

**READING GAVIN BOLTON:  
A BIOGRAPHY FOR EDUCATION**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This biography of internationally recognized drama educator Gavin Bolton has two purposes. Its primary concern is to illuminate the life of a man whose contribution to education and drama has extended over nearly half a century. A pioneer of drama education theory and practice, Bolton has inspired teachers and students towards a deeper understanding of the potential for drama in the classroom. However, this study is not focused solely on Bolton's work. It seeks to provide the personal, social, emotional, cultural, and historical contexts through which his work can be interrogated.

The other significance of this study is its exploration of the potential of contemporary biography as a research tool in education. Currently in an exciting state of flux, biography is moving toward creating new spaces for knowledge. Feminist and postmodern scholars argue for a different way of telling life stories, a complex approach that blends and interrupts the fragments of a life. Biography is no mere accounting of accomplishments. It must offer a richer taste of the many selves occupied by its subject - a wider range of the subject's meaningful encounters, significant life events and emotional textures.

A biographical approach to understanding the experience of teachers has consequences for many aspects of the profession. Biography presents a deeply personal opportunity to explore pedagogical models, honour valuable contributions to education, inspire self-reflection in the reader and promote dialogue. I believe that biography can enrich and expand the direction of educational research by creating a new space of inquiry.

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And, because who we are is reflected in where and to whom we anchor: my thanks to Albert, Eric and Pauline for keeping our ship afloat while I steered us into uncharted water.

## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, Arlene, for her strength and love and to her mother,  
my Granny, Josephine Bodner, who always said:

"In this life, you need education."



### **A Note from the Author**

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## **PREFACE**

I began taking steps toward writing the biography of Gavin Bolton when I was about three years old. Once I had control of my vocabulary and knew I could recite or sing my way into the hearts of any family 'audience' that happened to be present, I had the key to making and being in an 'as if' world. It didn't matter if no one else really listened; I was temporarily playing as someone else, exploring a world which I knew and did not yet know. I followed my impulse to play act by organizing neighbourhood theatrical events, and then, in school by trying out for school plays. My interest in theatre grew into a career of teaching secondary school drama. Then, after fifteen years, I discovered that while I still loved drama, I had no idea what I was teaching. I was bored, disillusioned and frustrated with my students and my work. I went back to school in search of a new way of knowing drama and education.

I met Gavin Bolton in the summer of 1990, at a summer course for graduate students at the University of British Columbia. Those six weeks altered my understanding of pedagogy, classroom drama and education in general. So, it would be completely unrealistic to begin this biography without acknowledging at the outset the regard in which I hold Gavin Bolton.

Nevertheless, writing a biography brings responsibilities. In (re)presenting the life stories of Gavin Bolton, I believe that I have exercised my responsibilities with care, retaining a critical eye and an interrogative perspective. A biographer holds a position of intimate trust, and when the subject is alive it is a weighty

but exquisite burden. I have relied heavily on Gavin's voice and 'presence' throughout this process of 'biographying'. The artistic choices I have made in creating the text reflect the Gavin Bolton I see and am privileged to know.

\*\*\*

**Auto/bio/graphic     or  
The Biographer's Autobiography in the Biography**

**July 27  
1989  
2:00 pm**

I wait in the hot summer sun.  
Stone Bench outside Department Office.  
Nervous stomach.

Rumpled professor now discussing my possible academic program.

I am embarking on a Masters' Degree in Language Education (but really in Drama Education). My first taste of the hidden curriculum.

Professor's third cigarette in twenty minutes.  
Says he, "You really ought to take Gavin Bolton's course next summer, you know."

Say I, "Who's Gavin Bolton?"

**July 3  
1990  
8:00 am**

First summer course in fifteen years.  
I'm a little resentful - best summer on record they say.  
I don't know anyone here...  
And what are we doing in the Commerce building?

Smallish man near the window. No, I mean slight and average height. Couldn't be. He's so inconspicuous. I thought he'd be more flamboyant, imposing somehow. Yet, there's something in the way he scans this collection of strangers that commands attention.

A few more stragglers enter. Not a word yet.

**8:10 am**

"Shall we begin? My name is Gavin Bolton."

\*\*\*

## **Bolton Snapshots from ENED 508**

**Summer  
1990**

Serious. Pondering a student remark. Stillness. Straight-faced.

Prompt and efficient and tidy.

Day four: breezy, wind-blown look. He's been swimming in the outdoor pool before our 8 am class. Tan is deepening. Now wearing sandals.

We cluster around the table in Edibles.  
He sits in the middle of all ten of us.  
Listens intently  
Says little  
Smiles charmingly  
Nods encouragement  
Checks watch.

Breaks rarely exceed the allotted time.

Lecture  
    Discussion  
        Application  
            Reflection  
                Reflection  
                    Reflection

Our small class goes out boating. Sails up. Gentle breeze on English Bay. He is silent; sitting alone at the bow. The wind quickens. He smiles; then grins.

Week Five: eyes twinkle. Mischief. Tease. "You'll never guess what happened while I was at Wreck Beach yesterday afternoon!"

\*\*\*

## **Indications**

The preceding pages have already signalled a difference in this approach to biography. My choices as a biographer have been informed by seeking to explore a postmodern, feminist perspective. Viewed in this way, biography as research can be seen to embrace certain features. The postmodern text is not chaotic, unstructured or careless. It is more accurately - shaped, crafted and intentional. There are many concerns which will indicate the form such a text may eventually take. Each postmodern text will make different demands on the reader. Some of the characteristics I have uncovered in my process are listed here, not as definitive landmarks, but as recognizable features in writing this biography. A postmodern, feminist biography will likely be concerned with:

- evoking images rather than capturing truths
- seeking to disrupt expectations of the life story
- inviting and challenging the reader to be fully engaged, rather than passively present
- provoking and promoting dialogue
- leaving textual space that is unfilled
- seeking a non-linear structure
- appearing as a consciously artful, creative project
- moving the reader, subject and writer in new directions
- asking more questions than are explored
- opening up areas that have been traditionally silenced in biography, to do with: domestic relationships, sexuality, subjectivity and voice
- commenting implicitly on the role of the author

This is but a partial list of possibilities that may emerge from a postmodern,

feminist view of biographical research. In this case, the structure of the project became clear to me in a single moment of insight; a reflection of the organic, intuitive nature of this approach.

The moment I am about to describe came precisely when I was ready to examine the context in which I would write the life of Gavin Bolton. It was unexpected, yet I recognized how it was a fusing of thoughts I had been exploring for several years with some degree of discomfort. I also knew, immediately after this instant, that form and content would follow.

### **In Arctic (Air)Space**

I gaze aimlessly through a small window.  
Miles below stretches vast whiteness  
    blank  
    limitless  
    arresting  
    frightening  
    freeing

I look and see nothing and close my eyes.

Wait.

I am compelled to look again.

Disoriented by the sheer endlessness of white  
At first I think - *No Boundaries* -  
But I know better. Even the Arctic has edges.

Where nothing appeared before,  
cracks and fissures emerge  
    contours create diversity.

(how do people and polar bears move across this frozen mass  
broken by its mini-rivers; ice-cold spider veins making  
connections difficult?)

My eye searches for mountains, valleys, ice sculpture - shape.

The landscape shifts as the flight proceeds.

I hope to see (but never do)  
the human signs. Where are the human signs?  
And then I see:  
I will

write the human signs in the story and leave an open horizon.

\*\*\*

I am comfortable and flying over the Arctic circle, returning to Vancouver from a week-long visit to England. There is an empty seat beside me - rare luck on an international flight. In my hand are the six photographs I have managed to bring away with me from Newcastle. I am to write the biography of the man I see in these few pictures. Where to start? I am really searching, grasping...must stay relaxed, open to the possibilities. I consider the options. A traditional biography would start with his birth, take him through school, the beginnings of a brilliant career, major contributions to his field, etc.,etc., etc.

I am not interested in a traditional form. I seek a difference in this representation which has no precedent. My vision of a postmodern, feminist biography has yet to appear. Still, I have a clear, but unscripted direction. The biography is an improvisation, I must move from moment to moment as it occurs. I play with the images of Gavin Bolton that exist in the photos. Where is the human focus?

What was happening for Gavin when these pictures were recorded? Why have these particular photos been spared from disposal? What meaning do they hold for Gavin? I have to trust that sensitivity to the images will come to me,

perhaps not all at once. After all, I would not expect instant familiarity in other situations or relationships. When I first looked out at the stark, blank landscape below me, I saw little. Then, features began to reveal themselves to me the longer I sat gazing, not scrutinizing, but allowing the force of the space to affect me. So too, I decide, the images of Gavin Bolton will begin to shape themselves into a readable pattern. Rather than imposing the form onto the subject, hoping to fit the pieces together to arrive at the conclusion, I will "be the piano, not the pianist" (Swan, 1994). Whatever emerges in this telling of Bolton will happen because I will read him in some way, from some angle. The challenge will be in trusting that the personal landscape will eventually appear, even if I can't yet see it.

Not surprisingly, I linger over the picture of Gavin that brings me closest to my own experience as a drama teacher. He stands with a group of students, encircled by their joy and energy. There is a tangible, human connection between them; the bonding of shared experience. I know this feeling. I have had it with my own students. This is where I can begin. This is a Gavin Bolton I recognize.

I start to write the biography when I reconcile my presence in it, my voice alongside Gavin's story. I tear open my ticket envelope and scribble furiously over it, pinning the words of my first chapter to paper. Then, I see the excerpts from my journal as the structural vehicle, the convention, by which I can travel between past and present, speaking at once reflectively and dialogically. These are the **INTERVALS** in the text which create time to pause for the writer and



the reader. The **MEDITATIONS** or [**Reflections for Readers**] offer the questions I am most intrigued by in my multiple roles as writer, woman, educator, learner. These structural devices invite the reader to be an active participant in this reading of Gavin Bolton. Furthermore, the form that leads the reader through the life story encourages a different way of reading and interacting with the text.

The rest of the biography expanded from this moment. I understand that no single interpretation of a life will be satisfactory, and every interpretation will add to the dialogues of drama education, biography and Gavin Bolton.

## **MEDITATION**

### **[Reflections for Readers]**

#### **WRITING. LIVING. LEARNING.**

What is the ongoing meaning of biography?

What becomes of the biographed life and life story?

How does the subject emerge post-biography?

What is happening to the subject through the process?

How is the writer affected by the process?

Is the subject shaped in any way by the biography?

How does the biographer emerge post-biography?

What is the nature of the relationship between biographer and subject when the process is collaborative?

\*\*\*

## INTRODUCTION

This introduction reveals details of my thinking and planning towards the biography; the literature I examined in order to find my way into the theoretical foundations that support the work, and my reactions to the ongoing process of writing a life. The autobiographical nature of the introduction is symptomatic of one of the problems of writing a life, an account of the authorial life appears, whether consciously or not, through the choices that are made in terms of material, construction and conceptualization.

By explaining the production of this biography, I have made a conscious decision to document my role in it. This is important to the study because one of its purposes is to explore the use of biography as a tool for educational research. The importance of this, as Liz Stanley (1992) argues, is "to enable more people than just one - the biographer - to engage with the biographical investigative or research process" (p.118). If biography is going to become a useful tool for researchers, it needs greater exposure and discussion. I feel that my perspective as a teacher/researcher is integral to the way this biography has unfolded. The implications of the approach I have taken to writing the actual biography are discussed in this introduction which is structured in three parts: **Beginnings, Passages and Portals.**

In the first section, **Beginnings**, I look at biography as a genre. This, in itself, is worthy of an entire thesis, for biography has undergone a tremendous metamorphosis over the last decade. Indeed it continues to be (re)shaped and

(re)conceptualized as a field. As a method of research it has gained enthusiastic attention from a number of quarters, for it provides a compellingly human context in which to examine a wide variety of topics: the social, historical, cultural, emotional, and personal fabric of a particular person at a particular time. Because it is, by nature, a narrative inquiry, biography appeals to the primitive and constant desire in human beings to live in a storied world. Thus, it has the potential to make significant contributions to a wide audience. Nevertheless, the ways in which we tell the stories of our lives is changing in complexity and intention. We now seek to include the more intimate and relation-based details that contribute to our personal fabric, and choose not to silence areas which were once considered either untouchable or uninteresting.

I also explore in this first section my own journey into the role of biographer. My intuitive conviction that biography was the 'right' vehicle for examining the life of Gavin Bolton was quickly confirmed as I began the study. However, first I had to learn what I meant by biography, and how that differed from previous conceptualizations of biography. In addition, I had to leave my expectations aside and accept that I was a stranger to this process of storying someone else's life. I needed to envision a company of participants who would be with me along the way: biographer, readers and subject<sup>1</sup>.

The second section of this introduction, **Passages**, examines the two underlying assumptions which inform this text: feminism and postmodernism. From the

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the label 'subject' is intended only as a clear term of reference. I do not wish to offend readers or diminish the role of Gavin Bolton in any way by using this convention.

outset, I had a clear understanding that what I was attempting to do was going to result in a biography that would not only look different to the reader, but would express the narrative of the life in a way that would also feel different from a traditional biography. As the writing unfolded, the approach seemed increasingly suited to the nature of the man, Gavin Bolton, and to the subject area, drama in education.

The open-ended, disruptive, and unsettling nature of postmodernist notions to do with text, self and truth are integral to the study of biography. How do we presume to write (an)other's life? How can a life be (re)presented textually? Who, in fact, are we writing about when we commit words to paper? Keeping these thoughts in mind had an enormous influence on the development of my thinking and expression when I began to write about Bolton. Recent developments in feminist biographical theory, particularly in relation to voice, subjectivity, identity, subject/writer relationships, and narrative strategies offer intriguing challenges to life writers and readers. My passage into these concerns meant a shift in my conceptualization of the project. The last part of this section outlines the methodology of the study.

In the final section of the introduction, **Portals**, I concentrate on the potential of biography as educational research. In the most profound way, biography allows the reader a degree of intimacy with the subject in the briefest possible time. In educational settings, teachers still live within a relatively isolated environment where deep understanding of the work of colleagues is rarely achieved because of constraints imposed by time, workload, and extracurricular

demands. However, meaningful connections need to be made, particularly in times when rapid change and public scrutiny impose heavy responsibilities on the profession. Biography is a portal into other worlds, other educators, other journeys.

### **Beginnings**

"Ambiguity is the warp of life, not something to be eliminated."

Bateson (1994)

Had I begun this thesis fifteen or even ten years ago, it would have been much easier to determine the nature of the biographer's work. Indeed, it would have been simple, knowing that I was going to write the biography of a white, Anglo, middle-class male. My objective would have been to present his considerable accomplishments as a feat of dedication and hard work: the singular effort of an ambitious scholar. At the same time, a significant historical contribution could be made to the archives of drama education by a critique of the subject's work over forty years. The narrative would be pleasing to the readers, who would likely be reading it to affirm what they already knew about the subject anyway. A satisfactory beginning, middle and end for the text could be fashioned, for the subject has conveniently retired from public life (which is surely the end?). And of course, nothing really personal would need to be included because the importance, after all, lay in the work.

How happy I am that my relationship with biography is beginning at its new genesis. The demands now inherent in the writing of biography place the writer in a highly creative, artful and unconventional role. The traditional

chronological form of biography, documenting a predictable birth, work, death cycle has been in a rapid state of flux. It is no longer satisfactory to tell a life story out of context, separated from the larger human realities and environments that have helped to shape the life. And, as I discovered in writing Gavin Bolton's life, choosing only a single context for that life would have been diminishing and false. Many different contexts have been woven together through the subject's experiences. In her analysis of process in feminist biography, Liz Stanley (1992) states, "biography is not only a narrative; it is also and equally self-evidently based on investigation, on inquiry, and on a process of selection in and out of not only the facts but the salient facts" (p.121). The biographer enters the already created past as an outsider, and emerges as co-author with the subject, and any sources of text or personal narrative about the subject, in order to recreate a new version of that life for readers.

A biography is an interesting space: neither fact nor fiction; complete nor incomplete; truthful nor untruthful. At the core of a biography is the story of one individual, but, in reality, the stories told are about the many different selves that have been written by that individual's experiences. No single version of a life story is 'right'; in biography there is great latitude for interpretation.

However, I knew none of this when I started looking into the mysteries and magic of a life belonging to someone else. Initially, I felt my responsibility would be to collect the 'facts' as they were known (by whom was unclear) and to tell the story as it was told to me. My expectations were uncomplicated. I

wanted to learn about the development of drama in education through Gavin Bolton's eyes, and to understand how he saw his role in its growth as a school subject. I wanted to find out more about the way he conceived drama strategies and other teacher-related concerns. I wanted to know the story of his life. And I thought it was that simple.

I soon discovered that in education's present context I would be exploring a landscape of diverse contours by approaching a biographical subject as educational research. William Doll (1993) describes the shifting paradigms of education which deal with such nonlinear concepts as "self-organization, indeterminacy, stability across and through instability, order emerging spontaneously from chaos, and the creative making of meaning" (p.158). These concepts would become guideposts shaping my understanding as I followed the bends and pathways of the research.

As a teacher it was quite clear to me which parts of Gavin's work would be considered important. A biography would have to deal with his skill as a classroom practitioner; the substantial corpus of theory he has written; his years training teachers at Durham University; his overall contribution to the development of drama in education; and his personality, appearance and general character. Of course, I would have to consult others about him and refer to his writing as well as interview the man himself. Naively assuming that biography was just about someone else's stories, I was unprepared for the heightened awareness and interest I would develop towards other life stories and my own.



In a fortunate coincidence of time and space, my opportunity to connect with my subject in person was facilitated by his return to the University of British Columbia as a Noted Scholar for the summer term of 1994. Although he would be teaching every day, there would be time for interviews and informal meetings throughout his stay on campus. I took his presence and willingness to participate for granted. I just assumed that all would serendipitously fall into place, that I would get the information I needed from him to begin writing the narrative. Despite my lack of ease (I was nervous, in awe of my subject and rather too businesslike, I think), Gavin was generous, cooperative and flexible. I did manage to collect a considerable volume of transcribed material from our discussions that summer. I did not, at the time, fully grasp that it was highly uncommon for a biographer to have such unique access to the subject's life. Biographers whose subjects are no longer living must rely on accounts that are further and further removed from the subject. Diaries, letters, and third hand retellings are valuable but different, more distant sources. It wasn't until I had reached a point further along in the study that it suddenly struck me that I was in fact working collaboratively with an expert on the subject! I was beginning to discover possibilities for the direction of my research.

