

Dialoguing with Wendy

Mary Ann Cain

Mary Ann Cain's publications have appeared in national and international literary and scholarly journals, diverse in their subject matter and genres, ranging from scholarly work in rhetoric and composition theory to literary works, including fiction, nonfiction essays, and poetry. Her five books include a poetry collection, *How Small the Sky Really Dreams* (Dos Madres Press, 2021), a biography, *South Side Venus: The Legacy of Margaret Burroughs* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), a novel, *Down from Moonshine* (Thirteenth Moon Press, 2009), and two scholarly books, *Composing Public Space: Teaching Writing in the Face of Private Interests* (Heinemann 2010) and *Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing* (SUNY Press 1995). Dozens of her scholarly essays on writing theory and praxis have been published in scholarly journals, along with many national and international publications of her literary work. She is Professor Emerita of English at Purdue University Fort Wayne and lives with her husband, poet George Kalamaras, and their beloved beagle, Blaisie. They spend time living in both Fort Wayne and Livermore, Colorado.

Keywords: dialogue, crots, writer, connection, academia, dogs

I don't remember how I first learned of Wendy Bishop's death in 2003, whether it was "star[ing] blankly at [a] computer [screen] or s[itting] silently with a phone pressed to [my ear] at the news," as Melissa Goldthwaite writes her in essay here. But like Melissa, I, too, was "speechless." When Susan Hunter, the editor of one of Wendy's favorite journals, *Dialogue*, asked me the following year to guest edit what was supposed to be the final issue in tribute to Wendy, I readily agreed. I had known Wendy since 1990, and as I moved through my own academic career, I always felt Wendy as a friendly presence. Even as I grappled with the vicissitudes of the academic landscape, particularly in the borderlands of English Studies, especially as a "writer-teacher-writer," I always felt at home with Wendy and her work. It wasn't that I always agreed with what she said or did, but much of the time, I found her articulating thoughts, ideas, feelings, and stories that affirmed what I was experiencing yet not quite formulating in the precise, penetrating, and personal, yet scholarly ways that she did.

When Melissa invited me to collaborate with her to propose this tribute to Wendy for *Peitho*, I knew I had to agree. I had unfinished business with Wendy; the *Dialogue* issue never appeared, for circumstances beyond my control. But also, twelve years later, I went through my own cancer experience—breast cancer—and kept marking the years I'd survived beyond Wendy. I knew I would never be productive in the same ways as she was. In a way, I didn't want to be if it meant my life might be shortened by what Melissa and Wendy so aptly describe in their collaborative essay:

We worry as that old feeling comes upon us, that we are co-existing in an academic climate

that encourages the heroic, the martyr-like, the materially-focused, the multi-tasking career arc. We worry about the possible slips between the cup and the lip. How do we advise others on ways to make a nest—find a horizontal safe house—within the vertical hierarchy of the institution? (168)

Now, twenty years later, as I reread some of Wendy’s essays and poems, we academics, we human beings, are now in a much different moment, different in so many, many ways. Back then, we had the luxury of assuming institutions of higher ed would survive, however imperfectly. We had the shield of ignorance to assume that global warming was far off, nothing that would impact us any time soon. We had the hubris to believe that in teaching students to care about writing, and to write in ways that would open doors to diversity, equity, and inclusion, that change would happen, slowly, yes, gradually, too, but ultimately would succeed through generational shifts in values, practices, and visions of what is possible. Those conversations were not about survival: will our profession, our institutions, our students, ourselves, our planet survive?

I am myself also in a much different moment. I retired from teaching in 2022, or, as I prefer to say, left teaching to write full time. In revisiting Wendy’s work on teaching, writing, mentoring, researching, and administering, I wonder if being “just a writer” as opposed to a “writer-teacher-writer” leaves me now more observer than participant with Wendy’s work, more connecting to those practices of writing as performed outside the academy, outside of teaching and mentoring, than trying to figure out best practices for navigating within. In the essay below, I am revisiting a dialogue I constructed with and about Wendy Bishop upon her passing in 2003. At the end of that essay, my present-time self returns to dialogue with that dialogue and with myself from 20 years ago about Wendy and her work. I do so in the spirit of bringing this retrospective forward, into the *now* we currently inhabit, making the walls (boundaries) of that moment tangible again and in doing so, helping us find each other through the fragments they engendered.

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Dialogue essay 2004-2006

Friday, December 31, 2004 6:16 p.m.

