

PREFACE

By Shirley Lumpkin

In the fall of 1997, I began a journey with three other women, Dr. Edwina Pendarvis, Ms. Laura Tussey, and Ms. Jan Adkins-Bills, to explore the writing of contemporary women in Appalachia. When we started, we didn't know what we would find; for we tried to begin without preconceptions, determined to let what we found take its own shape. All three of the women I worked with are contemporary women writing in Appalachia, Dr. Pendarvis and Ms. Tussey primarily poets, and Ms. Adkins-Bills a journal writer. I am the resident outside observer who chooses to call West Virginia (and hence Appalachia) home. Through working with these women, I have become more of a writer--an essayist, a journaler, and a very sometime poet--myself.

We would never have had the opportunity to undertake a research project of this kind if it had not been for the generosity of John Deaver and Elizabeth Drinko, who established the John Deaver Drinko Academy at Marshall University. Through the support of the Drinko Academy, its Executive Director Dr. Alan Gould, its Executive Secretary Ms. Stephanie Neal, and the other Drinko fellows, I was able to have the time, the financial aid, and the administrative assistance to complete this preliminary set of findings about contemporary women writing in Appalachia. In addition, the Drinko Academy offered the same kind of support to the Drinko student scholars, Ms. Laura Tussey and Ms. Jan Adkins-Bills, and support to my College of Education colleague Dr. Edwina Pendarvis. We are all deeply grateful.

What we offer here are some preliminary results of our ongoing research into contemporary women writing in Appalachia. The first embodiment was presented at the Marshall University Joan C. Edwards Playhouse, for the John Deaver Drinko Symposium, on April 1, 1998. What we are presenting in this CD and accompanying text is a shortened audio version of the April 1

presentation, a revised version of the written script for that occasion, and a selection from the phototext we used on April 1. We hope to present our ongoing work in many other forms to as wide an audience as possible, for what we have found not only challenges every stereotype and many generalizations about women, writing, and Appalachia, but also offers genuine hope for the future of women, writing, and Appalachia.

AN INTRODUCTION TO DR. SHIRLEY LUMPKIN, DR. EDWINA PENDARVIS,
MS. LAURA TUSSEY, AND MS. JAN ADKINS-BILLS
By Dr. Alan Gould, Executive Director Drinko Academy

Dr. Shirley Ann Lumpkin

Dr. Shirley Ann Lumpkin, the John Deaver Drinko Fellow for the Academic Year, 1997-98, received her bachelor's degree, Summa Cum Laude, from Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, in 1965, her Master's degree from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland in 1966 and her Doctorate from McGill University, Montreal, Quebec in 1983.

She received a Canada Council Doctoral fellowship, was a Dean's honor student at McGill and was a Woodrow Wilson Scholar at Johns Hopkins. A member of the Marshall faculty in the Department of English since 1983, she previously taught at McGill and at the University of Tennessee.

She has served on many university committees and the University Faculty Senate and as advisor to Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society. She is active with the university's Writing Across-the-Curriculum Program, the Marshall Writing Project and various organizations and activities in the College of Liberal Arts, College of Education and Human Services and the English Department. She has published extensively, including articles on American literature and African American writers, and

has made numerous scholarly presentations at professional conferences.

Named the West Virginia Legislature's Outstanding Higher Education Professor in 1990, she also received the Marshall and Shirley Reynolds Outstanding Teacher Award at Marshall University the same year.

Even a cursory review of her curriculum vitae reveals a remarkable and enviable record of service to Marshall, the community and her profession. Dr. Lumpkin has established a reputation of being an outstanding faculty member in every sense of the word and is most appreciatively regarded as a gifted teacher and a conscientious and caring colleague.

Dr. Edwina D. Pendarvis

Dr. Edwina D. Pendarvis, a native of Eastern Kentucky, is a Professor of Gifted Education in the College of Education and Human Services at Marshall University. She received her doctorate in Special Education from the University of Kentucky in 1983.

Dr. Pendarvis is an outstanding educator and scholar. Even a cursory review of her vitae reveals an impressive listing of professional presentations and publications, consultations, grants and editorial responsibilities. Additionally, she is actively involved in various writing projects at Marshall and has taught composition courses for the Department of English.

Perhaps equally important, Dr. Pendarvis is a highly regarded poet, drawing on themes from her Appalachian heritage. Eddy Pendarvis has had her poems published in a variety of noteworthy publications including *Now and Then* and the *Appalachian Journal*. Her book of poems *Joy Ride* is published in *Human Landscapes* (Bottom Dog Press, 1997)

Laura Leigh Tussey

Laura Leigh Tussey, Drinko Student Scholar for the Academic Year 1997-98, is now a full-time graduate student and teaching assistant for the Marshall University Department of English. A native of Eastern Kentucky, Laura began writing poetry at an early age and primarily focuses her poetic talents on the subject of growing up as a woman in Appalachia. Her publications include works in *Centerpieces* (Ashland Community College Literary Magazine), *Et Cetera* (Marshall University Literary Magazine) and a book of poems entitled *Time of My Unweaving* (Marshall University). Laura gave a poetic presentation of selections from her book at the Fourteenth Annual Jesse Stuart Writers Conference, November 13 and 14, 1998, at Ashland Community College.

Under the direction of Dr. Shirley A. Lumpkin, John Deaver Drinko Fellow for the Academic Year, 1997-98, Laura participated in the Drinko Symposium held on April 1, 1998 at the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse on the Marshall University campus.

Jan Adkins-Bills

Jan Adkins-Bills, Drinko Student Scholar for the Academic Year 1997-98, was born on Hart's Creek in Lincoln County, West Virginia. Moving from her original home to Huntington, West Virginia as a young woman was a major cultural shock, as was enrolling at Marshall University as a part-time student in 1987. Throughout all the change, she has maintained her deep ties to her large extended family, her family cemetery and her two daughters, at least partly through the journaling she began in 1980 and continues to do today. Journaling also became a way for her to construct her evolving identities as a woman and to create an authentic and authoritative voice and identity as an

Appalachian.

Jan, under the direction of Dr. Shirley A. Lumpkin, John Deaver Drinko Fellow for 1997-98, participated in the Drinko Symposium held on April 1, 1998 at the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse located on the Marshall University campus.

RE-MEMBERING, RE-WEAVING, RE-VISIONING 'OTHER' WAYS: CONTEMPORARY
WOMEN WRITING IN APPALACHIA

With Selected Phototext by Laura Moul, Sandee Lloyd, John Lloyd

Our Angle of Vision: Walking the Roads of Words with Contemporary
Women in Appalachia
By Shirley Lumpkin

Here in Huntington, West Virginia, one of the hearts of the place called Appalachia, four of us, two teachers, and two undergraduate students at Marshall University, have been fortunate enough to clear a space, thanks to the generosity of John and Elizabeth Drinko and the Drinko Academy, and to embark on a journey of discovery, walking the roads of mutual inquiry, collaboratively exploring the uncharted territory of an important subject: contemporary women writing in Appalachia.

We invite you to walk the path of words we have explored. We invite you to use our method of study: a collaborative conversation based on paying close attention to the rich writing life of contemporary women all around us in Appalachia. To paraphrase William Stafford in "Lit Instructor," join us in

dancing our "way toward the family of knowing" these women and their work by understanding that "[e]very quiet feather asserts a just claim." (87) We invite you to encounter what these women writers see about themselves, about writing, and about Appalachia and to use the accompanying phototext, composed by Appalachian photographers Laura Moul, Sandee Lloyd, and John Lloyd, to visualize the meanings of the metaphorical images in these contemporary women writers' works. We invite you to enrich your knowing by participating in the word ways of these women writers, as they re-member, re-weave, and re-vision the meanings of being women and Appalachian.

Let us begin with the journaling journey of Jan Adkins-Bills, Drinko Student Scholar and returning undergraduate student. Author of thousands of pages of journal writing over the last 20 years, Jan uses her journal writing to archive the fabric of her daily life and affirm the value of the invisible and unrecognized "woman's work" she does; to create a place of refuge and a space to pay attention to herself; to construct a voice of her own from words of her own; to "backtalk," critique and "unweave" the identities, ideas, and the boundaries imposed on her; to re-member, put back together in a new way, her past, her people, and her places, accurately and precisely; to integrate those re-constructed memories into her constantly evolving identity; to seek and interpret encounters with books, herself, her past, others, and Marshall University; to "homeschool"; and

to re-vision, to do her own work, expressing her creativity and fulfilling her desire to write. Jan sees her journal as her place to "be in words"; her place of learning and expansion; her place for testing, re-naming and re-defining, especially the re-defining of herself as a woman and an Appalachian. But most of all, Jan sees her journal as a journey, a curving road of words she creates while believing, "You never know what lies around the bend."