An excerpt from my research journal shortly before Gavin arrived to teach his course in 1994 illustrates my apprehension:

**June 23, 1994**

...begin listing questions for G.B. This feels at once exciting and intimidating. Who am I to start probing into his personal life? But I want to know, need to know, I guess, all kinds of 'things' about him...I really fear missing important elements...what if I don't say something that everyone who knows him knows about? (better to say what they

don't know). Can I use open-ended questions? What will he say??? I have permission to dig into the mystery of another person's life! Treasure...

Although I worried about my skills as an interviewer, envying the interrogative agility of a friend who was just graduating from the department of Counselling Psychology, I knew I had at least the basic requirements as defined by Seidman(1991): "The truly effective question flows from the interviewer's concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward" (p.70). The knowledge I was pursuing in the form of narrative was leading me into some exciting territory. It was obvious that I was not alone on the journey; as Josselson and Leiblich (1993) point out, the word narrative has "invaded every field" (p.x); a response, I believe, to the increasing need to share the human experience on more fertile ground. I began to think of biography as a geographic notion, a site of discourse, a dwelling place for multiple new images of a person to occupy. The images would be new because their creation would be from my external perspective; it would be a representation of the ideas, symbols, thoughts, impressions, instincts, and imagination woven as a tapestry of Gavin Bolton. The place of the biography itself would be a meeting ground for those who knew something of Gavin Bolton, and those who did not. I would be bringing together diverse groups of people to explore the life stories of one educator, touching, in the process, on historical, interrelational, educational and social concerns. Whatever ties we could find in common would be woven through the text.

## **Passages...**

Two important social constructs infuse the state of contemporary biography. One is feminism and the other is postmodernism. It is hard to say which of the two has had greater impact, and perhaps that is unimportant, as long as both are acknowledged. The two twentieth-century developments intersect in a surprising number of places. Both are reactions against a regime of accepted ordinariness, taken-for-grantedness and sameness. Both question the right of certain groups to hold power over others. Both have strong messages regarding the place of individuals as selves in society. Both invite a lack of closure and a celebration of ambiguity. Both insist on a dialogic approach to interaction. Both emphasize different ways of knowing. In the following pages, I will explore my understanding(s) of feminism and postmodernism as they have underscored my thinking and planning of Gavin Bolton's biography. Each brings its own limitations and challenges for the writer, the subject and the reader of biography.

## **...Of Text and Self**

My discovery of the drama of theatre, personal learning and textuality is presented in the brief account to follow as a way of examining the overlapping contexts of self and narrative:

L.J: Every Thursday evening, I meet with a small group of people who, like me, are fascinated by and passionately committed to theatre. We explore scenes and monologues, striving to find a truthfulness in our interactions that belies the instant intimacy we must face as actors. One of the exercises in which we have all participated, produces a curious

and revealing sensation in each person who experiences it. We are asked to prepare two monologues: one, a scripted piece, written by someone else; the other a true story from our own experience. Then we present the stories to each other with the objective being that the truthful story and the fictional story are indistinguishable. Often, it is difficult to tell. Sometimes we get the stories reversed when we try to guess. What we discover is that the emotions and desire are true, even if the text is not. We also discover we are compelled by how and why the text is revealed not what is revealed.

The postmodern era which has pervaded all manner of cultural agendas in the last quarter century is disconcertingly present and not present. For some critics the postmodern age has passed; for others, it continues to infuse contemporary thinking. As Middlebrook (1990) states, "in usage it has become a handy label for whatever disturbs our expectations by disrupting and recombining traditional elements, achieving effects of discontinuity" (p.155). Since the meanings of long-held human assumptions about truth, self and language have become blurred, there is an urgent need for a new approach to biography.

There are underlying principles of postmodernism to do with the way in which text is interpreted that are uncomfortable because they are provocative. Keep in mind that the context for discussing postmodernism here is the realm of biography. Critical to reading biography in a postmodern world is a perspective on authorship, namely: does it matter who the author is? who the author writes about? how the writer writes? How important is the role of the author in the final product? The author is no longer 'the' authority, but maintains an active creative position as 'an' authority. This has significant implications for biography, where ultimately, the writer must sift selectively through the precious collection of gathered material. The myriad decisions about inclusion of voices other than the author's own is a constant reminder to the biographer

that the biography is not being written alone; without the voice of the subject and others whose lives have intersected the subject's, the text would remain flat and dull. Biography is collaborative text-making; a process dependent on a wide range of sources and insights.

It is the author who chooses the order and form of the life's (re)presentation. The author engages with the presence of the subject in the way that fits the author's experience. For example, in this biography of Gavin Bolton, my authorial perspective has most often, I feel, been that of the teacher, and the emphasis has fallen towards the aspects of his life that seem relevant to me as an educator. Yet, I write from many different subject positions, including teacher. I am also woman, student, researcher, mother of a two-year old, wife, person from a different generation, with others not yet named. This is quite a different perspective from one which might be taken by someone whose primary interest is, for example, solely philosophy. To a degree, the author's choice of structure reveals authorial focus and autobiographical detail, and this in turn, affects the reader's interpretation of the subject. Certainly the relationship between the subject and author is one of importance, and part of a postmodern text is the dialogic relationship which informs the writing. In the textual telling of a life the author has the final responsibility for determining the balance between historicizing or contextualizing the life; for inviting the reader and subject to participate; or for limiting the potential for dialogue between them.

Finding sites for dialogue between the three principals is not an easy task and

opens up both stylistic and conceptual questions. Should the narrative be told in the unbroken voice of the author? Who will speak of, for and to the subject? How can the subject's voice enter the text? Can spaces be created to welcome the active participation of the reader? Overemphasis given to one form or style or idea may perhaps risk excluding an important opportunity for exchange. My greatest concern in this biography is to emphasize that there is room in biography for all participants. The relationship is a demanding one which requires flexibility, an agreement to enter willingly into the event, trust between members. A warning might also be attached here, for expectations held too tightly at the outset might be disturbed by the difference(s) I have explored in the body of the text.

The complex notion of intertextuality is amplified when applied to a biographical text. If we consider text to mean all events<sup>2</sup>, then a biography is not only the textual representation of the remembered events of a person's life as remembered by that person, it also includes the retelling of the events as remembered by others, and then the retelling of the events as interpreted by the author and a further reinterpretation of the events by the reader. Consider Gergen's (1994) observation: "that which counts as legitimate memory of the self is not a set of random images scattered over personal consciousness, but a culturally fashioned production. To remember oneself is to join in a public ritual" (p.94). Beyond that, the biography enters into a textual relationship with all other texts which relate to the subject and thus into a wider discourse

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<sup>2</sup> This definition of text appears in Rosneau's Glossary of Post-Modern Terms (1992): *text - all phenomenon, all events. Post-modernists consider everything a text.*

community interested in the life events and interpretations of the subject. These endless combinations of interconnectedness require a certain frame of mind in the reader and the writer. There must be a willingness to forego allegiances to boundaries of time and space; to belief in absolutes and to the pursuit of agreement between perceived contradictions and the lived experience.

The genre of biography has traditionally sought answers rather than multiple readings. In the past, a reader trusted that the biographer had 'done the research' finding out all there might be of interest, arriving at the 'definitive' word on the subject, which could then be absorbed passively by the reader. A postmodern reader, then, does not rely on assumption. It is not adequate to approach a life text with expectations of completion in the life of the subject, even if the subject does not happen to be alive. As O'Brien (1993) notes, it is time to start "going beyond the epitaph" in an effort to include ever-widening questions about the life text. Part of the key to grasping the nature of this limitless textuality lies in quest(ion)ing.

A postmodern approach to biography invites the writer to begin from a position of questioning which will inform the richness of the textual relationships to follow. Whose story needs to be told? How can the story be told? Why should I tell one part of the story and not another? Who might read this story? How will it be read? What might a reader feel or think or wonder about on reading this? What questions remain unasked?

In a collection of essays on life writing, Kadar (1993) argues that, "the life

writer does not pretend to be absent from the text" and seeks to move both self and reader into different dimensions of understanding. In this way, the reader is engaged on many levels: with the text of the subject's narrative, the creative text of the author; and the connections between those two texts and the reader's own lived experience. Kadar explains that life writing is:

a way of looking at all texts...in a way that allows our own prejudices to shine through, in a way that admits a level of feeling in the 'subject' inhabited by the author, the narrator and the reader. The reader who feels the most welcomed is the reader most likely to succeed at reading.  
(p.x)

It seems to be a special kind of reading that Kadar implies, a reading which provokes questions, challenges and reflection. The reader holds a more empowered position in a postmodern world. The authoritative omnipotence formerly granted to authors has vanished. The critical reader is an active partner with the author in the intertextual dance.

The personal anecdote about my Thursday night acting class that appeared earlier suggests important aspects about the way in which we are able to read text. Actors find ways to blend elements of themselves into the nuances of characters, and this becomes intriguing if applied to the act of reading, particularly reading biography. It is clear, as can be seen in the example, that reading is a highly subjective act, some of the 'true' texts being read as 'false' and vice versa by the spectators. Observers/readers are willing to extend their willingness to believe in an event if they perceive an element of truthfulness in what they are reading. In other words, a biographical text will not necessarily be 'true' to the actual events but can be truthful likenesses or (re)presentations of them, and still be pleasurable and of value to the reader. It is precisely this



degree of ambiguity which frees the writer and the reader to perceive the portrayal of the subject as a patchwork process<sup>3</sup> rather than a finished product, no composite of a unified self, but a collection of the subject's multiple selves seen over time and in space(s) opened up and arranged by the author.

There can be no single self portrayed in the biography, since no single 'true' self exists. Just as none of the actors in my class could produce an identical performance of the two selections, the biographer cannot presume to repeat the events of a lifetime as a picture of a whole self. A postmodern biographer must contest notions of a unified self at all turns, playing in the spaces made possible by contradictions, creating possibilities for readings from many different positions in the text. Ideally, it would be possible for the reader, the subject and the biographer to occupy a range of subject positions to enhance their interpretation of the text. It is only possible for the biographer to build an image of a life: a depiction of the subject's lived experience that can be examined by a reader that momentarily co-exists in a new space, a 'non-ordinary reality'<sup>4</sup> that is neither completely real nor completely imagined.

Even attempts to gather material about a subject for future inclusion in biography is an exercise in fictionalization by all parties. The reason for this is that the human memory designs its own past to fit the present self-construction.

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<sup>3</sup> The 'pastiche' of postmodernism

<sup>4</sup> I attribute this evocative phrase to Vancouver, B.C. director and acting teacher Scott Swan, whose approach to the intertextual relationships of the theatre experience has long embodied a postmodern approach.

I appreciate E.S.Reed's (1994) definition of memory: "autobiographical memory is the me-experiencing-now becoming aware of a prior-me-experiencing its (prior) environment" (p.283). We need to be able to satisfy current thinking about our(selves) with images from the past that seem cohesive.

The subject's memory of events is as susceptible to imaginary events as the writer's, and neither is in a position to dispute the accuracy of recall or deny the invention of detail. This is what makes biography a rich, human experience. There is no one right way to tell a story, no single life to create, no absolute pattern to (re)create, no ultimate 'answer' to be sought. In its very humanness, biography envisions the possibilities of a life; through a kaleidoscope of time and space.

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### **...Of Focus**

The momentum that continues to fire feminist auto/biographical studies will have a lasting impact on the genre of biography. With the writing of women's lives into the space(s) of present and historical contexts, the shape of biography is unalterably changed. Breaking away from the conventions of the chronicles of 'significant' male subjects written by other men, feminist theorists have raised the stakes for writers and readers of biography.

Concerned initially with finding the 'lost' women of literature and history, women scholars have called into question the relatively exclusive domain of men in biography. Alongside the gender issue, important concerns are raised

regarding identity; subjectivity; subject/writer relationship; narrative strategies; and voice. In her recent book *Telling Women's Lives*, Wagner-Martin (1994) identifies the conceptualization of a biography as a problem far more difficult than the choice of language or organization. Guarding against oversimplification, she opposes any kind of biography which would imply that the subject's life was a pattern which could be presented as an uncomplicated whole.

The need to address the omission of women from the pages of biography (and history) has given women interested in biography a problematic agenda. Historians, social scientists, psychologists and literary scholars can identify issues specific to their own fields which influence the perceived and actual position of women. It is the hopeful, emboldened and expansive view that feminist scholars bring to the issues that can benefit all biographers.

In feminist biography, there is a striking shift of emphasis away from presenting a life in an encapsulated form, to one in which the subject's experience is kaleidoscopic. Feminist biographers would have a narrative which aims to move the subject, the reader and the writer into new directions, both in their understanding of the biographied subject and themselves. To achieve that goal the voice of the writer becomes a collaborative and questing partner in reflecting on the life. Even where the subject is no longer living, the author seems to have seen the subject as living. Anna Kuhn (1990), describing an aspect of Christa Wolf's biography *Christa T.* states:

The author/narrator (Wolf) sees Christa T. not as an object of

investigation, to be mastered and shaped at will, but rather as living material, as capable of changing the writer as the writer is capable of changing her. (p.17)

Reconceptualizing biography opens up a vast field of questions. *All Sides of the Subject* (Iles, T., Ed. 1992) tackles some of these through a collection of essays by women biographers. There is evidence throughout the book of the conscious relationship that develops between the writer and the subject, much more a personal human encounter, than a simple accumulation of facts would permit. It is also a significant recognition by the contributors that discussions around methodology must be as important to feminist scholars as the literary product.

Very few references are made to the application of feminist biographical theories to biographies of men. In one case, however (Alpern, Antler, Perry and Scobie, 1990), there is a brief comment on how an increased awareness of gender issues might influence male biography. In the past, men's biographies have largely ignored how the domestic situation might inform the life of the subject. In a reaction against biography which fails to acknowledge such areas, Alpern, et al. suggest:

A heightened gender consciousness would help biographers explore the constraints by which society forces men into certain molds of behaviour. It would not ignore, or dismiss as irrelevant, a man's private life or the nature of his family and work relations with individuals of both sexes. Finally, a gender consciousness in men's biographies would lead to a greater recognition of the tensions men often feel, but seldom publicly acknowledge, between their private and public selves. In summary, there can and ought to be 'feminist' biographies of men that involve an awareness of gender constraints and issues in all aspects of men's lives. (p.8).

Of course both women and men deserve the intimate attention of a biographer whose interest in their subject goes beyond the obvious.

Soon after beginning the research I realized that I had taken on an interesting challenge exploring the edges of biography, as a woman writing a biography about a living male subject from a feminist perspective with a postmodern awareness. At every step of my planning this odd inconsistency seemed present. When the idea was embryonic my impulse was to limit the study to include only the stories that could be seen to bear meaning on the work of the subject. Shortly thereafter, I knew that I couldn't discuss the contributions of Gavin Bolton to the field of drama education without situating the study within the larger personal context of his life. It would have been of little use to discuss his theoretical developments and ignore the intrinsic motivation that had allowed the ideas to germinate; specifically factors which included his social relationships.

I had to search for a framework that would be flexible enough to accommodate my need for a collaborative, open-ended, intuitive, and creative process and a scholarly, rigorous, effective research method. In Kathleen Weiler's (1988) book I discovered a thematic grounding for my immersion into research. Aiming for a research model that is characterized by emphasis on a keen awareness of gender issues and action, Weiler offers a useful list of goals which seemed to bring the goals of feminism and drama education closely into focus. The list which triggered the connection for me considers feminist educational objectives:

- critique and analysis of texts and social relationships
- a political commitment to building a better society
- commitment to human values

- commitment to raising issues, questioning social values and ideology
- looking for a change in consciousness
- the classroom as a place where knowledge is interrogated
- consciousness of being a role model
- consciousness of the issues of role and gender

The list resonated loudly with my conception of drama education and was thus a useful foundation on which to build my image of a feminist biography about a male drama educator.

My first instincts about the process of data collection were rough and clumsy at best. Whereas I had notions of long lists of questions to ask my subject, it soon became apparent that a more productive approach would follow an open-ended model of interviewing. In Dan McAdams' (1993) guidelines for developing a personal myth, (in other words, recreating a personal narrative), I found a structure which suited my intent to follow an open-ended interviewing process. The process described by McAdams fit my purposes neatly: 1) it assumed a collaborative relationship between interviewer and interviewee; 2) it covered a wide scope of personal perspectives from birth to the future; 3) it examined many aspects of lived experience - spiritual, philosophical, moral; and 4) it provoked critical thought about difficult memories in a comfortable framework. In addition, as useful as I found the structure to begin my interview planning, it proved to be exceptionally useful for Gavin, as the self-reflexivity demanded by a collaborative approach to biography requires a high degree of self-disclosure on the subject's part. Although a relatively private person, his discomfort was eased by this process. I had found my way in.

### **...Of Events**

This short section is intended to serve as an overview to the methodology of the study. It is brief because I have infused the whole text with more explicit descriptions including not only the methodology, but my reactions to the experience of applying it throughout the project.

**June, 1993:** Gavin authorizes me to proceed with the biography. I ruminate happily on this until September; I do not yet have any idea what it means to write biography. I begin the study by acquiring the Bolton papers. This process takes approximately six months, as journals have expired, changed names or can only be traced with some difficulty. After reading the articles pertaining to and written by Bolton, I immerse myself in feminist and postmodern theory in the areas of education and biography. The next step was determining a satisfactory interview structure in preparation for Gavin Bolton's arrival at the University of British Columbia, July, 1994.

**July 25 - August 12, 1994:** The research interviews are conducted over a period of three weeks. We meet every other day for approximately two hours. All interviews but one are held on campus. The second day, we meet on the beach at Spanish Banks. I worry constantly about the wind in the microphone (although it was fine in the end); the uncomfortable logs we sit on; and the noise from all the others around us. I decide to abandon exotic locales for peace of mind; the interviewing requires all my concentration anyway. Over the three weeks, I collect seventeen hours of taped interviews, which I immediately

transcribe after each interview. I don't worry about formatting, I want only a working copy at this stage. It is important to hear the tapes again each time before I meet with Gavin so that if there are issues I want to follow up, I do not miss the opportunity in subsequent interviews. He returns to England at the end of the course.

