Mouré diatribe with a personal narrative makes me laugh. I must include Wallace's response here. It isn't the text really that causes my laughter, but the "switch-a-roo" that Wallace maneuvers. (In all honesty, I can see where they agree as much as where they disagree. Interesting that it is how to talk about these issues that becomes problematic for two such open-minded articulate women.) Here is Wallace's response to the lecture that Mouré gives her

Part I: Wake up and Smell The Coffee

My mug of coffee in the morning, along with the toast and jam or peanut butter, maybe bacon and eggs, is what I consider "a proper breakfast." A normal breakfast. Yet, of course, this perception is structured for me by the society in which I live, by dozens of movies, commercials, advertisement, jokes, etc. Most of the experiences I associate with coffee-are also "spoken" for me by my society as surely as the words I use to describe its taste as "mellow" "rich" "dark" etc. As surely as the articles in the morning paper are structured, are seen, are spoken, from a definite, though often unacknowledged, ideology masking as 'objectivity,' rationalized as 'real life.'

To the extent that I accept this cup of coffee without questioning its appearance on my table any further, I am bespoken by, determined by my society, by the ideology of a white, bourgeois, western, capitalist, patriarchal world view...

But.

I am also the daughter of a man who grew up on a farm, obsessed all his life with where food comes from, a health nut long before there were such things, man who kept a map at the dinner table and traced for me the routes the foods we ate traveled to our dinner table. (The few he allowed that didn't grow nearby, that is.)

I am, as well, the young student who, over a cup of coffee, was introduced to the writings of Karl Marx by a long-haired, thick-glassed young woman who was to be my best friend for many years. It would lead to many events, not the least of which would be the opportunity, several years later, to read Capital in Detroit with an ex-McCarthy victim, autoworker, commie. An experience that opened the world for me, even though, now, I recognize quite clearly that Marxism, as a methodology, has it limitations. "...Material relations between persons and social relations between things."

Which is exactly, of course, what the society I live in does not want me to see in my mug of coffee.

But I have had experience which allows me to see it and to that extent the language through which my experience of coffee is spoken is not monolithic.

The extent to which my experience remains my own is the extent to which I have found a chink in the wall of determinism. And through that chink I can see her. The woman who picked the coffee beans. Or who cleaned and sorted them. Prostituted herself in order that her kids could eat because her land had been taken away in order to grow them. Watched her husband, her sons,

her daughters 'disappear' because they tried to oppose this.

Impossible, perhaps, to decipher all the small, private languages with which I am learning to speak what my culture denies. And "In that impossibility- which is an absolute one- lies our freedom from determinism" (Berger). Lies the voice, which is mine alone, from which, on a good day, the true poems come.

April 8, 1986
Kingston

Dear Erin,

Enclosed is my response to your last letter.
It is a departure, a lateral leap, from my former approach
to the questions we have been discussing about language
and writing. I have trouble talking about theory, I realized.
I don't do it very well. What's more I don't want to talk about it.
I want to apply how I see the world, my rather hodge-podge
theories of language, to actual readings.
Hence the enclosed.
They include: coffee, a fairy tale, an old woodcut, and a poem by
Sharon Olds. I am also sending, at the end, a poem of my own.
I would be interested in watching you read something in return.
I am really looking forward to seeing you at the AGM.
Much talk and good fun I hope.

Much Love,

Bron

It is clear that Wallace doesn't really object to deconstruction. I venture to say that the very nature of her writing "deconstructs," questions the more lyrical forms by intruding upon them. She is well aware of the systems in language that limit us and that prevent any real change in our desire to advance, and she did some altering in the form of poetry because it better fit her needs- system and her story. She just didn't want to get into the name-dropping debate. That language is androcentric and has silenced women is clear to her because everything else has silenced women. She does, in other words, see that

patriarchy extends to language, and she chose to "deconstruct" in her poetry.

A word about Wallace and her contemporaries are in order. In the spring of 1984 Mary di Michele edited a collection of the works of eleven Canadian women poets entitled Anything is Possible. This collection is significant as it contains the poetry of ten women who Wallace considered her contemporaries. It is also significant because the women featured in this collection express attitudes about the role and plight of women that were shared by Wallace. While their styles differ from Wallace for the most part, that is while they do not accomplish the same stylistic feats that I feel Wallace has, they are worth mentioning with some detail. Mary di Michele had published an earlier collection with Wallace in 1980 and it was with Wallace's help that di Michele decided which poems to include in Anything is Possible. The way in which di Michele describes the collection follows. She says:

> This collection represents a new generation of women writers whose language is a kind of truth serum, asking pointed questions of the speaker as well as the words themselves spoken. With deep feeling, but without sentimentality, these poems describe the world as they see it. Because they are women to whom the world of feeling has been abandoned by many men and because they are incisively intelligent, their work has a special integrity and a facility to illuminate some vital areas of experience which Have been ignored by our literature to date.
>
> (di Michele, Anything is Possible, 5.)

Later in the introduction di Michele also says: "We are too wise, too sophisticated to look for heroes among us, but the heroic is a vital energy or impulse; a kind of collective courage and generosity is needed to transform one world (di Michele, Anything is Possible, 6.). The poets (other than di Michele and Wallace) who are included in the

anthology are: Roo Borson, Marilyn Bowering, Jan Conn, Lorna Crozier, Susan Glickman, Erin Mouré, Libby Scheier, Carolyn Smart, and Rosemary Sullivan. Some are mentioned earlier in this text but some are not.

Borson's poems in this collection put simply, focus on the difference between what a man and a woman seem to want, the difference between what they seem to feel, but more importantly what each comes to expect. In Borson's poems girls learn to imagine the luxury of invisibility but they also how to give up their own desires and self worth for the needs of men. The most extreme example occurs in "It's Never Enough." In this poem Borson talks about bikers who will "...push a woman into a corner where she can't/ say no. Even though she knows/ exactly what they're doing to her, and knows/ they do it just because/ they're careless, deliberate. / She's learned to need that violence, that searching,/ even if it's secondhand..." In this poem and others Borson tells us that women are forced to comply even to violence but, that they hear a different music but, that they have learned to be quiet about "the music" in their heads.

In Bowering's "Lucia Martyr," an old woman is the symbol for timeless, material comfort. Here Bowering tells us that woman is time, nature and religion, which existed before the organized religions of man.

> At midnight,
> when the constant pilgrims
> sleep,
> the old woman comes
> and lifts the lid
> of my coffin.
>
> Her kisses is sunken
> and warm,
> not like my father's
> which recalls

speechless death.

She loosens the shutters,
and I hear water touch,
stone by stone,
along the succeeding shore.
her tears are minutes.
My father cannot know:
he had no midwife.

She has wept with me
since the earliest nights.
when Christ was not
my comforter.
(Bowering in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 42.)

In Jan Conn's " Instructions to A Daughter," Conn tells the daughter to "hold nothing in the hands/ that cannot be fused to itself:/... She also says: "burn the heart like a wick in oil. / Pluck it out: hold it so/ the four winds can breathe on it;/ cover it with ashes from a wood fire, / disguise it as a fist, wrap it/ in a palm leaf. //" After doing this, Conn tells her daughter, she will be ready to love. In other words Conn insists, he daughter must know herself and the natural world, find understanding and solace before she can love. There is no mention of men in this breathtaking poem. (Conn in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 59.)

I have mentioned Crozier elsewhere in this work but would like to mention her poem "Pavlova" here because it suggests the internal struggle of the famous dancer, who, on her death bed wonders: "Should I have had children instead? / Sons and daughters/ to show pictures to. /... (Crozier in Anything is Possible, 67.) In other words, Pavlova wonders if she should have done these traditional things expected by women.

Mary di Michele's poem "Hunger," mentioned elsewhere, was included in this collection and clearly deals with men's view about women as their views relate to one specific pornographic magazine for men. In the poem a 24 year old model is disguised as a child and is therefore more provocative reminds us how early women become prey. (di Michele in Anything is Possible, 80-1.)

Susan Glickman's poem "The Sadness of Mothers" speaks to the way in which mothers live for the joy of others, what women in motherhood give up. I wish to include the whole poem here:

THE SADNESS OF MOTHERS

The greatest poverty of all is this
to live for the joy
of others; to never know, or always too late
what could possibly gladden oneself. This
is the sadness of mothers
and the continuing crime
of the world. And every child
perpetrates it
and every mother
is a willing victim
and it goes on and on, the pelican
suckling its young on its own blood,
the nightingale's chest against the thorn
singing the sweet song of martyrdom
to the greedy ear of the world. Oh,
the sadness of mothers haunts me, it fills my days
with lonely eyes, they are everywhere: pushing carriages
down alleys, back and forth in the hot sun,
sitting at bus-stops with too many packages
and not enough hands, never enough hands to wipe
all the tears of their own
never enough hands enough hearts enough blossoms
to lay to rest the sadness of everyone but especially
the sadness of mothers. Mothers weeping for the lost dreams
of children and the indignities of men,
mothers weeping for the girls they were one summer
before the world closed in. The sadness of mothers

is everywhere and a great crime and no one
will pay for it and no one can.

(Glickman in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 98.)

Erin Mouré poem "State of Rescue" while stylistically different from Wallace addresses the abuse Wallace addresses in her "Intervals" poem. Like Wallaces' "Free Speech" the secondary victim is a child. Mouré describes the scene: "The woman is holding the baby into the cold air/ beside two policemen at 4am/... As the woman moves out, she rescues/ herself from fear, rescues the child whose eyes are caught/ in the coat of terror, of furniture breaking in the night/... to the voice of his father/ who is not in heaven, whose name is not clear/ whose will is his child/... (Mouré in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 108.)

Libby Scheier's poems speak to sexual abuse. In the rather bizarre poem called "Dwarfs and War" even a small man commits rape. In "Some Days" the poet discusses her ambivalence about the male sex organ. Then in "Reversals" the joy the poet once felt about sex now seems to suffocate her. She compares her feeling about sex to other forms of power and oppression.

REVERSALS

this love begins to shroud me
your body over mine
is a large mushroom
I am dark and damp and cold
the freedom you once brought me
feels now like
closing walls
the warmth your body gave me
clings and suffocates me now
it is hard to know why
this has happened
why these truths of some years

have turned upside down
but the French kings
were guillotined, the Czar
was murdered, and
capitalism is halfway down
the other side of the mountain
a small thing
like our true love
can also ripen and die

(Scheier in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 126.)

Carloyn Smart was one of Bronwen Wallace's best friends and her poetry reflects the concerns these two friends shared. The bond that women have for each other is poignantly shared in "Outside Grand Forks, North Dakota." What is also interesting is how Smart uses the road trip mentioned as a vehicle for looking into the past just as Wallace might have done. Smart also includes some dialogue but in a very limited way.

OUTSIDE GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA

We smoke cigarettes and the time passes slowly.
As I am driving, you are doing the talking
and in between, we listen to the radio.
Franco is dead the radio says
and outside, it is thirty below zero,
and the beaten wheat is lying in the fields.
There are no trees here. The road is long and straight
and the cigarettes seem to last forever.

We are lonely for each other
a we drive along, we are lonely
or even ourselves.
We reach the building we are aiming for,
A low white building lying in the shade
of the cold afternoon
We sit in the crowded waiting room,
the smell of dust on the magazines, the plastic plants.
From time to time the nurse passes by,
an opaque jar in her hands.

Somewhere a girl is screaming,
but no one is the room is listening,
and I cannot talk to you
because it is you who will be screaming
and I'm just here to listen.

You've gone in – I cannot bear to remember
the look we give each other.
before you turn the short corner and are gone.

It doesn't take long,
and suddenly I see what it is
that the nurse is carrying,
and she passes me by with this thing in her hands
and she flushes it down the toilet.
I can hear them saying *bring me a bowl,*
she's going to be sick
but you weren't – you were always too proud.
There's your pale face coming towards me,
my arms around your fine body.

Oh my sweet friend
we are lonely for even our childhoods
as we drive towards Canada,
the wind chilling right to our bones.

(Smart in di Michele Anything is Possible, 137.)

Smarts' poem "Grace is significant too." In this poem a nanny named Grace, seems to have little value to those who employed her to watch their child, yet she was somehow considered less worthy of love because she had no children of her own.

GRACE

Grace was the woman paid to love me.
A small soft woman in grey and white
who died with one arm in her sensible coat
in 1963.
She had a close relationship with God
who loved her dearly, as I never did.

Stealing her heart with selfishness,
I gulped her life with my budding mouth.
You don't know how I suffer she'd say
as I'd laugh at her and pull away,
her skin so delicate
my breath would leave a scar.
She was a kind of refugee for love,
distanced by her sexlessness
From any family of her own,
I was her loved one, her darling,
the small baby placed in her happy arms
a week after my birth
and held there one way or another
until 1963
when a train took me away
to a school on the coast
and a life of my own, a history.
She died at Christmas,
on her way to the Carol Service.
She was so loved by God
that he took her with Him, they said,
to eat Christmas dinner in His arms.
But she always love *me* best, I said.
Grace was the woman paid to love me.

(Smart in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 142.)

In Rosemary Sullivan's "The Sad Story of Dona Beatriz De La Cueva," the natives Beatriz appointed herself the first governess in the Americas' after her husband, Don Pedro, died. The male Gods were not happy about this. "Agua coughed and sent his mud rolling into the city/ In the black coffin palace the unlucky one/ flew to the chapel with her daughter and eleven maidservants/... That Dona Beatriz didn't rule or survive long was not a surprise to Sullivan. She ends her poem with "that women should know God did not mean the city to be ruled by females//. That women could know greatness was the limit to their potential for power. In other words they could not rule. (Sullivan in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 153.)

The last poem in Anything is Possible is Wallace's "A Simple Poem For Virginia Woolf" (which is featured earlier in my work). In a sense this poem serves as a way for the editor of the collection to say look, we have all of these concerns, and we have all of these things to say yet here we are trying to squeeze our creative and our political work between the menial tasks that have been relegated to us by the male dominated society. Wallace also expresses her interest in the lives of women who do manage to get recognized. She ends the collection by reminding us that our condition and our labor has become vital to, central to the work.

> ...as I write these words
> those ordinary details intervene
> between the poem I meant to write
> and this one where the delicate faces
> of my children faces of friends
> of women I have never even seen
> glow on the blank pages
> and deeper than any silence
> press around me
> waiting their turn
>
> (Wallace in di Michele, Anything is Possible, 183.)

Maps, Roads, and The Light that Leads Us Back

A word is in order about the use of maps in Wallace's work. Like Atwood, Wallace uses maps to lead us back into the past. In fact, in "Tuesday Morning," Wallace relates maps metaphorically to the past when she says:

> Not this kitchen
> but the one that maps
> behind your eyes
> its perspective of table-legs
> and bottom drawers
> the hem of your mother's skirt

a world of voices
resonant with memory
and arms that carved
infallible questions
in the air above you...

(Wallace, Signs of The Former Tenant, 27.)

Several other references to maps can be found in her work. See "Intervals," and "Life-Lines" for two more examples.

Road trips are yet another way Wallace takes us back even while she is moving forward. This is clear in "Anniversary," in memoriam for her friend Pat Logan. Here poet is going forward in her car:

The road turns off
just where it always does and rising
comes out to the second corner
where the graveyard is.
your grave. You. Behind Us...

(Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 54.)

In the poem, "In My Mother's Favourite Story," Wallace tells a story about a time when, as a child, Bronwen was lost,

writes:

... I remember nothing of the incident
that the tiny child in the blue smocked dress
and soft white shoes
seems as remote from me
as any fairy tale
that the treacherous streets of her journey
remain lost somewhere behind
the unexperience face of this I return to
on visits driving my car toward
my parent's home the red bloom
of sunset caught for a moment in my windshield

then disappearing as I turn a corner...

(Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 13.)

Wallace's references to light are numerous. What makes these references unique are the way in which they lead us to the past or the imagined past (as we might see the past in the future.)

In "Red Light, Green Light," we are also moved into this way of seeing time and experience:

> Something about playing outdoors
> in the long summer evenings after supper
> the particular quality of the light then
> how it seemed to round
> and soften even the most heat-glazed afternoons
> so that the memory of those games
> - the grace of our bodies emerging from the awkward
> tangle of an ordinary growing up
> into the fluid movement of our play-
> has the glow of a painting
> by Christopher Pratt an adult's dream
> of lost time...
>
> (Wallace, Sign of the Former Tenant, 7.)

That this way of seeing light often occurs in a kitchen scene is telling as well. In "Freeze Frame" we find a couple sitting at a kitchen table, light falling in precise angles/ over plates and sugar bowl/" and while "something that holds them/ for a moment- the exact/ moment when you enter- suspended/... (Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 45.)

In "Women Sitting the poems ends with ...a women/ sitting in that kind of silence/ to spill itself like smoke/ around her//. (Wallace, Signs of the Former Tenant, 53.) The smoke seems to relegate the woman to the past, and she has become a part of the invisible past of all women as well.

INFLUENCES

The Land

Before my interest in Canadian poetry became keen, I thought of Canadian poetry, at least the poetry that made its way into the American classroom, as verse that dealt primarily with nature (the prairie, the north) and nationalism (filled with the colloquial and anecdotal voice). I was admittedly unaware of the Canadian debate going on over whether or not literature should be regional or cosmopolitan, but I was aware that many Canadian poets of my generation were asserting themselves against the powerful voices out of Montreal and Toronto. But for the most part, as an undergraduate student at Wayne State University in Detroit in the 60s, and a graduate student in the 70s, I had a feeling that Canadian literature was literature about a kind of civilized frontier.[18]

As I have discussed earlier in this work, I have since learned that deeply rooted in the Canadian poetic tradition is: 1) the mourning of homes left and things lost, and 2) a better account of the dismal surroundings both social and geographic. Like many poets before her, and after her, Bronwen Wallace paid particular attention to the natural landscape of her ancestors, as well as immediate landscape inclusive of her own garden. The social, political, and aesthetic function of this landscape is clear and will be discussed at the end of this section.