Dear Wendy,

I’m still thinking about your passing more than a year after the fact. I keep coming back to this: I’m a little mad at you. I wrote that in the notes I took after listening to your radio interview with Peggy O’Neill the other day. You had been a visiting writer at Loyola College in Maryland; I was glad to know you had been invited as a *writer*—a poet and essayist—to do workshops. It made me wish I’d extended that kind of invitation to you.

I know when people die that sometimes my first reaction is to get a little mad at them for dying. I’m sure

that's part of my reaction here. Yet for some reason I think you were starved for poetry. In the interview, you read your poem, "Gardenias," from your book *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Poem* and described the excesses of desire. I remember you were very strict with yourself about such indulgences, poetry being one of them. It had its place, but it never took over your life, not like it did for Dylan Thomas, for instance. I always admired you for not letting yourself get consumed in being The Poet as a singular identity. Poetry traveled with you everywhere, but you took it to so many places where it was so clearly Other that it never became just one thing, just one identity. Instead, it was so much a part of everything you did, all your life. At the same time, I sensed something was missing in your life, although you never spoke nor wrote of it.

Maybe I'm just a little mad because I believe, rightly or wrongly, that a part of you was not nourished somehow, and that had to do with the choices you made, the pace you kept, the insistence on connection, the shyness and solitude never indulged. Maybe I just want to know what nourished you through the struggles. Maybe I want to know that you did indulge. I remember your shyness because I could relate to it; I can picture your solitude even in the midst of a crowded convention ballroom. Maybe I'm really more than a little mad that no one ever published a full-length book of your poems during your lifetime.

Love,

Mary Ann

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Wendy Bishop's professional work in rhetoric and composition, writing pedagogy, creative writing, and writing program administration always seemed to me about possibilities, about ever-expanding horizons of textual encounters, new dimensions of pedagogical contact, new identities being forged. With those possibilities came the underlying story of ease, joy, and wonder, as well as commitment, practice, and focus. But I don't remember ever coming away with a sense of struggle, labor, conflict, or even pain, at least in her writing. That came in conversations, and now, as I read some of her poetry, through her poetic voice. Memory is funny that way; I know she wrote plenty about the struggles in her WPA work; in fact I recall reading such an article in *Composition Studies* back when I was a WPA right out of graduate school. Yet she used dance as a metaphor for the work of administration. I remember when her colleague, Ruth Mirtz, who took over as WPA when Wendy left that position at Florida State, was denied tenure, and how she wrote of the pain of that. But I don't remember feeling the pain in her writing, just in her conversations. She wrote about the struggles, but I remember the dance.

I was lucky to have a few conversations with her: one or two long and leisurely, post-workshop pub talks with a group of us; one in the gloom of the U.S. Grant hotel bar in San Diego during MLA; but more of them in the vein of how she recounted her own conference encounters—fast, fleet, penetrating words exchanged on elevators, in passing in a ballroom pre- or post-session, or a wave from across escalators going in opposite directions. Like the hummingbird Melissa

Goldthwaite recalls in her essay here, or the bird in and out of Bede's meadhall that Wendy herself recalls in her 2001 CCCC chair's address, Wendy moved quickly, lightly, but also, as Melissa says, fiercely and tenderly. I felt better hearing and reading about her struggles (me, too!), but I remembered more the possibilities of the dance.

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New Year's Eve, 2004. I'm sitting in front of the computer, my beagle, Barney (a female), lying curled on my lap. She is settled in, won't let me get up without some very unhappy looks. I remember today's horoscope in the newspaper about a woman who will be prominent in my life today. I want to go upstairs to retrieve the exact words, but Barney is determined to keep me here. She lays her chin on my arm as I type. I know this arrangement cannot last long—we've been here before—but I try to keep going and not shift around too much. Petting her, waiting for words to come, I conjure Wendy, think of her strong spirit, how much I loved her friendly insistence on making these connections, building these bridges, even when the territories "over there" seemed at times so hostile. I remember Wendy including her whole life in her writing—even the dog with which she ran three miles most every day.

When Barney wants food, very little I can say or do will dissuade her. Was connecting Wendy's "food"? Barney is not content until I sit back, away from the keyboard, and stop typing and shifting my legs. So I sit.

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Saturday, May 06, 2006 5:17 PM

Dear Wendy,

Twenty months after I started my introduction to the *Dialogue* issue dedicated to you, I return to it now, worried that it will be more about me than about you. And yet I also know you would challenge such either/or, categorical thinking and perhaps even praise me for writing in "crots," mixing genres, voices, and styles in an attempt to capture the heteroglossic combustion of the writing-teaching-writing experience.