The Journaling Journey of Jan Adkins-Bills

January 2, 1998
10:00 A.M.
Friday

How did I begin keeping a journal? Journaling wasn't a deliberate decision on my part, nor as far as I can recall, was writing suggested by anyone in particular, but sometime in the early 80's I began to pray on paper. These early morning notebook prayers also included everyday details of my family and the inevitable ups and downs of people living together under the same roof. With the first cup of coffee, I wrote in the journal, read from the Bible, then headed for Ritter Park for a run before it was time to chauffeur daughters to school.

I felt conflict with the desire to write and could relate to Gertie Nevels, the heroine of *The Dollmaker* who considered her whittling "foolishness." My writing was a private thing which produced no tangible accomplishment. It was time consuming and

often spread into areas of untouched thought and feeling. An entire morning could quickly become consumed, but these written prayers began a journey where I literally wrote myself into a more authentic existence.

During these early years of journaling I could not see beyond what my culture defined as the right way to live. The journal became a place where that struggle was verbalized and eventually questioned. I came to recognize the writing addiction I'd developed, but could not stop writing.

Over the years the journal has led me to an awareness of the natural world where I've tried to put into words the color of early morning light, or the way a snowfall transforms familiar landscapes, or how an agile squirrel crosses a busy intersection on a utility wire while I sit waiting for the light to turn green.

Within the pages of the journal I've celebrated time alone in Spring Hill Cemetery where with journal in hand, I've written about the bills that need to be paid, the laundry that goes undone, and speculated on names and epitaphs of people I never met, lingering until the sun has set and the evening star appears.

The journal also holds the grief experienced in death. My father, grandmother, uncles, and our family pets, all are mourned in these pages of written loss. The mourning eventually led to memories flowing from my pen, memories of good times shared, when

my father sang Hank Williams tunes at Christmas time and my grandmother sat in her recliner next to an aluminum Christmas tree in the living room of the country home where I was born.

The journal holds death, but it also holds life. Throughout nearly two decades of journaling I've changed from a young woman raising children to a middle-aged empty nester. But in spite of gray hair and hands that reflect work common to most women, outward signs of aging are minimal in comparison to what has changed inwardly.

The journal is a written testimony of that change as well as a place for continuity. It safeguards the past, helps me focus on the present, and is a springboard for the future. My journaling pathway has been a spiraling kind of journey where often the road ahead was experienced only in words I was able to put on paper. The words did not necessarily lead to a path more easily traveled, but I learned to trust them.

The year 1987 is significant in that I returned to Marshall. I was forty years old and my youngest daughter was beginning her freshman year at the university. I registered for one class, and have since continued to take one class at a time, except for one semester or two when I actually survived the heavy academic load of six semester hours.

In the eleven years since my return to Marshall, I believe that I am somewhere in my third year, and have yet to declare a major. I have come to define education in a different light, and

to experience learning in an atmosphere that accommodates the rhythms of a life that has never been in step with traditional academic goals.

In the fall of 1997, through the pages of my own writing, I began to explore the emergence of my voice, and in particular how that voice is connected with my distinct Appalachian heritage.

If the way I speak doesn't identify me with West Virginia and the heart of Appalachia, perhaps the following entries from my journal will convey my deep roots with this place I am proud to call my homeland.

August 22, 1997
Friday 12:32 P.M.

Spring Hill Cemetery
Run Time 11:40 A.M. to 12:20 P.M. 4 miles
70 degrees Cool breeze, sunny, billowy clouds

Dear Gussie,

What was the world like the year you were born?

1895. Your birth precedes both my grandmothers' by ten years.

Wealthy Lambert Hatfield and Inez McCann Adkins were both born in 1905.

Grandmother Wealthy died when she was only twenty-three years old and didn't get to experience as much of the twentieth century as you and my grandmother, Inez.

I wonder about this young grandmother of mine. What were her

hopes? What did she enjoy in life?

What are my hopes? What do I enjoy?

I'm not what you call a goal-oriented woman, Gussie, not in the way goals are seen by our society.

That may change a bit. I'm about to begin my Drinko project at the University, so there will be a few goals set here. But overall, I suspect these will be more in keeping with my own sense of what must be done, and what it is I am capable of doing.

Most importantly, this is work that matters to me.

So is the work I've been doing for years, but I've had difficulty defining my own efforts to learn, and to grow, as *work*.

Believe me, Gussie, it has been work, but again, not *work* as defined by my culture.

I'm almost fifty-one years old now. I pay attention to my own voice these days. I'm learning, at last, this is the voice to trust.

I wonder about you, too, Gussie.

What does it mean to be *A Woman of Valor*?

That is your epitaph.

Were you a godly woman like the woman described in Proverbs?

I hope not. Or if so, I want to think there was a whole other side to your personality. Maybe you could spin and weave or do whatever the scriptures say a woman of worth does, but maybe you had a mind of your own, too.

I'm curious about you, Gussie, but I don't really need any concrete information.

It's ok just to sit here where your body lies.

My father is buried in this cemetery, you know, over on the other side of the mountain.

I come here because it feels private, because I like your name, and your epitaph.

August 26, 1997

I come to the computer wondering how to begin exploring what it means to be an Appalachian woman?

Appalachian . . . this is not a term I would have previously used to define who I am. Appalachian has been about a region, referring to mountains, or The Appalachian Power Company of electricity, or has been associated with a kind of people, or way of life which was not applicable to me.

Where does this particular identity come from? If I consider myself an Appalachian, how do I define this?

March 20, 1998
6:22 A.M.
Friday

The Hampton Inn
Boone, North Carolina

Thunder storms rage in Boone, where this year's Appalachian Studies Conference is being held. Here on the second floor of the

inn, I move a small writing table in front of the window to watch as the lightning illuminates a row of pine trees across the dark parking lot.

I love the sound of rain and thunder.

One is not, of course, supposed to be in windows during storms.

It seems I'm living dangerously these days, not only by sitting in front of a window, getting this close to lightning, but by coming to this conference with Dr. Lumpkin, who said last night at dinner that certainly I will be able to *present* at The Drinko Symposium, and there is no doubt in her mind I can do this. I nod my head in agreement and say, yes, indeed, I can do this, and I'm actually looking forward to the event, even though speaking in a small group can cause my heart to pound uncontrollably and leave me gasping for air.

Maybe it was that cool, refreshing beverage I was sipping last night that was doing the talking when I said I was looking forward to this, but like I said, I'm living dangerously these days, going to conferences and giving talks at symposiums and sitting directly in front of a window where lightning could strike me dead. But I'll take my chances just this one time, and go right ahead with *presenting* my journal, of all things, at The Drinko Symposium in the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse, of all places.

Lightning.

It can strike you dead, but it can illuminate, too, can show

you the world in a blink.

Lightning is like knowledge, sort of. It can be a little scary.

March 24, 1998
5:59 A.M. 38*
Tuesday

Home, sweet home. How good to be home, but what a journey I've been on.

Do I write about my experience of being among hundreds of people who study what it means to be Appalachian, people who celebrate that heritage? Or do I narrow my focus for the Drinko presentation, condensing years of writing into a ten-minute talk of my journey through time, where words have become the means of transportation to a place of authenticity and identity?

Identity. Looking back, I see this as a main purpose of the journaling journey, although through the eighteen years of writing, the path I was on often intersected with changing identities. Still, when I think about it, there has been one specific thread of the journey that has always been present. As I wrote about cooking pinto beans and baking corn bread for our supper, wrote about celebrations and struggle, or put on paper my response to faraway places, from Boston to San Francisco to the southern beaches of the Atlantic, this thread was woven into every experience.

No part of my life, no part of that journey, has been untouched by the fact that I am Appalachian. I've come to see this clearly since last fall when I began to work with Dr. Lumpkin on the Drinko project, with recognition of who I am and where I come from growing by leaps and bounds.

This past weekend, at the Appalachian Studies Conference in Boone, that particular strand of identity has been irrevocably stamped into my sense of self and what is uniquely my own.

Throughout the conference, I came face to face with images and stories of a place, and people, I am distinctly a part of. The ties to a land and its people are not exclusively through blood, but my own connection to Appalachia is directly linked through the bloodline of the grandmothers who often surface in the pages of my journal. Georgie Lambert. Wealthy Hatfield. Ida Kirk McCann. Inez Adkins. It is in part through these women that my identity continues to develop, and surely it is my own voice I've come to hear during the silent process of writing.