Bronwen Wallace lived in Kingston, Ontario Canada all but the eight years of her life she spent in Windsor with her partner Ron Baxter and her son Jeremy Baxter (born in 1975).

[18] And still today, a litter better informed perhaps, I see much Canadian Literature as a way of mapping the territory, a territory of physical as well as, psychological and social boundaries.

Bronwen Wallace was born in Kingston in 1945 to Ferdinand Wallace and Margaret (Wager) Wallace, granddaughter of James Wallace and Edna (Reynolds) Wallace. Bronwen's father's family lived on the same Kingston farm for nearly two hundred years, and the rolling hills, tranquil inland lakes and small farm towns make their way into her writing as does the patriarchal work into which women are born, live, and are still bound. Often times, Wallace's landscape is most certainly Al Purdy's country in "The Country of Belleville":

> where old farms drift vaguely among the trees
> a pile of moss covered stones
> gathered for some ghost purpose
> had lost meaning under the meaningless sky...
> (Purdy, in Mandel, 8)

Bronwen liked to tell a story about the farmland in the Kingston area. She told this story at readings and during several radio interviews. The story goes: It seems when the first settlers (her Scottish ancestors among them) came over to Canada they were under the impression, because of their experience with the land in Scotland, that if an area was heavily wooded, it was also fertile. (In Canada however trees actually grow on rock.) So many of these early settlers picked a mountain basically, a rocky mountain for their farms. Being Scots and Presbyterians, however, they stayed (Gzowski, Radio interview with Bronwen Wallace, March 14, 1986). Not surprising, some of this story has made its way into Wallace's poem, "In The Midst Of It" from Common Magic: "...farmlands draw their nourishment from an ancient mountain range/ and houses rise, insistent/ as the rock and almost as indifferent." One point being, that Bronwen Wallace is a product of stubborn people who survive on stubborn land. Another point being that there is a tradition and a structure to contend with what precedes the more artificial structures and

traditions of patriarchy and capitalism albeit influenced and manipulated by these artificial structures.

Wallace grew up around rural and working class people and farmers. And she made clear that she personally could not separate the landscape from the people and the way people talk: "I couldn't separate the landscape of southern Ontario which appears mundane, straight and ordinary, though I think it's quite surreal and magical" (Williamson, Janice. Interview with Bronwen Wallace, February 22, 1989).[19]

We can see a glimpse of the Kingston of Wallace's girlhood and the landscape of rural life in "The Town Where I Grew Up," and can see the dimensions of that territory imposed by last names, religion, land ownership, and land use – all of the structures we use to segregate and stratify ourselves. We also see the common territory of nature in this poem:

> I used to believe this.
> Use to imagine an invisible
> border, like the Maginot Line
> we learned
> about and the bare-boned fields beyond
> where shacks grew.
> ...Planted for good luck
> by the early settlers, the lilacs continued
> long after the farms fail and houses
> weather away.
> flags of a different kind.
> (Wallace, Common Magic, 6,7)

The settlement of Kingston and its surrounding territory prompted Wallace particularly to look at its range of implications (about such things as the patriarchal history). There is a glimpse of Wallace trying to attach and detach herself form Kingston

[19] This reference to the surreal and magical distances Wallace from certain canapés of Marxist ideology. We can't place her square in the beliefs of Marx or of Fekete or Lukacs.

in "Lonely for the Country" because even in the land there are reminders of our powerlessness.

> You wish you could tell yourself
> that this is all too sentimental.
> You want to agree with the person
> who said, "There's no salvation
> in geography."
> But you can't. (Wallace, Common Magic, 8)

"Into the Midst Of It" which I referred briefly to earlier, is the poem that Wallace liked to read as a tribute to Purdy and their shared landscape. Therefore I include it in its entirety here:

> Into The Midst of It
>
> You'll take a map, of course, and keep it
> open in front of you on the dashboard,
> though it won't help. Oh, it'll give mileages,
> boundary lines, names, that sort of thing,
> but there are places yet
> where names are powerless
> and what you are entering
> is like the silence words get lost in
> after they've been spoken.
>
> It's the same with the highways.
> The terse, comforting numbers
> and the signs that anyone can read.
> They won't be any good to you now.
> And it's not that kind of confidence
> you're after anyway.
>
> What you're looking for are the narrower,
> unpaved roads that have become
> the country they travel over, dreamlike
> as the spare farms you catch
> in the corner of your eye,
> only to see them
> when you turn your head. The curves
> that happen without warning
> like a change of heart,

as if, after all these journeys,

the road were still feeling
its way through.

A man comes up on your right-blue shirt
patched from the sky-solid and
unsurprised. He doesn't turn his head
at your passing and by the time your eyes move
to the rear-view mirror, the road has changed.
But it's then you begin to notice
other people: women hanging clothes from grey
porches, a clutter of children on the steps.
Like the man, they do not move
as you go by and you try to imagine
how you must look to them: metallic glimmer
on the bright rim of their sky,
disturbing the dust
that settles behind you, slowly,
through the day's heat,
while on your mind's eye, their faces
form and change with the rippling patterns
sun and cloud make on the fields,
like the figures that swim below your thoughts
in the hour between dream and waking.

It makes you think of people you love,
how their faces look when they don't know you're
watching them
so that what you see there
forces you to recognize
how useless your love is, how little
all your hopes, your good intentions
can ever do for them.

Only now, this doesn't hurt any more,
becomes a part of your love, in a way,
just as the dry-weather drone of the cicada
belongs to the heat, to the dust that sifts
like ash over the shiny leaves,
this country you're traveling through,
where the farmlands draw their nourishment
from an ancient mountain range,
and houses arise, insistent
as the rock and almost as indifferent,

making all your questions
about why people came here,
what they liked about it,
why they stayed
as meaningless as questions you might ask
of the trees or the earth itself.
You, who have lived your whole life believing
if you make enough plans
you wouldn't need to be afraid,
driving through a countryside
only the road seems to care about,
to rediscover every time it enters
with that kind of love that's partly tenderness
and partly a sort of confidence
you can't put words around.
Like the look
the people at home will give you
when you get there: nonchalant and almost too deep
for you to see, as they turn back
to whatever held them
before you came. (Wallace, Common Magic, 20)

There is, of course, more going on here than a look at landscape and a coming to terms against the middle-class mystique. We know historically that acquiring an actual, livable home was and still is a struggle for working class women. That for many who have homes, making them safe clean places is an additional struggle. This appreciation for the landscape may be a way of creating a sense of ownership. In "The Town Where I Grew Up" from Common Magic, Wallace sees a landscape that despite fences and despite the Protestant ethic, a democracy of the land prevails which is symbolized by the lilacs that flourish everywhere and survive everyone.

The Town Where I Grew Up

In the town where I grew up,
most of the people had ancestors
who were UKLs and they still
like things, tidy, kept their yards
fenced and their noses clean.

After that, the things that mattered
most were last names
and being Protestant.

North of town, the road
disintegrated into potholes and the dust
that weathered the grey shacks
where the grimy laundry flapping
in the trees was the flag
of another country.

Up there
people shooed their chickens
off the table when the pastor came.

Things happened.

Crops withered overnight, ramshackle
barns hid two-headed cattle and young
girls bore their father's children.

What went on up there
was a story in a foreign language.

Pieces of it drifted into town,
like scraps of paper, catching
on the neat white fences
in the shaded streets.

Them and us.

I used to believe this.
Used to imagine an invisible
border, like the Maginot Line
we learned about in school,
between the teeming farms
that boarded our town
and the bare-boned fields beyond
where the shacks grew.

Now I think it's merely
a matter of emphasis,
like the *Globe & Mail*
and the *National Equirer*
They're both the same, really;

they both line words
like bars across the pages,
making you want to squeeze
between them into the white
where you think the truth is.

Each spring the countryside
fills up with lilacs. Every house
in town, every farm, every shack,
has a clump of white or purple
at the doorstep. And on the road north,
bushes occur in the fields, alone,
not a house in sight for miles.
You might think they'd grown wild,
but you'd be wrong. Planted for good luck
by the early settlers, the lilacs continue
long after the farms fail and houses
weather away.

Flags of a different kind.

They indicate the subterranean counties
plotted underneath the sleekest pastures,
and sanest red-bricked houses.
And rooted in the littered dark,
as dreams are, they bloom
each May as if they were
the only living things on earth.

And in the "Distance From Harrowsmith To Tamworth" Wallace takes us on a tour of the family landscape that she, like so many others, returns to, when she tells us that "...there's still not/ room enough/ to separate love from geography."

In the last stanza of this poem Wallace makes another leap for me when she names, once again, the undiscriminating wild flowers and weeds and relates these plants to the stories that she claims are all she has to call a country because there is no territory of her experience. There is no real ownership here or elsewhere:

In the ditches purple Loosestrife, Horseweed,
Fleabane, St. John's Wort, names I learned only this year

to make the flowers more familiar. Like these stories,
all I have to call a country.
Rich as blood, placenta for my future
already seeded in the field or that woman's face
in the last town, the curve of road there
as it turns toward the next, Tamworth people say
for this one, needing something
to make it sound like a choice,
whatever holds them here,
whatever they come to love enough.
(Wallace, Common Magic, 16)

It seems to Wallace that it is only the ordinary language that we use to share our common experiences face to face that helps us connect to the universal in our geography:

All over the city
you move in you own seasons
through the seasons of others: old women, faces clawed by weather
you can't feel
...It's always the chance word, unthinking
gesture that unlocks the face before you.
Reveals the intricate countries
deep within the eyes. The hidden
lives, like sudden miracles
That breathe there.
(Wallace, B.,"Common Magic" in Common Magic, 25)

It is, however, clear to me that before she came to terms with that landscape, Wallace literally tried to escape it. One of the ways Wallace tried to escape the landscape was by moving first to Vancouver, then to Windsor. Of course, politics was one reason she felt she had to move; she felt she needed to get to a more radical/liberal urban hub. But before that move, entering a Ph.D. program in Kingston at Queens was also an attempt to escape. Then, whether conscious or not, her subsequent dropping out of the Ph.D. program was a move back toward the land (and class) and what it represented for her.

In "Arguments With Myself," Wallace describes a scene in a bookstore (this occurred after she dropped out of the University):

> It's 1970, maybe 1971. I am standing in a bookstore with a copy of The Cariboo Horses in my hand. I have just read "The Country North of Belleville" and "Percy Lawson" and a few others. I am crying like an idiot right there in the store getting the book all wet so that I have to buy it. Maudlin, of course. Sentimental as hell. I can hear my old English profs sniffing as they read this.
>
> But I don't really give a shit. At that moment, I arrived, in my own country, with land that I recognized under my feet, and the people I knew around me, and a language I could get my tongue around filling my mouth...So that's what I owe to Purdy in a literary sense. His work gave me permission to write about the people I knew, and the landscape saw...
>
> (Wallace, Argument With the World, 165)[20]

Even more interesting to note is that in several of her poems, when Wallace writes about the landscape she also writes about the working class. That is, there seems to be an influence rooted in the tradition but also a breaking away from it or a rupture from within. The poem "Mexican Sunset" is a good example,

Mexican Sunsets

> Somewhere in Mexico, a volcano erupts,
> spewing dust that drifts northward
> disturbing the atmosphere of Southern Ontario
> so that all this autumn, small, grey,
> English-speaking towns are startled
> by inordinate sunsets: shameless
> fuchsias, brazen corals flaunt
> their outlandish origins in a country
> where anything can happen.
>
> Nothing's the same any more.
> Here in Kingston, even limestone forgets itself
> and the staid Protestant church towers
> succumb to gothic fantasies, window ablaze

[20] In a rather abrupt letter I received from Al Purdy dated August 22, 1997 from Amelisburg, Ontario, Purdy says he scarcely knew Wallace having met her only three times, but he says, "I know about Wallace being influenced by my (own) writing- (but) I hardly knew her work" (Wallace would say "Surprise, Surprise").

with dragon's fire and the pink screams
of captured damsels; while the bare, old
branches of trees are elegant filigrees,
burnt black and delicate
by so much colour.

It's November, but no-one believes it.
Winter's a crass rumour like the threat
of a layoff or a government's economic policy.
And the people inhabiting the lavender streets
have the stature of fabled creatures

from that land we all believe in, somewhere
between imagination and nostalgia.

You could call it
a state of grace, although
it's only for a season, like the love
we risk for each other
on the first fine day in March,
or during the perfect anarchy
of a heavy snowfall
when everyone's late for work
and doesn't give a damn.
A kind of conspiracy
we let ourselves get caught in,
half-bewildered, half-encouraged
by the sky's extravagance, this
fragile crust of earth
pulsing beneath us. (Wallace, Common Magic, 23)

The poem speaks for itself but briefly Wallace is telling us that her "small, grey English speaking" town is transformed by something happening far away. And even though it is nearly winter, no one believes it: "...Winter's a crass rumour like the threat/ of a layoff or a governments economic policy..." She tells us further that the land we believe in is really somewhere between what we imagine and what we long for in the past.

In "Charlie's Yard" from Common Magic we find the things of a workingman's life integrated into the landscape:

...bits of machinery, scraps he liked
the shape and colours of. They rust in the green
of his garden, plough discs and wagon wheels.

Wallace says further in the same poem that:

...No one intended
to leave it there...but
Now, it's rooted there as surely
as the tree behind it... (Wallace, Common Magic, 28)

Clearly, the artifacts of the working class life are as rooted as are the natural things growing there. Her own patch of land, Bronwen's garden (pictured later), was important to her. Gardening was how she became and remained close to the land. This was evident in her poetry, evident also in the view of her garden from her bedroom window.

In a letter I received from Joanne Page dated June 26, 1995, Joanne shares a poem that she wrote for Wallace during the time she sat with Wallace's body just minutes after Wallace's death.

Promise

I draw a corner of her garden in pencil
working in the details of poplar leaves
carefully around a single white chair
riotous orange of nasturtium
blue of cornflower green onion stalks
rendered in mutable grey

I make shadows where plants
rise from the soil
dark places where growth and death
intermingle then reverse one day
for no reason I can understand
the garden that outlived the gardener
by several months
leaves precisely increasing as mathematics
seeds failing without notice or schedule

into earthly corners
where my pencil cannot go.
(Page, In Letter to Gloria Nixon-John, 6/26/95)

I believe that the geography of home and the pull of the land come together in a woman's garden. The flower garden is that piece of land that is her own. No wonder gardening seems like such a luxury for many women of my generation. For my own mother, gardening during the years she also worked in a factory was just more work. But as she got older and retired, gardening became her pleasure and finally a hobby. I see my mother in her own small garden, which seems to me now as a room of her own albeit without walls. For my mother and for me, as well as for Wallace and many of her friends, gardens came later after all of the labor that was/is expected of us was/is done. In "Joseph MacLeod Daffodils," Wallace describes her friend Isabel Huggan planting bulbs even as they are having a conversation: "You're laughing," but your hands stay/ clenched in your lap, still forcing/ the tight, dumb bulb into the ground/ as if you could force your life/ to a pattern as serene as theirs, / a calm that flourishes in darkness/ to the pull of the sun/... (Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 31). In "Spaces" we encounter a man who is cutting down his poplar. Once he has also pulled the stump out his wife plants petunias. (Albeit in a polyethylene bird bath) over the hole the man has created. That gardens are symbolic of what working-class women might do if allowed to flourish seems evident in several poems. In the poem "The Maiden Aunts" however, they (the Maiden Aunts), the women not in the grip of men flourish and flower. "...(They) are loyal at family occasions/ ...yet something in their faces/ (in old photographs) makes these faces/ makes these features seem/ incongruous like the photograph/ ...but in the corner of some

unused drawer...their unguarded gestures/ seem to open to the dark/ like renegade flowers."

Clearly the landscape has more than an aesthetic function in Wallace's life and, therefore, her poetry. It serves, I believe, to make clear that something (even as pervasive as landscape) can have both an aesthetic and social function while at the same time can remain separate or immune from either function. Certainly Mukarovsky's Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Fact points to this interpretation (see Mukarovsky in Williams, 152-3). In many ways, Wallace's work is within art and outside of art. Like the land, the aesthetic value of her work is clear, the social and practical necessity of the land suggests we can't remove ourselves from it; but we can, in fact, "work it" to its ultimate practical application.

That my flower garden is a work of art is clear to me. That the garden Wallace wrote about and cultivated was and is an attainable form of art of and for the working class as well.

Meeting The Family

Before I talk specifically about the members of the Wallace family when I have met and the structure that family takes, I want to discuss what I believe Wallace saw in the structure we call "family." Earlier I mentioned the nuclear family. Peter Laslett's work points to some evidence that this nuclear structure existed and was widespread among rural working populations long before industrialization.[21]

I believe Wallace's work hints at her alignment with Poster's view of the bourgeois family as an historical phenomenon that was imposed onto the working class, and is in fact one of the successes (or failures) of bourgeois democracy. On an ideological level, the bourgeoisie has certainly secured a hegemonic definition of family life as 'naturally' based on close kinship, as properly organized through a male breadwinner and so on (Barrett, 204). Few (from the mid-nineteenth century onward) working-class households have this structure, however. The wages of other family workers (in Wallace's case, her mother), have been essential. And while many were concerned about appropriate gender behavior within this false notion of, family Wallace, especially evident in what she says about the women in her family, and in her relationship to her son, was not. Yet like most of us very powerful forces confounded Wallace's efforts – most certainly the ideology of patriarchy is of primary consideration in this regard.