Amy Hodges Hamilton writes about visiting you at home while you underwent chemotherapy. Even three weeks before your death, you continued to direct Amy's dissertation. The images of you as always connected, always available, always the teacher and friend and collaborator, haunt me as much as inspire me. Melissa Goldthwaite quotes you as saying, "I think of myself as always desperate for connection," and I wonder what fueled that desperation and why it scares me to even think about why you, of all people, would ever feel desperate when all you ever did was connect and connect and connect?

Love, Mary Ann

Wendy aimed to make visible the invisible workings of writing to those within and beyond the college classroom; she was interested in bridging audiences to include those on the outside. But as with any such struggle came fatigue and doubts. In her chair's address at the 2001 CCCC, she acknowledged her own and others' "burnout" and questioned her own state of being: "Since I too regularly feel crisp around the edges, I start to consider whether or not I am maturing into a generational cliché myself, less *counter*, *original*, *spare*, and *strange*, more *slow*, *sour*, or *dim*. Myself, but different" (329).

Yet reading her work, it is hard to imagine Wendy ever burning out. If anything, she was a kind of magician or alchemist. And the mixtures were for many of us a heady brew. We could be more than the sum of our parts, as she wrote to Melissa Goldthwaite: "M+W squared." She brought together roles, positions, identities, and disciplines in energizing, even liberating ways. But her work was much bigger, more generous, certainly deeper than mere professional life could contain. She wrote about the pain, yes, even the pain of the cancer that finally took her. But I remember more the largeness of her, the mystery surrounding the light her life provided to those like me who refused to accept writing, writing about writing, and teaching as somehow lesser acts in the academic/cultural hierarchy. It was not difficult to believe that her light would never burn out.

Wendy was a great mentor because of the balance she struck in embracing such diverse and sometimes divergent aspects of herself and her work. And certainly Wendy did pave the way for so many of us to do just that, to aim for balance rather than shutting down or denying the parts of ourselves that did not fit the academic mold. But perhaps even more importantly, she insisted on bringing us to the borderlands of our knowledge. With Wendy, there was no center, only the border at the center of all she cared about and fought for, against difficult and often frustrating odds.

As someone who has followed Wendy's exploratory, radically revising example, I find that the borderlands are perhaps the most challenging location to situate oneself—as teacher, writer, scholar. It is a place of unknowing rather than certainty, exploration rather than proven mastery, untested potential rather than certified accomplishment. Even after 20 years, I feel nervous excitement when I teach, especially when I know I've situated myself, along with the students, in the borderlands of what we know, say, and do.

Still, it is easy to forget that the borderlands are more than a metaphor and that real lives are at stake. Wendy insisted on bringing us to those borderlands, and also those of forest, night, and wild, of the interpenetration and interanimation that language gifts us. She showed us how to find ways to approach those borderlands and those who work within them in order to radically revise our vision of ourselves and of those Others upon whose labor we depend.

Wendy valued the labor of writing and of teaching for what it was—exhausting, exhilarating, necessary, vital, and just plain good work. William Stafford, speaking of his ditch-digging days, lauded the repetition, the over-the-shoulder glance at the sky, the moments of being totally in the moment with his own movements, with the earth, and with everything around him. Like Stafford, Wendy did not romanticize the labors of teaching writing, but neither did she condescend to them. It was simply good work. She argued and at the same time simply offered herself as the example that it was valuable and should be valued for what it was: “It takes encouragement and courage to find a clear passage to the safe harbor of affirming oneself as a teacher within an institution that valorizes almost every other role first” (“Places to Stand” 13). Wendy modeled how to find that clear passage for so many of us, and in doing so created passage for others to follow as well.