**Late September, 1994:** I send letters to a selected group of people who are now or have been colleagues, friends, students, or critics of Gavin. Over the next seven months, I receive correspondence from over ninety per cent of my initial contacts. Once I receive responses to the letters I begin to sense the direction of the thesis. Also during this time, I return to work on the transcripts, correcting typing, syntactical and transcriptional errors, as well as formatting the interviews for easy reading. This proves to be of great benefit to me later: I will spend hours poring over the transcripts and making notes in the ample margins. More importantly, it is an opportunity to listen again to Gavin's voice. It sets the atmosphere for me to begin work on the writing of the biography.

**January, 1995:** I realize that I will need to see Gavin in his own environment. Something is missing. I feel the enormous geographic distance between us is interfering with my ability to conceptualize the work. I contact Gavin and, upon his invitation, make arrangements to visit England in March. During February, I come to a complete block in the writing. I cannot move forward, and I feel frustrated and anxious. I am advised to let it go until after I return from my trip; just to read and think in the interim. It is sound advice. By



the time I leave for England, I am refreshed and clear, ready to enter into this new phase of the research.

**March, 1995:** During the five days I spend with Gavin and Cynthia Bolton in England, I hold formal interviews with six people whose knowledge of Gavin ranges through at least six aspects of his life. In addition, Gavin and I meet everyday for two or more hours of discussion. The whole trip enhances my perspective in ways that would have been otherwise impossible. The final shape of the thesis is envisioned on the airplane somewhere over the Arctic ice. Upon returning to Vancouver, the writing flows rapidly. I expect to meet my deadline.

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### **Portals**

Far from encouraging our ability to think creatively about discovering truths in personal narratives, our academic disciplines have more often discouraged us from taking people's life stories seriously. (p. 263)

Personal Narratives Group

As I stepped cautiously into the shifting landscape of writing and thinking biographically about someone else, my desire to know my own world in such terms increased. The interactions I overheard between people and conversations I had with others developed an added dimension of past, present and future time. I became aware of focusing on the 'I' of the other much more consciously than before, seeking clues to subtly revealed information that emerged voluntarily. Biography is what makes us interesting to each other. We are attracted by the 'why' and the 'how' more than the 'what'. We thirst for the intricacies of other people's circumstances and decision-making patterns. Like

detectives we seek the resulting pattern in the overall design of the life fabric; hoping for clues to the blueprint. Each life signals things that are at once revealing and mystifying; intriguing because of those patterns we can discern, but which ultimately remain elusive.

Biography connects us to the humanity of other(s). It provides a window for contact with a world often frantic and detached. To read biography is to sense a larger belonging, a resonance, a thread of connection to a time, place and experience beyond our own but curiously familiar. Groag-Bell and Yalom(1990) remark:

The impersonality, fragmentation, and alienation of the postmodern world seem less overwhelming as we follow the vicissitudes of a real person - a brother or sister creature from whom we grasp vicarious validation of our own lives. (p.1)

A biography pulls together pieces from an infinite collection of sources to compose a patterned record that is recognizable as the life of the individual being explored. A life told well is a blend of senses, insights, fiction and fact. A definition of biography from the Microsoft information software program 'Encarta' suggests, "it deals with the intimate, inconsistent textures of personality and experience." No biographer can hope to tell a whole story. The retelling will be shaped, to a degree, by the biographer's interests, insights and blind spots.

The ideal biography renders a sense of the subject, but is by nature an artistic endeavour. The structuring and conceptualization of the life story is essentially intuitive, a matter of finding the form that will amplify and illuminate the

various purposes and perspectives of the biographer. The form might echo, for example, the relationship between subject and biographer; or perhaps it might capture an element of the subject that is reiterated in the text; it might well suggest to the reader what kind of reading will need to be done in order to interact with the particular text.

My stylistic approach to this text was inspired by the trip I took to England in March, 1995, to complete my data collection. I spent five days with Gavin and Cynthia Bolton at their home in Newcastle. The journal notes I kept during that time appear in this text as INTERVALS. Utilizing them in this way seemed the most direct way in which to capture the sides of Gavin that I experienced in that context. But, I had no idea at the time I wrote the journals that they would appear in this manner. The short narrative that follows is taken from my research journal. It exemplifies to a small degree the kind of emotional turmoil that a biographer can experience in the process of charting a direction for the work.

**February 20, 1995 - 10:40 am**

I have just finished composing a letter to Gavin regarding my visit in March. It includes my travel itinerary, some preliminary attempts at scheduling, and a tentative list of interview topics. I try to achieve a balance between my intentions as researcher and guest, finding it awkward. I suffer momentary, but real panic about the upcoming phase of the research. The phone rings.

It's Gavin.

*"Hello, Laurie? It's Gavin. How are you? Have you received a letter from me recently? There are just a few different things I'd like to add to it."* He pauses.

I can't believe this could possibly happen ... if I include this in my thesis someone will think this is certainly a fictional section! How did he know I needed to talk to him?

"Fine...I'm fine. Yes, I got the letter yesterday."

I know I sound breathless; my heart is pounding. Why?

*"Good. Well, you can meet with Dorothy on Monday morning, it's all set up. Then would you like to meet with someone who's involved in the work I'm doing now, with Victim Support? ...Fine, then that will be Monday afternoon. And the woman I mentioned who is now an invalid? ...Yes? Good, I know it will mean a great deal to her. And my friend Allen Cohen? And Mike Fleming?"*

"It sounds terrific, Gavin. Please go ahead and arrange things however it suits you best."

*"And will you need writing up time?"*

"Not too much, I'll rely on my tape recorder and do the transcripts when I return."

I blurt out, "I'm so excited...see you in two weeks!"

*"Yes. That's right. Well, bye for now."*

Gavin abruptly ends the conversation, leaving me feeling puzzled. He obviously phoned because he's been thinking about and planning my visit. He seems very interested in the process, and yet he's just, rather curtly, left me feeling rather deflated.

"Goodbye."

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So what could be bothering me? And then I realize, having just heard his voice, Gavin is more than the person I know. After the trip, I will no longer know him just through the lens of student, researcher, or teacher. I am going to England to expand my knowledge of the Gavin(s) that exist. I will come to know him differently. I will see whether he is a morning or night person. I will see where he lives; how he eats; how he relaxes; how he drives. How he is with his wife. How he interacts with the public and his friends. How he now reacts to me.

And I will have to decide on how these things that I see will come to matter to my work.

Suddenly it strikes me that I am privileged with a look at Gavin's life that has never been entrusted to anyone else. In a very real way, he is collaborating in the process. My side of the collaboration is to find a shape for the impressions that I gather; to illuminate and interrogate this life; to open space for connections between subject, reader and biographer. I must and will ask difficult questions. I must remain aware of the responsibilities of the biographer: to be open to seeing and hearing; to create a work that is both critical and fair; to be aware of the obligations of scholarship; process; literary license.

Now I understand that the act of (re)writing the life story of another brings with it a dimension of human connection that goes far beyond the page. I, too, am shaped and changed by this experience.

This recognition is the important connection between biography and educational research. Meaning emerges for the reader when the writing invites personal reflection and encourages questions. By seeing the subject as a complex construction, fully ensconced in multiple relationships and images of self, the tendency to oversimplify a life is reduced. The lives of educators have long been seen as existing exclusively within the classrooms. Teachers have been seen primarily as representing the authority of administrative and governmental bodies. Grumet (1988) asserts that a more aesthetic, intimate approach is

needed in contemporary education. The personal significance of 'the teacher' as an influence both in and out of the classroom has been suppressed in the research. Until quite recently, the idea of teacher as researcher was considered unsound, and remains so in some circles. Biography is both intimate and aesthetic. It (re)places the personal in the public and can challenge distinctions between the private and public spheres.

Although biography is a subjective endeavour, it is also a valuable research tool. New models of research can prepare fresh ground for thinking and expressing views on education. Bateson (1994) identifies "a groundswell against educators of all kinds...not because they are not doing their jobs - it is because we have no adequate understanding of what that job is in the kind of society we are becoming" (p. 212). An opportunity exists to merge the personal and professional lives of educators more fluently; with a greater sense of how the personal infuses pedagogy.

Lives of educators can be storied to help other teachers connect meaningfully to both personal and professional concerns. Bateson (1994) believes that "if only to offer an alternative, we need to tell the other stories, the stories of shifting identities and interrupted paths, and to celebrate the triumphs of adaptation" (p. 83). Ironically, Gavin Bolton has been careful to keep separate his personal and professional selves, and the irony is heightened because as a drama teacher, demanding constant reflexivity from students and self, the possibility of separation might seem remote.

My awareness of my teaching self has been altered and sharpened simply by knowing more about the nature of biography. I am more able to hear the moment when a significant story is being told; more sensitive to the importance of life stories; more revealing of details from my own life. I know now, that it is unimportant, even misleading, to 'begin at the beginning' and 'end at the end'. The beginning occurs long before our own arrival in the world and does not end in death. Therefore, I hope that the reader can see this text as ripples in a pool: overlapping, fluid and ever-widening.

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**[The first six intervals are excerpts from the journal which I kept during my visit to Gateshead, England from March 12 to March 17th, 1995. The remainder were written in British Columbia].**

## **INTERVAL 1**

### **Gateshead**

Sunday, March 12, 1995

I step down from the bus after a five hour journey from London. The bus is early and I am relieved, wanting a moment to get my bearings, maybe brush my teeth and comb my hair before meeting Gavin again. No such luck. In the second that it takes me to turn toward the unloaded luggage as it is being heaved from the bus, I am hugged and greeted by Gavin, who has arrived early, too. I retrieve my bag from the sidewalk; Gavin insists on carrying it to the car. I have a first reaction of how strange it is to see him in this context; I am happy to see how well he looks - more well-rested and healthier somehow than he appeared last summer in Vancouver. Before we have left the bus terminal parking lot, Gavin has explained the agenda for the rest of the day, which includes a dinner party and theatre outing. We will have time for tea, to change and be ready for guests at five o'clock. After this is reported, Gavin tells me that there is a printed copy of the itinerary for the week awaiting me on the dresser in my room, as well as a sealed envelope, which I am to read directly. (The letter is from a client Gavin sees in his volunteer work for Victim Support, who has agreed to meet with me for an interview).

Sitting nervously in the passenger seat of the car on the 'wrong' side, (wrong



for a Canadian!), I begin my observation of Gavin 'at home'. We both talk at once, then relax as Gavin drives. He is not a careless driver, but not cautious either, almost 'lucky' and I find myself a bit edgy as the late afternoon sun blinds us and Gavin fumbles for his sunglasses as he drives. Despite the sun, he has the car heater on HIGH, but he doesn't seem to notice. We are both a little tongue-tied; it dawns on me that this week has significance for Gavin as well. Then, talking becomes easier. I am conscious of my dual role as guest and researcher. How can I appear to just be enjoying myself?

On our arrival at the house, Gavin's wife, Cynthia, and the dog, Benji, meet us at the door. I am warmly welcomed. Tea is ready and we go to the lounge for a short pre-dinner chat. But everything is on a schedule, as I was informed in the car, and Gavin is acutely conscious of the time. He makes sure the events are orchestrated as planned. He signals that it is time to change and prepare for dinner as the guests will arrive any moment, and of course, we mustn't linger as the theatre performance starts at 7:15 pm, not the North American eight o'clock.

The guests arrive. A tour of the newly designed garden is conducted by Cynthia. Then dinner is served, a truly English cold supper - the kind we read about in 'Good Housekeeping' magazines. Entirely prepared by Cynthia, whose culinary talents I would enjoy all week, the buffet includes: devilled eggs, a tossed green salad, smoked salmon, quiche Lorraine, gherkins, cold poached chicken with mayonnaise on a bed of lettuce, rolls and butter. Gavin busies himself carrying dishes to and fro, pours the wine, fusses a little over everyone

and is generally charming, making little jokes and setting a jovial tone. He 'nudges' the events of the evening on and I get the feeling that these close friends are quite used to his gentle 'directing'. I have heard from friends in Canada that Gavin has a passion for desserts, that Cynthia must often make two, and indeed, we conclude the meal with poached pears in red wine and sponge cake with strawberries and cream. Gavin abruptly notes the time and we depart for the theatre for a pre-show coffee. I start to relax and develop a pattern of having one eye on Gavin and the other on the situation.

The evening is a success. As we leave the theatre, Gavin is greeted by several other patrons, likely former colleagues, I think; but his response is just the briefest acknowledgement, a quick nod and smile. He is not inclined to small talk.

Our little company returns to the Bolton's to finish the evening with coffee, cheese and biscuits, and a critical review of the Shakespearean 'Revue' we've just seen. The guests depart, Benji gets let out, the doors to each room are closed, the security alarm is set, and lights are turned off. I try to gather my impressions of the day, the people and the place before I let go of the intensity with which I have tried to absorb everything. Just being here has relieved much of my curiosity. There is nothing like seeing someone at home, relaxed and in his bedroom slippers!



**Opening Night of *Dark Brown***  
Gavin Bolton surrounded by Youth Theatre company.  
Nuneaton; mid-1950's.

## Chapter I

### THE MIDLANDS

*The bulb flashes. The press photo catches a small, enthusiastic group clustered in the green room just before the curtain rises. In the midst of them is their director, a thin 25-year old secondary school English teacher who has led them through many weeks of exacting but amiable rehearsal. Now, on the opening night of **Dark Brown**, he shares in this last minute gathering of the company, satisfied that the work is solid and entertaining. He holds the group in his gaze momentarily, eager that they should reflect on their accomplishments as individuals and a group, before releasing them into the arena of audience and performance.*

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Gavin says that the years represented by moments like this were, to some extent, the happiest of his career. Two factors motivated Gavin to apply for a teaching position at a secondary school: 1) he wanted to do more drama than he had had the opportunity to do as an elementary teacher; and 2) he and Cynthia were anxious to get away from Crewe, and out from under his parents' roof, where they had lived in their first year of marriage. The secondary school positions he held in the Midlands allowed him to bring together the elements of teaching that have always remained significant in his approach: a high degree of contact with students, opportunities to explore the theatre, a strong sense of community, the amount of happiness such work brings to many people. Although the teaching assignments were predominantly English, including mathematics and some drama, Gavin found ways to incorporate his increasing

interest in school drama by organising a youth theatre group, which met in the evenings at the school.

The Gavin depicted in this photo is Gavin at the height of his 'Good Director' phase. Once this phase passes, Gavin begins to move further and further away from the epicentre of interaction; finding ways to increase the engagement of students with their own experiences, rather than simply following the teacher-directed agenda that script production emphasizes. His style begins to move toward empowerment and critical self-reflexivity. As he begins to distance himself to gain a broader perspective, the nature of the work becomes increasingly intuitive as Gavin seeks new ways of expressing the dramatic event.

The thrill of entering, and often winning, drama competitions inspired Gavin's approach to teaching. Prompted by success to develop his skills as a director he found himself registering for extra classes, even taking a sabbatical in 1956 to go on a British Drama League directing course. All the while, his impression of his own style was that of the 'Good Director', and with characteristic self-confidence, he considered his approach highly satisfactory. During the '50's, Peter Slade invited Gavin to bring his youth theatre group to Birmingham to join in with his classes, and in this way, Gavin came to know about Slade's work. Gavin was flattered by the attention shown him by Slade (a 'guru' of another generation), but it was a fleeting infatuation. Undeniably, Slade's work influenced Gavin; however, it did not have the deeper resonance Gavin later found in Dorothy Heathcote's work. Thus, Peter Slade remained a mentor only

in passing. Yet, Gavin recalls:

*G.B: I was very impressed and it was the time in my classroom teaching of drama I tried and failed abysmally to carry out his kind of teaching.*<sup>5</sup>

Paradoxically, the looser, more individualistic approach of Slade's clashed with Bolton's rather strict disciplinarian style, a discrepancy which he somehow ignored, although he tried to carry the two in tandem without conflict.

*G.B: And the head was horrified!. My classroom had become noisy and his, the principal's room was next door, and he used to come and look through the little window in the door and get very agitated. One day he came in and said, "Mr.Bolton, WHAT are you doing?" And I was so arrogant that I just assumed that HE needed to be educated! That what I was doing was helping these fourteen year olds to express themselves. The fact that everything always used to end up in a fight (shaking head) didn't bother me!*

Convinced he was 'on to something', Bolton was supremely confident in the concept of drama education as being valuable, even though he was uncertain of a tangible methodology. He needed that self-assured conviction to propel him through the split that separated Gavin the man and Gavin the teacher. He instinctively began seeing connective threads, but was not yet capable of making sense of what it might be that an educational drama for the classroom and the new techniques he was acquiring might have in common. That Gavin didn't recognize the split focus in the disparate methods was symptomatic of the lack of clearly articulated approaches to classroom drama. No one had yet formulated an accessible theory to identify elements of classroom drama. Nor had a useful way of seeing links between theatre skills and the 'new' creative drama, à la Slade, been invented. Later, as Gavin struggled to articulate a

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in Gavin's own voice appear throughout the text in italics, (preceded by G.B.) and are extracted from personal interviews, conversations or correspondence with me.

theory of drama education he met with resistance from other drama colleagues. It seemed as though committing drama practice to paper, although an essential component in the maturity of the field, altered its quality in some way. The necessity for a working vocabulary became apparent to Gavin, but he was already starting to work and think about drama in a different way. It wasn't easy for a newcomer to gain a hearing from within the ranks of the already established 'authorities'. After publishing an article or two, Gavin remembers meeting Peter Slade at a conference:

*...and he refused to speak to me, but I never allow anyone to refuse to speak to me so I followed him and said, "How are you, Peter?". And he turned around and said to me, "I observed children for eighteen years before I dared put one word on paper...". He obviously saw me as an upstart! Then he came around and we're quite close friends in our dotage.*

Determining an effective methodology which would incorporate theatre and 'creative' drama blending the critical elements of each towards learning objectives continues to be an unsolved quest even today. Lack of a common vocabulary still creates unnecessary misunderstanding amongst practitioners. Gavin's long exploration into the complexities of a sound pedagogy for classroom drama took him on a circuitous route through challenging terrain. It was as if he mapped out his route by instinct, feeling his way into territory that might prove useful in the future. Convinced he was on the right track, Gavin sought his bearings from multiple sources: first Peter Slade, then Brian Way, who was by now carving a path into child-centred learning, his involvement in Youth Theatre, the administrative positions, and throughout, his own singular determination to succeed.