Encountering Louise McNeill and *The Milkweed Ladies*

By Shirley Lumpkin

Jan's journaling shows the rich underground streams of writing we should look for in our own Appalachian place, streams Louise McNeill tapped, and published from, in over 60 years of writing. Former West Virginia Poet Laureate Louise McNeill's 1988

lyrical memoir meditation on place and identity, *The Milkweed Ladies*, invites readers to take a wandering re-memory walk on a road of words with her, now a 75 year old woman and established writer, back to the source of her identity and her writing, back to her memory place, the Swago farm in her Appalachian mountains:

Sometimes now, a quiet sense comes to me, the cool mist blowing in my face as though I am walking through islands of fog and drifting downhill slowly southward until I feel the mountains behind my shoulder. Walking on, I can see the light in the "big room" window as I come to our cottage standing in the meadow under "Bridger's" Mountain, as it always stands on the fore-edges of my memory, and the old farm where I ran the April fields and pastures to my great rock up into the woodland where the lavender hepaticas grew (16).

While her verbal re-membering does bring back to life the particulars of now-deceased people and her now-abandoned home, her walking back, like Jan's, also puts the meanings of the place back together in a new way: she re-members knowing "something beyond death" (7) created by her sense of connection to the long time of the natural world embedded in her memoried homeplace. She re-members the "oceans weaving and receiving," as they laid down the pink coral and seashells she found in the rocks on Swago farm; the rhythms of underground streams; the rolling seasons of moon and sunlight and, most particular to her place, the "old

blue misties" (7 - 8). Her re-remembering leads to her connection to many other cultures as well, since the particulars of her homeplace include the Native American presence in graves and "[t]he old Seneca Trail, running south from the Iroquois nation" that "wound its way across" her pastures (9); her father's travels to many parts of the world; her reading; and the immigration of French Canucks and Italians when the logging started. Migrations, movements, and cultural interactions, as well as rootedness in a particular place in Appalachia, inform the chosen and constructed landscape of her consciousness as a woman and a writer with Appalachian identity.

She also re-weaves her connection to her culture, claiming as part of her identity that which the accepted boundaries of gender roles had denied her in fact. As men, her father, G.D., Uncle Doc, and grandfather could experience their particular part of the original 15 million acres of Appalachian virgin forest by hunting, roaming, and fishing their 60 unbroken miles in fall and spring. Being a girl, McNeill was not allowed to walk the trail with the men, but through her imaginative listening to their stories and then her re-telling of them in her memoir, she could claim their trail wandering as part of her own landscape of consciousness, knowledge of Appalachia, and identity:

Down in my heart, I knew every trail and wood sign from learning them by the fireplace in winter, and on the porch at harvest noon. I knew I could walk it

blindfolded: the steep open trail up to Beech Spring; then into the forest again; north past the overhang of High Rocks; down onto the wild Headwaters with forest around me, darkness at midday, the great oaks and the deep pavilions of shade. If the men went by the way of the Gauley, I could look down and see the rolling savannahs of bluegrass, mile upon rolling mile of open grassland sweeping down the forest and river shore. As I had learned it, I had learned it deep: the farthest place, the ultimate passage (94 - 5).

By letting the words of story sink into her imagination, she could claim through her own re-writing what in cultural practice she could only participate in through story. In her re-writing, she walks the trails with the men and knows 'the men's' forests as intimately as she re-members her own practices as a girlchild playing with the milkweed pods, taking out the silky white insides, and (in her transformative imagination), making them "milkweed ladies, as pure and delicate as soft white dove-birds," whom she and her playmates invited to tea and engaged in conversation "about the Ladies' Aid meetings and the strawberry festival down at the church" and whom she made up poems about (88-90). Through her imagination and her writing, in forms of "backtalk," McNeill re-constructs the lines of gender roles and claims the activities of both the men and the women as her identity and cultural territory.

While reclaiming all of her place and culture as her landscape of consciousness, McNeill weaves in a song of lament. Chronicling how they sold their wood to save the farm, she recognizes that the "sour song" of permanent loss sung by the land when the Cranberry River turned muddy is also hers to sing. With a poet's vivid imagery she re-weaves "the muddy, silted streams, the forest fires, the skid roads bleeding down the eroded hills and the terrible waste of it all" as companies go bust, trout die with sawdust in their gills, and trees are left to rot (98) into her re-membered forest, streams, and trails and her identity as writer, woman, and Appalachian.

However, McNeill's sorrow songs do not lead to the despair of the men in her family, who reacted to the Great Forest Fire of 1930 and the subsequent flooding--both caused by logging--first by re-naming their joyful stories about the "land over the mountain" to sorrowful stories about "The Bonnie" and then by falling silent and refusing to speak of it at all. Instead, McNeill re-constructs the lost place from the 'memory words' in her mind:

But for me, the lumber companies had not cut the Bonnie, nor the Great Fire burned it to blackened claws. Because I was born a woman and had not gone, could not go, it lay for me as I had first found it as a girlchild by the winter fireplace, listening to the men's wonder tales. In my obsession and possession, the

hunter men still walked. The great trees lifted forever across my vision and the sounding waters still ran. My dream of the American forest was deep and mystic and old; but the dream itself was always in the distance, moving before the seekers like the sun (100-1).

Since McNeill's knowing of the place was in words, she can re-vision the destruction, not by denying it, but by asserting the transformative verbal power of the vision of the "great trees, the great waters, the great forest," as a dream to be sought, possibilities to be re-covered in the future by using the vision of possibilities embodied in words to guide action.

Like the iris bulbs from the homeplace McNeill carried with her to plant wherever she lived, images, metaphors, and ways of knowing from her experience of the homeplace are planted deeply in her mind and guide her living, writing, and construction of identity. Like Jan's, these images and metaphors often come from re-covering and re-visioning the women in her family--Granny Fanny, Aunt Malindy, and her Mama. Through details and images, McNeill claims an ancestry of complex women, who wove life, knowledge, understanding and beauty out of their place, an intersection of roads meeting and crossing, and offers these women to readers as meaningful metaphors. McNeill re-members her Mama "in her Japanese kimono, sitting by the woodstove, singing a song" and holding the child McNeill in the warmth of "her kimono--the only beautiful garment she owns--a Japanese kimono made of

palest green stuff, with white chrysanthemums and pale birds flying through the flowers." (21) McNeill lays this first image over her re-membered image of the "day by day" Mama, a work-ridden farm woman, cooking, scrubbing clothes, milking cows, sewing on the foot-treadle sewing machine, rendering out hot lard and canning sausage cakes in her calico dress, faded sunbonnet, and "ugly Sears Roebuck shoes" (21) and lays both images over her re-membered image of Mama "standing out in the meadow with a wild pink rose in her hand," (22) knowing and teaching (like all the women in the McNeill's family) the names and natures of all the tame and wild flowers of the fields and woodlands. Woven of home and faraway places, radiant with inner light expressed in the acts and arts of dress, talk, song, and plant knowledge, and worn by hard work, McNeill's women become complex metaphors for the possibilities, powers, and multiple identities of being Appalachian and woman that shaped McNeill's mind, life, and writing.

When McNeill experienced her world tilting off its axis on August 6 & 7, 1945, she turned to her metaphors constructed out of her re-membered visions of the women and her homeplace to find the strength and knowledge needed to live in the newly made and dangerous postmodern--because post atomic bomb--world. Understanding and facing the precarious and temporary balance of a world which could tip any minute toward continued life or toward total obliteration, McNeill could draw on the taproot of

her re-membered homeplace and write:

But my heart does not break. There is a kind of benison that falls sometimes on the fields and mountains. Sometimes it is sunlight or a slow misty rain or a goose-feather snow drifting down from the sky; and the mountains ringing the fields, ringing the little village down at the crossroads and the white steeple of the Upper Church. And though I realize that I am old now, so that the years play tricks on me, it is all still there sometimes, an unchanged presence, even the rat manure in the water spring; and sometimes we are still at home and it's summer (31).

"Sometimes"--like "rat manure in the spring"--is an unromantic view of the past; the power of McNeill's verbal re-membering comes not from nostalgic longing, but from tapping a permanent source of complexly meaningful memories that can shape words to re-vision identity and therefore possibilities in her postmodern world.

Encountering the Poetry of Laura Tussey
Introduction by Shirley Lumpkin

The possibilities for women in the Kentucky place of her Appalachian birth and (after several out-migrations and returns) residence and the unromantic complexities of the place and people named Appalachian are central concerns of Drinko Student Scholar

and undergraduate English major Laura Tussey. A poet, Laura, like many other women writing in Appalachia (Marilou Awiakta, Maggie Anderson, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Barbara Kingsolver to name a few) began her poetry writing without awareness or even knowledge of Appalachian women writers. Through our collaborative inquiry and Laura's study of women poets currently writing in the area around her home in Kentucky, some of Laura's most recent poems have focused more consciously on exploring the complexities of the Appalachian place, people, and culture and on "backtalking," critiquing both stereotypical assumptions about women and Appalachia and the cultural restrictions and possibilities for women in Appalachia.