Cameron Wallace, brother of Bronwen Wallace, was the first contact I made with the Wallace family. Having found his name in a Kingston Ontario directory I called and

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[21] See Laslett, P. Household and Family in Post Time, Cambridge, 1972.

asked him to meet me for an initial introduction. He most generously granted a meeting. I, therefore, drove up to Kingston (my daughter Reneé joined me in order to take photographs). The three of us met at Chez Peggy Restaurant in Kingston on January 27, 1995, and at that time Cameron agreed to take us to visit his parents, Peggy and Ferd Wallace, the following morning (I regret to say that later Cameron began to distance himself from me and to avoid my phone calls and letters). I have written to ask what I did to offend him, but he doesn't even answer these inquiries. I felt, however, that he was a bit suspicious of Americans in general. I think, however, I saw a change in his attitude toward me when I broke into tears in one of my interviews with him. He seemed offended in fact. Also, in my typical American style I asked to join him and his friends for dinner (so that I could continue to get information), and then I paid the bill (little does he know that my generosity is more Italian than American). When I asked Carolyn Smart to find out what I did to offend him, she said, it was just Cameron's moodiness that she also sometimes saw in Bronwen as well.

I first met the parents of Bronwen Wallace on January 28, 1995 in their senior citizen high rise in Kingston, Ontario. At that time they told me a little about their family history. Bronwen's mother Peggy Wagar Wallace is of German and Irish decent. Her grandmother was Rowena Leonard who married Edward Reynolds. Peggy's family came from Germany- stopped off in Ireland, then the USA (Kansas), but returned to Canada because they were United Kingdom Loyalists. Her father's family originated from Wales just below Glasgow (Lowlanders, Ferd calls them). Ferdinand's parents were James

Wallace and Jane Sleeth and they were farmers. The Wallace family history in Kingston, Canada dates back to 1834 to James Wallace and Jane Sleeth.

Because Peggy had suffered a stroke that affected her speech, Ferd Wallace did a great deal of the talking for Peggy during the first interview I conducted with them. It was plain to see, however, that Peggy's illness was responsible for these dynamics because Peggy felt comfortable interrupting her husband when she could manage clear speech. Sometimes out of frustration she wrote me notes while her husband was talking (the notes served to clarify names and places mostly). Peggy Wallace also wanted to ask me questions about myself. She seemed as interested in me as I was in her.

Ferdinand Wallace said that his biggest education came from the Depression during which he had twenty-five jobs, a few of which were working with the Department of Highway, encyclopedia sales door to door (he met Peggy while selling encyclopedias at Hartington School). He also worked as a plumber's helper for a brief stint. Ferd Wallace said he considers himself a kind of "make do" person, and he was quick to say that the Depression led him to work beyond the farm with many different kinds of laborers, skilled and unskilled. Peg made clear in this interview that her husband brought home stories about the plight of the laborers with whom he worked. She also said, with obvious pride that her husband would not be held down by the Depression and that he turned even encyclopedia sales into a lucrative occupation. She mentioned too, that "Ferdinand was always inventing something" and that "metallurgy was a special interest to him." It is interesting, I think, that Ferdinand Wallace belonged to the culture of farmer, as well as the culture of laborer off the farm. Because of this he brought to his

children a rather broad working class perspective. And Peggy Wallace, although surrounded by stay-at-home mothers, worked as a teacher while her children were growing up. [22] In fact, there were three generations of teachers before her. This was unusual not just in Kingston at the time, but anywhere, in fact. In fact in "Rites" (Marrying Into The Family, p. 37), Wallace explains how different her mother was from the other mothers in the neighborhood:

> My mother was a teacher
> every morning running
> for the bus
> the other mothers
> slippered and pincurled
> watching from their kitchens
>
> I called for Barb on my way to school
> Barb's mother in a pink housecoat
> sipped coffee inspected me
> for flaws *your mother*
> *should take care of you*
>
> pulling my hat down
> hard over my ears
>
> So I learned to pretend
> a mother fat
> and pincurled in a huge kitchen
> surrounded by coffee cups...

Even though the Margaret (Peggy) Wallace I met had to use a walker in order to greet me at the door when I first arrived on that January morning in 1995, she was an elegant, imposing figure, large boned, tall and immaculately groomed, wearing what could have

[22] Interesting to note the parallels here with my own parents. My father also found new ways to keep money coming in during the Depression and my mom went off to work in an overall factory, while the majority if others mothers in our neighborhood stayed home.

been a teacher's outfit- a paisley blouse and gray wool skirt, nylons, and dress shoes with a sensible heel. She greeted me with the gentle eyes of a good mother- good teacher and yet there was a formality about her as well.[23] Ferdinand Wallace, also tall, somewhat stooped with age and illness, also using a walker, was all "look at me, listen to me." He had an urgency in his eyes and talked nearly non-stop the whole time. His speech was somewhat slurred but that didn't stop him whatsoever. At one point Peggy Wallace sent him out of the room to make tea (the task too daunting was then taken over by Cameron).

Certainly Ferdinand Wallace had a profound effect on his two children, Bronwen and Cameron. I know that he brought his diverse working class stories home to his family. Bronwen liked to tell her friends that when they sat down to a meal her father often felt compelled to tell the family where everything on the table, the food in particular, came from, the beef, the bread, even the metal utensils. [24] Wallace talks directly about this influence in her poem, "Food." She says "My dad says the stuff/ that's really worth drinking's/ squirted warm and straight from the teat/ and I believed him.../ (Wallace, Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 50).

In Bronwen's case it is clear that what her mother modeled and what her grandmother and aunts did and said had a greater impact on the activist, and the poet she (became) then did anything the men did or said.

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[23] See Page in Appendis for the poem I wrote about this first meeting.

[24] This brings to mind a personal story. My mother was also raised on a farm (but later worked in factories). One evening when I had a girlfriend over to supper the girlfriend asked where the other two drumsticks were! It was clear to the rest of us that my mother had cooked only one chicken and also clear to us that my friend believed chickens had four legs. How quickly we (industrialized America) moved away from "the farm!"

Even though of a different generation with a different personal set of moral standards, I believe that Bronwen's brightest guiding moral light was her mother, Margaret (Peggy) Wager Wallace. Peggy Wallace was generous enough to give me photocopies of her own journal/ diary. In the entry dated 1988 (no month or day) Peggy is asking herself if her life has been a success.

She asks, "*What is success?*"

Then she answers: "*Perhaps if I consider this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson I will have an answer. 'To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to hear the appreciation of honest critics and then endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to look for the best in others, to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition, to know even one life has breathed easier because I have lived.' This is success...*"

As I unravel the life and work of Margaret's daughter Bronwen Wallace, we might well return to this quote as a sort of general (very general) summation of Bronwen's personal aspirations as well.

In several of the articles Bronwen Wallace wrote for the Whig-Standard Newspaper, as well as in several interviews she gave, she talks about the Sunday visits to her paternal grandmother's house for dinner with many other members of the family present. Wallace recalls that there were stories told at the dinner table, stories about what was happening in the surrounding community or in the family, stories that seemed to neither idealize nor condemn. But Wallace tells about the stories the women told in the kitchen before and

after meals, stories that were quite different in that these kitchen stories were primarily about women's lives, and men, if mentioned at all, were on the perimeters or they were objects of ridicule. "The stories in the kitchen moved differently too, as they were told around tasks and questions about tasks. Have I made enough mashed potatoes? Is the turkey done? Who is watching the baby? The story weaving and bobbing around the obstacles of women's work" (Wallace, Whig-Standard, Dec. 1988).

Bronwen also recalls the atmosphere in that kitchen as electric with a sense of subversion (It occurs to me now that Peggy Wallace, in removing Ferd from the room to fetch tea for me on the first visit, she might have been trying to recreate this "kitchen talk").

In this same Whig-Standard article Wallace hones in on her grandmother's method of telling a story and observes that her grandmother could not tell a story about someone without digressing into an explanation of the genealogy of that person, or digressing into a past history of that person even if that history is just an aside to the incident at hand (Wallace, Whig-Standard, Dec., 1988).

Of course, Wallace calls up these Sunday dinners in her poems, both in terms of the style of that talk, and in terms of the gender issues and class issues that wafted through the kitchen and made their way to the table. Her 1980 collection, Marrying Into the Family, is full of such poems: "Great Aunt," "The Family Saints and the Dining Room Table," "The Maiden Aunts," and "Grandma Wagar's Double Bind." My favorite is "Behind the Photograph" because it reveals her grandmother's determination. I also

believe that this poem shows us how Wallace saw the structure called family and also where Wallace was headed stylistically.

Behind the Photograph

There's this photo of my grandmother at 25
in an elaborate hat of creamy satin
with a great dark feather that lifts
almost as proud as the profile beneath it
the tilted chin and sweep of rich black hair
all that I know of this woman
her famous skill with horses
her grace as a dancer distills here
in what could be
the cover for a novel
where despite her father's poverty
the heroine marries
the one she loves

Not far from the truth
given by grandfather
who began their marriage spending
all the wedding money on an opal ring
which she wore all her life
through year after year
he wanted to pawn it
for the scheme that sprang
like weeds from the dust of his farm
and when they lost the land
he said it was her fault
scorned her for begging
credit from the grocer and
taking in mending
something in her he hated even then
a stubbornness perhaps that took directions
he hadn't expected till way later
he hated the disease
that crippled her
till in the final years he'd
take away her crutch
leave her weighted
to the chair the fat old woman
of the last photographs

defeated eyes turned
from the sun beside her

When I was six
my father took me to a beach
where beneath the dunes
he told me a hotel was buried
and all day I spent
digging expectant that any moment
my shovel would strike stone
sun flash on the scarlet tip
of a shingle just as now
lights of green and amber
glow like secrets in the opal
my grandmother left
well-kept promises that keep me
sifting the stores
the photographs for something
I'm supposed to find
the moment just before
the shutter click
lift of a chin that
even beneath the rolls of fat
brings the bones of a young woman
into profile or the defiant
moving of a crutch behind a chair
in every photograph its absence
a statement like the straight set
of the shoulders The almost careless way
the hands are folded
gestures that move
out from behind the photograph
to frame it in another way
like the gestures I leave out
in my memory of wet sand
tears and my father calling me home
the way my hand clenched
around the handle of the shovel
and the arm's arc again
and again into sand
my back turned
from the waves

and the sun's inviting dance

Like the talk her female relatives had in the kitchen before and after their Sunday meals, the grandmother in this poem is at the center. Both Bronwen's grandfather and father are peripheral. Both make promises to these females, then let them down, leave them injured, but not defeated. Both try to weaken the resolve of women and in the case of her grandfather insisted that women remained anchored in the periphery.

Also notice that while the above two poems clearly have the shape of a poem on the page, they read like rambling narrative with an image here and there. The line breaks are more controlled in these poem then they are in her later collections. She puts narrative punctuation back in later as well (See Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace).

Shirley

Shirley Wallace (Ferdinand's youngest sister) lived with the Wallaces when Bronwen was a child. I had the good fortune to interview Shirley during my second visit to Kingston on June 11, 1995. Shirley was visiting her brother and sister-in-law at that time. It was clear as a result of my interview with Shirley, as well as documents I have been given by Ferdinand and Peggy (letter to Shirley from Bronwen and vice versa), that Shirley Wallace has a unique perception of Bronwen and the relationships in Bronwen's immediate family.

My interview with Shirley Wallace took place in the Wallace's small high-rise apartment in a senior citizen complex. Shirley asked if we could go into a private area of the apartment. I was excited by the request for privacy and so we moved into a small den adjacent to where the others were. Even then Shirley whispered.

Shirley lived with the Wallaces when Bronwen was a child and stayed in the Kingston area until 1952. Once Bronwen got older, especially after her marriage to Peter Dexter, most of the conversations and interactions Shirley and Bronwen had were what Shirley describes as "confrontational." Shirley believes she challenged Bronwen:

> As a social worker I would challenge her...I would ask her how she was helping the people in low-income rentals for example... as Bronwen believed she worked on their cause. Bronwen only saw the big piece of the whole situation. When Bronwen was at Queens University she fought battles she thought people should she fighting without regard for their own moral codes that is she was imposing her moral code on people as he helped them out. She wanted to take the landlord to court, some long drawn out process. I, as a social worker saw things differently. If I, as a social worker, could help people maintain the status quo, help a bit in a way they could use it, like helping someone improve sanitary conditions immediately."

(Of course I wanted to interrupt Shirley and say, " you were both correct"). Shirley made several asides during the interview that shed light on Shirley's feelings about her Brother, Ferdinand Wallace. At one point she said, "I wanted to move into this room because in case you haven't noticed Ferdie had quite an ego and likes to control things." Another interesting aside was "Ferd never let the children do things their way, it was Ferd's way or not at all." Interesting also in this interview was Shirley's suggestions that I look over Wallace's poem, "Behind the Photograph." Shirley saw the poem as an indictment of Bronwen's father and grandfather. "Sad," Shirley said, "I actually watched Bronwen leave that sand castle (described in the poem) because of her father's need to do what he wanted when he wanted. I thought it sad. Sadder even that this child saw it that

way too."[25] At this point in my work, I began to see clearly that there was a resistance to domination of women by men in the Wallace family.

That Wallace had to give in to her father's wishes is clear in her poem "Behind The Photograph." There are also many accounts of her father's insistence that the family visit his mother, even though the children and other adults did not enjoy these visits. Virginia Woolf's accounts of the pathological attempts of bourgeois fathers to insist on their daughters' dependence, financial and emotional comes to mind when I read "Behind The Photograph" (included elsewhere in this text). To see it this way suggests that patriarchy refers to the ideological aspects of relationships- in this case- the paradigm of father-daughter. (McClary, 5-9) Perhaps Wallace saw it this way at times. I think, however, because of her political work, as well as what I see in her writing, her poetry specifically, that she saw patriarchy independent of these paradigms, even independent of the organization of capitalism. She saw capitalism and industrialization as a catalyst to this trans-historical form of domination. If we look at Wallace's "The Kingdom Of The Fathers" (In Marrying Into The Family), as well as many other poems in this collection, what is obvious is that women inherit profiles, furniture, other artifacts, and anger. While they continue to try to gain some power, the structures of family and society, inclusive of capitalism, keep them down or do not recognize the value of their contributions.

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[25] I didn't see Ferd's behavior on the beach as particularly harsh or any different from how my own father might have behaved. Her comments and views suggest a tension no one else feels, or is ready to discuss with me. Shirley saw egotism and bull headedness in this one man (her brother). Bronwen, I think, tended to see it as a product of a class structure more than a character flaw in her father.

Shirley also believes Bronwen married Peter (a marriage that lasted three years), because she wanted to "get out from under her father's grip."

Throughout the interview, Shirley made reference to Bronwen's generation as a generation that thought the previous generation was not doing things right. She mentioned that she believed Bronwen's generation actually thought that they were going to "go off to college and gain some kind of power to change things, divorce itself from the past."

Shirley believes Bronwen changed in this regard, and came to terms with what those previous generations offered and I tend to agree with Shirley. At this point in the interview Shirley Wallace asked if she could read to me from Bronwen's collection of essays Arguments with the World. The particular essay from which she read is "Lilacs in May: a Tribute to Al Purdy." [26] Shirley read:

> My university education was taking me further and further away
> from my parents, who had worked like hell for me to get it.
> Not only was it allowing me opportunities they never had,
> it was teaching me contempt for their lives and for my own class
> background, my own cultural context...And the landscape! My
> family had lived around Kingston for two hundred years....
> Everything I saw, I saw through their eyes and their work
> and their lives. The only thing was I didn't know it.
> And so when I came to study English, I accepted without
> question that I was going to live in another country now.
> A country where the grass was greener, the hills softer.
> A country where words like "moor" and "glen" seemed to fit.
> A country where lilacs bloomed in April not in May- and without any
> apparent scent.

[26] Purdy's influence was discussed again in the section that deals more specifically on style and craft. I will also share a terse letter Al Purdy sent to me in which he refuses to comment on his influences on Wallace's work.

The next few lines Shirley read, speak to influences both good and bad. She continues, "To put it simply, I gained a great deal from my education, yes. But I lost too. I lost my family, my history, my language- as well as, smells and shapes and colors of my life. Without those I could not be the writer I wanted to be"[27] (Wallace, Arguments with the World, 164-5)

Earlier I mentioned that Cameron began to distance himself from me after I got emotional during one of my interviews with him. In this interview, Cameron clearly states that he saw those visits to his paternal grandmother's house as less than pleasant. In this interview he also discusses how she (Bronwen) saw or experienced a different childhood than he did. Of course, Cameron saw things from his privileged status in the patriarchy. Actually he reveals a lot here, and I would rather not paraphrase but show parts of my transcript of the interview:

Excerpts from an Interview with Cameron Wallace
March 31, 1995

(Commenting on my earlier meeting with Peggy and Fred Wallace)

GNJ: **Do you know when you hug someone how you feel if they do not like to be hugged? I just felt like "oh, oh, what did I do-- fauxpax?**

Cameron: Yeah, it's just not part of their...language. How they deal with people. So Bronwen, I think she was dealing with a lot of stuff, like with the aunts. They were all really nice people, but they did not make life easy. They

[27] Bronwen Wallace's earliest political awakening is discussed in the forward to Arguments With The World. In this forward Joanne Page discusses Wallace's writing in a high school newspaper. In that same text Wallace also discusses her political awakening in a grade thirteen-history class. As Wallace describes it she had an epiphany on October 24, 1962 when her teacher, Harold Richie, was discussing his fears about the Cuban Missile Crisis. From that point forward Wallace began to pay attention, read the newspaper, watches TV, and discusses issues with others.

certainly didn't do it with the intent to be unpleasant. They just had absolute ways too, as to how things were done. I think Bronwen met that head-on. So she caught a lot of stuff, where I did not. Also, her personality was different. She had a lot of things- she was struggling against stuff.