Meanwhile, as his interest and involvement in drama grew, Gavin "*being the ambitious kind*", pursued professional advancement with equal vigour. Soon, he was appointed to Head of English. The connection between the teaching of English literature and the use of drama in the classroom to approach the study of literature has had far-reaching implications. An English/Drama concentration has been the professional passport of many teachers. Yet, the effect of this has historically been that teachers concentrate more heavily on the English side of the concentration, relegating drama to the level of servicing the literature components of the curriculum. Gavin saw the opportunities of the combination and used the experience to his advantage.

The same year as his appointment to Head of English, 1957, Gavin and Cynthia's son Andrew was born.

*G.B: One of the most wonderful moments in my life was when we found out my wife was pregnant. I'd been away all week and so she waited until I came home each weekend and so it was a Friday evening I'd got off the train and landed home and Cynthia welcomed me with that news. I suppose it changed my life in that it was a sense of new responsibility, new phase beginning...it changed how I saw myself. It's quite a novelty to know that you're going to be a father...and you start imagining all...this new person is going to be created from us and what on earth could it be like?*

This period was a time of great happiness and contentment for the Boltons. Extracurricular hours were absorbed by the Teacher's Drama Society formed by Gavin, and of course, the ongoing Youth Theatre activities. Gavin sharpened his skills as a director - developing more than an acquaintance in the theatre art form. However, it wasn't enough for Gavin. Despite a full slate and a seemingly satisfying professional life, he soon started applying for administrative positions, prepared to move anywhere an offer was made. This



ambition to seek positions of authority in the school system clearly suited Gavin's goals. He already knew he had the ability to make a difference in students' lives with his liberatory approach to education, and, at this point, advancement within the system seemed logical.

It was becoming clear to Cynthia that her husband possessed an extraordinary singlemindedness and that her role might easily become a supporting one. This she was prepared to accept. A pattern emerged which saw each new career move of Gavin's meaning a corresponding period of adjustment for Cynthia and Andrew. Before her pregnancy, Cynthia too, had had a successful teaching career, but it fell aside for several years while Andrew was young. Fortunately for Gavin as he pushed ahead in his career, Cynthia provided a strong foundation at home, clearly willing to be the accompanist to a solo performance.

By 1959, Gavin and Cynthia had been married for eight years. They had bought and settled into their first house in Nuneaton, had a child, built a comfortable place in the community, and enjoyed the security Gavin's successful teaching record provided. Both in their early thirties, it must have seemed like all was unfolding as it should. But the year proved a time of emotional and geographical upheaval whose full extent Gavin did not recognize.

In 1959, after enduring debilitating rheumatoid arthritis for most of her adult life, Gavin's mother died. Although Gavin had been devoted to her, he had been surprised by the ease at which he had grown apart from her as a young man, and her death, when he was 32, '*...seemed just a 'right' thing to happen, so I didn't experience any grieving.*' Gavin

credits her with his sense of humour, his social nature, and gift for conversation. Still, the loss of the more influential of his two parents may have had a profound meaning for Gavin. Now, too, he saw even less of his father, a dour Scot who had been always rather distant. Andrew was just two, and so would never really know his paternal grandparents, just as Gavin had never really known his.

An offer came and Gavin became Deputy Headmaster of Fishwick Secondary School, Preston, Lancashire. The move to the Northwest had its problems. The school itself was tough, with a student population quite accustomed to being in the hands of the police - not exactly a fertile ground for the kind of teaching with which Gavin had become comfortable. Pre-war notions of education which called for rigid discipline and non-interactive teaching styles would not ease for some time; for young Bolton, bursting in with respect for students and for learning, the progress seemed very slow. The customary discipline for misbehaviour was caning.

The staff had adopted a stiff disciplinarian policy, viewing their role defensively. When Gavin arrived as Deputy Head, he was told, "the only way to deal with these kids is to clip them over the ear", which presented difficult administrative choices for Gavin. Many of the staff were sceptical and outwardly unsympathetic to the idea of introducing drama into the school. Of course, Gavin was convinced that the only way to attack the problems would be through drama and plenty of it. So, in addition to his administrative responsibilities, which included the school timetabling, Gavin made sure that every class in the school had drama, which he taught. Gradually, everyone was won over, and the school developed a positive bias toward drama. Teachers, administration and students began to value the place of drama in their

community. The same unmanageable tough kids became drama festival winners, showing up for Drama Club even if they'd been truants for the rest of the day.

This nearly miraculous turnaround didn't come without a price. Many long hours were devoted to building a climate conducive to learning, and not only for the students. Gavin cast himself as the founder of a Drama Teacher's Association, writing to every school in Preston, and discovering a number of drama teachers *"who were just ripe for developing drama"*; hence the beginning of endless weekend courses, eagerly attended by the Preston drama teachers. The successes spurred Gavin on, feeding his conviction that somehow, drama deserved a place at the centre of the curriculum.

Consequently, the early days in Preston were also tough in another way. The effort being lavished on the passionate interest in drama was not being matched by equal effort at home. Work began to distance Gavin from his family. For Cynthia, out of work, at home with a baby and in unfamiliar surroundings, the move meant isolation and frustration. These years must have been fraught with tension as Gavin, coming into his own as he recognized his commitment to drama was increasingly willing to sacrifice family time. The impact of this period was a factor in an even larger decision: although Cynthia wanted more children, she began to understand more completely the role she was taking on as prime caregiver. Notions of a bigger family were completely abandoned by the time the young family would move again when Andrew was five. The early years of financial struggle and isolation for Cynthia convinced both of them

that she would be happier out of the house and working, at least part-time. Eventually, friendships were formed, a better balance emerged and the years in Preston, 1959-62, were, on the whole, satisfying.

The enthusiasm for increased learning and rigor amongst the members of the Drama Teacher's Association led to an invitation being sent to Brian Way to look at the work being done in Preston schools, and also to run numerous courses. Way, whose philosophical thrust in drama was child-centred and emphasized the personal development of the child through creative self-expression, was the acknowledged 'Master Teacher' of the time. According to Gavin, Way was impressed by what he saw, presumably an enthusiastic group of teachers, eager to follow new trends in drama education. He became a regular visitor to Preston, fostering a friendship with young Bolton. (At least Gavin perceived himself to be much younger than Way at the time. Years later, when researching material for his History of Drama, Gavin discovered a mere five year difference in their ages, which came as a shock!).

An important shift occurred in Gavin's conceptualizing of his career plans during the Preston years. Climbing the ladder to a Headmaster's position lost its appeal. With utter confidence, Gavin now turned his energy completely to drama, declaring:

*I was 34...and I wanted to be a Drama Specialist...and always arrogant, always assuming that whatever I did I was going to be the best at it.*

That being said, it came as quite a surprise when, after applying for a drama position in his own Authority of Cheshire, he wasn't even shortlisted. But,

perhaps fate intervened, for soon after, Gavin applied to the County of Durham for a post as Drama Advisor to schools and got it. Part of the interesting twist here can be explained by fate, but irony, too, had a hand:

*G.B: I got it on the strength of my qualifications, which were these old speech and drama qualifications, nothing to do with the qualifications I got through Sheffield University. All that time in those early years I went and took more and more so I got to a graduate diploma called the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music and Drama. So all that had been ongoing; me studying separately from my training to be a teacher, and it was that, what had originally been my hobby that was the qualification that Durham was looking for because they wanted somebody who could train people in Speech. And it's interesting because I didn't train anybody in Speech from the moment I started in Drama!*

'Luck' is the word that surfaces most often when Gavin recalls his life and it is in the moment of transition from Preston to Durham with the shift of focus and responsibilities that seems, to him, to have been the luckiest. The job of Drama Advisor meant going around to all the schools in County Durham, from Infant to Secondary level, assisting drama teachers as best he could. All of this was appealing, with the exception of working in the Infant schools (under age seven) which caused Gavin some anxiety. It became constructive anxiety, as Gavin felt obliged to sharpen his skills in that area.

A professional acquaintance made soon after his arrival in Durham was the link that would determine a significant chain of events in Gavin's future. Gavin met Mary Robson in his capacity as Drama Advisor for schools. She taught in a teacher training program for mature students at the University of Durham. As this acquaintance became a friendship, Gavin, Cynthia and Andrew were often invited to Mary's house for meals. Over dinner one evening, as Gavin carried on a lively conversation about his approach to drama teaching, Mary

exclaimed, "You know, the way you talk, you remind me of my friend at Newcastle, her name is Dorothy Heathcote. I'll introduce you!"

*G.B.: And that was the luckiest moment of my professional life!"*

That moment also marked a new chapter, as Gavin was about to realize the complexity of what he had yet to learn!

The ten year period that had started with Gavin and Cynthia as newlyweds living in two rooms of the Bolton seniors' home was a long journey that took them far from their roots, but distance, time and experience became the cornerstone which gave them the confidence to firmly establish new roots of their own. From being an eager young Sheffield graduate to becoming Drama Advisor for the County of Durham had taken Gavin a mere thirteen years to accomplish. Whatever was to happen next seemed well within his reach.

**Festival of Britain Year  
1952  
Chester Cathedral**

Gavin, center



## INTERVAL 2

Monday, March 13, 1995

Knowing that in three hours I would be meeting Dorothy Heathcote in her own house had me wide awake at 7:00am. I have, of course, had years to fashion an imposing personal mythology around Dorothy, not at all eased when Gavin later pointed out that many people would give their eye-teeth to be in my position this morning!

Mornings at the Boltons are strictly an 'every person for themselves' affair, with breakfast being shared or not according to when one gets up. So I had plenty of time to ready my thoughts for my meeting with Dorothy. As Gavin's penchant for punctuality is pervasive, we could not leave the house a minute before ten minutes to ten o'clock, as it would take exactly ten minutes to get to Dorothy's house. At precisely ten, the door opened just as we stepped up to knock and with no surprise, Dorothy said, "I knew it would be you, Gavin!"

We were ushered in to the dining room, I think quite a central and important room in the house, where the next two hours would pass as with a breath. Raymond, Dorothy's husband sat tinkering, repairing something mechanical. A former student of Dorothy's, Marlene, was present for the interview. Gavin left, promising to return at noon. By now, I knew that meant twelve o'clock sharp!

Gracious, warm and not in the least bit imposing, Dorothy was as eclectic with her stories of Gavin as the surroundings of her house. She told her stories of Gavin through her own stories and what resulted was a comparison of their

parallel but unique careers. I found the interview exciting and exhausting as I endeavoured to keep pace with her rapid flow of impressions and stories.

When Gavin returned, there was a quick moment together in the dining room, the briefest exchange between Gavin and Dorothy, and then we left. There was an oddly 'worklike' quality to the interaction between Gavin and Dorothy, which reflected a seriousness, an attention to business, that somehow felt right, but not what I expected from friends of such long standing. Perhaps, because of my presence, the day was more professional than social.

After lunch, and the noon news, Gavin had a nap while I caught up with my notes. Cynthia had just come back from one of her twice-weekly swims, and was sitting in a sunny corner working on a current needlepoint project - a kneeling cushion for the cathedral. Church work occupies a considerable part of Cynthia's week, but Gavin's only rarely.

Gavin and I had our first formal interview in the afternoon. It was a little rough to start, but the feeling passed quickly. I don't know why I expect everything to feel 'perfect'. He spoke very quietly, formally to begin with. The interview is dealing with childhood. I think Gavin is amazed that his childhood should seem so important to me. He often mentions it with surprise. "I don't know what you're going to make of it!" he says. He has such strong feelings about remaining in the 'now'. The distant past seems quite difficult for him to recall.

I welcome the opportunity to go to bed early, as Gavin and Cynthia go to a



regular bridge meeting. I read and re-read my letter from Malcolm, Gavin's client from Victim Support, with whom I am to meet in the morning. He feels his trauma and loss have been made bearable by Gavin, and the poignancy of his letter indicates a remarkable man. I look forward to the interview.

## **Chapter II**

### **EARLY DURHAM**

The move to the Northeast of England marked a pivotal moment in Gavin's career. He began his post as Drama Advisor for schools with a commitment to drama education that was now unswerving. The split between Gavin's desire to achieve status as an administrator which would bring security and 'position', but at the expense of his inner desire, was now repaired. Not surprisingly, Gavin's tendency toward control made the administrative track an attractive one. But the need for control was overruled by his need for creativity and intellectual challenge, which could be satisfied by drama work. He could move into this phase of his career with renewed energy, excitement and clarity of purpose; for the first time undistracted by endeavouring to satisfy conflicting paths.

However, the new location too, had a part to play in this transition. Anyone who has ever taken a road journey from the south to the north of England will remember how the congested expanse that epitomizes the south melts into occasional villages, then sparsely located hamlets, ever dwindling until eventually the most prominent feature is agricultural land and highway. After some considerable distance, and about six hours travel time, the small city of Newcastle appears. Attractive enough, although not 'charming' in the usual sense of 'old' European cities, Newcastle rises on the banks of the River Tyne, the south side a sprawling collection of identical red roofs on row houses. The city begins and ends sharply, its edges clearly defined and visible from most vantage points. The surrounding feature of pastoral low hills and green fields is

pleasant but relatively unremarkable. It surprises me, an outsider, how such a seemingly limited landscape, both in beauty and population, could possibly be home to two major universities. Yet, Durham and Newcastle Universities happily coexist within fifteen miles of each other, and are both considered quite prestigious.

The isolation of the North can be sensed in different ways: the strong dialect, the smaller population, less traffic congestion, the absence of 'edginess' in people more common in the south. The Newcastle area has a distinctly rural ambience gilded with urban amenities. The crowning architectural feature is Durham Cathedral, perched over the river for one thousand years. The resting place of the Venerable Bede is a spectacularly well-preserved monument, perhaps because of its isolation.

Whereas some people shrink from conditions which force independence and perseverance on the individual, Gavin seems to be innately comfortable with isolation. To a degree, aloneness has been a constant feature in his life since early childhood. Indeed, it seems important to Gavin that privacy is protected, and the path of his working life has accentuated his isolation with each succeeding level. Time, place and coincidence conspire to write the next phase of Gavin's story. The distance between Gavin and the school classroom increases as the focus turns to teacher education. However, the distance brings a new perspective.

Something completely unpredictable now opened the door to an unusual

opportunity for Gavin. Early in the 1960's, Newcastle University (Newcastle), which actually had campuses located in both Newcastle and Durham and was part of Durham University, grew to a self-sustaining size that allowed Durham and Newcastle universities to split. In those days, teachers were served in two ways: student teachers by Departments of Education and mature, practicing teachers wanting a year or so of inservice coursework by Institutes of Education. When the University split and became two, Durham was left without an Institute of Education, and Newcastle retained its Institute, where Dorothy Heathcote retained her appointment. Of course, Durham wanted an Institute, so a Director was appointed and instructed to hire staff.

What happened next seems almost fairytale-ish; if written in a novel's plot the reader would think it contrived, but according to Gavin:

*He (the Director) appoints somebody to be in charge of Primary Education. He appoints somebody to be in charge of Psychology of Education and ...I've never understood this... he looks around for who the third person should be and decides that it should be drama... because he was aware of Dorothy Heathcote's work! It's incredible when you think about it...all the other specialists that could have gone before Drama, but Drama got the third appointment. And this is where I was extremely lucky, he happens to sit in at one of my teaching demonstrations,, and I don't know he's there! All I know is that this man comes up to me at the end of the session and says that he's enjoyed watching me teach and 'did I know that there was going to be a job advertised at the University'? And, of course he couldn't say any more...but he would be VERY interested if I were to apply!*

And so, Gavin left the local authority and went to Durham University, to a post in which he could do exactly what he wanted to do and which required him to run courses only if he wanted to! Gavin saw that whereas his previous job had a local sphere of influence, this new job could be national in scope. His contract with the University permitted free-lance work and consultancy

throughout the country. It had not yet occurred to Gavin that the work might become international, but by the end of the 1960's, he had traversed the United Kingdom, attending conferences and offering workshops, and had witnessed a groundswell of interest in drama education. Gavin rode the wave of the progressive education movement, taking advantage of the popularity of drama as a classroom subject to intensify his study of drama's potential in the classroom.

**North Wales, 1963.**

**In the seaside resort of Rhyl, the recent death of Mr. Robert Bolton, age 73, by heart attack surprised residents here. Attendance at services for Mr. Bolton indicated his popularity in the community.**

By 1970, Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote were the only two drama specialists who had university appointments in drama: both located in the Northeast; both becoming popular for their approaches to drama; together nearly every day watching each other teach, and both beginning to go abroad to teach. Now the line between home and career life began to blur as Gavin came more and more to be known internationally and, *"the strange, flexible, liberal, free, experimental job I've held for all these years affected the way we see ourselves at home and who we are as people"*. The shift to the University helped align the many Gavin(s). He could teach, write and travel with autonomy and above all, keep his focus sharply on drama. And on Dorothy Heathcote.

Proximity to Dorothy meant that Gavin had optimum conditions for his own private 'tutorials'. Eager to experiment, he would see things that Dorothy did and take them back to make them his own. At this point in his career, it would be fair to say that Gavin was not being original. What he was doing was sampling and testing strategies and principles against his own knowledge; trying to find a fit. Of those early days, Dorothy says:

Gavin is eclectic. He's able to collect from other people and transform it and he doesn't collect and copy, he collects and transforms. But at that stage, he was collecting and copying.