Laura Tussey's Prose and Poetry

I am here to share a bit of my poetry with you, and to speak to you about the women of Catlettsburg, Kentucky. These poems, which I have constructed in the first person, are not merely about myself--though they do contain seeds of the autobiographical. Instead of offering my audience a one-dimensional view of a single woman's life, I hope to give my listeners a glimpse of the commonality of life experience among the women "on my street"; the women who through social inequality and gender biases perpetuated through the decades, have been objectified and discounted by virtue of their poverty, lack of

formal education, and their sex.

Throughout my literary career, I have faced the less than accurate depiction of the image of woman in canonized literature. I have observed countless female characters with whom I could neither relate nor identify. What I seek to accomplish with these poems is that you walk away with the understanding that these women, who for any number of reasons have been demoralized or set back by societal circumstance, are not mere statistics in a book, but real women who share not only the common thread of social classification but also one of resilience.

The first poem that I will present is called "Rain," and describes a sort of "quest" for individuality on the part of the subject. Though there is no set resolution to the subject's place in life, there is a cleansing of herself that occurs with a simple act of childish defiance, or rather, self-assertion.

Rain

The rain pelts splattering
Rivulets along the root
Of our grand magnolia bush.
The pink-mop blooms are gone now
And its knotted fingers delve
Deep into the continuity
Of the red clay earth
To avoid being washed away.

* * *

Through the waterfall of trees
I must look strange to him:
Black-streaked cheeks
With lank soaked hair;
A thirty-year-old child

Huddled in yellow vinyl,
Cross-legged in the pooling street.
I see him framed in blue
Damask curtains
A puppet in a box.
He cannot reach me here.

Here the rain beats bravado;
Translucent drops chime
Tiny crucibles on my upturned
Face and I am cozened,
And I am cleansed.

The rolling wind will rise
And diminish softly leaving
Scattered streams;
Bastard drops
Of full blown hope.

The poem "We Remain" was written almost immediately after I overheard a number of sociologists theorizing about reasons that women stay with men who beat them. These individuals attributed it to learned family behavior. I assert that it is not merely familial socialization, but one of a shared societal ideology that defines a woman's "place."

We Remain

"So why do they stay"?

"Well it is obvious to me that these women have been socialized into this behavior--They most likely saw their fathers beat their mothers."

No--well, yes--but that's not quite all.

We remain in abusive relationships
Because we fear
The prospects
Of growing old alone.

Because we think
We have no where else
To turn.

Because our Mommas did
And their Mommas.

Because we get damned tired
Of trying to break through
Your glass ceiling.
Because we lack education, or motivation
Or any number of other "tions"
That have been theorized to obscurity.

Because our Daddies
Taught us the meaning
Of "respect" when we were young
Enough not to question him.

Because our benevolent welfare system
Is decidedly less attractive.

Because the next love
That we fall subject to
May just be worse.

Because like kicked dogs we feel
That we have deserved it.

But mostly, we remain
Because we hope with undying
Faith, that like our face in the glass
With each new bruise,
He might change.

The poem "Leda's Swans" was written in response to that by Yeats which describes the rape of a maiden by a powerful God. While I by no means take lightly the violence of the act, I began to play with the image of woman subjugated. The young woman of the poem, Beauty, is an actual person who lives in Catlettsburg, Kentucky. While she dreams of leaving this area in favor of a better life, sadly, she views marriage as the only means by which

to achieve her goal.

Leda's Swans

*Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?
--William Butler Yeats*

Leda's Lunch, 1948.

Grandmothers watched cautiously through faded curtains
Along Oakland Avenue the barge workers on leave
And local "gang" of boys flocked
Across the street from Chick's Grocery Store.
War hardened, slouching defiantly,
They sneered looking through streams
Of girls passing by the doors of Miller's Meats
And never considered escaping Catlettsburg, Kentucky.

Fords finely tuned, with war
A fading memory, they reveled,
Feathered in greased pompadours, secure
In the knowledge that they had done their daddies proud,
And their country proud, they screamed
Jubilance -- Utter elation for being young, male,
American Masters of their lot --
To the factory worker's daughters
And the young housewives nervously eyeing the cracked walk
While clutching their coats tighter to their forms.
Before them, their futures unfurled like so many flags.

* * * *

1998. Leda's Lunch has ten years since
Gone the way of Chick York's Grocery.
In its place is a video store/pizza shop that boasts
"The Best (ONLY) One In Town."
Still its vestiges remain in the cobbled corner,
The aging stockyard that stands witness to generations
Of the same faces, sons and grandsons--Phantoms now
But ever-present with blank powerful stares;
Their tired catcalls made somehow more urgent
Since Catlettsburg has declined silently
Along with river travel, Eastern Kentucky logging,
And the young wives who now buy their meats
At the Mid-Town Kroger.

Beauty is a reasonably new addition here
And they watch her as she parades by in her French twist--
Exposed nape, opaque lipstick and Chic jeans--

Though they did not think her beautiful,
They saw her walking a block away.
Her mother named her this to please only herself
Despite her then-current man's objections--
Beauty was she said "The only thing in this world
That I managed to do right."

But her mother is troubled she has not found a "good boy";
That she sees her daughter facing generational annihilation
From the bottles of Boone's Farm stuffed
Under her mattress and the three-dollar whiskey
That flows muddied as the breath of the boatmen
Who navigate the Big Sandy running
From the factories upstream.
And Beauty, like her mother before her,
Plans to leave Catlettsburg--
Maybe by way of the truckers who park nights
At Clark's Pump-N-Shop's new lot.
She chooses her men like she chooses her aspirations--
Whatever is available, she will take hungrily,
And with all the desire of one who thirsts.

The corner-watchers murmur to each other
That she'll go down easy for a buzz
Or a fifth of Maker's Mark.
The price of her love is cheap
For the man who will hold her
Helpless to his breast.
Sex, she has learned at fourteen,
Is more valuable than golden eggs,
And modesty and pride are words
That Beauty saves like fine down pillows

For the certain day when she will have
Opportunities, a home of her own.
Or for the day she finds some barge worker,
Some trucker-man who likes it so well
He marries her and drives her out of here.

I will close with an address to the hills with the hope that they
might hear me.

An Address to the Hills

I feel your lording arms close
Round; your breath, the wind
Caressing my bared arms.
It seems forever that you have been
Of me. Unrecognizable minutes
Slipping into timeless days.

I suspect that you are more
Than just the earth on which
I tread; impermeable over-hanging
Engulfing ridges circling cool valleys.
Ferns offer up their fronds and berries
Bloom in symphonies of jeweled
Finches and azure-laden cranes
Unheard by my stilled ears.

And though I crest your ridges
I am bloodied. Choked back
By honeysuckle growing
Upward wildly to the flailing sky.
Streaks of sunlight pass through
Majestic oaks like tiny tomorrows,
Boughs tightening to the rays; fingers
Gripping stolen gold. Our futures live
Within the bellies of your trees.

Encountering Marilou Awiakta and *Selu, Seeking the Corn-Mother's*
Wisdom by Shirley Lumpkin

With her Cherokee, Scotch-Irish-Celtic, and scientific Appalachian heritages, Marilou Awiakta, a child being raised in Oak Ridge, TN (what she calls a reservation for atoms and we might call one of the centers of atomic research) when Louise McNeill saw the fulfilling of her Aunt Malindy's Death Omen in the 1945 dropping of the atomic bomb, has always insisted that Appalachia is where the future begins; for she saw it move in on

top of her. Writing *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom* in the form of a double-woven Cherokee basket, Awiakta combined poetry, interviews, speeches, essays, and her versions of faxes, pinkslips and memos in a pattern designed to bring back into our consciousness the 12,000 years of Native American living, history, and stories, particularly those of the Cherokee, in Appalachia and America. Insisting that Appalachia is an intersection of the Cherokee, the atomic, and the Scotch-Irish-Celtic where the future begins, Awiakta offers the wisdom of those we have forgotten or fail to recognize, using the perspective of "womanspirit" in her verbal rendering of the traditionally female, complex Cherokee art of double-woven basketweaving.

Thinking like a basket-weaver writer, Awiakta organized 10 years of her writing into the first section of the book "Weaving I" around the center of her writing: her belief in the presence of and need for the Law of Mutual Respect and Gender Balance. From that center, she arranged her poems, essays and stories around four themes or basket ribs: SeluWounds, Mother Earth, Healing and Selu. Weaving the outside of the basket-book as a journey seeking Selu, once she reached the rim of the basket, Awiakta wrote and then re-wrote all the inside of the basket-book as the second part, "Weaving II," "Selu, Spirit of Survival," offering the seeds of Selu's way in the form of essays, poems, and stories that apply Selu's wisdom to postmodern life. The

result is a work that eludes and challenges accepted literary classifications. Readers have no word in which to box her book and can participate in creating a new written form.