GNJ: **How so, is her personality different?**

Cameron: She was a real achiever. At school, she was a browner. She was there getting marks and all that kind of stuff. In school, that's fine, I didn't mind. I was lucky I was smart. Then it got difficult, and then I just wasn't interested any more because it was really pretty lame. Whereas, Bronwen, I think she got her competition from her perceived idea that she was not very good looking, which she wasn't compared to a lot of her friends. I think that played on her, this is my opinion, all her life. She needed to be recognized and that's what she worked on. She always had friends who were really attractive. She just wasn't attractive.[28] We were both the same way that way. It's the sort of thing where now you look back and you think how naive that was or whatever, but with Bronwen, it definitely affected everything.

GNJ: **Affects women more?**

Cameron: Absolutely, because you are in that position of waiting and "gee, is somebody going to like me." And even though she always had boyfriends, she had more boyfriends than I ever had girlfriends, but I think it was the same sort of thing. Her perceived idea of maybe she wasn't attractive. I sort of think that part of her personality was because she was trying to achieve something in other ways. She was way more competitive that way, so she was a browner in school. She was a real play by the rules kind of thing. She was in the Sunday church thing at first.

GNJ: **You are talking about the earlier part of her life.**

Cameron: This would be when she was in high school or whatever.

GNJ: **Before the college rebellious kind of thing?**

Cameron: Yeah, I think she had political sensitivity before that, but it really came out around that time she really started challenging stuff. It was the 60s she was always looking for, like okay this group sucks, so therefore this other

[28] This is odd to me because many of Bronwen's friends describe her as attractive, elegant in long flowing skirts and earrings. Many used the term charismatic to describe her.

group must be the right group. That's what I always disagreed with her on, was that she would attach herself to a group. Okay, then it's got to be the unions, or its got to be the Marxist-Leninists or its got to be this. Rather than...they kind of all suck, maybe that's where the 80s is.

GNJ: **I wonder if it, too, might be part of the academic world, because the more education I get, the more I begin to feel the academics do that, what you just described, and that there are these academic trend and it's pro this and anti that and then it shifts.**

Cameron: I think, in part, back to her childhood...I think she was probably...maybe in her mind, she had an unhappy childhood. Her perception of Ferd and Peggy is diametrically opposed to my perception. When she was coming back from Windsor where she had lived with Jeremy, it was one of the big drawbacks to coming back to Kingston was this perceived idea that Ferd and Peggy were going to be somehow all over her and controlling her life. When she actually came back, the biggest advantage of being back was Ferd and Peggy being around and being available to take Jeremy for drives and stuff like that, so that kind of gave me an idea what her perception of the situation was. Lots of times, we did disagree. I guess everybody does that. Where something happens you perceive it as happening this way and I'll perceive it another way.

GNJ: **I perceive you both as artists...you and your sister. I'm wondering about what in your childhood, do you think, what was the common thread that shaped you as an artist and also your sister even though you perceived the childhood differently. What do you think it was that led you to appreciate or understand art? Anything about your family life, school life, community you can think of.**

Cameron: My father would have probably been an artist and preferred to be an artist. He just never had the chance. He hit the 30s and that did it.

GNJ: **I heard all about the Depression today from your Dad.**

Cameron: Oh yeah, he's got the stories. It's always good to get them.

GNJ: **Yet, I look at your mother's writing and certainly there are a lot of artistic thoughts and potential there too.**

Cameron: Yeah, in terms of personality, Ferd is more the artist. What I always liked about dad was what he taught both Bronwen and I to never take everything at face value. I guess that's where I now find him when you are talking to him you're always finding something different. Always read between the

lines. You look at a newspaper and I'd read it. This is probably happening because of this, which he doesn't do now--now that he is older. The one disadvantage of getting old. He was the one that really first taught that sort of thing. Even though he comes off lots of times being reactionary and stoic, in actual fact, and Mom is the one that comes off as being accepting. In actual fact, when Ferd is the one who will change and Mum is hard line. But Mum is also...she has a real artistic edge too, but it's a different kind. I think she appreciates making things...so she may not have the same kind of creative edge that dad does. Maybe that's why they match so well. Dad has the creative thing, and doesn't necessarily have the ability to carry it through. Mum has the ability to carry it through with the work, but doesn't have the same kind of edge of creativity. In lots of ways, for two people who you would think are as far from the arts--the traditional arts--as you can get...they enjoy going to the theater...but they are not what you would say are real critics of the art. Both of them in actual fact are...I think it's because they both incredibly smart and gifted. I think my grandfather was probably an artist and I think mom inherited that too.

GNJ: **How about trust, trusting? Are they trusting?**

Cameron: They are pretty good. You mean trusting in people?

GNJ: **Uh-huh**

Cameron: They are both pretty good. Yeah, I would say absolutely compared to the general world.

GNJ: **What about your sister? How was she in that regard? When she met someone, did she trust them or did she wait?**

Cameron: No, she would wait, and I think once there was sort of a bond created then... I think she was maybe a little bit holding off..

GNJ: **Did she have a lot of male friends that weren't lovers?**

Cameron: Probably not a lot. She never had as many male friends as I had female friends. So, by my standard.... She did have male friends, but I think she probably had a lot more female friends. I think later she had more male friends.

GNJ: **Okay, Well, I guess this question is shot. I wanted to ask you if there was anything in your childhood that you really resented.**

Cameron: It's hard not to like your childhood because it pretty much affects like who you are and how you make decisions. I would have liked not to have as much access to the family.

GNJ: **You mean like your grandmother...**

Cameron: The grandmother and all... But that's not a big deal.

GNJ: **You know, Shirley is aware of that.**

Cameron: Oh, I'm sure she is. I've told her. One of the advantages of them is that they have always shot from the hip, straight from the hip kind of stuff. If you'd interview all of them, you would find the ones that had the most to do with the family are the most resentful. And the ones that had the least to do with the family are ones that are now most interested in maintaining some sort of relationship. I know in specific my cousin Kathy, the two women that grew up on a farm. I'm saying girls, they really would be quite happy if they never saw anybody in the family again. They really got angry in terms of people showing up on what was their house and farm and couldn't relate to it as being the extended farm of the whole family.

GNJ: **I hope to see that area, the farm. Tell me how you feel about your sister's work, her writing. It is accessible to you.**

Cameron: No, and to be honest, I've probably only read small amounts. I'm not a big fan of poetry. A lot of it I specifically don't read because a lot of it...more the early works...made me kind of angry. There was some stuff that was very specific and I just disagreed with it. She never wrote a poem about me, so it's nothing personal, but there's a lot of stuff.

GNJ: **You're in them though; bits and pieces of you are in them.**

Cameron: I don't thing so.

GNJ: **I'll have to show you.**

Cameron: Okay, I would really, really...like to see this.
Nothing.... except for the fact, she may have mentioned her brother, but they are pretty minor references.

GNJ: **Was she aware of how you felt?**

Cameron: I guess I was strong graphically, she wasn't. She was strong in terms of literature, which I wasn't. We mixed well that way, but we were talking different languages, too, so that...

GNJ: **And the graphic aptitude comes from your dad, the mathematician?**

Cameron: I think also from my grandfather on Peggy's side. I never was particularly interested in poetry. But, I always enjoyed going to poetry readings.

GNJ: **How about this last collection, the one dedicated to all the country songs, the Emmylou Harris collection? Did you read much of that?**

Cameron: I read actually the last two or three books.

GNJ: **The senses of humor in that collection seems a little like you. I mean, I see you in some of those works. I see a big change in that prose form she used later on where she kind of let go and was able to joke about everything. Didn't seem angry or worried or reflective as much as she was very intuitive and free.**

Cameron: It's hard for me because I know the instance of the poem lots of times. I have a friend who is a playwright and the same sort of thing where I'm looking at some of the stuff she's written, particularly when I knew her, you be "oh, yeah, I remember this incident" and all that. You're putting it together that way. I did the same thing with a lot of the stuff Bronwen wrote. So I was never able to take a completely cold view.

GNJ: **Out of what you read, you said some of it made you angry. Did any of it embarrass you?**

Cameron: No.

GNJ: **When you think of your sister in crisis, what would you think the times were when you saw her most in crisis? What was going on in her life?**

Cameron: Oh geez...There was always a crisis. She was sort of drawn to crisis.

I think probably the first major crisis was when she divorced Peter and I think that really.... that probably set up a tone for quite a while in terms of how she saw Ferd and Peggy because, I mean at that time, you didn't divorce and....

We always got along really well. It was a real brother/sister kind of thing.

> Probably we were at our worst for the first few years. I know that having read her diaries now. This is not what I perceived, but having read her diaries I think she genuinely.... She didn't dislike me, but I was an annoyance to her. Actually, it's interesting, you'd probably gain a lot by reading these diaries.
>
> Because she sort of...I was just there. That's all. Probably around the time I was 12 I was not the annoying little brother any more. I think that's probably fairly normal with a lot of women with younger brothers. Then we started talking. From the time I was probably 16 we sort of got to be friends. I was old enough to drink and she could buy beer and stuff like that. At that point then, her big fear was if somebody didn't respect her so she thought that was a problem, then forget it, she didn't have a lot of time for somebody. So then we always got along. I used to stay with her in Windsor for 3-4 months at a time. When she moved back here Ron was working with us, so we spent a lot of time together. When she got more interested in writing, we would see each other, but normally it was my initiative at that point. I would take Jeremy. I spent a lot of time with Jeremy. We would do things. I'd stop over when they lived on Gibson Avenue.

Jeremy

When I first met Bronwen Wallace's son Jeremy, he was home visiting his father, Ron Baxter, in Hamilton, Ontario. I conducted my first interview with Jeremy on August 21, 1995 at the home of Ron Baxter. At that time Jeremy was a student at the University of British Columbia studying Theatre. He said he was considering work in directing or set design, but also that he liked to write and might like to write for the theatre at some point in time.

During that first interview I focused on four areas. I asked Jeremy to talk about himself. I also asked how he was like or unlike his mother. I asked what his relationship with his mother was like and what his relationship was/is like with other females in his family or in his personal life. He answered the first three questions in some detail.

The first two words out of his mouth, that he used to describe his mother, were "stubborn" and "practical" (*like her poems I thought).* Later he said that she was "obsessed with safety" and "It seemed she was always expecting the worst to happen." That she was different from his friends' parents was also obvious to Jeremy. When I asked for specifics, he said that his mother "even at an early age involved me in decisions" and that "she saw my rebelliousness as somewhat good." She "always let me explain myself." He said that as he reflected on his childhood there seemed to be "very little gender molding." He said that at an early age he was allowed freedom but responsibility.

Jeremy Wallace is a remarkable young man. He is his mother's son. He is bright, open-minded, gentle and kind. In the interview I had with him in San Diego on November 20, 1996 (poolside, and we laughed at how middle-class and ironic that seemed), he told me how open his parents were, how fair and democratic. As a result he said, "I grew up fast. I was always the one who had to tell friends about things like drugs and sex." He also said that he called his parents Bron and Ron because "they wanted me (him) to feel like an equal." He also mentioned that his mother helped him learn how to have female friends, how to make a relationship equal, but that he learned on his own that "(any) a relationship is never balanced and there is always the problem of making love last." This comment turned our conversation to the men in his mother's life. "When I look at her wedding pictures (marriage to Peter Dexter), I can't believe that was my mum. I didn't hear her say much about Peter but she was very upset when he died."

When I asked Jeremy what he thought his Mother would be doing today, he said, without hesitation, "Fighting Mike Harris[29] He (Harris) is openly country club. She would not be still about that." Jeremy also confirmed that his Mother was obsessed with Emmylou Harris. "She wanted to come back from the dead as a country western singer like Emmylou." He said she was working on the Emmylou collection when she was dying. "That's why the poems at the end, starting with 'Bodily Fluids' seems just tacked on, they were. She would have done more with that collection." He said also that "when he hears Emmylou it makes me sad, you can imagine, how sad."

In a letter I received from Jeremy dated September 12, 1996, I saw more than just a glimmer of his mother. In the letter, Jeremy tells me about a theatre professor he has at U.B.C., a man Jeremy describes as "a very amazing man." Jeremy was particularly taken with a lecture that this professor gave, in which the professor declares that a wall of interpretation has risen, over time, between the work of the great playwrights and the public, that all we do is analyze, criticize, and theorize instead of re-appropriate and rediscover. I am sure Bronwen would have agreed with this position because she despised intellectual distance. In this same letter, Jeremy answers my question about authors that he believed might have influenced his mother. "I will throw out Rainer Marie Rilke as an idea, someone who she read a fair amount."[30]

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[29] Mike Harris is Premier of Ontario and has a reputation for supporting big business and ignoring the needs of the less fortunate.

[30] I can see some of Rilke in Wallace. I am thinking specifically of the poem "Death" by Rilke. In this poem Rilke starts with the ordinary objects (cups, saucer, false teeth) yet Rilke moves out from the ordinary scene to "Starfall."

Then as a very special gift to me, Jeremy enclosed a poem he wrote for his mother called "Spaces"

Spaces

A hole killed you.
Slowly I watch it
as it opened on your face,
stinking of death,
ripe, acidic
I watched
as the hunger of the tumor
was swallowing you,
your unfinished life,
your unfinished work.

We could not stop it.
With all our shaking hands
believing in you,
wanting to soothe
your strength.
And the last time we saw you-the physical you
you were dead.
And the hole
stopped killing you,
its darkness hiding inside you.

You were burned.
The darkness of that hole remained,
in me,
in all of us,
spread out in tears,
like your dusty dry ashes
we carried away with us.
Your body recedes
and yet I see you everywhere.
Those times I feel you close
at night and the hole grows wider
to let you in.
Other times it gets so small
I don't know if you are still there.
And I wonder if it constricts you
forces you away

like it squeezed your breath out
when you died on your bed
and I sat shaking through the night
wondering if somewhere in the darkness of the void,
in some breathless vision
you were watching.

There are many poems in which Bronwen refers to her son Jeremy. In "Jeremy at Ten" the safety issue, the fear of something dreadful (that Jeremy was quite aware of), runs through the poem. The real dread that she comes to terms with in the poem appears to be her combined feeling of love and loss, her desire to freeze the moment to keep Jeremy careful and safe in his tenth year. "... that each birth is also a loss/ we never touch the bottom of. /" It is amazing to read Jeremy's tribute to his mother and then to read Bronwen's tributes to Jeremy. Both seem to be letting go, again and again, aware of the spaces that separate then even in life. And even in this poem the plight, the endless labor of a mother surfaces in an honesty that shocks and breaks open the reality of a woman's life. "But there were days when I couldn't stand it. / Your hands on my breasts, / my head filled with nothing/ but tears and the smell of urine, / (Wallace, Common Magic, 82-3).

In an article in the Whig-Standard Wallace mentions her fear that in being given mostly the work of men to read, Jeremy would not be getting a well-rounded education. "What my son will be reading this semester is male human experience, presented as if it represents the whole. Too bad for him. Worse yet for his female classmates" (Wallace, "English Literature: It's still a man's world," Whig-Standard, 2/1/88, 32).[31]

[31] Later this same article she talks about Dorothy Livesay and P.K.Page as import writers we might use in the classroom.

In yet another article, Wallace expresses how important talk with other women was especially when she first became a mother. She also talks about the turmoil she felt when she first had Jeremy. "I had to keep him quiet while his father slept...things got even crazier when I went back to work... Weeks rushed together in a blur of the alarm clock, errands, trips to the park and laundry, laundry, laundry...I was falling apart... Finally I talked to other women." She creates some relief by forming a group called "The Mothers' Group" and eventually this group led to other political action groups and help groups for mothers.

That Wallace comes to terms with the need women have for one another's help is clear in her poem "Distance From Harrowsmith To Tamworth" (in Common Magic, 14-15), as she weaves Jeremy into her life and her poem (Wallace "The Power of a Group of Mothers," Whig-Standard, n.d.).

Politics

Most of the information I have about Wallace's political life has come to me through her articles, her essays in Arguments With The World or as a result of interviews I conducted with her female friends, her brother and, the father of her son, Ron Baxter.

In her essay "The Cuban Missile Crisis and Me," Wallace actually pinpoints the moment that her life (then her writing) took on a political bent. Wallace tells us "...I am a particular kind of poet and one whose themes follow a particular bent because of a revelation. An epiphany if you will, that I can pinpoint with absolute accuracy. The date was October 24, 1962. The place was my grade thirteen-history class, taught by

Mr. Howard Ritchie at Kingston Collegiate and Vocational Institute. The event was the Cuban Missile Crisis." Wallace goes on to explain that her teacher's reaction to the crisis, his anger and fear, made her aware of the threat the situation posed, made her feel mortal, made her realize that her life was in the hands of adults who might or might not make the right decisions. Later as an adult reflecting on this she understood more clearly it is the "...interpretation of events, and the way we use them in our personal lives that helps us begin to realize how history matters" (Wallace "The Cuban Missile Crisis" in Arguments with The World, p. 27-29).

This crisis made Wallace take notice of other current events. She began to read the newspaper, and later to become active as a college student in CUCND (Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). She became one who might react when others stood passive. An indirect reference to historical moments like the Cuban Missile Crisis show up in Wallace's third collection of poetry The Stubborn Particulars of Grace in the poem entitled "Koko." This poem starts out about Koko the talking gorilla and moves into a discussion about communications in politics and in our personal lives, how there is the danger that the communication becomes more important than the gesture, the message, or the event "like the starch at the back of the brain/ we no longer recognize as memory. ...On the TV Reagan and Gorbachev in Geneva, / thought their names don't really matter much, / just two more faces over shirts and ties/ discussing missile size, the 'nitty-gritty'."

And in "Daily News" from Common Magic," her concerns about the environment surface again, as does her concern about nuclear war. In the poem she suggests that the

planet is "all out of kilter" and that she hears *men* telling her "that victory is a nuclear war/ which 60 million people survive."