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Yesterday, as I finally sat down again to write this introduction, 20 months to the day since I first began “the Wendy issue,” I watched as my beagle, Barney, took her usual place on the sofa downstairs in my office. This time she did not interrupt me to seek the warmth of my lap, despite the fact that my basement office is colder in May than September. Even though it was dinner time, she did not come to my desk and, with her strong right paw, scratch the filing cabinets in persistent circles. Maybe she was content that earlier that day I had taken her for a walk around Foster Park. Unlike many dogs, she is not a walker; she stops and sniffs every last thing around her. But that morning she stared at me with such intent while I laced my walking shoes that I knew she wanted to join me. It took us almost twice as long as my “normal” pace to circumvent the park, and I had to keep my eyes tight on Barney, not the explosion of lilacs, tulips, and crabapples flowering our path, just to keep her going. At the end of the walk, I lifted her in my arms to smell the three different kinds of lilacs that line the bikeway to the park, because the day was too beautiful not to. For once, I did not resist Barney as she led me to the borderlands of my assumptions about a “productive” day and radically revised my vision to include attending to my dog’s insatiable nose and proud and steady trot in between fits of sniffing. Perhaps like Wendy, I, too, am just as desperate for connection.

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Sunday, May 07, 2006 3:02 PM

Dear Wendy,

What is it about our profession that makes us so lonely, so “desperate for connection” that we will ignore the imperatives of authorities, the warning signs, the threats of physical, psychological, material, and emotional harm and press on, “against the odds,” to make and sustain our relationships? What if teachers, especially teachers of writing, were really valued in the ways that you hoped for, struggled for, and ended your life still working for? What if we, as a country, valued the ditch digger and the sugar cane field worker, the teachers of writing working in obscu-

urity? What if we brought the shadow populations out into the light of respect and gratitude? Would our desperation disappear, and if so, what would we be left with? What would it be like to feel satisfaction without wearing ourselves down against the frustration and pain of teaching always in the shadows, in the service of certain notions of mastery? What stories and poems and dialogues and essays could we write to help us imagine such a world, and also help us “find a clear passage to [that] safe harbor” of connection and relationship, of the community so often written and spoken about but so little understood, let alone manifested in sustainable ways, within and outside the classroom?”

Your death puts me into another borderland, another location that insists on exploration, uncertainty, and risk. What am I willing to give up, change, take upon myself to radically revise my vision of myself and of Others, but also to change the borders themselves so that all may find their true value?

I don't know the answer to that last question, but I do know that I am not the only one who wants and values the connection and the work, who wants “balance” and connection (“dialogue”) but also, paradoxically, the unbalancing borderland to be at the center of all we do.

Love,

Mary Ann

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At Foster Park, the spring flowers have reached their peak of color and perfume. I've always thought it was no accident that I moved to a neighborhood where I can walk every day in a fostering place, since, like Wendy, so much of my teaching life centers on that concept. I seek a similar kind of fostering as I walk the park's generous green stretch almost every day. In a newly planted semi-circle of crabapples, a stone marker in the ground reads: “Death ends a life, not a relationship.” So the pain is there, as is the sorrow, but the dance into the borderlands, with all who knew and valued Wendy and her words, and all those who will, continues.

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Reflections 2023

Wednesday, August 23, 2023 5:45 p.m.

Dear Wendy,

It's been over a year since Melissa and I decided to co-edit this cluster conversation for *Peitho*. It's also been over a year since I retired from academia to be the writer, not the teacher, not the writer-teacher-writer. Just writer. When I knew you back then, I wasn't writing poetry. Now I am. In my essay about you for *Dialogue*, I lauded the fact that you did not want to fly only under the title “poet.” While I've often wondered, What if you had?, I also know my life would be so different had you done that. Call me selfish. But also call me still sad that your one full-length volume

of poetry was published posthumously. Call me mad that most people don't know this book exists. Call me curious to know what if you had "made it to the finish line" of academia, as I've jokingly described it to friends. Doug Hesse thinks you would have loved spending time at Alligator Point in your beloved Florida beach house and not looked back. Melissa and I aren't so sure.

When I made the decision in January 2022 to leave teaching, I thought I'd really miss it, at least for a while. That writer-teacher-writer you wrote about struck deep chords in me. I was certain those identities were so intermingled that I would feel some pain and grief in leaving, especially leaving sooner than I'd imagined. Surprise! I didn't. Other than weeping during a walk with my colleague and friend, Janet, around that same Foster Park I wrote about 20 years ago, I haven't much grieved. And I'm glad to claim "writer," just "writer," as my identity now. Had you survived to know academia in its current throes of upheaval, turmoil, and "radical revision," I wonder if you might not have sought an exit sooner than planned, as I did. And, believe me, this is not the kind of "radical revision" you had in mind.