Awiakta's book becomes a basket, offering the reader a corn seed, an invitation to accompany her, along what she calls "a quiet path that obviously spirals into another country" (18). Again, as with McNeill, we enter the country of re-memory, but this time not the Swago farm with the Native American trails intersecting it, but a "primal space" place where Cherokee stories and images, interwoven with scientific and Appalachian ways of speaking and thinking, allow readers to experience how "mother earth" and the "web of life" are literally true metaphors. Drawing on the sounds of words, as well as the arrangement of text and visuals, Awiakta reaches toward readers, using a voice inviting us to accept her as our guide and walk back to the time and place behind our currently visible one, to the re-membered "primal space," where the law of mutual respect reigns and we live in awareness of life as an interconnected web.

As with McNeill, this journey requires that we recognize, with our guide, permanent loss and that, with our guide, we lament; for Awiakta reminds us that the native "web spinners," the Native peoples who first lived the philosophy of the web in Appalachia, are gone, erased by European settlement, the Trail of Tears, and the Tellico Dam. Again, like McNeill, Awiakta insists that while those first spinners are gone, the land itself and her

Cherokee blood within feel these spinners and the harmony of their web and can re-member, give a version/vision of them back to us, through the transformative power of her translating words, although her act of re-construction works only if we readers participate by listening to and following the words.

The journey to that place is through words re-remembering or putting back together not only the original place, but also the painful wounds of Cherokee history and contemporary experience that tore such a web of interconnection apart and rend it now. Therefore, Awiakta constantly reminds us that the "teetering point" upon which our contemporary world is balanced creates the necessity of a journey back to our roots to find wisdom:

Awake in the dark
you know
I know
We may not make it
Mother Earth may not make it,
We teeter
on the turning point.

Against the downward pull,
Against the falter of your heart and mine,
I offer you a gift
a seed to greet the sunrise
Ginitsi Selu
Corn, Mother of us All.
Her Story. ("I offer you a gift," 8 & 207)

This poem, "I offer you a gift," is repeated in the beginning and the ending of the book *Selu*, emphasizing that while Awiakta offers us the wisdom and the power of her intersection Cherokee/Scotch-Irish-Celtic/scientific Appalachian heritage as an antidote to despair, the world is still on that dangerous

teetering point McNeill--and most of the other contemporary women writing in Appalachia--see so clearly.

Throughout her basket-book, Awiakta fuses the worldview and world-ways of the Cherokee, the scientist, and the Scotch-Irish-Celtic Appalachian vernacular to remind readers of the irreversible and permanent damage to the fabric of life that is spreading in our times. The poem "Dying Back" is one good example:

On the mountain
the standing people are dying back--
hemlock, spruce, and pine
turn brown in the head.
The hardwood shrivels in new leaf.
Unnatural death
from acid greed
that takes the form of rain
and fog and cloud.

In the valley
the walking people are blank-eyed
Elders mouth vacant thought
Youth grow spindly, wan
from sap too drugged to rise,
Pushers drain it off--
sap is gold to them.
The walking people are dying back
as all species do
that kill their own seed. (5)

Interweaving the perspectives of ecologists on forests and acid rain, the Cherokee on the nature of trees, people and their relationships, and colloquial speech with the intonations and rhythms of Cherokee and Appalachian uses of English, Awiakta's deceptively 'simple' language creates a vivid, story-like metaphor of the decline of the human and natural landscape. The resonating words and ironic understatement build to the

culminating irony of the last line. Failing to recognize their relationship to trees, postmodern people don't even recognize that two species--tree and human--are going the same way, to the same end, from the same causes: human thoughtlessness, human greed, and human lack of consideration for the interconnected web of life and the source of that life.

Most of Awiakta's most powerful challenges to the assumptions and behaviors in our postmodern society are not as elegiacally ironic as the "backtalking" "Dying Back." Rather, she uses a type of "backtalk" best described as a humorous form of 'backlighting,' putting the light of words behind an object to show us what it really is. Awiakta describes this common practice in contemporary women's writing in Appalachia much better as the "saving grace" of humor, of "looking out of the corner of the eye" at events. Knowing how Cherokee and Scotch-Irish-Celtic traditions interweave in Appalachia, Awiakta offers a good definition of the particular kind of Cherokee backlighting and backtalking verbal wit and humor she uses when she says, "The cream of Cherokee humor is scintillating satire, couched in dry understatement and accompanied by an almost imperceptible twinkle in the eye" (210). Awiakta believes this Cherokee humor and its Scotch-Irish-Celtic counterpart create perspective and invite thought: "Subtle as sunlight playing through forest leaves, humor backlights the depth of wisdom" (14). Grounded in concrete observation of the tangible natural world, belief in the Law and

its workings and in the web-connected effects of human behavior, Awiakta's witty, humorous words work both directly to create a warm, friendly connection with readers and indirectly to "backtalk" readers' assumptions, to invite readers to pause, to pay close attention to the words, to re-think, to re-consider their direction, and to consider looking inside themselves and around in other directions for wisdom (toward Selu and her story perhaps?).

One good example of this subtly 'simple' technique is Awiakta's "fax" introduction to *Selu* :

FAX

To: The Reader
Fax No.: Wherever you are

From: Awiakta
Fax No.: East Tennessee mountains

NOTE: If there is a question or problem concerning the information transmitted, please read *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom*.

REMARKS

Subject: Corn, Mother of Us All
Ginitsi Selu (Cherokee name)

Content: Her survival wisdoms (time tested) and other seed-thoughts.

Organization: Doublewoven basket (Cherokee-style)
Essays/stories/poems interweave in a pattern. Outer side of basket is a path to Selu. Inner side is Selu herself. We walk the path together, gather thoughts, then contemplate Selu's wisdoms as presented by Native Americans who have preserved them. We consider applications of wisdoms to life,

government and the general good.

Reason for Making Our Journey:
So we won't die.
Neither will Mother Earth.

10/7/93 4:00 pages: 1 usage time: 00'27 (xv)

Knowing her postmodern audience wants to get to the 'facts fast'-no length, no indirection, no waiting, no thinking--and knowing that everything about her book requires just the opposite of the postmodern fax approach, Awiakta gives readers their postmodern language with her scintillating, satirical 'punchline': the long, slow, contemplative, metaphorical, narrative non-fax form is simply needed "So we won't die."

This backlighting, backtalking, subtle, serious "twinkle in the corner of the eye" verbal humor is also woven into *Selu*, the traditional Native American story Awiakta re-tells us several times in several versions, and throughout *Selu* Awiakta's book, especially when Awiakta is describing the depth and dangers of the wounds we have inflicted on each other and the earth. The poem "Mother Nature Sends a Pink Slip" is one typical example:

To: Homo Sapiens
Re: Termination

My business is producing life.

The bottom line is

you are not cost-effective workers.

Over the millennia, I have repeatedly

clarified my management goals and objectives.
Your failure to comply is well documented.
It stems from your inability to be
a team player:

- *you interact badly with co-workers
- *contaminate the workplace
- *sabotage the machinery
- *hold up production
- *consume profits

In short, you are a disloyal species.

Within the last decade

I have given you three warnings:

- *made the workplace too hot for you
- *shaken up your home office
- *utilized plague to cut back personnel

Your failure to take appropriate action
has locked these warnings into
the Phase-Out Mode, which will result
in termination. No appeal. (88)

Using business memo (and military) vocabulary with punning
accuracy that mines the resonating 'insides' of the words'
meanings when used by the 'voice' of mother nature, Awiakta
backlights the dire situation human beings have created in their

postmodern society and suddenly reveals the danger they have failed to consider: the possibly fatal effects of their actions on the web of life. The backtalking humor of the form snags the readers' attention and creates a perspective.

Her backtalking, backlighting, re-weaving, and re-remembering do not, however, lead to despair, but to an offer of gifts to right the balance and fend off the delivery of mother nature's pink slip. Since Awiakta's gifts of the traditional stories of Selu, Kanati, and Little Deer, with their gender balance and laws of mutual respect; the stories of Cherokee history and the role that grandmothers and the Beloved Women like Nancy Ward played and play in Cherokee public and community life; and her own stories as a woman writer--who, using the metaphor of the clasper roots of ivy, claims the realms of thought, science, public space, Cherokee traditions, Appalachian geography and native vernacular, and creates a "round tradition" of art she defines as a fusion of materials which builds bridges between peoples and cultures and allows "womanspirit" to be more strongly "sung and seen"--are too long for this forum, I offer only two of her resonant images for re-visioning what a more balanced and fruitful life can be: the "swinging bridge" and "streams of woman's wit."