Ron Baxter remembers the moment he was taken with Bronwen and her politics. The connection was her brother Cameron. "I was Cameron's friend when I met Bronwen. We, Cameron and I, were on motorcycles and she was standing on a balcony above us on Garrett Street (Kingston), and we were discussing, no debating Quebec after the Revolution. Bron seemed to have answers and was helping to organize 'The Student Left' at Queens" (Baxter, September 28, 1997, Hamilton, ON).

Ron said he thinks of the movie Breaking Away when he thinks back to his involvement with Bronwen and their decision to go West. He said they all wished to escape the rather traditional mores. He also said that among Bronwen's passions was environmental concerns and that she was particularly focused on the Dupont family, the epitome of a capitalist/industrial power in this regard. Ron further told me that at a meeting of the Canadian Parliament in 1969, Wallace spoke as a group of women friends chained themselves to the visitors' gallery in order to support abortion rights legislation.

According to Cameron Wallace, Bronwen was married to Peter Dexter and living in a commune with others when she became involved with Ron Baxter, and it was at this point that Wallace and her friends became more political.

Cameron let me know in the interview I had with him that he considered this political activity in Queens "ridiculous." The way he put it was, "I found it, the political activity ridiculous! It's not like Kent State where people are getting shot. This is Queen's U. Everybody who graduates here ends up a judge or in the Senate or something like that"

(Wallace, Cameron, March 24, 1995). Cameron's detachment from all things political seems almost like a reaction to his sister's preoccupation with politics. This is interesting particularly since Cameron seemed to be struggling to survive in a depressed economy at the time I met him. He didn't seem concerned about where society and therefore the political machine had placed him, or he didn't care to deal with that concern. Perhaps the reason is that Bronwen Wallace was however aware first-hand of gender divisions in the capitalist formation while Cameron was not. Because of gender, we see why Wallace first moved toward Marxist ideology then distanced herself from an orthodox Marxism, a system that relegated woman to the theoretical, the political, therefore the sidelines. She did however explore familial relations and did look at the analysis of representations of gender differences in cultural production.

But Wallace was not just seeing a different Kingston than Cameron saw, she was looking beyond her own turf, and in 1970 she traveled west first to Vancouver then to Windsor, where she lived in a communal setting with several like-minded friends. Ron Baxter was among these friends. At that time Chrysler workers were forming a union in Canada and Wallace helped to rally people together who shared a common political philosophy. As a result, Wallace established a community resource center (in the building that was once South Shore Books in Windsor),[32] and it was there that a Labor Center Organization of some 30 people was organized to infiltrate the factory and then report back to the U.I.C. Wallace worked for the U.I.C. at the time. Her job was to take reports from the workers that she was assigned by the U.I.C. She saw this role as an

[32] South Shore Books just closed this year (2000).

opportunity to report their concerns and plights to others in the Labor Center Organization, to infiltrate and spy.

In an article written in a labor newsletter that came out of the Labor Center, Wallace poses some of the questions that she felt were becoming important as she put it "in terms of the collective perspectives with regard to work place organizing" (Notice, if you will, how class struggles particular to women began to surface).

1. Given that TLC is the place where our experience in various sectors is brought together, how can we begin a process whereby these interconnections are made more coherently and more profoundly than they are now?

2. In other words, do we need to take more seriously the task of developing an integrated *view of the class?* How do we do it?

3. The Auto-group seems to be adopting a fairly 'in-plant' orientation and practice. Is this the result of a particular ideological position or is it a temporary strategy? What are its strengths? Weaknesses? How does the collective operate here both theoretically and practically in the development of a wider orientation for that group?

4. How does the student group see itself in relation to the auto group and vice versa? *The women's groups?* New Technology group?

5. How about *community struggles?* The Women's Place and its connection here?

6. Do we have a tacit policy of 'laissez-faire' for various sectors with some vague notion that some day it will all come together? Is this dangerous? Mechanistic? Do we think it important to understand the *relation of various sectors to capital?* When and how do we begin to explore this? How do we understand the conditions that will bring *various sectors of class together?* Is it a future goal or a necessary condition for revolutionary organization?

7. What is the place of TLC theoretically/practically in all this?

8. Do we have to develop more critically our ideas about relations between inside and 'outside' people in various groups?

9. Should there be some research done about the history of and potential

> for militancy in various sectors? Should this be a criteria, where possible, for choosing a work place? Should there be some collective direction and discussion for members seeking work? Are too many people seeking plant work? What about small plants? CN? Civil Service? Retail? Truck driving? Construction? We don't have a perspective on all this. Do we need one? (Wallace, Bronwen, THE NEWSLETTER, No. 51 Summer, 1974)

Clearly, Wallace was seeking a working definition of class that would include these workers and she was beginning to take a particular focus on women (whether in the home or workplace) as a unique population with unique needs.

In Common Magic, published in 1986, Wallace gives us her "working-class sensitive" view of Windsor, as well as Detroit in "Reclaiming the City." She gives us an image of Windsor that is not the "City of Roses" it claims to be, and a Detroit that is anything but the "Renaissance City":

> Reclaiming the City
>
> The signs says, *Windsor, City of Roses,*
> But anyone who's lived here knows it's a city of hands
> and dark metal, necessary as blood,
> or the long lines of cars pumped from its factories
> for the arteries of a continent.
> A city of days produced on an assembly-line,
>
> the sun an ancient star that doesn't chart things any more,
> intruding on the dreams of those who churn with the effort
> of learning this tighter chronology.
> A city I came to by chance
> the way I might meet a man at a party
> and talk about anything at all,
> never thinking he could change my life forever.
> Which is not what I mean to say at all, of course;
> *a man at a party,* putting this stranger in
> as a mere figure of comparison
> and what I want from this city now
> is a sign of proof that I was a difference.

Tonight, I have dinner with Mark,
still in his apartment by the river.
More than anything, I envy his ease with the place,
love I want to call it, though he doesn't
shrugging if off with that gesture
I've seen old men use for their wives,
as if what kept them in a marriage all their adult lives
were some paralysis they hadn't found a cure for yet.
He moved her in '67, just before the riots started in Detroit,
his balcony a ringside seat that summer from which to watch the
low hills of smoke peaked occasionally by sirens or gunfire.
He kept his TV on the railing, tuning in particulars,
the recognizable curve of an arm throwing a bottle,
faces as young as his own, and the others, shielded by rifles
as the army moved in, but he turned the volume off,
he didn't want some newsman to explain things to him,
and how his stories stretch through pauses
more important than the words somehow,
like the fact that he's still sitting here,
taking it all in.

What we study tonight
is how Detroit has rebuilt itself, its skyline
dominated by RenCen, that space-age castle,
a city within a city, where tracks of light are elevators
carrying their passengers high into the night,
though in the older dark below
the planet is reclaiming its own,
block after block, as people move out to the suburbs
the grass moves through the rooms burnt-out houses.
In a few years, Mark says,
RenCen could be stranded in the middle of the forest,
an alien craft, with no-one to remember how it got there,

and tonight even the freighters on the river
move with more than their usual weariness
as if they've known all along
that their cargos of oil or metal
are the lives of men and women, scrabbled from the earth
one way or another
In this city where night is always
forcing someone out of bed and into a factory,
dreams come as they will
and I could travel far enough

I'd find our place on Wyandotte,
just as it was, and you
leaving for work at midnight
while the baby and I curled into sleep,
milky with it, still, in the morning
when you returned, your anger cold as the first light.
All those nights punched in, punched out
to a language I couldn't love you enough to learn.
Any more than you could.
Tuned to your talk of unions and shop-floor politics,
how could you see that I was turning
to another revolution, how our son
tore my days up by their roots
and handed me a life I had to grow to fit
if I wanted to survive.

Statistically, it's common enough. *Marital breakdown*
due to stress. Science leaves us no-one
to blame any more; though in that, how is it different
from politics or religion; our own smaller wisdom's,
whatever brings me back here, hating
what his city made of us and keeps on making
of so many others. *City of Roses,*
though what thrives here is restlessness;
where someone is always working, anything can happen.

And a night like this drives a hard bargain;
it won't let me get away with feeling sorry,
that makeshift emotion I rig up sometimes
to disguise my choices. I'm stuck with what
I can't reclaim; how I loved you
as much as I love my life without you now
or my own body, our marriage in this city

we came to by chance, rooting ourselves
in the child we made, wanting to, not thinking of the future
as he carries us into it.[33]

[33] I find the references to marriage in this poem particularly interesting because Wallace talks about her marriage and her child from this marriage. In fact she was never actually married to Ron Baxter.

Eventually Wallace saw the need to focus on the plight of women and children affected by industrialization and labor conditions and she formed a book cooperative, then a day-care cooperative for factory women (This day-care cooperative still exists in Windsor). In other words, she was not just writing about these conditions.

In a 1995 interview with Cameron Wallace, Cameron gave his view of this political activity. He made it clear that he saw the political activity of Bronwen and her friends in Windsor as the "work of outside agitators" because "they never really held jobs in the factory." But friends of Bronwen suggested that her work in the Unemployment Claims Office brought her close to the workers and their individual struggles, and I discovered later, while talking to Ron Baxter, that Ron did, in fact, do some factory work while in Windsor and that Bronwen's work at U.I.C. gave her a close look at the specific conditions in the factory and the conditions faced by "wives" and children of factory workers. Also Wallace clearly defined clerical workers as part of the working class, not above or below those who worked in factories.

Ron Baxter told me that he believes that it was poet Tom Wayman, who was then a writer in residence at the University of Windsor, who helped Wallace channel her activism into writing and encouraged her to send her poems off to a Canadian literary journal. Wayman also insisted that Wallace join a writers' workshop. She did, and it was in the workshop that she wrote many of the poems in her first collection. In this same interview with Cameron, he mentioned that it was at this point that Bronwen met Chris Whynot (who rented space in their house in Windsor). He later became Bronwen's partner but only after Bronwen and Ron had a child together in 1974. At that time

Bronwen and Ron agreed to split up, but they remained friends and both remained active parents to Jeremy.

"They lived in a house on Johnson Street which they let out to boarders...and one of the boarders was Chris Whynot. So she became involved with Chris and Ron was gone. It was always sort of a melding kind of situation with Bron" (Wallace, Cameron, Kingston, ON. March 24, 1995).

Clearly when I talk to Cameron, I get the feeling that he did not always appreciate or approve of his sister's lifestyle or her political work. While Cameron seemed to see the men in his sister's life as rather incidental to her other needs and even sees them as victims in her wake, her female friends and even Ron Baxter seem to see it differently.

Ron Baxter credits Bronwen with helping him get "in touch with his feminine side" primarily because gender roles were an issue in their lives together and in their political activity. Together, they also faced the difficult decision that Bronwen made to have an abortion in the first few years of their life together.[34] Ron also cites the time after their son Jeremy was born as a difficult time, a frustrating time for Wallace as she was staying home with her son Jeremy, and yet still had a keen desire to be out and about, and even more active in labor politics. She was, as Ron Baxter put it, feeling powerless.

In a little known publication called The Magazine published for workers in Windsor (that Ron Baxter passed along to me) a collection of poems that Wallace published therein entitled "Shiftwork" points to the frustrations and sensitivities to which Baxter

[34] Although very much pro-choice I believe the decision to have this abortion weighed heavily on Bronwen's mind until the day she died, and I believe this weight surfaces in her writing. In particular I see this surfacing in "Burn Out" from The Stubborn Particulars of Grace.

referred. Nighshift #2 (published approx. 1975) is one such poem. This poem may well have been the beginning of Wallace's close scrutiny of the plight of working-class women in her poetry.

Nightshift #2

In the middle of some warm and favorite dream
he arrived,
tense and resentful,
making me, somehow, responsible
for the job, the crazy hours
the cold walk home;
rearranged blankets
wrenched pillows
throws himself to an uneasy sleep
while I huddle guiltily
on the cold edge of morning,
until the baby wakes.
Daily, the house become a battlefield
and I, a kind of buffer zone
between doorbell
Telephone
the joyful noise of my own son
and the hostile stranger
in the bedroom.

All day long, I hear him
tossing and swearing,
At dinner, he presides in silence
anger, palpable, behind his eyes
The baby whines and plays with his food.
I hurry to remove him
and above the sound of his bath
hear the inevitable drone of the TV
foresee another wasted evening;
And though I know in my head
it's the company's fault
find myself plotting, bitterly,
the best way to pick a fight.

(From The Magazine, Vol. 10 #4
Aug.- Sept. 1976)

In an interview with a writer and dear friend of Bronwen Wallace, Carolyn Smart, on April 4, 1994 in Kingston, Ontario, Carolyn mentioned that Bronwen justified the abortion she had and suggested that knee problems and subsequent and frequent x-rays were the reason she decided on the abortion. Carolyn also mentions that Bronwen revealed to her that her husband, Peter Dexter, came out as gay less than a year after their marriage, and that this knowledge was instrumental in her decision to leave Peter and to act on her attraction to Ron Baxter.

Wallace did not just cast Peter aside (as Cameron seems to suggest). He surfaces directly and indirectly in several of her poems. In "Benediction, for Peter D." upon hearing of his death, Wallace reflects on their life together. (and the rituals in that life, in this case being pie-making.

> A wedding ring and the art
> of making pastry are all I have
> from our marriage, Peter...
> I miss you more now.
> So young then, I thought forever
> came with words, the hateful things
> we never took back,...
> each death specific
> as the terms that bind me to it,
> so that yours, which loses the cells of your body, scatters
> the details of our marriage too, the bits that matter to no-one else
> I'd meant to gather in some day...
> (Wallace, Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 33)

Obviously, the news of Peter's death came hard. She had regrets.

While Cameron saw Bronwen's infatuation with Chris Whynot as just another melding, it is interesting that Ron saw it as important for Bronwen, saw it as what she needed. As Ron put it "Chris seemed to give her the right amount of freedom and security

and the permission and space to write" (Baxter, September 28, 1997). When I told Cameron about Ron's comment, he said quite emphatically that no one had to give Bronwen permission to do anything.

By 1980, Wallace had returned to Kingston with son Jeremy and it was then that her first collection of poetry was published. At this point she also helped to establish the Women's Studies Program at Queens' University and taught Creative Writing there. But because the academic life (albeit somewhat political by this point) was not enough, was contrary to what she believed must be done, Wallace began working as a front-line counselor at Kingston's Interval House, a shelter for battered women and their children. In the words of her friend, Joanne Page, "The two year stint (at the shelter) moved her profoundly, temporarily dried up her writing, and crystallized her feminine politics, which found voice in 1987 when she began writing "In Other Words," a column for the Kingston Whig-Standard (Page, Arguments With The World, 9). The manuscripts that followed her work at Interval House are People You'd Trust Your Life To (short stories) and Keep That Candle Burning Bright & Other Poems. But most noteworthy in this context are her poems entitled "Intervals" from The Stubborn Particulars of Grace published in 1987. Wallace dedicates several of the sections in "Intervals" to women she served at

Interval House.

> This is for Ruth,
> brought in by the police
> from Hotel Diu emergency
> eyes swollen shut, broken jaw wired
> and eighteen stitches closing on eye. This
> is what a man might do...

"I can't sleep," she apologizes,
every time I close my eyes,
I see fist coming at me
through the walls...
(Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 61)

...This city, an edge like any other;
its dark, the border territory between house
where violence holds up in men's hands, the shadow
that fall between a woman's breasts, the kids born
already knowing...Like time bombs, all those childhood's
huddled in corners...
(Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 60)

In "The Town Where I Grew Up" in Common Magic Wallace asks that we look beyond the Kingston area. In this poem it is not just a different life we see but Wallace tells us that it is all a matter of seeing what we care to see, or believing what the establishment wants us to believe.

Interval Years

It is clear that Wallace's work in Windsor was moving her more in the direction of concern for women and their children, and that her efforts at this point became as practical as they were political. In an interview with her friend and co-worker, JoAnne MacAlpine, I learned about Wallace's particular concern for the children who followed their mothers into Interval House for shelter. "What struck me was her keen interest in the children. I think we (the other volunteers) hoped that because the shelter was for abused women, that the children could just follow them in and things would improve for them too...Bron recognized the kids as child residents of the shelter. And not just appendages to their mums" (MacAlpine, Kingston, March 25, 1995).

We get a glimpse of this concern in "Intervals, Part II Free Speech" when Wallace relates the desperation of a client at Interval House through the description of this client's child.

> ...Only her children can understand.
>
> The oldest, fourteen, is smaller
> than an eight year old, his wrists
> thin as the pencil he's using
> to mark off the days
> their father left them alone, locked
> in their cabin forty miles North of here...
> this is for him too, for Steven,
> round-shouldered old man of a kid,
> one hand on the paper, the other
> in the air, signing to his mother
> the little he has to comfort her
> in her language. (Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 61)

Wallace was moved to take action and so together with Cathy Jamieson, set up a one-on one program for the kids. Individual volunteers would pal up with a child and design modest activities and outings. Games and books were brought in, and a garage was converted into a play space for the children.

One of the things I heard over and over from the women who worked in the shelter with Bronwen was that she seemed to have an intuitive sense of what was needed next, what the next move was or should be. I asked her friend and co-worker Debra Greer what Bronwen wanted to do next that never got done. To which she replied:

> She used to try to work on it and never happened,
> And still isn't happening, something called 'Second
> Stage', some kind of affordable, secure building where
> women could go after they leave the shelter" (Greer,
> Debbie, Kingston, June 10, 1995).