Some of the experimentation was fruitful, and some was not. A period in the seventies which Gavin recalls with some discomfort emphasized that drama had to be 'gut-level' or else it had failed:

*GB: In the summer course I used to run at University of Toronto, we used to work for a whole week on the same theme, going deeper and deeper and people used to get upset and fraught, nevertheless totally committed to the work and at the end of the week we used to feel as though we'd been through some deep experience together. And I thought that was part of it.*

Although only for a relatively brief period of four or five years, Gavin's immersion into the unsafe, inimitable, heavily emotional, issue-based drama method had unfortunate consequences for the next generation of drama teachers. Gavin recognized that teachers despaired of ever being able to achieve that kind of drama, and that, being discouraged, they tended to give up teaching drama altogether. People who had taken courses in those years were left with an odd impression of the nature of drama. The greatest difficulty was finding a way to teach the 'gut-level' approach as a method and soon Gavin rejected it in favour of a more structured approach which he realized was based

on theatrical structure.

*GB: I think it's possible to pinpoint a period when having absorbed Dorothy's way of working with the whole class and using teacher-in-role and generally creating what was generally described as gut-level drama, which I think swung too much in an extreme direction. After that, I started to see that the elements of theatre were part of the work and started once more to resurrect those things I was good at in the early days of drama which I'd tended to leave on one side. So, once I saw myself working in theatre in the classroom, theatre of a different kind, then I was at my most comfortable, and my writing became its most clear and I was more easily understood by other teachers.*

### **Theatre of a Different Kind**

Writing about his experiences in teaching has always been the basis for the development of Gavin's theories of drama. His self-reflexivity has been a constant since the earliest publications. In pursuit of 'making things clearer' Gavin has been a prolific contributor to the field.<sup>6</sup> This contribution is significant in a number of areas. Without doubt, Gavin has been concerned with articulating his own practice, turning it over and over to reveal new facets of interest.

There is, I think, a direct correlation between familiarity with Bolton's practice and the accessibility of his writing. More than once, I discovered people who commented that initially they had found the books too dense or simply didn't make sense, only to discover, after watching Gavin teach that suddenly the text was completely intelligible. Those whose initial response to the writing was, "it couldn't be clearer," often had considerable prior experience in approaching

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<sup>6</sup> See the Bolton Bibliography included as an appendix.

drama in this way, and had observed Gavin teaching as well. In terms of the ordinary classroom teacher who hasn't had the opportunity to see Bolton in action, the writing is sometimes difficult, which Gavin recognizes. *"If I were a classroom teacher", he says, "I wouldn't have time to read me; it's a pretty esoteric area. People know me through my workshops."* Former student Marie Langley recalls, "he finds it difficult to appreciate that students do not always understand his concepts straight away...he finds it frustrating to have to meet them lower down, but Gavin is approachable." Eventually, with perseverance, theory and practice become enmeshed.

It is paradoxical that although the work is highly accessible to teachers when observed or experienced in a drama workshop, finding the 'right' language is an ongoing struggle. Perhaps this is less difficult to understand when we think of drama as a language of its own, a kind of literacy of the body that entails the ability to read signals, feelings and visual impressions and to infer meaning from implicit, not explicit messages. These are complex concepts to transform into written text, difficult to express without equally complex descriptors.

The writing itself reflects Gavin's speech: crisp, articulate and succinct. At some point in my study, I began experiencing the odd sensation of hearing Gavin's voice as I was reading his writing, so characteristic of the man were the words. I wished, as I came to know him better, that people who didn't know him could catch the same witty inflections and humour that the writing captures if you know how to read it.

Historian John Fines (1994): "To be honest, I wish Gavin had gone on with performance work, in which he was supremely good and taught so well. Instead, he let Durham University turn him into a false academic, messing around with dead texts and sad traditions." Perhaps so, but it was the setting of



the university, the attachment to a long tradition of academe which helped Gavin find and carve out a niche for drama, giving it more 'respectability' and a broader influence.

The other aspect of the field which must be credited to Gavin's writing is well-summed up by John Allen (1994): "I think Gavin's contribution has not been so much in laying down an orthodoxy as in stirring up debate." By the late seventies, and the arrival of Gavin's first book, *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education*, it was clear that there was indeed a theory emerging. Linked to Piaget's thoughts on symbolic play, and Vygotsky's notion that play helps to develop abstract thought and metaphoric thinking, Gavin began to flesh out his thinking about dramatic playing, identifying what he perceived as the essential elements of drama for the classroom. At the same time, an unfortunate and unintentional distinction was drawn by some readers that what Gavin was doing had nothing to do with theatre, because he avoided talking about it.

*GB: ...even within the work, in discovering this new method, it did not occur to me that I needed to keep saying "I still believe in the school play". Other people can write about school plays, other people are better at doing them than I was, although I've always enjoyed doing them. So I didn't write about that, I wrote about something else. But what I should have done was write about something else whilst making sure people understood that I wasn't turning my back on traditional theatre in the school and yet that is how I've been read.*

The book explored models of play and their implications for drama, and drama as a strategy to promote learning, really laying the groundwork in anticipation of the pivotal dramatic playing to performance mode continuum identified by Bolton. A marked increase in interest in drama as well as inspiration amongst other educators to write about their experiences resulted from its publication.

## Chapter III

### MIDDLE DURHAM

But I am as constant as the northern star,  
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality  
There is no fellow in the firmament.

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III i 60-2

The short, pre-1985, 'Golden Era' of drama in education, when innovation and experimentation were valued and encouraged by government agencies and school authorities alike, gave way to a less promising period as the eighties advanced and right-wing politics promoted a skills-based curriculum.

Nevertheless, in the face of adversity, there is often a positive outcome. In the case of drama, those who advocated it as a classroom subject were prompted to examine their intentions more closely, as the defensive position they were forced to adopt demanded acute attention to the purposes and potential of drama. Under Margaret Thatcher, the focus in British schools headed towards the National Curriculum: examinable outcomes for all courses, with the Arts barely surviving as discrete subject areas. Drama was subsumed by English and lost its right to even be named. Despite the depressing conditions imposed by a narrowly focused and short-sighted political agenda, Gavin Bolton figured largely in establishing a corpus of theory and a vocabulary for drama educators. The field was beginning to define itself: first through Gavin Bolton's writings, and secondly through those who were critical of his practice.

It is important to keep in mind that as Gavin was developing his ideas about drama, he maintained a high profile, being responsible for the in-service training of teachers in drama, as well as offering workshops both at home and

abroad. In relative terms, the drama in education community was small, and continues to remain so. Gradually, as graduates of his classes entered the field the richness of the work became even more apparent. Many of these graduates, among them Cecily O'Neill, John O'Toole, David Booth and David Davis, cultivated what they knew of Gavin's work and adapted it to their own styles of working, but consistently acknowledged the seeds which had been planted by Gavin. Of all his former students, it is Cecily O'Neill who has rooted her practice most firmly in her understanding of Bolton's work. In Gavin's words, she was:

*...the most valuable student I ever had, in that she gave as much back to me as I gave to her, and she helped me to see my work through her eyes, at a time when I needed it. She evaluated it and then helped me look beyond what I was doing to the next phase. I think I have an awful lot to thank Cecily O'Neill for. She can often see what other people have missed.*

Not only has Gavin benefited from O'Neill's critical analysis of his work, he has enjoyed seeing her develop into a drama educator of international stature. One of his greatest joys has been to see the accomplishments of his former students. Yet, to my knowledge, Bolton and O'Neill have not collaborated on a paper or project which might help to further clarify those issues in drama education which still remain elusive. Despite a ready audience for such a collaboration, and a doubtlessly fertile partnership, the familiar distance which seems to characterize even Gavin's close relationships might prevent an endeavour of this nature.

As the arts came under attack from many quarters as frivolous, a lightweight subject always timetabled as an elective, it became clear that two camps in the

drama world were settling in for a long seige. The split between those who distinguished an enormous gap between 'theatre' and 'drama' set up a false dichotomy which has had long lasting harmful consequences. Those who argued for theatre arts believed strongly that the only way that drama would stand a chance against education reforms would be if evidence of marketable (read examinable) skills could be produced in theatre arts classes. The other group maintained that if drama were to survive it would be on the basis of its substantial contribution in a more overall educational contest - highlighting a means of creating personal knowledge through dramatic events.

LJ: The falsely argued dichotomy between product-based and process-based classroom drama has had longlasting consequences. Even contemporary teachers have difficulty blending the most salient strands from both approaches into a cohesive philosophy of drama education. It seems that neither side has received the necessary scrutiny which would illuminate the symbiosis upon which excellence in the field depends. Instead, critics have been eager to highlight dissimilarities and fissures, producing confusion and weak leadership for teachers.

Although the two sides were essentially fighting the same battle, namely, trying to sustain the life of arts education in schools, they were soon waging war against each other, solidifying the impression of the governmental opposition that there really was no legitimate reason to substantially support either side. One side argued that the art form of drama was paramount and the other that education through the art form came first. Antagonistic relationships were the result<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The war metaphor, being characteristic of an omnipotent presence in a given social structure, is aptly used here, I believe. A patriarchal approach supporting a transmissive model of education is clearly evident in the desire of some theorists and practitioners who support a skills-based theatre program which excludes any experiential component. A feminist position, which I suggest Bolton occupies (albeit innocently), seeks a more holistic, creative and transformative outcome. The emphasis is placed on why, not what; the power of an experience arises from the strength of the collaborative effort of the group, not the authoritarian directive of an individual.

A necessary part of the growing pains of a developing field of study, the early criticisms of Bolton's approach emerged at an opportune time. After nearly twenty years of nurturing his craft, Gavin was reasonably well-prepared to stand by his work and deflect the criticisms which seemed to him unjustified, while at the same time acknowledging that certain other criticisms helped shed new light on various aspects of his work. For example, Jon Nixon's suggestions that Gavin's practice avoided dealing with issues of race, class and gender, addressed contemporary feminist issues, but misrepresented Bolton's work, as Bolton himself pointed out in *A Reply to Jon Nixon* (1985). David Hornbrook's challenges, in direct opposition to Bolton's work, targeted perceived shortcomings such as a neglect of text-work (although in Hornbrook's view, text can only mean script), an absence of theory, and Bolton's lack of understanding of classroom realities. With the exception of the occasions on which he addressed comments directed at him personally instead of towards the work, Gavin has managed consistently to rise above the petty criticisms and learn from the plausible ones. Former student David Davis (1995), who now directs a large drama in education program in Birmingham, U.K., notes "He is not a careerist and would never sell out a principle for his own gain. He is non-defensive and generous to friends; realistic to enemies, of which he has extremely few."

An excellent overview of the debate based on criticisms against the approach used by Gavin and Dorothy appears in the arts education journal, *2D* (Dance Drama). Ken Byron (1986) weaves the issues raised by a number of educators (including Hornbrook, Bennett, Nixon, Neelands, Dobson, Graham, Fines and

Davis) about Bolton and Heathcote's approach, into a comprehensible overview. Presenting these voices in a collage, Byron highlights points of contention between these two positions and in some cases, includes Bolton's response to the critics. Some specific issues against Bolton which are addressed include:

- charges of indirectness - avoidance of controversial issues
- universals (concept central to the broadest human contexts)
- the lack of politicization of drama education
- authenticity - by which Hornbrook means subjectivity
- implications of drama in the classroom

The article is satisfactorily read as an historic moment in the development of drama education in Britain, a time when two things happened: 1) a number of relatively new but keen scholars found a forum to express their beliefs; and 2) an important airing of issues occurred, useful if only for the clarification of misunderstandings. It is not my intention to closely examine these arguments in this text; rather they are presented as a backdrop for the development of Bolton's thinking over subsequent years.

While some of Gavin's energy was absorbed by entering the fray during the eighties, his constant focus remained his drive to set out the parameters of a classroom drama for teachers and students: aims, objectives, strategies, language, and a philosophy that needed to become clearer in order to be more fully understood. He acknowledged and welcomed critical commentary, which helped him to intensify his pursuit of the complexities of educational drama.

### INTERVAL 3

Tuesday, March 14, 1995

Now I am starting to feel at home. In my role as biographer, I have an obligation to participate and record, finding the delicate balance between both roles. I waver between a desire to probe and an impulse just to observe. I sense a more relaxed mood in my hosts, perhaps a case of the unfamiliar house-guest becoming a known quantity. I'm sure I appear more at ease to them as well!

The two hour time allotted for the interview this morning is spent in intense concentration on my part. Gavin has asked a client, Malcolm, from his volunteer work with Victim Support to give me some impression of Gavin from a non-teaching perspective. Shortly into the interview, I recognize how valuable this is to be, as the man I speak with has an uncanny, intuitive reading of Gavin that is insightful. When I recall the impassioned discourse of Malcolm, delivered in his strong 'Geordie'<sup>8</sup> accent, my memory is of trying to take in all that he is saying and hoping that I will be able to transcribe the tapes. At the same time, I am transfixed by a master storyteller, whose metaphors and analogies are amazingly clear.

I go for a brief walk after lunch and return to hear Cynthia playing the piano in her little study. She has a sensitive touch and is willing to repeat a section until she finds it satisfactory. Gavin is reading the paper in the lounge and comments, "*Cynthia is a natural accompanist, that is her true forte.*" For some

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<sup>8</sup> A strong dialect of Northeast England.

reason, the comment sticks, and I file it.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent with Cynthia. We chatted quietly, more an ordinary conversation than an interview. As the sun dropped in the late afternoon, Cynthia continued to work on her needlepoint cushion, a large canvas held in a frame, alternating between having it or Benji on her lap.

(Weeks later when my husband transcribes the tape, he wonders who is doing all the heavy breathing!) She is very attached to the old dog, and admits that if it were up to Gavin, there might not be a pet of any kind. I get small hints about the extent of Cynthia's religious devotion: the cushion for the cathedral, the collection of paperweights with religious figures, her joy at Andrew's singing in the cathedral choir as a youth, the pointing out of the spires of the cathedral as we drive, and her knowing exactly the right view a visitor should first have of the one-thousand year old Durham Cathedral. Including volunteer work on church committees, much of Cynthia's weekly activity is directed to the church.

Tonight we attend a Royal Shakespeare Company Performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Theatre Royal, a delightful production that brings a "Bravo" from Gavin at the curtain. In the lobby, I am introduced to the verger of the cathedral the Boltons attend. He is a former actor who, Cynthia says, "brings a real sense of circumstance to a service, he does everything with aplomb." On the drive home, Gavin enjoys telling me the Somerset Maugham story of *The Verger*. I see the actor in Gavin as his voice shifts through the characters in the story.



It has been a long day. I am tired and turn in, but Gavin and Cynthia stay up for tea and 'telly'. Tomorrow, to Durham University.

**MEDITATION**  
**A PLACE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

How does the work of Bolton affect me as teacher?

What do I want to know most urgently about the practice?

How can I do drama this way?

How must I think about drama in order to mine the experiences I create more fully?

How does Gavin think up the sequences?

How is this way of knowing drama of use to me in a practical way?

Does drama fit into fifty-minute time periods?

Can drama work with unmotivated students/teachers? Special needs? ESL?

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Why isn't it easier to understand?

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## Chapter IV

### DRAMA WORKS: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING

What is behind a successful piece of drama work in the classroom? Why do some examples of classroom drama resonate long after the actual event? How can a teacher reasonably expect to 'hit the mark' on a fairly consistent basis? Primarily, the quality of a drama experience is determined by the quality of teacher thinking that goes into the preparation, long before the idea ever comes to life with participants. But it is the particular kind of thinking that is important; the particular conception of education that a teacher holds which will determine the potential of any drama experience.

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#### The Teacher And The Task: We Explore Intentions

**LJ: Why is it so difficult for people to grasp drama teaching approached in this way?**

*GB: I think it's difficult because it requires a new frame, a new language, a new conception of teacher/pupil relationship. What is extraordinary is that book you loaned me by Doll, an educationist, he is talking about new ways of seeing pupil/teacher relationships in future, a new kind of dialogue between pupil and teacher, and he's writing in 1993, and he is describing hypothetical possibilities that we have been doing in drama for years and he says that this is going to be very alarming to teachers because it's stepping through a new door! Any activity that causes you to rethink what teaching is, is difficult.*

**LJ: What does a drama teacher need to know?**

*GB: In general terms, a drama teacher needs to know that the pupils know a great deal already about life and needs to find a way of creating opportunities for pupils to reveal what they know. A drama teacher needs to know that the pupils are creative.*

*Additionally, a drama teacher needs himself to know about theatre and needs to have some practical psychology at his fingertips so that he can assess where people are and assess people's moods and feelings; he needs to be able to distinguish between true and phoney work; he needs to be able to hear what people are NOT saying - he needs to be able to guess at what is being withheld; he needs to have a sense of school time - to be sure he's not going to come to the middle of a very dramatic experience when the end of a lesson comes, so he's got to have that sense of time as well as the other dramatic senses of time...*

**LJ: So the ideal teacher is an Everyman in a way?**

*GB: Yes...an Everyman with theatre skills! ...Another skill a drama teacher has to have is the ability to look at a theme or other material and think of it in terms of a suitable focus and be able to focus. A lot of teachers find this very difficult...I still haven't discovered a way to teach that.*

**LJ: How do you do that yourself?**

*GB: I practised looking at a topic from different angles, but different human situation angles. Whereas you find most teachers who are graduates and most academics will look at a topic from several academic angles so that they finish up with a list of academic subheadings, and they're no nearer to finding a focus for drama. So, it's finding a variety of human situations within a topic that is the secret to finding a focus.*

**LJ: You mentioned before that you have to be willing to go into the classroom and not know where the drama will go, or be able to use what you get from the participants in order to further the work. How does that affect your planning of a sequence?**

*GB: There's often a tension between those two. I sometimes find that I need to plan thoroughly as though there isn't going to be anything of importance from the class, at least not in a major way, so that I've got a pathway that will take the experience deeper. By creating that pathway, I'm taking the experience deeper in my mind, and so I'm probing the subject in my mind the more thoroughly I prepare. Then I've got to learn to give that up if the class wants to take it in another direction. But at least I will have known some of the possibilities and so I'm looking for openings in the direction the class has taken it into.*

**LJ: Is that where inexperienced teachers fall down? They want to rely too heavily on what they've chosen?**

*GB: Yes, and experienced teachers, too. I'll fall down on this, I'll get too*

*attached to where I wanted to go.*

**LJ: What is the role of drama education in schools today?**

*GB: I think it is to create personal knowledge. I think there are different kinds of knowledge, mostly we talk about packaged knowledge that would go into a category, the knowledge about which you can make a proposition or statement. I think there are other ways of looking at the world more obliquely and drama does this more than anything else. It brings the knowledge alive.*

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### **Living in the Learning**

Of the hundreds of drama sequences planned by Gavin, a piece of work developed in his last years of active teaching reflects a maturity in the work, an effective blend of the most significant theoretical and practical concerns in a dynamic application. The drama sequence based on Arthur Miller's (1952) play *The Crucible* captures the quality of Gavin's thinking and is an effective demonstration tool for teaching drama concepts to teachers. *The Crucible* drama sequence is representative of Bolton's best work. It operates on many levels: it is a mixture of several drama modes, a variety of social interactions are explored, and it is a rich content area with the potential to expand into other areas of study.