The "swinging bridge" is one of Awiakta's metaphors for the kind of knowledge that should guide action. Rooted in her personal experience of fearfully learning to walk a hand-made,

hemp-plaited Appalachian swinging bridge, suspended over a rushing, cold mountain stream, Awiakta's poem "Song of the Swinging Bridge" offers readers a tangible example of the workings of law of mutual respect and the resulting need to learn to match our personal rhythms to that law or face disaster. Animating the image of the "swinging bridge," with a singing, womanly voice and the verbal rhythms of a woman's experience of sex (which replicate the rhythms of a swinging bridge), Awiakta invites us to think about what kinds of behaviors can "bear" us "safely/through the void":

Song of the Swinging Bridge
Mind your step.
I'm alive!
Not steel or concrete--
muskey sinew. Sunwarm
yet damp and pliant
in my deepest fiber.
I vibrate to your touch
curve to your shape
undulate, sigh beneath
your weight
But. . .
Stomp me--I fling you up.
Yank me--I swing you
in an arc of fear.
Mind your step.
Blend your rhythm with mine
so I can bear you safely
through the void.
When you reach solid ground
look back.
I sway gently
remembering. . . (258)

Backlighted with humor, the swinging bridge metaphor/story invites the reader to consider its applications to daily living. All the applications, are dependent on the readers' active

connection of the descriptions of walking the swinging bridge to a specific moment in the reader's life. The metaphor suggests a method of reading Awiakta's work; a way to make decisions; a way to learn from the history and culture of the Cherokee in Appalachia and from woman's experience of the world; an approach to the natural world and to using the resources of the atom; and a way of staying alive, of avoiding the "void." A rich resource for knowing how to live, this Appalachian image is a metaphor particularly applicable to the postmodern world--but the readers must create the connection, the application of the wisdom encoded in that metaphor.

Awiakta also offers one of many variations on the images of mountains and water as metaphors for knowing and understanding the writing, the women, and the wisdom Appalachia has to offer the present and the future in her poem "Smokey Mountain Woman:"

I rise in silence, steadfast in the elements
with thought a smoke-blue veil drawn round me.
Seasons clothe me in laurel and bittersweet, in ice
but my heart is constant. . .Fires scar and torrents
erode my shape. . .but strength wells within me
to bear new life and sustain what lives already. . .
For streams of wit relieve my heavy mind
smoothing boulders cast up raw-edged. . . And the
raven's lonesome cry reminds me that the soul is
as it has ever been. . .
Time cannot thwart my stubborn thrust toward Heaven
(183)

Awiakta implies that listening and paying attention to the tangible manifestations of the local Appalachian places and ALL the Appalachian inhabitants, the standing and the walking, the Cherokee and the Celtic, the African American and the Native

American, the woman and the man, will allow us to see the intangible wisdom they embody. We will see how water and words are alike, how streams of women's wit in women's writing in Appalachia, can re-shape space and time and possibilities, and how womanspirit, abiding it itself, re-memembering and connecting, makes words that need to be heard and apply directly to our postmodern present and future.

Awiakta's *Selu*, the basket-book, is a re-visioning of what 'other ways' can teach us, of what 'other' ways we can choose to live, and what kinds of 'other ways' writing can be. It is a book meant to be like a corn kernel, like a root, like a bridge, like a bowl, like a basket. *Selu* is a weaving of words designed to give the reader "a synapse in the mind, a lense in the eye, a drum in the ear, a rhythm in the heart" (326) and is offered to us by a woman writer who presents herself as "stump settin'" and studying on the meanings of roots, the web, the Law, and the atom and calling on all of us in the postmodern world to dance with those like her who have Cherokee, scientific, Scotch-Irish-Celtic, womanly Appalachian "corn raised ways" of unified thinking and writing. Our survival, she suggests, may very well depend on our ability to accept her Appalachian gift.

Encountering the Poetry of Dr. Eddy Pendarvis
Introduction by Shirley Lumpkin

Marshall University College of Education professor, teacher,

writer, and poet Dr. Eddy Pendarvis has been exploring the human and natural landscapes of Appalachia for years. Her thoughtful dissent from over-simplified generalizations about gender, knowing, identity, and the complex, diverse place and people called Appalachian, like her pursuit of the inclusive, artful forms of poetry, find powerful embodiment in the voices, images, and paradoxes of her poems.

Eddy Pendarvis' Prose and Poetry

I'm pleased to be a part of this project. My mother's family first settled in what is now Pike County, Kentucky, in the late 1700's; and my father's family came to Fayette County, West Virginia, in the early 1800's, so I thought I knew a lot about Appalachia. But one of the many things this project has done for me is to teach me how much there is to learn about this diverse region. So my first poem is a kind of disclaimer. I don't want to present myself as speaking for Appalachian women. It's hard enough to speak for myself.

Complaint

I wouldn't tell the truth
if you held a gun to my head.
Couldn't probably,
even if I would.
I've tried;
but whatever I say,
as soon as I say it, it's a lie.
I'm a magician,
pulling one long scarf

out of my sleeve,
then another
and another.
I watch, as amazed as my audience--fuchsia,
paisley,
and loud checkered prints.

I open my mouth
an egg pops out.

I'm a tenant in a burning building,
throwing all the sheets
into a pile
in the middle of the room,
knotting them together,
leaning out to watch them drop
jerkily
just short of safety.

Sometimes, I weave Rapunzel's braid--
long plaited whispers and charms
that won't support any weight,
that unravel at a touch.

So many choices
and every choice the wrong one.
Even when I write them down,
it might as well be with invisible ink
for all the truth you can see
on the page.

Although I was born in a little coal town in a hollow in
Floyd County, Kentucky, I never felt isolated because I loved to
read. The world of books was almost as real to me as the world
outside my window. In my poetry, I've always liked to include
people and places I've read about as well as those I've known
through first-hand experience. My next poem combines eastern
Kentucky and ancient Egypt.

I had been wanting to write about the way we children played
with June bugs when we were little, but I never could find a way

to get into the poem until one day I remembered something I'd read--that scarabs and June bugs are closely related beetles. Then I was able to write the poem, telling about how we used to tie a string to a June bug's leg then hold onto the string, (This was before we thought much about cruelty to animals.) and watch the June bug spinning around above our heads like a lasso. To us, that was real entertainment.

Kentucky Morning

How things change over time.
The great are brought low
(though the low are somehow never
raised high).
Take the scarab: talisman of the Egyptians.
We thought these clumsy bugs were toys,
beautiful but comic, in their wrecked,
lumbering flight.
With the sun glaring down on us,
we slung this summer beetle,
its leg tied to a string,
around and around, a buzzing wheel.
Unaware of the importance of our prisoners,
we twirled in the green heat,
while faraway--in cool, underground
chambers--
pinned to the still, muffled chest of pharaohs,
the June bug's brilliant cousin lay poised,
ready to bring back the dead.

This next poem is about a stereotypical Appalachian experience, visiting the homeplace. Appalachian writers are famous--or infamous--for writing about this topic. Re-visiting our memories can be more than mere nostalgia, however. Remembering can be a way of finding a new significance in an old experience, a way of re-weaving experience.

Orogeny

The celtic calendar split the year in two.
Each month had its tree.
Midsummer's tree was the oak,
and the word for oak meant door.

The house at Marrowbone is gone,
but every summer we come calling.
We walk the tar-daubed tracks,
stepping from one oak tie to the next.
A mile down the ribbon rail, we spot the
chimney,
its stubborn stones jutting into the sky.
Far ahead, the gleaming rails seem to meet.

We step out of the sunlight into a grove,
This is the homeplace--Rose of Sharon still
blooms here--
we don't miss the walls.

The cellar's hidden, half-buried,
its jars filled each Spring, with mud from the
river.
When we scrape the ground with a scythe,
we can hear the old sidewalk underneath.
In a birch tree nearby, a black snake slides
slowly from one bough to another.

These mountains were linked long ago
to the Caledonian mountains in Ireland.
Beneath the wide ocean--rising serpentine in
the deep,
they are connect still.
But all our old homes are gone
until we come calling.

How we understand the world depends greatly on how people around us interpret it. We learn through other people's different visions to develop our own perspective. In part because I grew up in a sexist culture, I valued my father's vision more than my mother's as I was growing up. Only in the past few years have I come to value my mother's way of looking at the world. This last

poem tries to acknowledge some of the debt I owe my mother for what she has taught me to see.