According to many of Wallace's friends, her work in the shelter was frustrating and consuming. Wallace was particularly frustrated because the shelter was a stopgap measure and it was difficult to see a long-range result or solution. Yet Wallace looked ahead and dreamed of other solutions. She also seemed to lend some civility to the way things were done at the shelter. For example, it was Bronwen who decided that prior to each meeting, the shelter workers gather to discuss what troubled them about the operations of the shelter in general or specifically. Wallace also had a way of dealing with problems that never seemed like criticism. She was mindful of people's differences and all of their feelings. Darlene George told me a story about some of the awful things people would donate to the shelter and how angry it made many of the workers. When Darlene expressed her anger to Bronwen over one particular shabby stuffed animal that came in, Wallace dealt with it by suggesting that Darlene throw if off the side of the house in order to dissipate her anger. Darlene also said that Bronwen made those human off-the-wall suggestions now and again (George, Darlene, Interview, June 10, 1995), and that this was helpful. Both Debra and Darlene made clear to me that even if Bronwen was not "up," she was always kind, always warm, and always inclusive.

But one friend, JoAnne MacAlpine, remembered a tough Bronwen, a Bronwen who could stand up to the police officers who came searching for women. She remembers how angry Bronwen became when the police downplayed the good work the shelter did. Wallace told MacAlpine that it was Ferd Wallace who prepared her to deal with this reaction on part of the police because he (her father) seemed to trivialize what Bronwen did, as did her brother Cameron.

In the Spring issue of ARC Wallace is being interviewed by Brenda Carter when Carter asks/comments:

> The poems that have arisen out of your work with battered women at Interval House in Kingston in your new collection, the anger that was a part of an earlier poem "Dream of Rescue," seems more controlled in the new ones and I think these poems are far more ominous..."
>
> To which Wallace replies:
>
> That's really interesting. I think when I first began to work at Interval House, when I first began to deal with the whole question of violence against women, I really did have that kind of nice, liberal idea that I was rescuing people or that I was helping these poor women. And I think that one of the things that I learned from working at the Interval House is that there isn't an "us" and "them" situation, that as women we are all in danger and that recognition of that changes not only how I look at the issues but how I look at myself and how I look at where I am in society. And it clearly changes what I can do about it" (Wallace in ARC, 46).

I wasn't quite sure, when I started this work, why it is that I have decided to focus on Wallace's poetry, but in that same interview in ARC Wallace kind of speaks for me when she tells Cantor:

> ...The private title for the collection that I had in my mind for "the Stubborn Particulars of Grace" is now the title of the last section "Nearer to Prayers Than Stories" which is a phrase that comes from an essay by John Berger. He's a Marxist critic who wrote "Ways of Seeing". He has an interesting essay on poetry in which he says that poems, even narrative ones, do not resemble stories. That all stories in one way or another are about battles, about victory and defeat. But, he says, a poem is a way of crying out, a way of saying, this has to be paid attention to *now*. It isn't an appeal

> to the future, it is an appeal to the *language* to pay attention and in that sense they're nearer to prayer than to stories. Poetry speaks to the immediate and I really believe that and I think in that sense poetry can change things" (Wallace in ARC, 47).

That the line between poetry and story blurs into meditation and yet serves as "political discourse" fascinates me. It also sets Wallace apart from certain ideological camps in which others would place her.

At a recent literary conference a kindly gentleman, upon hearing a paper I delivered about Wallace, pointed me in the direction of a few working-class women poets who are living and writing in the general area of British Columbia. He suggested that I read the work of Kate Braid, Maxine Gadd, and J.B. Joe. I am grateful to him because suggestion was a reminder to place Wallace in her rightful historical-literary context particularly the context in which she first began to write poetry that combined the world of work and womanhood. While these poets take on the prospective that Wallace did, their styles however, are not in the "disobedient" forms, the blurred forms, the inclusive forms of Wallace.

Pat Logan

According to Jeremy Baxter, very few things affected Wallace as much as the illness, then death, of her friend Pat Logan. Along with several poems in her friend's honor Wallace (together with her husband Chris Whynot), made a film about Pat's struggle with cancer. The title of that 1982 film is All You Have To Do. In a review of the film by Bill Hutchinson, Whig-Standard Staff Writer, Hutchinson says, "The film successfully attacks the common practice of pretending death does not exist. (14)" What I found most interesting in Hutchinson's review, however, was his comment that the film "...is not a

documentary, nor is it a series of land-edge interviews challenging and probing the subjects. This is a portrait, not a slice of life work." And unlike what has been said about Wallace's poetry, "The film's major limitations lies in the politeness, poise, even consideration it shares with its subjects. We see the finished product, not the process, the pain and turmoil that had to be lived through" (Hutchinson, Whig-Standard, n.d.) [35] In the poem "Anniversary," in memorial for Pat Logan, Wallace begins as she drives away from the graveyard where Pat are buried. Wallace longs to tell her friend ordinary things like what she ate for breakfast, or about a new antique place she has found. She remembers a day they spent together. Then the poet meanders ahead to where she might stop for a sandwich on her ride home and the common courtesies she might share with the vendor. Wallace makes us aware at the poem's end that the simple exchanges she had with her friend Pat, is what she treasures (Wallace, "Anniversary" The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 54-5).

I had a notion the other day to take the film All You Have To Do and to insert the series of poems Wallace wrote for Pat Logan, at crucial intervals. The poems appear in Signs Of The Former Tenant in the section entitled "The Cancer Poems." The poems in the series begin with Pat's diagnosis and move through her surgery, treatment, remission, and death. But amidst these poems are the "Dream Poems," rather surreal poems for Wallace. In these dream poems, it is difficult to tell if the dreams are dreams that

[35] Interesting that once Wallace turned to short story/fiction writing that she was able to do what she did not do well on film. Perhaps the film was a desire to do what she did not do in poetry- actually capture a more complete narrative. Perhaps she saw fiction as somewhere between essay and poetry. Wallace hints as what fiction can do in her essay. "Finding Some Unsuspected Truths In Fiction" Arguments With The World.

Pat Logan is having or if they are the dreams that Wallace is having. The poems also reflect the subconscious dealing with each stage of Pat's illness. Hidden as well in the dream poems are the lessons Wallace learned from Pat, as well as what they both learned from the process of death. They learned that the ordinary along with the extraordinary is important, and that it is important to consider both as an important part of a woman's life.

In (the) "First Dream" the woman enters an empty shop where she hopes to purchase a book that an old man refuses to sell. A sinister male figure has followed her into the shop and offers her the book. The woman in the poems tells the sinister figure, "but it (the book) was mine all along" - the book (just as the life or death) clearly belongs to the woman but is taken by the male figure. In (the) "Second Dream," in a house with arched windows and spiral staircase, a man with a softer face and hands offers her biscuits and wine. At this point the reader thinks that the man provided these comforts the reader thinks? By the third dream the woman sits in a fishing boat at the center of a grey lake - a monkey in cap and jacket is turning cartwheels on the bow. She is trapped with this "clown." In (the) "Fourth Dream" she is in "an old house again or a prison" and there is "an old man under a bare tree" but somehow the tree is made of crystal with crystal fruit. And perhaps she is the fruit ready to fall and break. Then when the dreams, (like Pat Logan's life) are over, Wallace returns us to the particulars of Pat's living then dying and looks beyond the interaction with (and captivity with) the surreal male figures in the dreams.

Wallace could be telling us many things here, but what seems clear to me and important to my focus is what she says about a woman's life and work, as well as, the

importance of the interaction a woman has with other women, how they touch each other's lives. The last poem in "The Cancer Poems" series is "A Stubborn Grace." In this poem the poet speaking about Pat Logan says:

> ...your words taking root
> in this room in your eyes
> that draws me
> to your bedside and your warm hands
> growing into mine
> hands I have watched so often stubborn
> grace of them lifting a child or reaching
> for food at your crowded table
> shaping the pots you made...

And further the poet says:

> ...we can only give you
> what's at hand for now whatever we were doing
> just before we came you do the same
> for us and your dying weaves
> through the muddle of our days
> a single thread
> in the cloth of another colour...

The influence of other female friends surfaces in other Wallace poems as well, and in nearly each of these poems the work that women do is central, never peripheral. In "Between Words" (for Carole) in Signs of the Former Tenant the narrator/poet sits in a bar with a friend, a nurse who laments the number of and condition of the very young, very poor farm girls who came to the hospital to give birth every February.

In " The Story You Told" (for Liz Whynot and Linda Zingaro), three women discuss their mothers' lives as young women then move into how old women react to young women and vice versa. Right in the middle of the poem the narrator is "Late for work and rushing for the bus/ while the old woman (is) sweeping her walk on the corner."

And in "Bones" (for Barb) from The Stubborn Particulars of Grace Wallace relates a story a friend told her. This poem is so intertwined with the life of her friend and the work that women do that it is best to show it here:

Bones

A story of yours got his one going,
so I'm sending it back now, changed of course,
just as each person I love
is a relocation, where I take up
a different place in the world.
The way you told it, it was after midnight,
you coming off the late shift, heading home
in a taxi, a woman driving
and you ask her if she's ever scared
working these hours and she says, "No, I've got this
to protect me!" reaching under her seat
to pull up (you expected a crowbar,
a tire iron) this eight-inch, stainless steel
shank. "The pin from my mother's thigh,"
she tells you, "I got it when they put
one of those new plastic ones in."

Sometimes when I tell myself this story
I get caught up in logistics,
how the doctor must have delivered the thing
from layers of fat and muscle
into one of those shiny dishes
the nurse is always holding
and then she would have,
what? Washed it off? Wrapped it in towels?
Carried it down to the waiting room, the daughter
sitting there, reading magazines, smoking cigarettes
It's so improbable, like the fetus
pickled in a jar in the science lab in high school,
though other times it's just
there, natural as the light
that bounces off it,
somebody's mother's thighbone,
for protection, like her face
in the hall light, rescuing you
from a nightmare.

You told me this
during my visit last year
when I'd just quit working
at the crisis centre, that job
that wrenched me round
until each morning stretched, a pale, dry skin,
over the real colour of the day,
ready to spring at me, like the child
whose hand had been held down
on a red-hot burner
reappearing in the face of a woman
met casually at a cocktail party.
Everywhere I went, my work experience
drew me through confessions I couldn't stop,
and I couldn't stop talking about them
so you had to listen
but, being you, in that way that listening
can be active, when the listener re-enters
the country of her own damage
from a new direction.

This can be like watching someone we love
return from the limits a body can be taken to
- a botched suicide, say, or an accident.
Years, it might be, before the eyes or the hands retrieve enough
to offer as a sign,
what doctors think they can detect
on a CAT scan, some pattern in the cells
to show them, once and for all,
how the mind, like the body, makes shape
of what's left, the terrible knowledge
it labours through, slowly regaining itself.
Though on an x-ray, even the bones show up
as light, a translucence that belies their strength
or renders it immeasurable,
like the distances we count on them to carry us,
right to the end of our lives and back again,
and again. (Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars
of Grace, 80)

In " Joseph MacLeod Daffodils" (for Isabel Huggan) in The Stubborn Particulars Of Grace, Wallace converses with her friend about most everything:

(Another thing we share, our delight
in quotations like that, exactly what you'd expect
from girls who grew up wearing glasses
into women who read everything;
your bathroom so much like mine,
a huge bin of books by the toilet
and on the shelves, all the bottles
turned label side out.
"The contents of somebody's bathroom,"
Diane Arbus said, "is like reading their biography.")
(Wallace, The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 31)

Many people commented on the fact that Bronwen Wallace had many close female friends. Testimony to this was the group of women whom she called her healing circle. This was a group of female friends from the Kingston area who arranged a schedule to care for and visit with Bronwen around the clock while she was ill and dying. The members of this group read their works to her and the works of others, they shared memories, but sometimes they just kept silent vigil. Most of these women have met with me and told me about the time they spent in the healing circle with Wallace. Of particular interest (and lending insight into her character), was the story about the construction noise near Wallace's house during that time she was dying. It seems friends wanted to call the proper authorities to tell them that the poet was dying, but Wallace insisted that they not call, telling her caretakers that the noise would not be halted for others and need not be halted for her.

The dinner party that I gave in order to get Bronwen's friends together has become somewhat symbolic of her life because women of all ages, working women, many of whom worked in the shelter, came together at this dinner to talk. Of course, there was much laughter; there was the sharing of memory and many tears. Many of these women

do not have the occasion to see each other on a regular basis, still there was nothing uncomfortable about their coming together and I was welcomed into the fold like the rest. It was as if they needed this time and space to grieve informally. In their stories, in the casual power of their voices, I could hear Wallace's work continue.

CONCLUSION

Of course the majority of Wallace's work, both literary and political, occurred during a very self-conscious period in North American women's lives. The weakened feminist movement was being revived and women were beginning to re-examine questions about how their private and public lives were structured and how gender relations affected those lives. While Wallace sometimes leaned toward a Marxist analysis of capitalist structures, it is clear that she also saw the rules of patriarchy and her "gendered life situation as important." Therefore the modern feminist movement and the ideologies of that movement became a more valuable base or platform for her work. It was troublesome for Wallace, however, that in the institutions of "higher learning" the intellectual take on feminism seemed to ignore class and economic strata – seemed to want to discuss feminism, especially when it had to do with literature, within the vacuum of the university. Furthermore, Wallace felt some frustration because many could not see that literature by women, in a particular class, was/is a form of production, which quite naturally will and should contain the material, the artifacts, the linguistic structures and literacy constructs of this class and its subclass-women.

I'd like to indulge myself in a couple of other points here that have more to do with my work than with Wallace. In doing this work, all along I have faced either the idea that biography was/is not academic enough, or that it is hardly a genre at all. I see this work, however, as a place where we rescue certain women from historical oblivion to show them as agents of change, as critics, and as leaders of their class and culture. I believe that we cannot ignore these ideological issues – especially not the feminist issues, but that

we can't give short shrift to the seemingly mundane details of ordinary life events, artifacts, and work. In doing so, the particular becomes the universal and vice versa. The biography seems to be the perfect place for all of this.

The somewhat hidden struggles of the biographer also should not be ignored. It is natural and draining to develop this close encounter with our subject's life. We go through stages of rejection and, of course, identification that can be painful. We learn things we are not sure we should reveal and must deal with issues of privacy. It is ultimately impossible to maintain, or rather sustain a critical, scholarly stance.

Perhaps because of all of this, and because of the constant feeling that what I say here is as much interpretation as fact, I first must let you in on the context in which I write, then I wish to allow you to see/hear what others have said about Bronwen Wallace in their letters to me.

Just as I sat down to begin this conclusion, there was a knock at my door. The academic in me said, "Ignore it or you won't get your work done." I heard Bronwen Wallace says, "Open the door." As I suspected it was a neighbor, she had her barn jacket on, her hair in disarray, as was mine, and she was holding a bag of dog treats - the peaceful entry ticket into my house. She looked upset.

"Come in" I said "Have time for a cup?"

"Sure" she said, "but I have to be quick, Al (her horse), is out to pasture and I don't want him out there too long this early in the season."

My five dogs sat audience to our talk in my kitchen. The talk went from tractors, to flowers, to neighbors, then to husbands, and grown children. Her husband is away sixty percent of the time she said. Her boys off to college...

The talk goes on for an hour before she leaves with her signature "Come on down, I'm alone, you know."

It occurs to me once my friend leaves that Bronwen Wallace, had she lived, might well be facing some of the personal concerns that the two of us articulated at the table. Even if Wallace was not faced with them herself, she would be writing about them, of that I am sure.

Wallace would be fifty-four years old now. Her son Jeremy is in college in a distant city. Her parents are becoming feebler by the day and are living out their years in a senior citizen high-rise. Many of her students are still writing and some are publishing meaningful poetry. Kingston still has its best Victorian face forward, and many of the older homes in Kingston have been maintained or restored. There are still many beautiful personal gardens planted in even the smallest of yards. There is, also, still a need for places like Interval House; and the many prisons on the near peripheral of Kingston areas still teem with inmates. Wallace would be writing about how things have changed, and how they have not. Household chores and concerns about her son (and soon perhaps, grandchildren) would still hold the ethereal in her poems together. Her darker poems would most likely deal with issues of primary importance to women and children today. She would, I am sure, also be vocal about gay rights, gay marriage, and perhaps, the need for more research in the area of women's health concerns. She would be helping us to stretch our definition of family. She might have begun to take on more of the academic hierarchy.

Perhaps she would have organized a writing retreat like the Baniff Center for the Arts in order to continue to help get the voices of women, even older women like me, out

there. Perhaps her last collection Keep That Candle Burning Bright tells us what she intended to do, in terms of the typography in her narrative style. But my guess is that she stretched the lines in that last collection because she wanted to stretch them like the loneliest county roads. I hear these poems lope along when I ride out back in my South pasture. I think it was these rhythms she heard when she wrote Keep That Candle Burning Bright that caused her to elongate those lines whereas in her other poems, the near obvious shape they take (line breaks that denotes poetry) while accommodating a conversational narrative, was clearly the point.

Of course, I have read Wallace's prose. Many feel she would have moved deeper into fiction. Perhaps she would have. I think, however, her film about Pat Logan was more telling. I can see Bronwen writing for documentaries and screenplays and getting low-budget films out there- perhaps bucking and breaking the traditions in yet another academy.

The thinking about where Wallace was headed makes me sad, but it also gives me some direction. Wallace would most likely still be writing about things like Beatrix Potter, (maybe Harry Potter), artificial insemination, and the government of Canada all in the same meandering. And she would still be meandering around issues in the way our thinking and speaking often does. She would be screaming about gun violence and child victims. She would still be looking at the problems of the power some have over the other - not in order to discuss these paradigms of power in Marxist or Pre-Marxist terms, but rather in order to evoke stories and then social action that might address these paradigms.