This chapter explores this particular sequence from its conception, through planning, and execution. I have used the sequence in my own teaching from Grade Eight through Twelve, as well as for drama teacher workshops. It is an exciting experience for both teacher and participants: evocative, multidimensional, dramatic in a highly theatrical context and, above all else,

reliably repeatable, so soundly conceived that the drama works, no matter what experience the participants bring into the event.

The dialogue which follows the outline below is an exploration of the kind of 'teacher thinking' Gavin followed in creating *The Crucible* drama sequence. It tries to anticipate the questions another teacher might have if they were attempting to understand the process.

First, though, is an outline of the sequence. The steps of the drama are sketched rather than painted. What the reader must do here is to read between the lines to a degree, imagining more fully the actual events, envisioning how a particular strategy might unfold with a group, applying his/her own drama context to the text as it is written here.

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**A Drama Sequence  
(Based on Miller's "*The Crucible*" )**

1. Teacher introduces 17th century Salem by discussing the fears, superstitions and beliefs of that time and place.
2. An imaginary doll is introduced as teacher speaks. It is clear that long pins are being stuck into the doll and teacher drops in the notion of witchcraft.
3. The doll is passed around the circle, each participant handling it until it returns to teacher.
4. Attention shifts to four large pieces of paper on the floor. Each participant must write down any superstitions that they hold. Then, the groups move from paper to paper, initialing superstitions written by others that they too believe in.
5. Teacher asks for anyone who has NOT signed anything to stand. Suggesting

that these (however many there are) represent outcasts in "our community", teacher asks the rest of the group to surround them and "try to make them one of us". After a few minutes of the group's collective effort to pressure the 'outsiders', the class is asked to sit down and teacher states "that is what the play is all about."

6. Class is asked to divide into groups of four, family groups. They are to sculpt a picture of purity and innocence.

7. Each 'father' is asked to introduce his family to the teacher, who is now in role as the 'Reverend'.

8. After greeting each family with formality and approval, the 'Reverend' states that some of these 'innocent children' were seen dancing naked last night in Salem woods. Teacher holds silence for a moment.

9. Now the teacher asks the 'children' to take a piece of paper and write down whether or not they are G (guilty) or I (innocent) of dancing in the woods. They may show the papers to other 'children' but not to 'adults'.

10. The children are sent from the room. The adults arrange the space as in a church or meeting hall. The families are rejoined, then take their places in the 'pews'.

11. The Reverend addresses the group, declaring that no one will leave until the evil deed in the woods has been clarified and the guilty ones uncovered for punishment.

12. Reverend asks the eldest child of each family to come forward, to stand in front of him, place their hand on a book, and repeat after him "My soul is pure." The children are questioned with seriousness.

13. Each family is asked to take their group into the vestry, to determine the 'truth'. The Reverend spends a brief moment with each group to assist in the interrogation.

14. The groups are brought back to their places in church. Now the younger children in each family are questioned, and parents are also asked to identify suspects. Tension mounts.

15. At a moment of intense involvement, the teacher drops the role of Reverend and asks 'parents' if they really know which of their children is guilty or innocent. The guilty ones are asked to stand. The drama is over.

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While this outline does omit some subtleties, particularly in relation to Teacher in Role, it does show the structure that is in place to support the theatrical experience.

**LJ: Why did you design a drama around *The Crucible*?**

*GB: It was a play I had directed many years ago and I was very fond of it. I thought it would make an interesting drama.*

**LJ: What was your overriding concern or question once you had decided on the play?**

*GB: How do you take a historical event which took place in a different culture in the 17th century and make it accessible to modern students? And to add to that, how does the historical event become/seem familiar?*

**LJ: How did you decide where to start?**

*GB: The picture in my head was of a community of families torn by the rumour that some of their adolescent children might have been dancing in the wood and engaging in black magic. I began by trying to visualize a scene where these families confront their offspring in an attempt to learn the truth: dramatically engaging, historically valid, but pedagogically impossible - **unless the setting for such an interaction was so formally controlled that there was virtually no room for manoeuvre by the actors.** By 'formally' I mean something more than relating to social formality, ritual or historical authenticity. I am using a cultural meaning of 'formal' - **in which there can be only one way of behaving.** With teacher-in-role signalling the 'rules', the participants have no choice but to sit in a certain way, speak in a certain way, repeat after the 'minister' with hand on the 'bible' in a certain way, remain silent and submissive. It now becomes pedagogically possible - and subtleties of exactly how a girl places her hand on the 'good book' become enormously dramatic, because that is the **only available room for manoeuvre.** So far, so good... but it can't be a first step.*

*A number of problems arise that can only be resolved by giving the class some preliminary experiences:*

*How to share sufficient of Miller's play and the historical context for the class to grasp what it's going to be about*

*How to make the 17th century Puritan society accessible to modern young people*

*How do class members become characters without reasonable preparation*

*So: a mixture of typical 'teacher talk' imperceptibly turning into a dramatic ritual with the doll - suddenly and briefly, we're in 'theatre'.*

**LJ: What was your reasoning behind the listing of superstitions?**



*GB: Brainstorming on superstitions - signing your name against a superstition, followed by 'harassment' of the minority - both an intellectual way into a theme of the play (black magic) and the beginnings of a threatening situation.*

**LJ: What is the importance of the 'family portraits'?**

*GB: A safe way of casting, a technical matter of deciding relationships and ages for the participants to deal with. Pedagogically, an important period of the lesson when they are released from the teacher's eye. Tableaux must never be used just for one purpose, so I now need to introduce another theatrical occasion, through a simple question and answer (careful choice of vocabulary), publicly and ritualistically giving the names of the family, etc.*

**LJ: Is it critical to include this step?**

*GB: To understand the new dimension I inserted at this point, we have to turn to the penultimate episode, when, in families, the parents are to interrogate their children. This scene immediately following the formal setting of rigid chapel behaviour is a pedagogical challenge, for the participants now have some leeway; the scene has moved towards a cultural informality. This cultural change of gear is also a pedagogical change of gear - and on one or two occasions when I used *The Crucible* in this way, some 'families' could not cope with the degree of freedom implicit in the informal level (still less could they cope with the less formal level of the final scene when the whole group meet and interact). It is as though the participants, having obeyed the unspoken laws of the teacher-led chapel scene have to find for themselves the informal rules of the family interrogation. This is a 'pedagogical leap'. The two things the actors know is that 'father' is the authoritative head of the family and that the children are to proclaim their innocence. Beyond these they can only explore their behaviour patterns; such patterns are not 'givens' as in 'formal' cultural behaviour - and if a typical family of wife and two children all see the informal rules as behaving submissively to the head of the family, the wives in particular are going to have a pretty bland time!*

*So, going back to the preparation of the family tableau, I inserted, after a few trials, another dimension at this point. I suggested that the mother could, if the participants chose, be the private authority figure of the family or authority could be shared. Now in implanting this notion, I am anticipating a greater degree of leeway within the family rules when the actors come to do their interrogation scenes. This is pedagogically more rewarding for participants who can take advantage of it and dramatically more dynamic.*

**LJ: Obviously, you wanted the ending to be gripping and 'real' for the participants. How did you ensure this would be the outcome?**

*GB: The final scene is based on the 'game' of a secret decision. The*

*adolescents can decide whether or not they were guilty. This 'game' of some actors in actuality not knowing other actors' decisions is crude, but effective and should be used sparingly. It adds the 'zip' though.*

**LJ: Why is *The Crucible* so effective?**

*GB: Because the early stages of the lesson allow for ownership of the characters, in a gradual and unthreatening way. Also, the existential experience of the final scene is timed to be there when the participants are ready for it. And that final scene is most effective when the group as a whole, take that final scene over and the teacher becomes a follower. Because it is episodic it is manageable. It also reveals themes without explicitly mentioning them.*

**LJ: Is it significant that you developed the sequence late in your career?**

*GB: Yes... I think I was blending all the tools of drama that I know.*

**LJ: Has it been the most memorable piece of work you've done?**

*GB: No... The most astonishing piece of work I've ever done was one week with a group of Grade Eleven/Twelves in Toronto. We met every morning, Monday to Friday, and they chose the topic of School Reunion. So we spanned ten years over five days; they went from seventeen or eighteen years old to twenty-seven or twenty eight. We agreed that Friday would be the Reunion, and that they would not have seen each other for ten years (since Monday).*

*We talked about what would mature them during the week, creating scenes of life occurrences. Then on Friday we went straightaway into the Reunion. Most of them had borrowed clothes from their parents and it was extraordinary. It ended as the 'evening' ended, with people drifting off to the sidelines one by one and just watching and waiting until everyone had had a chance to tell their story. But this was in the 1970's, and the work was really a one-off, and not as safe as the work was to become later on.*

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## **Teaching by Design**

I have thought about *The Crucible* work for a long time, both as a teacher and a biographer. When I first encountered it, I was a student in a small group of

graduate students, and Gavin's purpose in taking us through the experience was twofold: it provided an experiential moment casting us as 'students', and, as a model to deconstruct. It was rich with potential, containing all of the critical elements of a successful piece of drama work. As we interrogated the process, step-by-step, examining the components and how they applied to classroom settings, we were unknowingly being initiated into the realm of the artist's way of thinking.

Gavin could not tell us exactly how each piece of the sequence came into his creative consciousness, but he could tell us why and how they worked, in this combination, as a powerfully theatrical piece. He could not give us the inspiration he had had for the creation of this event, but it was possible for us to glean insight into our own processes. It became a question of asking how to layer experience so that it fits together meaningfully. How does a teacher determine a starting point that will inspire creative choices further on?

Not until I had gone back to the classroom to work with students with my own experiments, did my understanding of teaching dramatically have any impact on my work. Now, I feel that it is this trial and error, the playing with ideas until it 'feels' right, that drama teachers need to become effective. It is not enough to think that you have grasped the idea; there must be a willingness to go in, try it out, conquer the fear of 'failure' (which is, in the end, simply learning), and to endeavour always to stay in the moment, no matter how thorough planning has been. However, John O'Toole (1994) suggests that Gavin's ability to focus ideas and contexts is real artistry..."some of that is

practice and experience and techniques, knowing how to focus a segment. But some of it is just sheer creative imagination, the ability to see like in unlike; to find a path through that will lead to something new."

What does the choice of *The Crucible* reveal about Gavin Bolton? A prominent feature of the play is its theatricality. Indeed, when Gavin recalled his interest in it as a potential for drama, it came from his pleasure in having directed it as a young teacher. Alongside the intriguing aspect of the black magic, which is never far from the public's interest, particularly the adolescent public, other notions such as morality, humanness, deception, love and forgiveness all hint at possibilities for Gavin's enthusiasm for the play. Friend, colleague and former student Carole Tarlington (1994) notes:

I suspect he's a terribly moral person. I've never heard him moralize ever, but his work of course deals with ethics and he doesn't make judgments so you never really know quite where he stands on these things. He seems to be very moral. And at home, in England in that area, the church is very important in people's lives...I have a feeling the church has helped shape him.

The character of the Reverend is absolutely controlling, giving teacher-in-role considerable power over the group. It seems a perfect vehicle for Gavin - mildly chilling, severe, intimidating. Those who get to know Gavin well often comment that initially there is a feeling of distance. As David Griffiths (1994) comments, "he can be quite intimidating intellectually in that you are always conscious that he chooses his words very carefully, and doesn't waste any, and that he appears to be analyzing everything you say" which results in Gavin's appearing not to be very warm. This is reiterated by Mike Fleming who recalls, from a student's perspective, "once you'd had your time with him he'd get very

distracted; even socially, if you went for a cup of coffee with him it was almost as if a shutter would come down." Thus Bolton always carried the 'lone wolf' reputation. However, once a certain level of familiarity was gained, while the intensity remained, Gavin's warmth became apparent.

Another aspect of this drama is its historical significance - Gavin is interested in events from other times, and much of his work explores the connections between past and modern lives. Embedded in this is the actual content of the play, the evil doings of man against man through witchcraft, accusation and suspicion. "I think Gavin is fascinated by the seamier side of life, the dark side of human nature, the things that make up human thought and emotion," suggests Carole Tarlington. More than once a group has been surprised by the focus Gavin has selected for a drama. For example, in examining the story of Cinderella, it is not the obvious friction between the stepdaughters and Cinderella that Gavin emphasizes but the relationship between the adults - father and stepmother - and the apparent impotence of the father to defend his daughter against cruelty by the rest of the 'family'. Both for adult and student participants, this shift of perspective has a poignant, meaningful ring and thus becomes a more challenging and 'human' dilemma to probe.

*The Crucible* also demands that both teacher and students work for extended stretches in a predominantly theatrical mode. This does not imply that they are giving a performance, but that they are following the rules of being in the moment, and allowing and following impulses which occur, albeit within the context that has been devised. In the scene where the entire group joins

together at the end, there is no question that all are held by the drama of the moment. It is, as Gavin explained above, as though there is no other possible way to behave. The work is truthful, convincing and theatrical. If an audience were present, it would be captured by the palpable tension, the visual appeal of the scene and the action of the characters. Still, it has been difficult to persuade some drama teachers that all of this can be accomplished without any dependence on exercises that are specifically for 'concentration' or 'relaxation' or 'imagination' or 'speech' or 'miming'. Some teachers choose to pursue all of these skills outside a dramatic context, and by doing so, fail to make them significant to the learner.

We can look closely at one moment in the sequence which has rich complexity. It holds an example of the kind of delicious moral dilemma which often flavours Gavin's work: the moment when the young women are asked to decide whether or not they are guilty of dancing in the woods. In the single act of deciding, layers of personal struggle can exist. Does an adolescent woman delight in the opportunity to have a secret? To flaunt authority? To shock the adult community? Does she leap at the chance to be 'wicked' knowing that it is within the safety of a drama? Can she balance what may be very strong personal beliefs about morality with the freedom to experiment in role? How might she weigh the moments leading up to her decision in order to speculate about the consequences of her actions? In essence then, does she bring ALL her current understanding of moral positioning to bear on the decision, without the words MORAL/RIGHT/WRONG ever spoken? Might she then later reflect on why she chose one position over the other and thus come to a deeper

knowing of (her)selves?

Perhaps it is this that *The Crucible* exemplifies best of all: that the careful blend of pedagogy and theatre results in a whole that is more than the sum of its parts; that it can be an experiential event between people which can effect changes in understanding. The oblique situations Gavin creates are a great strength in his work. Gavin works comfortably with ambiguity and invites and encourages students to join him at whatever level they are individually prepared to participate. Even the teacher's acknowledgement that the dramatic event is an unpredictable journey can be an empowering moment for students. With Bolton, students are not patronized by being spoon-fed the insights and outcomes; they must determine for themselves the overarching themes, underlying assumptions and personal responses to the drama. In their search to manage the social event into which the drama throws them, students are confronting and learning about their individual skills and assumptions of both the content area and the art form. What is of utmost importance here is that the search is collaborative: it is a group process which allows individual growth.

Bolton's pedagogical style infuses this evocative work implicitly. The teacher is present as participant/spectator/director/facilitator/educator/actor/ theorist/ historian/artist. One reason these multiple subject positions are able to emerge in the drama is distance. Bolton has found the critical distance which enables him to move freely amongst these positions, not overtly dependent on any one single perspective. It is distancing that seems to signify his style and conception of drama, and perhaps other relationships as well. This is important

to the drama teacher on several counts. First, the drama teacher must hold several minds at once, being both 'in' and 'out' of the drama simultaneously. Students participating in the drama must feel the 'real' engagement of the teacher in the event, the honest integrity of a critical pedagogy. Secondly, in order to ensure that the drama unfolds artistically, and further, that students are made aware of the art they are creating, the teacher must apply another mind set. In this case, the mind must be able to summon up a visionary, overarching theatrical sense of the whole as composed by its parts. Thirdly, the teacher must meet the demanding requisite of being acutely aware of the complexity of presenting content, in a dramatic context, for the purpose of learning. And this brings one other point forward, and that is Bolton's unwavering conviction that, at all times, the teacher's mind must be concerned for the quality of the experience as that experience is understood by students. That these qualities, among others, co-exist so profoundly in this piece, loudly bespeaks its potential as an important model of drama education.

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### **Contentions...**

Naturally, the response to Bolton's work has not been unanimous. Over the years, his theory and practice have been contested by a handful of other educators. Most often, Bolton has welcomed the critical analysis of his progress, recognizing the value of objectivity and the varied expertise of colleagues in the field. He has engaged in broad discussions about many aspects of drama education including drama as an art form; drama and emotion;



drama pedagogy; and drama mythology. It is this final category which is the root cause of an important misreading of Bolton which is ongoing. Although, in the end, Bolton has, as always, put the past behind him, he was alarmed by statements made by David Hornbrook as early as the mid-eighties.

Over the past decade, Hornbrook has made some interesting, if exaggerated, claims about the nature of drama in education. In *Education and Dramatic Art* (1989) he startled drama educators by heavily criticising the work of Bolton and Heathcote. His proposal for a more skills based approach to drama curriculum was almost overshadowed by his personal attack on "Gavin and Dorothy", as the new 'Muggletonians'<sup>9</sup>. Tempers on all sides flared and cooled, and those who remained in the ensuing debate eventually gave credit to Hornbrook for knocking down gurus and stimulating useful interrogation into the state of the art. Ironically, as Mike Fleming (1995) points out, "Some of the criticisms are overstated and therefore less helpful to us...and also, I think some of the criticisms that Hornbrook made about the early drama in education Gavin would have subscribed to himself." Hornbrook chose to set up straw arguments which perpetuate the old dichotomies rather than shoulder a leadership role which offers new directions and alternatives.