Coruscations

Mother, I can see what you want to show me,
the orchard as it was--hung with pears,
strewn with apples--as it is,
tangled weeds and fallen branches.
One shines through the other.
I can see the peppermint-scented creek,
dimpled and rippling,
sliding down the hill and over
rocks to pool under bending willows
and river birches. Creeping myrtle
carpets the hillside. I can see it blooming.
Columbine's tiny, orange jets
blaze in the summer grass.
I can hear the creek's song and the rush of
the river,
the rumble of coal gons and the steam
engine's whistle.
I hear your mother's stories:
Aesop's fables and the lesson Tecumseh
taught--
about how one stick will be broken,
but the bundle is strong.
I can see your mother standing on the porch
in the early morning darkness
holding the lantern high for her girl
to cross the damp yard
to grandma's house
to help with chores.
She stands there until you have passed
through all the deepest shadows,
until she can hear you climb the steps
and see your silhouette
in the widening light
of the opening door.
Mother, I see what you want to show me.

Encountering Marcia Myers Bonta's *Appalachian Spring* and
Appalachian Autumn by Shirley Lumpkin

After the lyrical meditative memoir, the basket book, and

the poetry, we end where we began: in a journaling journey. Marcia Myers Bonta, however, keeps a naturalist's journal, spending several hours every day on her own and adjacent acres of her Northern Appalachian Pennsylvania mountain, hollow, forest, and fields, watching, pen in hand, quietly becoming a part of the landscape, waiting attentively, observing and recording the details, thinking, and writing. Like a whole line of women naturalists and writers in Appalachia, including E. Lucy Braun, Ruth Harris Thomas, and Anna Botsford Comstock whom Bonta discovered and researched, and an uncounted array of contemporary women writing literary nonfiction about the natural world in Appalachia (like Barbara Kingsolver, particularly her essay "The Memory Place"), Marcia Bonta transforms her naturalist journal writing into books intended to be a tool to "educate people about the wonders of the natural world" and "specifically about the wonders in their own backyards" ("Bonta," 44). Presenting the seasonal details of her own Pennsylvania mountaintop place in *Appalachian Spring* and *Appalachian Autumn*, Bonta hopes others will use her writing about Appalachia to see their own backyard, the natural world, more clearly.

Bonta, like Awiakta, McNeill, Jan Adkins-Bills, Laura Tussey, and Eddy Pendarvis, is not unmindful of the paradoxes of what she is doing nor unmindful of the paradoxes of her place. Writing "love songs" and "praise songs" about the Appalachian place and seasons on earth she "loves the most" (*Appalachian*

Spring, xiv) and the "happenings and special beauties of this place" (*Appalachian Autumn*, ix)--asking readers to re-member the particulars of the Appalachian natural world--leads directly to asking readers to see how endangered that world and therefore all the world is. She shows how the "entire web" of her Appalachian place's natural life--and by extension the global biosphere--is threatened by humans harvesting wood and animals beyond a sustainable level, by humans polluting with pesticides and emissions, and by the encroachment of human populations bent on recreation. Since she--like the other writers--believes Appalachia is an intersection, connected to everywhere, and is the crossroads where the future is happening, she uses her writing to warn readers that the entire web of life is in danger and to show what can be done.

Backlighting with wit, her journals constantly disprove what she calls the "isolated island theory of Appalachia." She writes that her mini-habitats and biologically diverse land might be an island but not an isolated one, and that it seems more like a busy (and fertile) intersection: "Less than a mile away in either direction there are highways, farms, several villages, a town and the main east-west railroad line; in fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, we live in a SMSA, a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area" (*Appalachian Autumn*, 14-5). Observing the wind that brings spring to her Appalachian mountaintop on March 5, she identifies it as the Chinook, a warm, damp wind from the Japanese

current off the Alaska Panhandle, which sweeps down the eastern sides of mountains and changes 30 below to 50 degrees above in minutes. Re-membering and re-weaving into the landscape the long human history of her place, she writes that the local Native American inhabitants long before her had understood this webbed connection of their Appalachian place to the world when they named this Appalachian spring wind "Snoweater" (*Appalachian Spring*, 24). She presents the interconnection of everything again when she writes on April 9, "[i]t rained ducks and loons, grebs and great blue herons," and backlights her re-discovery of the same lesson of the web with wit: our "isolated natural acres" are actually located below a "waterfowl interstate highway," directly on the "main migration route of many eastern waterfowl between the Chesapeake Bay and their Northern Breeding Grounds" (*Appalachian Spring*, 69-70). Everything she sees and records about her local natural world--the visiting birds, the migrating raptors, her sitting on the First Field Ridge and feeling the wind blowing and the earth tilting--reminds her, as it did McNeill and Awiakta, that from a scientific, naturalist, and woman's view we living in Appalachia are living at the center, are interconnected parts of the same web, and borders and boundaries are perceptions, dependent on the angle of vision, and therefore fictional human constructions.

However, Bonta's naturalist view also highlights that what humans perceive and then do the interconnectedness of the natural

web makes permanent in unexpected ways. For example, the April 28 gypsy moths Bonta records seeing in the 1990s are, she writes, only on her Appalachian mountaintop because an entomologist from Medford, Massachusetts imported them in his attempts to make silk and a few escaped in 1868.

Recording everyday wonders and surprising connections leads Bonta to interweave celebration and elegy, benison and anger, joy and sorrow, despairing doubt and hope. When she focuses on capturing the details, intricacies, and mysteries of the ordinary flora and fauna of her (and therefore our) Appalachian backyard, Bonta celebrates the extraordinary beauties and invites readers to participate in the joy. For example, after presenting the precise detail of a beige butterfly's wings, she writes: "How often when I stop to look at something in nature that appears to be quite ordinary does it become, in closer inspection, extraordinary--reason enough I've decided to pause and let nature come to me rather than continually pursue it. To sit and be brushed by a butterfly's wings is not an experience to disdain....if I had one wish for the world it would be that troubled people everywhere could experience the beauty of an Appalachian spring day by sitting in a green meadow, as I did, and take the time to watch an ordinary kitchen maid become a dazzling Cinderella, her ball gown of lace her crowning glory" (*Appalachian Spring*, 140).

Using precise detail and finely tuned metaphor, simile and

image, Bonta invites readers to see, re-see, and re-member our Appalachian backyard flora and fauna in their natural seasonal context. She re-creates in words native and immigrant wildflowers like trillium, milkweed, painted lady, wildrose bushes, buttercups and hawkweed, mountain laurel and ferns. She draws readers' attention to butterflies, moths, spiders, webs, and insects of all kinds. She asks readers to look down, as well as up and around, so we won't miss the wonders of the forest floor fungi she finds on her autumn walks and records in detail, word-painting their brilliant colors, their fruiting bodies, their hyphae filaments that "snake through the forest floor" and remind us that without their vital function of breaking woody materials into soil "our woods would suffocate in their own debris" (*Appalachian Autumn*, 41). She asks readers to re-vision how much we really know about animals like the foxes, raccoons, squirrels of all kinds, and deer, presenting mysterious behaviors she has observed and found recorded in no books. And she asks readers to see and re-vision the most famous of all the ordinary Appalachian wonders: the "Color."

Bonta's *Appalachian Autumn* is a re-visioning of what this Color, so associated with the Appalachian region, actually is. She asks us to see the beauty, the function, and the vulnerability this Color represents. Recording the beauty of the Appalachian forest's flaming color, Bonta backlights it, as a naturalist. She presents the color as linked to bird migration

and plant dispersal, another example of the webbed, mysterious interconnectedness of the natural world. Migrating birds on the interstate-international highway above her land need fruits high in nutrients to migrate successfully, she writes; the trees that turn such a brilliant red so early, like dogwood, black cherry, and sumac, have such fruits and birds can see them because of the color, she writes. So the Color suggests to her once again "that in nature everything is connected to everything else, in intricate and often little understood ways, producing a finely tuned system that has continued to evolve over the millennia. To destroy even one link may be disastrous to an entire system. Probably it is only incidental that such processes as leaf color, early or late, also present such a feast for humans' eyes and boost to their spirits" (*Appalachian Autumn*, 67).

However, Bonta wants us to see, as she has, even further behind the view of the Color; to see how the Color signifies vulnerability to destruction and permanent loss and to see that loss as she has. Throughout *Appalachian Autumn*, but particularly during the months the Color is at its height, Bonta records witnessing the sounds and sights of clear-cutting. As the screaming skidder and chain saws on her neighbor's land fell trees and chew up terrain, Bonta writes of her October rage and pain: "I am not resigned. Each falling tree pierced me to the bone and nowhere on the mountain could I find peace. Suddenly autumn has become a time of intense sorrow for me. The brilliant

leaf colors seem to symbolize the final flare before the inevitable end--a bright flame, consuming itself like a candle, leaving nothing but a burnt-out, trashed, and dying earth" (*Appalachian Autumn*, 60).