In her "Blueprints For A Larger Life" Wallace suggest that women once had more power- evident in the oldest tradition- in the celebratory words of Wicca. She states further that this power was a power from within and the power to. The shift, she says, a shift to power over, of men over women, adults over children, whites over blacks, rich over poor, and this shift happened long ago. Wallace calls up a poem by Libby Scherer in this article. It is a poem about rape that is also about the impossibility of writing a poem about rape. She tells us how Scherer uses her damage as protest "shoves her life into the face of the patriarchy and says, 'you better listen to this.'" This is important to the protest as Wallace equates this poem with the sort of protests that we make, the protests directed at those who have tried to silence us. "The poem is like a speak-out a 'take back the night' march" (Wallace, Whig-Standard "Blueprints In A Large Life", 1987). That she has placed this poem dead center in a newspaper article is telling as well. It breaks the norm and moves "high art" into the mainstream, and mainstream style into high art. Wallace would still be doing this.

That she had a vision for equality goes without saying. Mary di Michele speaks to this vision Wallace had when she (quotes Baker to) questions if women will ever evolve away from a tradition that marginalizes us.

> Could we evolve away from a tradition
> which had been a sort of fluctuating stock
> market of literary values, could we
> substitute the long line of ghosts of kings
> jostling in the hierarchy, with rooms of
> people of all ages, from all ages? Talking
> together. Reading Bronwen Wallace's work,
> whose poems are both a deepening and
> heightening of the art of conversation,
> makes me answer, most emphatically, yes!
> (Sheard & Wachtel, p. 100)

That Wallace saw diversion by class as a way of blinding us is evident as well. That she knew that the institutions of higher learning only help/helped to create larger gaps between the class- to separate us from our roots- but to especially separate us from the struggles and voices of the generations of women before us, was articulated again and again by Wallace. That she ignored the dictates of the larger literary community and pushed narrative poetry toward plain talk- the kind of plain talk that we might hear in our neighborhood or in our country music is unprecedented. Most notably because she does this while discussing the concerns that ordinary women had/have. That she guarded against showing women (in her poems) escaping into a fantasy- away forever from pots, pans and diapers to some transcendent place, was innovative and bold as well.

Because I want this work to be a tribute to Bronwen Wallace, I have decided to close with a few letters. First a few letters to me, then a couple of letters that served as her last words to those left in her wake. And finally, I must tell you that my work only begins here. The books and transcripts, articles and interviews as well as the poems I have been blessed with, will continue to take me into this remarkable woman's life and her work. After the texts of letter from friends and her son Jeremy, I will also include my own letter to Wallace as well. Later and most appropriately, I will continue to chronicle her work in a collection of biographical and ethnographical poems- an idea Wallace would love.

March 31, 2000

Dear Bronwen:

I had a nightmare last night. In the nightmare my mother had overslept (something she never did), my granddaughter was without clothes and my husband was watching a basketball game (actually a rare treat for him as he is the proverbial workaholic). He lifted his head in my direction and said "Oh by the way, we are having twelve people over for dinner," after which I had a violent, nervous breakdown. I woke thrashing, heart racing. This is the way you came to me today, out of a nightmare about the situations in which many women and children still find themselves. This wouldn't surprise you, I know. But you wouldn't keep silent about it, either.

In the last five years, I have been looking at your life and your work, and I am just beginning to know you. I know that I can't look at the world only through my eyes anymore. Actually, I can't pass a large vacant house in this area without thinking that you might encourage the local officials and a group of friends to convert it into a shelter for women and children, even abused men. Some feminists think this is what we did in the 60s and 70s, but I know it is still our real work. Lack of money would not stop you as it does me.

Also, I can't sit and write a poem without asking myself if I have hidden what I want to say in some elitist language, some language that is not really me. Actually, at times I felt this way while writing my dissertation. Perhaps that is why it has been so difficult for me. It came together more like patchwork than an academic work, and I am afraid it reads that way, too. But you would understand that most things in a women's life are part of a patchwork of their experiences, life work, professional work, and custodial work, which results in some unique, colorful design. When I write now, I constantly ask myself if the piece I am writing is accessible to those who inspired it. I ask if it is true to its

history. I ask if it is hidden in the language one class uses to distinguish itself from others. I ask what I am faking, forcing, or hiding in order to take a middle ground, in order to publish. These are tough questions for me especially since it is you who has taught me that my voice is valid.

In the last year I have traveled to Italy and found my way to the tiny southern Italian town of Prigano, and to my maternal great-grandmother's house, a tiny stone house with a shed for a donkey attached. This is where I came from. That this realization will make its way into my poetry goes without saying. That it will be as important as what I say about growing up in Detroit, Michigan in the 50s and 60s would make you proud. The industrial landscape of Detroit did not make me. Perhaps the walks on Belle Isle with my mother in the shadow of the "Seven Sisters" did. The RenCen doesn't excite me. It is much too clearly phallic and tom like.

I regret that I came to your work so late in my life. I find it interesting (Tom Waymen pointed out to me) that you were just across the river in Windsor when I was a student activist in Detroit at Wayne State University in the 60s. Had we ever sat in a room together, ever talked? Why did we let the River divide us? Why did my political action stop when yours continued?

If we could sit down to coffee I imagine we would talk about how we have become invisible to most men in our middle age. We would probably feel a mixture of grief, anger, and relief over this. I wonder if we would talk about the real possibility that one or both of us could live with and love another woman the way we have only let ourselves love men. Not that we can't love men but, we might talk about, if doing so, might indeed set us free.

You would talk about raising your son. I would talk about raising daughters. I would tell you how much easier the role of motherhood seems for my daughter than it was for me, or you...(obvious in your poem for Jeremy). My daughter's ease with motherhood makes me proud, but also frightens me. I could tell you this. You would understand, commiserate.

And, oh, the literature we could share! There are a few new poets out there that seem to move in the direction you took in your work, but after awhile they seem to back off, move back toward a more controlled narrative style. I will watch this and report on it. I wonder if I am called to push the envelope here. To try to take up where you left off. I wonder if it is in me. You would tell me to try. You would also tell me to drop the parenthetical wouldn't you!

I have been wanting to ask more about your illness. I sense that your early indulgence in marijuana combined with smoking cigarettes and drinking was in part to blame for the illness that took your life. Or did the dental surgery you had provoke it? Did anyone ever question this? Perhaps you would be taking a long hard look at the tobacco manufacturers had you survived..

You would be my connection to Canadian Literature. I need a new connection because, and you would mourn this knowledge, South Shore Books in Windsor has closed. It has given in to the new direction of Windsor with its casinos, topless bars, and all. I would like to talk about the casinos with you. What do they stand for? How would they make their way into your poems? How does this change the landscape of our history?

You would be glad to know that your friends and family were open to me. But I am sorry to say that Cameron, who was first very helpful, has since shut me out. He won't even tell me why. My notes and e-mail to him now go unanswered, yet I owe him a debt of gratitude. It was Cameron who first contacted me, Cameron who sent me copies of your articles and many of your letters. I think that he feels left out of your life in some way. (Are you aware that even your very last letter makes only passing reference to him). I wish I could make this better for him and for you. I see it as much like my relationship with my brother. We love them but can't get through. Their place in the 50s, and 60s, and 70s growing up was so different. Of course, when/if Cameron reads this, he will say it is just so much bullshit! Anyway, I would like to talk with you about this.

Ron still adores you. He has remained your loyal friend, and a good father to Jeremy. I see so much of you in Jeremy! Chris, now married again, would not speak with me at all. I sense he is avoiding pain for himself and others in doing so.

I have so many questions. Try, as I did to find answers, I feel humbled for the trying. I promise you that this work will continue. One more thing. I never listened to country music before but now I listen to Emmylou Harris whenever I feel stuck in life or love. Her rhythms buoy me so, allow me to move on.

And instead of reading Marx again or studying deconstruction theory anymore, I am going to do some deconstructing. I plan to travel to my paternal grandmother's house in the southernmost tip of Italy so that the lack of this bit of my history doesn't blind me. I feel my own place in history now too. Even when I am cleaning stalls, planting tomatoes, I see this action as part of my history. When I wipe spittle off my granddaughter's chin, I feel that history moving along.

Oh, Bron, how many heartaches must we share? It is nearly lilac time. You liked this time of year. Let this work bloom with the lilacs for you this year. Know that I carry you out into the world this way and that our journey has just begun.

You put it this way:

> ...Even those women we dread
> sitting next to on buses and trains,
> their bodies swelling with messy secrets,
> the odour of complaint on their breath,
> may be prophets. Whether we listen or not
> won't stop them from telling
> our story in their own.
> (The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 48)

> ...how little is ever really possible
> for any of us, botched
> failed things to whom it may only come once
> and never clearly, that moment
> when the voice that tries to sing
> through all our stories rises, briefly,
> first person singular.
> cries *yes* and *now* and *help*
> *help me.*
> (The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 67)

> To come back, again,
> to those Sundays at my grandmother's table, ...
>
> To begin to see, a little,
> what they taught me
> of themselves, their place
> among the living and the dead.
> thanksgiving and the practical
> particulars of grace, and to accept it,
> slowly, almost grudgingly, ...
>
> (The Stubborn Particulars of Grace, 110)

Appendix A

Letters

Gloria D. Nixon-John
4183 Locust Valley Lane
Oxford, Michigan 48370

Dear Gloria:

Bron was an accepting person. She was non-judgemental and always willing to listen to the other persons point of view. She had strong principles and stood up for them without making anyone else who did not agree feel inadequate or wrong. If you disagree with Bron she still respected your opinion.

Bron was different from others because she was so open, caring and fair with others and there was no phoniness within her.

Bron would walk into a room and smile her wonderful smile. She usually was bouncy and could pick up on the mood of the room right away. I got a warm feeling when Bron arrived as I knew that Bron would be helpful.

Bron smiled a lot and her body language was receptive. She would not interrupt but when she wanted to say something and was waiting she would not be able to sit still. She seemed elegant in her demeanor but never acted snobbish. Her posture projected to others how she seemed to feel good about herself.

Bron had insecurities. She was always worried that Jeremy would be given food with peanuts in it as Jeremy is deathly allergic to peanuts. She also felt that her teeth would not last as she had a gum disease. Bron went through very painful dental surgery to get them repaired so she could retain her beautiful smile. She had a big party when she turned 40 as she felt very strongly about not waiting until she turned 50. Did she somehow have a premonition of her death in some way? Bron seemed to feel insecure about her writing at times and felt she might lose her ability to write.

Bron loved to read the tabloids such as the " Enquirer" as they made her laugh at the ridiculousness of the stories. She loved jewelry and wore long roomy skirts most of the time.

She totally disliked abusive mens behaviour and very little tolerance for their behaviour. She worked at Interval House so she could help women and kids have a better quality of life.

We never discussed religion that I can remember. Bron felt very strongly about censorship though. We used to get a lot of Harlequin romances donated to Interval House and the staff would send them on to another agency. When Bron started working at

Interval House she was appalled at this and explained that censorship was terrible because who determined what was " bad" or " good " and where would it stop? She convinced the staff without much trouble and we no longer censored the residents reading.

While Bron was a counsellor at Interval House she also spent many hours with the kids. They loved to see her as she told them wonderful stories while painting their faces. She would always listen to them and answer all their questions if possible.

As for the copy of the interview and the dinner music, I do not have either but Deb Greer, Trish Crowe or Judith Taylor would know.

I am sorry I took so long to respond to your letter. I had more major surgery and took awhile to recover.

I ran into a woman I had not seen for years and told her about you as she had taken classes from Bron. She would be interested in hearing from you if you are interested in her concepts of Bron. Here is her name and address:

Anne O'Hara
142 Grenadier Drive
Kingston, Ontario
(613) 544-5127

Hoping to see you again.

Sincerely,
Eleanor

Bron's Memorial Service

Bronwen autographed one of her books for me and wrote "Sister to Sister". Bronwen felt that way about all women.

Bronwen gave us many gifts. When she gave us her wonderful smile her whole face glowed. Her eyes always seemed to sparkle with life and spirit. I need to say as well that her eyes flashed at comments she found offensive. Bronwen exuded warmth and compassion to everyone. She was always accepting of others and valued their feelings. Bron's perception of others was usually right on. Bron taught us to consider all sides of an issue and to realize all the implications of any decision. As an example: censorship in relation to pornography. Bron felt that we should not dispose of any reading material regardless of its content as censorship is both a political and a personal issue. She asked good questions: Where would censorship stop? Who would determine who would do the censoring?

Vivid in our memories are the hours and hours we spent as a group working on the house philosophy and operating guidelines. Bron was so passionate about words and helped clarity the nuances between one word or phrase and another. Bron was always willing to share any ideas and knowledge she had and was open to any suggestions others might have for doing things differently.

One staff asked me to share an experience she had with Bron. "I had only been a volunteer at Kingston Interval House only a few weeks and had decided to go to my first volunteer pot-luck. I was very nervous. I was new to Kingston, new to the shelter movement and new to Kingston pot-lucks. I found myself sitting next to a woman who declared herself a feminist and she helped me to become comfortable and part of the group. She laughed a lot and I always think Bron had a lot to do with why I became involved in the shelter and stayed."

Bron shared many experiences about Kingston Interval House through her poetry.

Bron will always be a par t of Kingston Interval House- she cared about it so deeply and gave so much of her time and energy- with a terrific sense of committment. She gave the women and children a gift- the gift of being listened to. She listened wonderfully well with heart and mind open. Bron taught us a lot about living, loving and caring. We are proud to have worked alongside her.

Talk given at Bron's service by Eleanor Suboski

Sept. 12

Hi Gloria,

The old rhythm slowly resúmes itself as I work my way back into school mode. I can't remember a september when I wasn't going back to one school or another. This has always been the month during which I confront (or re-confront) the big, bad, intimidating-as-hell world of institutionalized learning. You must be familiar... In a way it depresses me to think that I have followed this pattern for so long. But at the same time this year I find I am excited about school-- there are things to look forward to and my schedule is the best it has been since I came to UBC. I even have a whole day off--sort of. All in all the transition into school mode has been pretty smooth. I feel good--ready to work.

I have a theatre history prof. who is a very amazing man. He has traveled over the world to hundreds of theatres, opera houses, crazy parties and tells wonderful stories. We were talking yesterday in class about the tendency for people to be intimidated by the work of the "great" playwrights--and this is true with other art forms too. It isn't the work itself that we find intimidating but rather the wall of interpretation that has arisen, over time, between the work and "us". This is so true in the university environment where all we do is analyze, criticize, theorize, memorize... We need to re-appropriate all of these great works (he referred to everything from Oedipus Rex right through Shakespeare on down to Beckett but again it holds true in so many instances). We need to pull them through the wall to curselves so we can rediscover them as they are--with no essays or theses to stand in between.

"Ve need to spend less time tinking (he has a giddy German accent) and more time exploring and experiencing without trying to figure de whole ting out." The need to re-eroticize these arts because we are losing touch of our senses--getting lost in the dusty academic analytic headspace. After all art is sensory--sensual and if we forget that and only think about it all in our heads we're cutting ourselves off.

At the end of his lecture he confessed that he is in love with Susan Sontag, a woman who argues similar theories.

I could go on but I won't. I'm not exactly sure why I've written all this but I guess it got me riled up. Maybe you can use it as advise for some of your students...

I really don't know about any foreign others that influenced Bron's work. Authors that wrote in other languages hmmm... well Karl Marx -- I don't think that helps much. I will throw out Rainer Maria Rilke as an idea--

someone who she read a fair amount. I can't think of any authors to compare her to though. That's a tough one for me.

San Diego still sounds really cool. I only wish I knew what my schedule was going to be like with the shows at school. I have midterms Thurs. 16th and Fri. 17th and one of the shows I am designing for closes on Sat. the 18th. I may need to be there the last night of the show but I think I could miss it (let's just say: if you were going to book it on the Sat. maybe you could let me know before you did). Otherwise I am available and would love to go anytime after late Saturday night until whenever you leave--the 21st? So let me know! If you would prefer another arrangement or something I'm cool with that too.

Before I go I wanted to mention to you someone who I have known a long time-- a member of the Logan family (I think we talked about them before.) Pat Logan was Bron's closest friend for many years. Chris and Bron made a film about her and her fight with Hodgekin's disease... Anyway Pat's daughter Amy was close to Bron and was involved in the support group/roster when Bron was sick. She is an interesting and insightful person. I mentioned your name to her and the work you were doing. She would like to talk if you would. Right now she is somewhat hard to get a hold of. She just moved to Vancouver with her boyfriend. So if you wanted you could send a letter or any information to me and I could forward them. I see her quite a bit. She have a more fixed address soon.

take care,

Jeremy

P.S. I am sending these two pieces. I guess connected in that both were written, in a way, for Bron. blue is a newer poem and spaces I wrote just after her death.

July 7 '96

Hello Renee, Hello Gloria,

I guess it has been ages since we last spoke. The river of time swirls along the endless spiral path. Suddenly it is the middle of summer and my time for adventuring is not as plentiful as I would like . However comprimises must be made --I am doing my best to maintain my focus and I try to tell myself that adventuring can wait.

I have a pretty cool job these days. I am working at festivals around Van as a crew person. My first gig was the International Children's festival. I did everything from driving tent stakes with a sledge hammer, to putting up huge tents, stages and seating, to herding small children into shows inside the tents, to installing lighting equipment etc... I met lots of interesting folks. Next was the Dragon Boat festival -- giant canoe races with teams from around the world. My job there entailled collecting garbage (primarily) also moving sound gear, food and people around in golf carts. There was lots of free beer which made the garbage pick up a little easier--also 12 bucks an hour. Tomorrow I start the Folk festival which promises to be a good gig--location is excellent: right on the sea shore.

I managed to get four days off last weekend (after working ten straight). I journeyed to a magical place on the west coast of Vancouver Island. There lies the oldest of trees and hanging mosses and , of course, the open ocean. Wow--fucking amazing. Endless beach and surf and white mists rising out of the sea. I even braved the waves long enough for a quick body surf.

I was accompanied on this trip by my new sweetie--Valerie who is also a theatre and fine arts type person--she is currently a directing graduate student. Val has a truly inspirational spirit and a very grounded outlook on the world. We seem to share a common rhythym.