Hornbrook asks: "How can a classroom teacher actually benefit from a practice

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<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Heathcote remembers first hearing about Hornbrook's book at a conference she was attending. While she was at breakfast one morning in the company of historian John Fines, her daughter interrupted the meal exclaiming the "dreadful things" Hornbrook had written. Fortunately, Fines was able to explain what a 'Muggletonian' was (a seventeenth century prophet), and Dorothy enjoyed the analogy.

such as Gavin Bolton's?"

He states:

Bolton:

- 1 . has no coherent, systematized theory upon which to base his assumptions of drama, which has created a potpourri of assumptions based on a general belief in child-centred education
- 2 . has marginalized drama in the school curriculum by leading teachers off into a world unsupported by theorizing
- 3 . has no understanding of the needs of the average teacher, the constraints of the classroom and the system
- 4 . is unable to present a discernible and particular body of knowledge, skills and understandings

It is somewhat difficult to accept Hornbrook's challenges, particularly where the arguments are obviously misinformed. However, Hornbrook has voiced opinions about drama and education which have led to a necessary and vigorous interest in drama education research. The complexities surrounding the consequences of 'the Hornbrook incident' are worthy of being examined in another context, for there will be some lasting effect from the controversy.

## **Reprisal**

The debate stirred up by Hornbrook, (and a few others who jumped on the bandwagon), had only a limited and briefly unsettling effect on Gavin Bolton. In the years that followed the release of Hornbrook's first book, the community of drama educators was forced to look closely at the observations made by Hornbrook. Although this was not the first time in drama education's history when critical voices were raised against Bolton, Hornbrook's suggestions

certainly provoked the most response from Gavin. Certainly, Gavin's response was necessary because of the obvious inaccuracies perpetrated by Hornbrook about the subject matter, not because of the personal nature of the arguments.

The following reflections are Gavin's on "The Hornbrook Incident":

*GB: I found that very annoying, Hornbrook's criticism of me, because it was unjustified, in that although I could see what he was doing and why he was doing it, and saw some useful advice that he was giving, I couldn't make sense of his attack on me.*

*He charged me with being individualistic and I look at my writing and most of the time I seem to be saying that: drama, of all the arts, is a shared experience...here he is saying that I promote individualism!*

*He was charging me with turning my back on theatre and that didn't make sense to me, so I got very annoyed. I thought he was seeing what he wanted to see, and not really reading me with any care. He wanted to put me in a slot. And it also annoyed me that he could be so critical of my work when he's never seen me teach...never ever been in a classroom of mine, but people would think he has in reading him. So altogether I found him a pain, and my response was to kind of get back at him a little...*

*Then when the other chap, his friend from Brighton, Peter Abbs, whom I have a lot of respect for, jumped on the bandwagon and started to say that Dorothy and I had "regretfully turned our backs on theatre," that really annoyed me. I was very interested in some of the criticisms that have come out about my work, which I think are legitimate.*

*Partly what Hornbrook was saying...and partly what people like Warwick Dobson or Jon Nixon have come up with...this idea of by extracting themes, by generalizations of a particularity of drama it does offer a way of avoiding looking at serious issues, so that there has been an attempt in my work to rush to the safety of the larger theme, rather than say look at the particular social or political issue. So far from facing up to the issues, the drama escapes from them because I haven't persisted in holding it there and pushing our noses in whatever social issues have cropped up. I've slipped away and said, 'well, this is about power...' I was reminded of it the other day.<sup>10</sup> The gender issue is a*

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<sup>10</sup> In the summer of 1994, at the University of British Columbia, Gavin Bolton introduced several concepts through the story of Cinderella. This example referred to by Bolton is a case of the deeper issue of 'gender roles' being glossed over for the broader, safer one of 'power'.

Gavin sets a dramatic playing sequence up for the class. In it, there are three Dukes and four Maidens. The Dukes are to choose a bride for the Prince and are given a set of guidelines with which to test the maidens and find out their likes and dislikes, thus their compatibility with the

*good example of what I've tended to do. I would slip in my explanation of what we were doing to a level of generality, like power, which is safer. I think critics of my work have been justified in putting that forward, and that includes David Hornbrook.*

*One useful thing that Hornbrook did was to create an atmosphere where people can offer alternatives and be critical. Because there was too much guru worship going on; I was quite conscious of it. He's knocking down gurus...If those gurus are of any worth at all, they're going to spring back again; people are going to look again at what they've said or done; the work is going to hold. And if they're not any good, we're just as well without them. So we need that kind of change, new perspectives.*

Dorothy Heathcote recalls Gavin's reaction to Hornbrook: "Now, I remember Gavin, he was sitting just where you are and he says, 'Dorothy, I am not going to let them dismiss my work and your work with this. I'm going to do something about it.' And he actually thumped the table very gently which for Gavin is very unusual ....the only time I've ever seen him do this. And I said 'well do feel free'...I don't care about putting the record straight..."

## **Cadence**

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Prince. The 'Dukes' are seated behind a one way glass for the purpose of observing the behaviour of the 'Maidens' undetected. The women are instructed to accommodate every whim and preference of the dukes when they appear. Gavin has 'scripted' the experience so that the women actually agree to these submissive roles, creating a social context where this is logical behaviour. The 'Dukes' arrive and the elaborate game of playing the roles begins. Ultimately, the women end up being 'graded' on a scale of one to four; at that point it ends.

The discussion which followed the dramatic playing exposed the gender issues at the heart of the exercise. The men were reluctant to admit that the 'power' they were feeling went beyond the exercise. The women were frustrated by the lack of sensitivity to their very strong feelings of degradation. A major concern was that in order to do such an exercise with students, the focus would have to be changed so that the participants would not be left with the impression that the gender roles were being reinforced.

There is no one way in which to interpret or anticipate the impact of the contributions of Gavin Bolton to education. We cannot expect that footsteps, even firmly planted ones, will guarantee a path. Future generations, perhaps even the generation that is now entering the field, will have a perspective that is unavailable to contemporary view. Able to see the threads of Bolton's work woven over time and through space, someone thirty years hence might detect a significance as yet unannounced; or the work and thinking may be applied in a different context, with different possibilities.

My own reflections on Bolton have led me to consider his career in the three modes which most closely affect my teaching: creativity, pedagogy and theory. The list which follows is by no means the definitive list of Bolton's contributions. Others will find different points of intersection with his work; different resonances of experience. My purpose here is to point to the moments where I can enter into dialogue with the work and extend it further into my own context(s) as writer, teacher, researcher.

## **Theory**

There was a moment in 1990, early on during the graduate course I took with Gavin that startled me. Until that moment, drama education had been, to me at least, an exercise in delivering skills - transmitting the knowledge that would lead to 'better' acting, interpretation, set design, lighting plots, make-up, costuming, prop selection, blocking, etc., etc., etc. It frequently occurred to me that despite the change of students from year to year and my best attempts at

using diverse scripts and techniques, nothing much ever seemed fresh or unique. It felt that somehow, all of us, students and teacher, remained outside the work; removed emotionally, severed from genuine connection with our thoughts and actions. Thus, when in 1990, I realised that **drama must be linked to meaning**, I knew I had taken the first step in realigning my theory and practice. Suddenly, the gap between what we had been doing and how we had been doing it narrowed to a simple question: "Why are we doing this?" Content must matter - we must care about the human response to the event. Even more importantly, we must see the event through a multiplicity of lenses, including, primarily, our own.

Gavin Bolton has documented the development of his work and thinking over forty years. Through this prolific legacy of articles and books, generations of learners can explore the growth of one person's journey into a specialized field. **His writing identifies his principles of learning, theatre and pedagogy**, creating an archive of immense value to educators.

In the search for a foundational theory for drama education, **Bolton has identified links between drama and other branches of education**. His early connections with the child development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky opened new perspectives on thinking about drama education. Now, it is possible to envision the ties that can be made between Bolton's conception of drama and critical pedagogy, critical thinking and postmodernist views of education. These interesting combinations may well deserve deep exploration by current researchers and practitioners.

Some aspects of drama theory are identifiable as unique to Bolton. The strongest principle seems to have appeared at the apex of his discoveries during his active teaching career, and that is his **differentiation between dramatic playing mode and performance mode**. By placing these at opposite ends of a continuum, he emphasized their relatedness and dependence to each other, simultaneously creating a balanced, holistic approach to drama education.

Another useful characteristic which can be attributed to Bolton is that his dramatic events are multi-purpose: since **he structures sequences for repeatability**, they are models of craftsmanship and ripe for deconstruction - either through his own written analysis, through public analysis with teachers or as observed demonstrations with students.

He has **worked diligently to establish the importance of theatre elements in the context of drama education**. Anyone who has observed him with students has seen the actor, director, playwright, at work. In giving form to meaning through theatrical conventions, he is able to select and shape moments of significance within a classroom setting which will lead to the participants' understanding of what it means to work both in context and content.

## **Pedagogy**

There is an implicit guideline which underscores every facet of Bolton's

approach: impervious high standards. He is steadfastly **clear on the responsibilities of the teacher**, which he himself models. The teacher must expect that high standards will lead to quality work from self and students. The teacher must have a vision of learning outcomes. The teacher must strive to engage with challenging material. The teacher must not be afraid to make decisions, and above all, must understand the imperative of risk-taking in a dynamic approach to pedagogy.

Repeated echoes of: "Gavin doesn't suffer fools gladly" punctuated the research. Yet, he has mastered the art of saying "That isn't good enough," with tactful grace. He **demonstrates how to elicit high standards** by demanding artistic integrity, self-reflexivity, and self-discipline. At the same time, the ultimate joy he experiences in doing this work is always apparent.

A teacher who **stays in the moment**, Bolton is undistracted, clear and committed when working. He feels that **a teacher must believe in and value what students offer** in a real way; students must not sense false affirmation of their contributions.

His extraordinary command of English **elevates language usage and awareness** for drama participants. His examples and instructions are efficient, colourful and precise. There is a 'less is more' quality to his speech that invites and informs the dialogic process he supports.

Bolton has an innate ability to see minutely; to celebrate ordinary events as



extraordinary; to hold up a moment which **slows the action down** for participants and gives them the opportunity to make deeper meaning from the experience.

There is often a sense, when watching Bolton work, that he is **constantly monitoring the response and rhythms of the group**. He is acutely aware of the nuances of reactions to the dramatic event; perhaps slightly less so to the individual reactions of the participants. There is attention paid to the subtleties of 'reading' the group, which will ultimately serve to make the most from that groups' dramatic potential. As well, importance is placed on teaching the group a greater sensitivity in its own readings of the experience.

One of Bolton's great skills is in showing teachers **how to let theatre do the work**. It is essential to find ways to let the theatre elements of time, space and action do the work of expressing what the participants want to say, placing no burdens on the individuals involved as 'actors'. Handled in this way, many more students reach the kind of transformative thinking currently popular.

Bolton exemplifies a **human, intuitive, exploratory approach to teaching**. It is impossible to overstate the value of risk-taking which he has always encouraged. In drama teaching, these risks can be manifested in many ways. From fearing to appear silly in a role and then doing something spontaneous anyway because it feels right, to the teacher's and students' choice(s) of material, there are important opportunities to explore new territory at every turn.

## **Creativity**

Although criticized and challenged (never sufficiently from Bolton's point of view) he has ever **remained true to his own vision** of the potency of drama education. Unafraid to venture into areas that appeal to him, Bolton continues to discover, discard, dismiss and detour through ideas in his relentless search to know more. He has constantly **sought new ways of viewing old conventions**, turning them to a different use; enhancing them or being innovative in their application.

Of great importance is the way in which **Bolton has pointed to a different way of thinking about what it is we mean when we say 'drama in education'**. He has drawn a map for others through his development of vocabulary and concepts; always seeking richer directions for the work. He **allows creativity to move at a very deep level**, sometimes imperceptible until a backward look is given to an event. Then, a brilliant word or suggestion dropped early, probably inconspicuously, is seen to eventually flower into a pivotal moment, resonating with the significance it was always intended to evoke in the participants.

Contrary to criticism which misrepresented his position toward exploring controversial issues in the classroom, I venture to say that there is no topic which Bolton would deliberately avoid. Quite possibly, the more contentious the topic, the greater the challenge to find a protective frame for examining the facets of the theme involved. What is most important is **finding connections**

**between the personal experience of the participants and the dramatic context.**

Lest the above be viewed as a litany, I will reiterate that the elements of Bolton's work noted here are only a few amongst many others which will come to mind for those who have studied Bolton's work. Still, for those new to his approach to drama education, this may serve as a useful starting point for launching a further investigation. These observations have been important to my own thinking and pursuit of drama in the classroom context.

#### INTERVAL 4

Wednesday, March 15, 1995

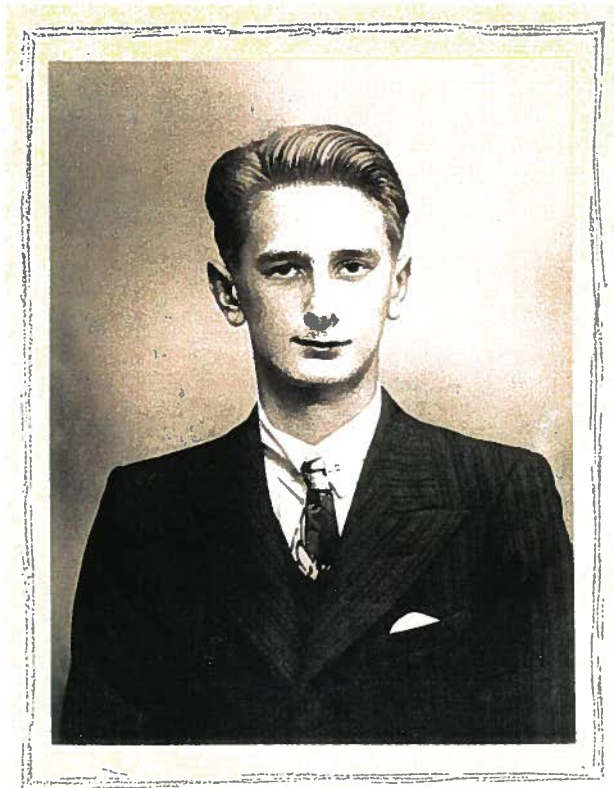
Gavin and I have taken to having our morning coffee together in the lounge. It helps to sort out the day's schedule and I can also give him things to start thinking about for a later taped session. I have a feeling that this is his usual time to write and I know that the current 'history' project is a near obsession - never very far from his mind. Nevertheless, he spends all the time with me that I want, and has really left his own work aside to accommodate mine.

The weather is blustery and chilly, but bright, and it is a perfect day to see the Cathedral in Durham, as our destination today is Durham University. Mike Fleming now runs the programs begun by Gavin and he has agreed to spend some time with me while Gavin visits the library. He has many interesting thoughts on Gavin and his work, having been a former student and then a doctoral candidate, with Gavin as supervisor. Reminiscing about Gavin has been a pleasurable and jovial task for everyone I've spoken to, and Mike, who continues to work with Gavin in many capacities, has no trouble filling the hour with his reflections.

Lunch in the Cathedral Refectory and then a brief tour of the huge structure itself. I get the feeling early on that Gavin has done this too often, (he is not terribly enthusiastic about it), but of course it is a 'must see' for guests. He seems much happier when we return to work on interview topics at home. Our topic for the afternoon session is his work in psychiatric hospitals, and it provokes a long discussion on the nature of the work and its implications.

I am again tired, and grateful that Cynthia and Gavin are off once more for bridge, so that I can sleep! Every conversation I have seems to point to new paths of discovery. I'm afraid that I will forget to write down what I've heard or that the tapes will get destroyed or that there will be some kind of disaster... perhaps just in my bad dreams...

**Chapter V**  
**CREWE: THEN and THERE**



*J. L. Hart's Studios,  
52 Nantuxch Rd., Crewe.*

**A Portrait**  
Gavin, age 16, Crewe.

*GB: I'm not sure how old I would be, probably about seven, and standing outside a house where some children were having a party to which I had not been invited, even though I lived on the same street. I found that very upsetting and I remember feeling very lonely, and I stood at their fence trying to see into the room where the party was going on.*

How does this memory shed light on Bolton's life and work? It suits my conception of the man Gavin Bolton, and although I did not know the child, it allows me to transcend the constraints of time and space to glimpse the boy. My own reasons for including it as a moment in this text have changed since it

first sang out to me while reading the interview transcripts. My reading of Bolton has shifted many times since I began this project. At first, I held romantic notions of a young and somewhat fragile boy, wistfully an outsider. As I came to see different Gavin Boltons, I felt that this isolation was far more willful than I first believed. It suited Gavin to remain on the edge, giving his mind the space and freedom to question his experiences and to the nurture divergent thinking that allowed him to see common signs and events in an uncommon way. From very early on, Gavin's self-determination carved out space for independence and distance, two characteristics which mark even his most intimate relationships.

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1927

Crewe was a railway town in those days.

**BOLTON: Robert and Alice (nee Hamer) are pleased to announce the arrival of their son Gavin, brother for Robert.**

Gavin was the third and last son born to the Boltons, the first having died as a baby. His mother would have only a few years of reasonably active living following his birth before becoming immobile with arthritis. Even so, Gavin recalls the difficulty she had in walking short distances and the limitations her health placed on the family. All of that was compensated for by Alice Bolton's extraordinarily outgoing personality.

Ah, his mother was gorgeous, she had a tremendous personality, very chatty, very lively...whereas his dad - I don't think he formed a real relationship with him; just didn't know him.

Cynthia Bolton

*GB: I think my mother was the first significant person in my life and she had a lot to do with the kind of person I am, more than my father. I suppose I've got my sense of humour from my mother... she tended to see everything as funny in the end and I've tended to pick that up from her. She was a sociable person, enjoyed company, enjoyed talking; I've got that from her. She was...I suppose she was a remarkable person in many ways; many people thought of her as remarkable, so that she was good to live with.*

For the first six years of his life, Gavin lived with his parents and brother in a small, semi-detached house, bordering on a big play area. To a degree, Gavin lived the life of an only child, there being a six year age difference between Gavin and his only brother. As a child Gavin spent his time playing outdoors with other boys and girls near his home, though seldom in the company of his brother, with whom he "*didn't get on.*" (Oddly, in later years when Gavin had to make a decision about his schooling and career, it was Robert's example he turned to, duplicating exactly the steps Robert took into working with sight and hearing disabled students).