I think I'm going through a radical revision of "writer-teacher-writer." I don't know if I'll ever *not* be a teacher. But the places have changed. The "writer" and "teacher" are not the identities I began with 33 years ago. I know this is so because as I've reread your work and read that of the others in this cluster conversation, I see so much more clearly now how I became more like you as my writing and teaching progressed. One of my last classes in Spring 2022 was a new one, "Writing for Social Change." I don't think I ever taught more like you than that class. I stopped worrying so much if what and how I taught prepared the students for the rest of their academic or professional lives. Instead, I sought to help them find engagement with their lives as they were right then. I encouraged them to write in different genres, styles, and modes of discourse, as well as media, to really mix it up, to better connect with the diverse, heteroglossic reality that they already inhabited. It made me wish I had taught and written about that kind of teaching more throughout my academic life. If I ever go back to academic teaching, that's the place where I will start to radically revise everything.

With gratitude and thanks.

Love,

Mary Ann

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Wendy's concept of "radical revision" (employed in this cluster conversation by Amy Hodges Hamilton, Micaela Cuellar, and Meg Scott-Copses) helps me in this moment of re-visioning myself from 20 years ago, along with my understanding of Wendy's work. In "Places to Stand," Wendy writes,

The goal then is not to toss out the unified text with the academic bath water, but to offer options. To explore for ourselves, and to allow our students to do so also, how a deeper understanding of the connections between thought, words, and life may occur when we re-read our own

writing. To do that, of course, we must write. (17)

In this act of rereading my writing, I find myself radically revising my writer-teacher-writer identity now that I am “outside” the institution where this identity primarily existed. I am writing to discover a “deeper understanding” of that “unified text”—in this case, the text of my academic identity and of academia itself—in this moment of radical change and upheaval for those in the humanities and liberal arts. In this radical revision, I lean into the forms and genres that Wendy led me to 20 years ago—the cros, the genre mixing of personal, academic, and narrative writing—to re-vision the writer-teacher-writer who no longer teaches in the classroom: “Because styles, genres, and syntax seem to both prompt and predict thought, I need to think in and through them all” (17).

What this rereading prompts me to understand is what Wendy was demonstrating and advocating for all along, namely that to create spaces for students *and* ourselves to learn, we need to create spaces of learning that go beyond the prescribed identities we are presented with. We need to understand our work as not simply one identity or another, one genre or another, but (as I wrote 20 years ago, quoting Wendy) as something that helps us “‘find a clear passage to [that] safe harbor’ of connection and relationship, of the community so often written and spoken about but so little understood, let alone manifested in sustainable ways, within and outside the classroom.”

I reread myself as not “outsider” or “insider” but as a learner who still learns through language, thoughts, and writing. Stories are an important container through which those elements necessary to relational work like mentoring are carried forward. I radically revise my “outside” location as one that helps me understand and experience the intimacy that language and writing make possible, an intimacy that teaches me new understandings of how writing enables new ways of knowing and being by creating the relational webs through which all else is made possible. I understand “intimacy” as coming from a practice of deep observation and attention to others in relationships of mutuality, respect, and cooperation. Being released from the urgency to “produce,” to “publish or perish,” and to give more and more of myself to students, colleagues, and the institution, places me in a different mindset, a different sense of time, one that allows me to open up to what I might have overlooked before in my rush to produce. I don’t simply *know* how much words matter; I *feel* words more as an experience. And it’s stories that best carry that experience.

In *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley’s Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*, Tiya Miles painstakingly unravels the story of a simple cloth sack that was passed down from an enslaved woman, Rose, to her daughter, Ashley, after Ashley was sold to another slave owner. The sack contained the few objects that Rose could muster to sustain her: a “tattered dress 3 handfulls of /pecans a braid of Roses hair” (Miles 5). Decades later, Ashley’s granddaughter, Ruth, embroidered the contents of Ashley’s sack in colored threads that told the brief but potent story of her

grandmother's experience.

As Tila Miles demonstrates, the sack is a container that, like stories, carries a transformational power, “mark[ing] a spot in our national story where great wrongs were committed, deep sufferings were felt, love was sustained against all odds, and a vision of survival for future generations persisted” (274). In this “radical vision of Black persistence,” Rose’s fear was turned into love and a commitment to “fight for life”—her own and that of generations to come (274). The sack is a container that carries not only physical sustenance but emotional and spiritual resilience in the face of unfathomable injustice and suffering. In her deep dive into Ashley’s sack, Tila Miles demonstrates what otherwise would go unnoticed and unvalued in this weaving of identity, culture, and legacy across generations of African American women, namely the power of the ordinary object to sustain life across generations in the face of impossible circumstances.