Backtalking both the lumbermen and their reliance on what they called Christian values and the legal system that guarded their ownership rights in her journal, she asked questions about who owns the land, those with legal title or those who live on it and know it, questions about what the reverence of Christianity means if it doesn't include keeping one's word and conserving the land and trees. Her ultimate backtalking question, however, is despairingly flung into the void of the destruction left by the lumbermen and directed toward all of the human race: "A verdant mountainside made desert in a couple of weeks. How will the biospheres escape the ravaging greed of humanity and its machines"? (*Appalachian Autumn*, 110, 113, 114)

Detailing what she sees when she climbs back to what had been the crowning glory of her place and of the autumn Color, the "wilderness knoll," Bonta also records her reaction: her unbearable grief and rage at the contrast "[b]etween the stunning autumn colors and the crushed and dying understory and piles of logs." With her pen dipped in the acid of her bitter despair, she etched the vision of the "new" wilderness knoll into her own and her readers' consciousness, asking that every time we see the Appalachian autumn Color we see also this vision of its absence:

"The wilderness grove was gone--totally trashed--and the yellow bulldozer was posed on the top knoll, triumphant in what it had accomplished with the help of puny men"; the "bare scraped bones of the knoll," baked in the sun; "[t]he forest of singing, calling birds was gone, leaving only silence. Not the silence of Sunday's balm, but the silence of death and finality. Never in my lifetime would there be another wilderness grove here"

(*Appalachian Autumn*, 127-8). The image of permanent desecration and obliteration, caused by humans, is as much a part of her nature writing as are the images of beauty and the functions she celebrates.

The coming of November and December bring Bonta solace to record in her journal, the natural solace of the light pouring through the leafless trunks of living trees on her land, what she calls a "benediction and promise," much like the benison McNeill described from re-membering the light, the land, the people, and the trees of Appalachia. But neither this experience nor the lives of the trees left on her land stop the logging, and she writes of the skidders and the saws screaming on.

In the end of *Appalachian Autumn*, Bonta presents her re-vision: a temporary balance between hope and grief for permanent loss. Reporting the success of her and her husband's hard fought battle to save the place by buying the adjacent land, Bonta writes that they were able to save 60% of the hollow, the large trees and the banks of ephemeral wildflowers. But, she adds, 40%

of the land she and her husband now own is clearcut wasteland that she will never in her lifetime see renewed. On the teetering point of a temporary, 60% save, Bonta writes her last sentence in *Appalachian Autumn*, "I wept for what had been and what will never be again" (123) and continues to journal and research, planning to write books on Appalachian winter and Appalachian summer, still mourning the loss by celebrating and seeking the wisdom and beauty the land offers.

Torrents of Womanspirit Words Erasing Boundaries and Reweaving Bridges by Shirley Lumpkin

As I look back over these encounters with contemporary women writing in Appalachia, what do I see? I see how little we know and how much more we have to learn: we are just beginning to see Appalachia and the writing of the region, just beginning to pay attention to the contemporary women writing in Appalachia. I can also see some common strands weaving through the work of these contemporary women writers.

First, all the women writers challenged imposed or assumed boundaries of genre, gender roles, Appalachia, homeplaces and literary influences. They backtalked and 'un-wove' those boundaries and assumed the authority to re-write the definitions of Appalachia, literary form, identity, gender roles and home. While rooting themselves consciously in relationship to a local

place and people they named Appalachian, all wove into the relationship whatever they chose to add and considered that addition authentically part of their Appalachian identity. Even when their relationships with Appalachia involved challenging assumptions, preconceptions, or gender roles, all associated coming to their writing voices and their identities with abiding in relationship to Appalachia. All chose Appalachia as their center from which to roam. All see Appalachia as an intersection, a meeting place of many roads, connected to many times and peoples, and therefore a "space of meetings," a liminal site, from which to see clearly the effects of past and present inequality, domination and inappropriate uses of power in the scarred land and in the silenced voices they re-member and to re-vision the possibilities for making and changing directions. Their Appalachia is a location of confluence and commingling--not without tensions and conflict--of complex people of many ethnicities and values; and a place offering many encounters, particularly with the 200 million year old hills and the diverse flora, fauna and waters that emerge from this living record of the ocean of time.

Secondly, these women writers tap the power of forms to transform, using writing as acts of re-membering and re-weaving the past into the present and re-visioning the present and the future; acts of constructing bridges between themselves and their multiple identities, bridges between themselves and their

homeplaces and peoples, and bridges between themselves and other places and other peoples. These writers assert and demonstrate cultural agency, exceeding the boundaries of the space allocated to Appalachia or women or women writers by inventing forms of writing (like the 'basket-book' or a 'lyrical memoir meditation'); by backtalking and backlighting accepted practices and definitions; by calling attention to the ordinary, backyard life that they, as women, know and present as extraordinary; and by embracing and expressing the tension and paradox of living on "the teetering point" where all may be lost, while offering stories, images and metaphors rooted in the intersection of the Appalachian place that invite readers to imagine other and possibly better ways of living in our dangerous and endangered times.

Thirdly, not one or two or a few women are writing in Appalachia. While I have examined closely only six, Jan Adkins-Bills, Louise McNeill, Laura Tussey, Marilou Awiakta, Eddy Pendarvis, and Marcia Bonta, Joyce Dyer has 35 in *Bloodroot, Reflections of Appalachian Women Writers on Place*; the radio anthology *Tell It On the Mountain* has 15; and Sandra Ballard and Patricia Hudson have a list of 105 for their forthcoming anthology of women writing in Appalachia. In many voices and genres, hundreds of contemporary women are spinning roads of words out of the creative intersection of Appalachia. We are living right in the middle of a literary renaissance that will

re-define us, Appalachia, and American literature.

Fourthly, these contemporary women writers present self-authored and gendered identities. Each one writes as a woman, insisting on being listened to as a woman, writing out of her particular form of rooted life in Appalachia and offering another point of view from which to construct ways of living in the postmodern world. While recognizing the hard work and danger of doing so, these women embrace writing out of the intersection of their gender and the Appalachian place, embrace the possibilities offering by living a gendered writing life in the Appalachian region at the confluence of many forces and possibilities. While dangerous, like all margins, an intersection is perhaps one of the freest, most creative and most diverse places; for from their intersection these women can see in many directions, can meet and commingle many perspectives, and can construct many ways to go.

Joining their "intersection sisters" (Many African American, Latina, Native American, and multiple ethnicity writing women in the Americas also conceive of their identities and writing as coming from a gendered "place between."), contemporary women writing in Appalachia sing with Zora Neale Hurston "I have memories within that come out of the material that went to make me" (quoted in Baker, np) and with Joyoti Grech "What I don't have/are someone else's borderlines/I rub them out with my desire/with action/and a need to know/I am never satisfied/I flood [your] borders/with the sea" of my words, to keep your life

blood "red like mine" (quoted in Davies 58).

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On contemporary women writing in Appalachia, I relied particularly on Joyce Dyer's introduction to and collection of essays by contemporary women writers, *Bloodroot. Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (University of Kentucky Press, 1998). See Dyer's introduction for the phrase/concept "articulate fire," the metaphors of fire, mountains, and roads, and ideas about literary renaissance and diversity in Appalachian women's writing. See Maggie Anderson's *Bloodroot* essay "The Mountains Dark and Close Around Me" (31-39) for information about Louise McNeill's (and other women writing in Appalachia's) writing process and the word/concept of "confluence." The radio anthology *Tell It On the Mountain* on tapes with accompanying curriculum materials from Appalshop is another key source for contemporary women writing in Appalachia. See also the interviews with George Ella Lyons and Barbara Kingsolver, among others, in Elisabeth L. Beattie's *Conversations with Kentucky Writers* (The University of Kentucky Press, 1996).

On gender issues related to knowing, marginalization, diversity and working processes, I particularly relied on the following in developing my thinking:

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By reading many literary works by writers identified as and/or calling themselves Appalachian and works on Appalachia, I shaped my conception of Appalachia as a particular type of place "between" with its people exerting agency in defining its boundaries and as an intersection. This idea was confirmed and extended by the work of Jim Wayne Miller, Wendell Berry, and Rodger Cunningham (particularly his thought provoking essay "Writing on the Cusp. Double Alterity and Minority Discourse in Appalachia" in *The Future of Southern Letters*, ed. by Jefferson Humphries and John Lowe. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: 41-51). I found excellent descriptions of and names for aesthetic and cultural forms shaping both the oral and the literary arts in Kathleen Stewart's *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an 'Other' America* (Princeton University Press, 1996). On cultural issues, particularly insider/outsider ones, I found Joseph Bruchac particularly helpful. See especially the interview by Meredith Ricker in *MELUS*: "A MELUS Interview: Joseph Bruchac." *MELUS*. Volume 21, Number 3 (Fall 1996), 159-178.

For literary theory and terminology, I found the following most useful:

Baker, Houston A. Jr. *Workings of the Spirit. The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. University of Chicago Press, 1991.

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