In case you are wondering Bernadette and I parted on happy terms and still hang out. I guess we had too much difficulty finding a common agenda. We are heading in different directions and trying to bridge that gap was tiring and not very fulfilling.

Does that make any sense?
Do I make sense in any of my meandering chatter?

Do y'all think I am crazy?

I hope so.

Renee, I enjoyed reading your letter and the offer to come for a visit is very enticing. After Folk fest (early in August) I am returning to Ontario for a while. Had I more time I would attempt to cross the border and journey to your ever intriguing woodland home. However I think under the circumstances it would seem too rushed. I have a lot of visiting, remembering, laughing , crying, indulging and catching up to do in Ontario--I get overwhelmed just thinking about it.

Soooooo perhaps Christmas, perhaps next summer but I know in my heart that I will make it there before too long.

Hope all your creative endeavours are progressing well: dysertation work, darkroom construction. You guys will have to keep me up to date on all developments.

Here is my new address:

4 - 131 West 13th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C.
V5Y 1V8

Telephone: (604) 873-1264

Take care,

lovejeremy

Dear Gloria,

Your project sounds really exciting and I'll be glad to give you any help I can but I don't know if that's going to amount to much.

My relationship with Bronwen totally and profoundly changed my life. I've been thinking about it since getting your letter a few days ago, but I'm not coming up with any information about her or words of wisdom she gave me.

What I mostly remember about the time we spent together are my own feelings which were frustration with not having the words to tell her what I needed to tell her or ask her what I needed to know (and wonder, that time after time she'd just sit with me not talking) anger at the way she was always saying things to me that I totally didn't understand as though they were the simplest truths in the world (it wasn't until the summer she died that I could honestly say I was beginning to get a little of what she'd been trying to tell me, and that I could thank her), anger and frustration with the way she'd read something I'd written that I thought was good, and never say "that's good" but always something like "So, now what are you going to do?", and love.

Sometimes when I'm alone in the house I find myself looking out a window across the fields and thinking about Bron and I can barely remember.

Dear Gloria,

Immediately upon leaving you I began to come up with things I wished I'd mentioned. Likely this is endemic to the process. So many pieces of it, there were, much to collect together from the various filing places in what passes for one's mind. Here are a few of the scraps that fell out while I drove from Kingston to the cottage Saturday morning.

The writing class.

One Rosalind Adams, R.R #1, Milford, Ontario, K0K 2P0, a rather silent, mysterious, painfully shy young woman who said virtually nothing in the classes, who turned out distinctive pieces about life as a seasonal worker in Prince Edward County (a poorish area to the west of Kingston, around Picton) which were clearly autobiographical and very strong. Ros adored Bron, and Bron seemed to be very supportive of Ros, talking with her before and after class, possibly between. Ros was striken by Bron's illness and would turn up at Gibson Ave, near mute with distress that last summer. Later she came to drop in on me regularly, then dropped out of sight. She resumed contact with me a couple of years ago. She had birthed a daughter whom she named Bronwen. The infant was born with a heart defect and only lived 4 days. She has subsequently had two sons, still lives in the Picton area & might be able to shed some light on Bron's mentoring/teaching ability.

Another from the class, Richard Belzile, a francophone & an out-gay man, now at the other side of law school has just been hired by the Queen's Human Rights office as someone about to undertake anti-heterosexism work within the university (sign of the times). I presume he could be reached through the university commencing in September. He, Richard, is also a gifted ASL signer and signed Bron's International Women's Day speech, heretofore known locally as Blueprints.

Bron's style in a teaching situation, as I mentioned, seems in retrospect to have been almost at odds with her personal style. As I came to know her first in the classroom, I didn't catch the

separation until I spent time with her afterwards, elsewhere. Certainly the confrontational Bron, the argumentative Bron, this woman stayed home on teaching days. We did get her passion though. It was electrifying. She loved reading aloud. I understood why she did it so well better after I talked to Peggy about elocution Peggy was known for her prowess - and listened to Bron's aunt described a young Bron on the washing line platform, declaiming poems to anyone who would listen. (This last story came from the aunt as she and I sat a shift with Bron's body after she had died.) Thinking back to the creative writing course, the memory of her voice and her familiarity with the material she chose remains clear and affecting still, after all these years.

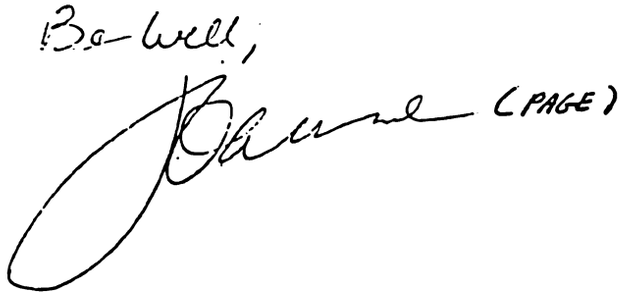
Monday, June 26/95

Another memory centres on what I might best describe as the ethics of writing about real people. I've since had this decussion more times than I'd like to remember and understand it to be one of the standard topics among writers and writers' friends. There are, of course, all kinds of points of view. You who are engaged on this very subect will have your own "take." The subject came up because one of the undergrads had written a short story about what she admitted was an incident involving her upstairs neighbours in the student rental where she lived. She, the student, was very troubled about having written the story. Did she have the right, she wanted to know, and what did Bron think about such issues? Without missing a beat, Bron came back with something like: "Of course! You write what you have to write. Your obligation is to the story, to the writing. People will like it or lump it, doesn't matter." The class chewed over the right or wrong of the question for the rest of that class and several more. Probably the reason I remember her position so vividly was because the village poems I was engaged in wrting had positioned the same dilemma directly in front of me and since I'd read Bron's published work (Marrying Into ..., Common Magic, The Stubborn Particulars...) I'd had occasion to wonder how much was autobiographical and real and, well, wondered about this very matter.

"close to the bone" was written right after the Blueprint speech and now reads raw and unpolished. It was never published, never submitted. "promise" was published, along with another I can lay my hands on, in a little literary mag out of Kingston called Next Exit,

edited by Eric Fulsom for some years. Eric put out a special issue with pieces written for Bron. Can't put my hand on any of those issues either, although I know they are around.

Rather than let this sit awaiting completion in my computer for who knows how long, I think I will cough it forth and send, as some evidence that I have been thinking about our conversations.



October 21/96
at Kingston

Dear Gloria,

As ever, a long delay between promise & delivery. But, and, well, you know how the time goes. Swiftly. I've decided that I'd just better get at this, bit by bit.

A favorite B. poem, ah Gloria, there are so many. In fact, choosing one seems impossible & probably why I've delayed sending off this package, most of it easily assembled. To force the issue, I'm come downstairs to a café with only the Birdsworth Particulars to choose from although I love especially a whole slew from Communion and and and... So I choose "Seeing is Believing" — could have been "Koko" or "Change of Heart" or "Testimonies" which I love, or or or, well you get the idea — So, "Seeing is...":

The wonderful motion, the shift from magic to science, from Alberta to Ontario to — how does she do it? — mountains & then to every landmark cent loose. From Kathie to Jerron to a friend St. John's to Australia, and of course Bron firmly anchored in the centre, except that she's in motion too, driving to Calgary and somebody "out there/moving steadily into it." ("that "it" accounting for so much). Never forgetting Emily Dickinson.

The Wallace hall marks: "these tiny squares/that open onto so much sky" — always openings; nods to other women writers, artists, other women thought to be ordinary; the over-coffee conversational tone; the solid ideas, philosophical questions, placed casually without bells & whistles; the

2/ a Brownism

ordinary images relocated "my mind / brakes and switches to reverse / like the flashing orange note I can hear"; a dash of Flannery O'Connor; the lovely memorable sweep to the finish. Never a throwaway ending, never an ending which can't bear the weight of the poem, never an ending that seems to have arrived too soon; the care with word and line which remains invisible — no seams — yet allows the motion & thought all the necessary room to move, or stand still; the affection for the story, the passion TO TELL.

Of course you know all that.

I love to read her poems out loud. That's not always the case with poems I love. I think it reflects the pleasure she took in making them so she begged to be read aloud.

About craft. What did she teach me?

To play. To rearrange, to shuffle parts of stories or poems, that they needn't remain as they first arrive on the page. As a novice, I had there was some finality in getting it down, as though that were the only part of the process. She pointed out (gently) that capturing the idea was only the beginning. Of course one ought, also, to be careful not to overwork so as to lose the freshness of the original spark, but much more work was required beyond draft #1. Gradually I came to see the truth in revision-as-improvement.

To be true to the impulse which is the source of the poem or story, not to flinch or back off.

3/

that's not so much craft as or ethic principle, I suppose, but it inevitably informs craft. Requires bravery. She was not short on bravery or conviction, so she taught that one as much by example as by instruction.

The care required by, or applied to, each & every part of the poem or story: word, line, image, arrangement, sound, theme, and so on.

The amount which can be learned by reading good stories & poems. She loved reading other people's work aloud. And when we weren't able to pinpoint the particular strengths, sometimes she simply couldn't wait for us to stumble along & burst with exhuberant analysis, which was just as well, which was quite fine as it saved time &, in truth, the loss of enthusiasm was as affecting as the points she was trying to get us to recognize. Who can resist a teacher who loves what she is teaching?

Respect for the effort anyone who is trying to write puts out. This has proved invaluable to me as a reader of submissions for Quarry mag & as a teacher of writing (if anyone can indeed call herself such a thing).

The need for integrity of voice. This is a little hard to nail down, because I don't remember her specifically talking about such a need, as a need. It was more the other way around, as in: if the language works with what the poem is trying to say, the poem will work. But, as I look back, I see that she could and did manage a kind of integrity of voice in everything she wrote, from notes, to letters, to poems, to her columns & essays & speeches. Certainly part of that had to do with

what she was saying but it also occured because of how she said it.

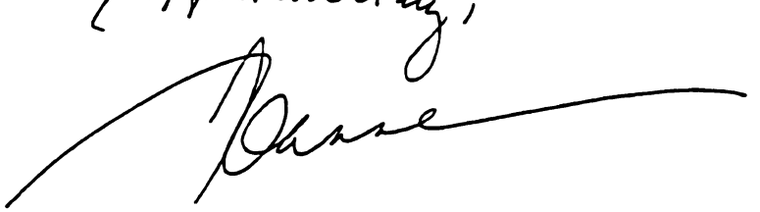
Not to be afraid.
Not to quit.
Not to get distracted.
That writing is important.
That it is imperative for a writer to take herself seriously.

Again, these aren't craft but making the learning of craft possible.

One other little bit you might not have known. Bron was of assistance — wait, that's too clinical or distant — Bron helped two lesbian friends, a couple, with a project. The "project," Timothy Wallace, was born after Bron died. His mothers — Vicky & Tina — now live in Nova Scotia. They are quite a wonderful pair & it comes to me that they would be willing to tell you the story, should you want the story. And I'll bet you do. I hope to be able to get their address before I send this off to you. If I don't, haven't, keep reminding me.

That's all for now. I hope your life is skimming along smoothly —

Affectionately,



October 6, 1988

Dear Joanne,

Great to get your letter - and the poems, which I have returned with lots of comments. Generally, fine-tuning here. These are very good. I'm particularly taken with how you seem to be taking more chances, risks, especially with the two longer pieces, though that energy seems to have affected the shorter ones too - nice touches, like the presence of the Holsteins in The Hill, the little aside about Slim in Of Mills, which give the poems a density and a texture which is really exciting. And you're right about where the problems are in the longer pieces too, and I've stuck on lots of comments which I hope will be helpful.

Aw, gee, looks like you've lost your wonder-woman pencil case (or super-woman) - I'm being a very hard-wrking girl, mainly because I have a deadline for these poems for CBC State Of The ARts. They're in rough shape now and have to be sent on next week, first-draft deadline. I'm sort-of pleased, sort-of scared about how they're coming out, which is as very short, snappy prose pieces, very different from my earlier stuff. So it's fun and exciting. I'm not getting involved in community stuff here at all, and am sticking to the CC mandate about how much time I have to give the English Department (3 days) to the letter. I do see lots of students in that time but I'm really giving myself lots of time to write and to think and to read and do all the things I don't seem to have had enough of in the last few years. I'm loving living alone, even in residence, and really feeling that this period of time is a period of grace, a gift.

One of the people I'm reading and loving is Elizabeth Bowen, her novels now her short stories later. She's someone I read as an undergraduate - a novel called The Death of the Heart which got destroyed for me by a professor who referred to it as "sentimental women's writing." As it turns out (surprise, surprise) my current re-reading of it reveals to my delight that she is anything but sentimental, though she's a woman in all the ways that professor a man who loved Lawrence and Durrell could not see, she's wonderful, amazing, ironic, funny, moving, intelligent. Wow.

I am seeing some people here, of course, friends I knew slightly that I am getting to know better as the months go on. And I'm planning to take in some of the London scene, though, to date, I haven't even been down town.

I'm so glad you're going to come on to the Interval HOuse board, we need good women. I will be looking forward to seeing you at meetings when I get back.

Anyway, some student photographer is coming to take my picture for an xxx article/interview they're doing with me in some magazine, so I guess I'd better go wipe the ink off my chin, etc.

Keep writing letters and poems
Of the titles, I like Safekeeping best, but none strike me as "it" really.

Bob, Brenda

Joanne

-Here is a bracelet I thought you'd like. The colours remind me of you. ~~It's~~ It became special. It's from Bowling Green, W.V. where I went to give a reading in Oct 1987 at the U of W.V. Huge Success. Great interest there in Canadian literature. I was warmly + southerly received. It was a very good time.

The process by which this bracelet is made (+ about which I kept absolutely everything except that it involves ~~possibly~~ pressing natural materials at high heat and laminating them somehow (?)) is unique to the area.

I just like the colours and the memories. I hope you will also take some of my leaves and other earrings

I like to think of ~~this~~ this having passed on, and around. There is so much power in these gestures of sharing bits of our lives. ~~Between you~~ Between you + I the "life contact" was too brief, I know, but the depth of that encounter touched some of me into your life

Love,

Jan

Ashes

To: Chris, Jeremy, Peggy, Ferd, Cam, Ron, Carolyn, Joanne M., Wendy, Amy.

At this point in my life I feel most deeply connected to you people. To you, Chris, because the life we shared together was the richest, most fulfilling, I had ever known and I expected that to be the case forever. Jeremy, because you are my son, unique in that & it will all you have taught me to be. To Peggy & Ferd, being my parents for the connection between my potential & what I became which ~~whose~~ was good & strong thanks to you. Cam, my brother, always there. Ron, with whom I am connected forever in our child; Carolyn my most supportive friend, going so far for me & for my words. Joanne, your sensitivity & courage. Wendy, the renewing of old blood-ties, "kissin' cousins". Amy, connected through Pat, you are my daughter, but you are also ~~you~~ my friend in your own place.

None of this says what I want it to. I see your faces at night when I lie awake, knowing you give me the strength for this.

I like the idea of you're carrying me into the world one last time. I hope you will enjoy doing this. I hope you'll share plans & ideas ~~to~~ ~~do~~ if you want to, places even. I hope — very much — that it isn't ~~just~~ a chore. But an act of love.

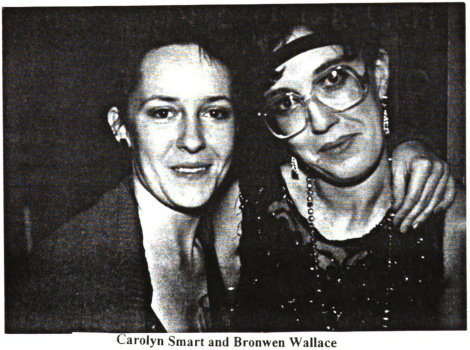
Appendix B

Pictures

Bronwen Wallace

Cameron, Peggy and Ferd Wallace

Jeremy Baxter



Carolyn Smart and Bronwen Wallace

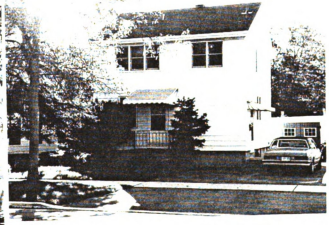
Wallace Family Farm

Ron Baxter

Me and Jeremy

Wallace Apartment

Interval House



Last Residence

Bronwen's Last Garden

Appendix C

Poem

I MET CAMERON YESTERDAY*

For Bronwen Wallace
(1945-1989)

A today he took me to meet your Mum and Dad
We wore our flannel faces while you loomed above
the crisp white linen you never wanted to be.
Cameron poured us all tea and we talked about
our mutual love for Siamese cats, but make no mistakes
this was ceremony.
Now, late afternoon, as the shadows paint
a favorite picture book, and those cats thread up
the fire escape at the Hochelaga Inn,
now having almost touched your life, I must face
this unearned grief.
I did not even ask how you faced your death,
if your lips curled back like the petals of the crocus
the Innkeeper force-blooms in the tidy foyer.
Words were never on your lips. I have always
had to call them up from you, so that I might tell Cameron,
so that he might tell someone he is about to love, his lips
so much like wings.
Those two cats are on the roof now, I see them mine
the eaves for traces of something they remember--
a feather perhaps--see them bat the thick particles of light.
And I see you rise up over Kingston, in the distant city smoke.
Smoke.
Over the room where your Mother and Father
first knit you with lean boned thighs, circumambulated
with kind vapor, even into the years of your disapproval.
How were they to know you would collect like
this monolithic grief?
And how was I to know that
I would see your smile reverse
like empty parenthetical
that I must fill.

Gloria D. Nixon-John

* I hope to write a series of Biographical poems about Wallace. This is the first in the series. I have only four to date but his will be my next project! Wallace would have wanted it to be my first project!

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