The story of Ashley’s sack returns me to the power and possibilities that stories offer as a container for radically revising our relationships within and beyond the academy, and by doing so, radically revising the academy itself. As I radically revise this “insider/outsider” binary I confront now as “just a writer,” I come to understand how much Wendy and her emphasis on narrative has prepared me for this moment of shifting ground. It’s not about *either* telling stories and fostering the relational threads of intimate understandings of self and other *or* doing the “hard” work of analysis, argument, research, and evidence. Instead, it’s about appreciating what narratives, like everyday objects such as Ashley’s sack, provide in terms of sustenance. In short, stories don’t just support us; we can’t, literally and figuratively, live without them.

And now in this moment, when academia faces its greatest challenges and threats, we need stories more than ever. We need the kinds of relational work—collaboration, teaching, mentoring—that Wendy valued and argued for, work made possible by writing, teaching writing, and studying both. If we carry the sack of our stories forward, “we cannot forget its layered lessons” (274), which we need to sustain us in the face of overwhelming force and potential domination and suppression. The world has always been there; it’s just that academia’s inward-looking demands made that less apparent. And now the world has come blasting into academia’s view. In some ways, it’s been positive in terms of fostering inclusion. But in this moment of radical revision, much of the change being forced from without has been hugely negative. Such negative “revisions” are, at least in part, the consequence of academia’s hubris in positioning itself above the fray, including the relational work of language, writing, and the teaching and research of writing that continues to be devalued as too basic or remedial or just plain ordinary, like a sack. As I radically revise myself as “just a writer” in relation to the academy, I also start to radically revise my vision of the academy itself. And in this, I see how much Wendy’s work has prepared me for this moment.

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Twenty years is just a number, as the saying goes, until you get up close and consider what

all has happened. In my radical revision of self and other, I see twenty years in dog years, i.e. the three beagles I've lived with. Like Ashley's sack, my beagles are the containers that sustain me and carry forward memories of sustenance, love, and a commitment to carry on. First Barney, who entered my narrative 20 years ago. Then Bootsie, who came five years later. And now, as of one year ago, Blaisie, our newest. Just as Barney, in my previous narrative, kept reminding me of the world and all its different movements of time, attention, and stillness, Blaisie continues to complicate my identity as not simply in the world as a human being but also as part of the natural world—a world I experience now as both breathtakingly beautiful and frighteningly under siege with climate change. Each beagle marks a different season of life: Barney saw the beginning of a settled home life and job; Bootsie ushered me through the middle years of health and other personal challenges, including breast cancer and losing a second home to a climate-change-fueled wildfire; and Blaisie arrived just as my husband and I shifted to being writers, “just” writers, after decades in academia.

As I write from this house rebuilt in 2013 after the fire, with Blaisie now a year old, I think of Wendy and her black dog running on the beach, her hummingbirds at the feeder, and how she merged identities with them, and the beach house where she, too, considered storms and destruction but also the sea turtles making it all worthwhile. I think of how radical revision requires destruction as well as creation. Living in close relationship to anyone or anything, one must learn to relate to both.

Still very much a (sometimes destructive) puppy, Blaisie demands the kind of intimacy that has marked this shift into a new awareness of language and stillness; she carries the storms that make the deeper understandings possible. Such storms are extraordinary teachers, offering lessons of intimacy that are gifted through close attention, stillness, and then language, writing, reading, and reflection. And in this exchange I find, along with Wendy, a measure of hope even as so much else tells me otherwise. When we radically revise our identities to be in dialogue with the Other, new worlds, new possibilities, new understandings appear.

As my Other, Blaisie challenges me with her playful insistence that I pay close attention or else destruction may ensue. And it always does. Because I know now, after 28 years of life with beagles, how fleeting their puppyhood is; because I have the privilege to stop what I'm doing to pay attention without feeling the crunch of time slipping away and other, more urgent tasks, going unattended; because I am, perhaps, also a bit wiser about how to address her destructiveness, I radically revise my self as less concerned about maintaining an order and control I assume is necessary and more concerned about engaging the destruction she presents on its own terms. To this end, I silently sprinkle cayenne pepper where she is chewing and biting: her bed, the furniture, the carpets, sometimes even the light sockets (though thankfully, this last one is rare). The pepper lets her environment give her feedback instead of me having to correct her. As a writer, I gain more respect for the destructive aspects of my own composing processes, now untethered from