The Boltons were a solid, respectable family whose children went to Sunday School, and who, because of Mrs. Bolton's cheerful nature, were warmly regarded by the community. When Gavin was seven years old, the family moved to a new house, still in the same neighbourhood, allowing Robert and Gavin to continue to attend the same schools, church and activities. Children of the early thirties were seen and not heard. No explanation was given for the move of a few blocks, although it was apparent that the new location was somewhat more desirable, the house slightly more 'comfortable,' and the electric heating a 'step up' from the coal used by the rest of the community. Alice Bolton, ambitious for herself and her family, knew that it was important to



instil high standards in her sons, to strive to be better than you thought you could be, even if the goal seemed unattainable. She was a constant and noteworthy reminder to all of them, always seeing herself as a little superior and thus creating a sense of nobility and status around herself and family, despite the limitations of her illness.

*GB: The main experience that I recall from childhood is having an invalid mother who had a serious form of rheumatoid arthritis which in those days was incurable. So that as a child, most of my school age rather, I recall, included a home life that was concerned with looking after Mother. And she had to be fed, and bedpanned, and generally nursed, and the three of us at home shared that nursing and the cleaning of the house, but my brother, who was six years older then went away to college, so father and I shared most of that nursing.*

Alice Bolton found a unique way of coping with the severe restrictions of her illness. Left with only one mobile joint, her jaw, she soon had her own 'coterie': a steady stream of visitors who came to rely on her congenial, positive and caring demeanour as a salve for their own lives. Her outlook ensured her the ongoing companionship of the community and the adult conversation which she must have craved from her husband. Robert, the 'dour Scot' would sooner hunker down in a corner than engage in a chat with his wife or his children.

*GB: My father really had very little to say. And all the visitors my mother had who used to come to see how she was; used to be entertained by her... and my father would sit in the corner and if he thought it was time for them to go he would sort of grimaced, still saying nothing walk to the mantelpiece and pick up the clock and wind it!*

As Gavin grew older, the narrating of the events of his day to his mother became an important daily routine. She was keenly interested in the people and their interactions, (who said what to whom? how did that episode work itself out?), and Gavin would have to recall in great detail the comments, arguments and discussions of his teachers and peers. This was a brilliant strategy on

Alice's part. She could monitor Gavin's comprehension of the world, know intimately the things which caught his interest, exercise his love of language, story and character, and maintain a bond between them, reinforced day after day. This affinity for language shared by mother and son forged a special connection between them.

Gavin found a childhood companion in the girl next door. They shared a love of performing plays for others, competed against each other academically, and helped each other through hours of homework. Not really keen about dating as he grew older, "*I was never a deep breather*," notes Gavin, he occupied his leisure time with cycling, playing cards and, above all, going to the theatre and cinema. He loathed organized sports of any kind, preferring the solitary endeavours which allowed him to set extremely high individual standards without team pressure. It also kept him outside the group, pursuing his own activities without interference.

*GB: I was greatly in love with the theatre and Crewe had its own theatre and repertory company. I would go off on my own as a child to the theatre. I think some of the acting was ham acting, where the actors would posture on stage, holding their arms like so...and I used to go back home and stand in front of the mirror and hold my hands in front of me like that...The cinema was another great source of imagination for me...great excitement over cinema. In my mind, I reenacted films over and over again on the way home.*

World War II began when Gavin was eleven and was the backdrop to his early adolescence. At least on the surface, the major effect of the war in Gavin's perception was that it curtailed activities that he might otherwise have been able to pursue extracurricularly. It did, perhaps, fuel the imagination of a boy already intrigued by the drama of everyday life.

*GB:...the other feature that coloured my school period was that it was wartime, so I spent an awful lot of school life in an air raid shelter. And I remember that we all used to wish, all the pupils, that the air raid siren would go before Latin which was a great problem for me, because I had to pretend that I wished that and Latin was my favourite subject. And I had to disguise and go along with the others and clap my hands with glee as the siren went, and miss Latin!*

The war imposed certain other restrictions on life that would have real consequences for the young Gavin Bolton. While the grammar school he had just begun to attend had always put on plays, something he had been looking forward to participating in, extracurricular activities were stopped when the war began, thwarting Gavin's interest and expression in drama. One thing the war did not do, however, was to interest the young Gavin in things political. In fact, the opposite occurred - he became intensely disinterested. In earnest, he began his long, outstanding career as a student of Speech and Drama. Here he followed in brother Robert's footsteps: both boys were adept at memorization and verse speaking, winning awards and entering competitions, and taking exams towards a Speech and Drama certificate. Until much later, during university, this activity had to sustain Gavin's interest in things dramatic. The substitute activity for play-making left a lasting impression on the two competitive Bolton boys:

We were on holiday together, Gavin and I and Robert and his wife, and listening to the radio. Someone was reciting a monologue and Gavin joined in with it saying, 'I used to do that one.' Then Robert retorted, 'But I did it first!'

Cynthia Bolton

### Scots

*GB:We could only afford to travel to Scotland once, maybe twice and all I remember is that my grandparents lived in a 'Buttenben' which was a one room apartment where the bed pulls out of the wall... and she used to say'Och, you're ma wee boy' (I can hear a Grandmother in*

*Gavin's voice as he lilted this phrase) whenever she saw me and I liked that. And my Grandfather was a great fussy, and as soon as we arrived which was some time around two o'clock, he'd be prompting his wife to get the tea ready because we'd come for tea. So, driven to desperation she used to have to get the tea ready, because we'd come for tea, High Tea, for three o'clock because this important event, the tea, had to be got through! It dominated his whole afternoon. And that's really all I remember about the Scottish grandparents.*

### **Welsh**

*Only one of the grandparents of the four I knew well. She was the Welsh side, my mother's side of the family. She married an Englishman whom I only have vague memories of...When I was four or five I remember being a bit shocked when I visited him on his deathbed. He appeared not to know me. It didn't upset me because I wasn't close to him. There's this awful story that goes with him, that my grandmother wasn't left with any money whatsoever, partly because he'd hidden away a whole pile of money that he'd saved that Grandmother didn't know anything about. And when he was sick they lit a fire in the bedroom, which they never used because they didn't spend money on coal to heat the bedroom. And the money, they discovered afterwards, had been packed in the chimney and it all burned!*

### **Just 'Gavin', Never 'Bolton'**

School life was easy for Gavin, probably because he loved it, pleased his teachers and genuinely found learning a pleasure. He recalls, bemused, that while all of the other lads were only referred to by their surnames, he was always called Gavin, even by the English teacher who became his nemesis. Mathematics was his favourite subject, and English drew Gavin in because of his interest in drama. He enjoyed most subjects and carved out a place "*always in the top six, but never actually at the top of the class.*" The English classroom was a proving ground for Gavin. Although he showed an aptitude for the subject and was interested in it, the single ingredient that soured the experience was the English Teacher. Gavin hated him. Then:

The Headmaster died.  
The English Teacher became Headmaster.  
And Gavin quit school.

At age sixteen, the time when he would have entered Sixth Form to specialize for University entrance, Gavin abruptly left school to avoid studying under that English Teacher. Persuasive, cool and logical, he convinced everyone who mattered that he truly wished to quit school and become an accountant. He failed to convince himself, but pride and determination pushed him down the office path. Although called up for Army duty at age 18, Gavin failed the medical due to a heart condition. He continued as an employee of British Railway Accounts Department. The time spent at British Railway wasn't a total loss. Gavin met Cynthia there<sup>11</sup>. However, after three years in training, Gavin left accounting behind. Where he was headed wasn't exactly clear. The brief relationship he'd had with Cynthia, also employed by British Rail, was cast aside in order to move ahead. Gavin was about to shift gears.

The calculating Bolton weighed the options. Going into college without being committed to a purpose seemed very risky to the young man who had just exited from a rash decision. How we like to think we are deciding the future when we make a decision. Despite the fact that Gavin did not get along well with his brother, that they were not close and had not shared many interests,

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<sup>11</sup> Cynthia recalls "He came to work in the office where I was working, very large office, hard to imagine these days, with great big desks, high desks where you sat on both sides. Difficult to remember... he was thin, he was lively, talkative - he used his hands a lot. And it wasn't a sort of meeting, it was just somebody from downstairs, you know, so there wasn't any big impact from either side. We must have known each other quite a bit before we actually went out for a date...then it was just an ongoing thing. In that first year, I suppose I was more in love than he was."

for some reason, Gavin felt secure in choosing to following Robert's lead here. He went to the school for the Blind and Deaf where Robert was already employed, and took a residential post as an unqualified teacher, which was legal at the time. In the two years that followed, Gavin enjoyed working with special needs students, absorbing techniques in both areas. This teaching experience was sufficiently satisfactory for Gavin to consider teaching as a career.

*GB: So, I decided to train as a teacher. Whilst I was teaching (residential) I continued my interest in drama, but the odd thing is that although I now know there were a fair number of avenues I could have gone along in teacher training to do with drama, it never occurred to me to link the two. And I saw my interest in drama as my hobby. And the thing about it ...this is one of the things that amazes me, there are all kinds of prestigious theatre schools that I could have chosen and a) it never occurred to me; and b) it never occurred to anybody else either... so I...the only logic I followed was that my brother had gone to Sheffield University in the Teacher Training department - and that should be what I did! It still never occurred to me to see myself as a drama specialist. Drama, even if I was going to use it in teaching was always going to be on the side. So, the subjects I took at college were English, History and Math, because I was still very fond of Math.*

Gavin excelled in his class. Probably the youngest member of the group, he had what the others, many of whom were returning veterans, did not have: two years of practical teaching experience already behind him, and an attitude that seemed to guarantee success.

*GB: I took it for granted that I must be a good teacher and I think I chose the profession on that assumption. Perhaps it was because I chose the wrong profession to begin with; it would have been a shock if I had not been able to teach.*

Although now twenty-four years old, Gavin was not ready to move. In part because he felt responsibility towards his mother, he wanted to live at home again. The desire to live in Crewe restricted Gavin's choice of teaching positions. Trained in secondary education, Gavin discovered that the only available posting was in a primary school, but wanting to be at home, he

Bolton, inspired by her positive attitude and good humour. Cynthia was waiting when Gavin returned.

Within the first year of his new teaching career, Gavin and Cynthia were married. That day stands out as an important feature in Gavin's adult life.

*GB: I can recall vividly the day I got married. It had an unusual feature in that after the church service, all the guests had to go round via my house to be greeted by my mother, who was in bed, before we could go on to the reception. For the honeymoon, Cynthia and I went off by train, no car in those days, to the furthest point I'd ever been from where we lived which was just fifty miles away!*

Gavin had never experienced being an adult alone.



**Newlyweds - July, 1951.**

As with many young couples, tight finances led to shared accommodation - with Mr. and Mrs. Bolton senior. The arrangement was to prove unsatisfactory, precipitating a move within the year.

Primary school teaching experience would ultimately prove more useful than Gavin could have known at the time. The nurturing environment of the primary school had been an incubator for this fledgling teacher. A fatherly Headmaster whose interest in drama and personal interest in his staff reaped positive professional results, encouraged young Bolton to take the reins and throw himself into school productions on a grand scale. Every class soon had Drama with Mr. Bolton, the community was treated to huge shows every term under his direction and it was "*all very enjoyable*" for two years. But it wasn't enough. He had been content in Crewe, not needing more room for discovery. Finally, Gavin was determined to leave the 'nest' and seek any position that would take him away. He had outgrown his birthplace, and new horizons beckoned.



## INTERVAL 5

Thursday, March 16, 1995

I look forward to today's interview with Alan Cohen, probably Gavin's closest friend and also a former university colleague. He is as gregarious and warm as Gavin and Cynthia have promised. It is clear he thinks the world of Gavin. I find the glimpse of Gavin's university days fascinating. It seems he was both an enigma and an inspiration to his colleagues; but one who always stood firm in his beliefs.

I asked Gavin if he dressed formally for his university teaching. He proudly replied, "*There was a tradition of formal dressing when I first began - and I broke it!*" (Is this the same Gavin whose friends tease him for spending too much money on clothes? the friends who call to ask, "and what will Gavin be wearing tonight?" before they meet on a social occasion?)

After lunch and naps, Gavin and I head to the study for what we know will be our final hour of talk for the purpose of my study. The sun pours in on Gavin, surrounded by his books and papers, seated on the old wooden kitchen chair that he finds most comfortable. I tuck myself into the corner on the little grey upholstered chair. We cover odds and ends, my last tape runs out. We keep on talking and conclude by talking about the 'Best' experience Gavin ever had teaching, and the 'Most Successful', which seemed an appropriate place to leave our interview.

We have tea with Cynthia, as has been the custom each day. Then at precisely

5:30, we leave for Durham to visit Marie Langley, a former M.A. student of Gavin's. The timing again is important - in fact, when we arrive eight minutes early, we sit in the car to wait until six o'clock, which is the appointed hour of the visit. In this case, Gavin is concerned about intruding on Marie, who manages pain from a severe fall without drugs, and Gavin is afraid she might be resting. After introductions, Gavin leaves and heads for the library, but not before assuring Marie and me that he will return at exactly 6:45 so as not to overtire Marie. She laughingly protests, but of course, he is true to his word.

Confined to a wheelchair because of her accident, Marie had to leave her teaching career and has found a way to be productive and help others by publishing a series of booklets on Pain Self-Management. Her own search for wellness has been aided by close contact with Gavin, whom she views as a constant friend and support. Marie credits Gavin with making a major difference in her life, not only through his teaching, but also in his continued care and conscientiousness towards her.

Our final evening together is spent over another beautifully prepared dinner and a bottle of wine. I am sorry to have it end. Now that the work is done, I want to just relax and be on holiday! However, I know that the five days has been right, for all of us.

## **MEDITATION**

### **EDUCATION WRITTEN IN BIOGRAPHY**

How do we know the lives of teachers?

How do teachers know their own lives?

Where can biography lead the researcher?

How does biographical knowledge contribute to educational research?

How can biography be rewritten?

Who might be suitable subjects?

How can the work of biography become a collaborative event between reader,  
subject and biographer?

How can biographical research be used for education?

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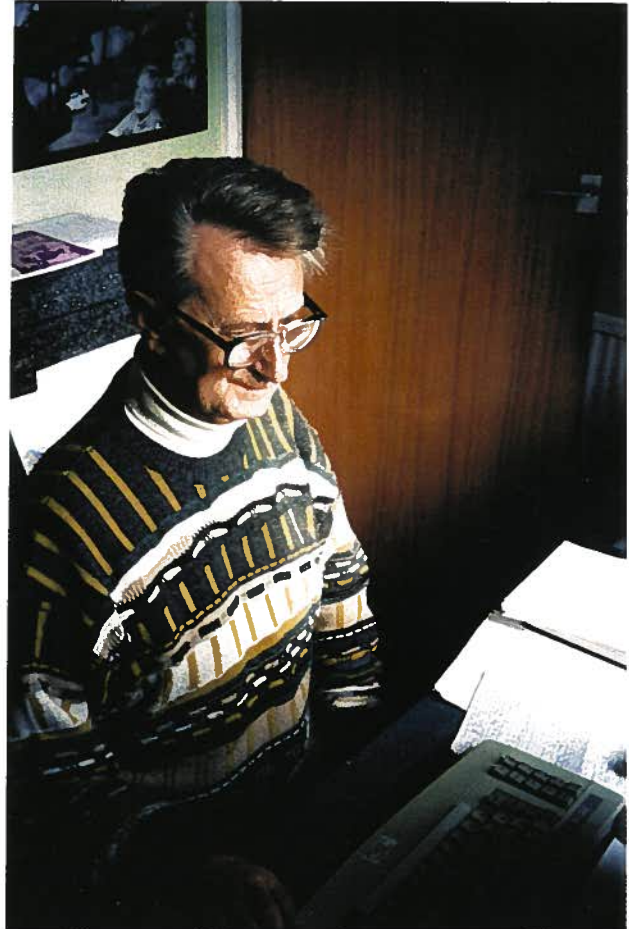
Why must we know the lives of teachers?

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## Chapter VI

### GATESHEAD: NOW

*G.B.: I think I am an opportunist...that I'm good at recognizing signs of an opportunity coming along and seizing it. I think that may be true of my private life...certainly true of my professional life...and that being so, it must also be true of my private life, although I find it more difficult to give examples from my private life. So, I seize the day, Carpe Diem...and enjoy it and experiment with it and relish it and push it forward. That's it, I think.*



**Work is Play**  
At home in the study

*I've reached a point in my life where I'm working so hard because I'm short of time and I think to myself, twenty years ago, I don't think I was working this hard! I don't think I felt under the same pressure that I'm putting on myself now...that's odd isn't it?*

But he, his own affections' counsellor,  
Is to himself - I will not say how true -  
But to himself so secret and so close,  
So far from sounding and discovery...

Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*; I i 150-3

### **The Life-long Learner**

A Reader<sup>12</sup> of Durham University, with a long, distinguished international career behind him, Gavin Bolton retired from his university position in 1989, knowing that there was much he had left undone. It was impossible for Gavin to enter retirement 'gracefully', and equally impossible was the thought of a complete retirement. Late in 1990, he found an appropriate challenge for his time when he invited Dorothy Heathcote to co-author a book on using **Mantle of the Expert**, her professional signature piece. While that work was ongoing, Gavin continued to accept teaching invitations around the world; one month in Budapest, the next in Vancouver. Still hungry to ask the questions that needed asking about his craft, to dig deeper, and to move forward, Gavin continued to write articles reflecting on his experiences, offering his latest thinking to any who were interested. Then, in 1993, Gavin, aware of a major gap in the literature, turned his eye toward the past and began writing his fifth book, a **History of Drama Education**.

It would be hard to name others who might be better qualified to tackle a

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<sup>12</sup> Reader is a prestigious position bestowed upon professors of British universities according to merit.

project of such magnitude. Even in his early publications, Gavin had an historian's sensitivity to the importance of the contributions of pioneers in the field. He was the first to establish a tangible thread of continuity between the first glimmerings of creative play in the classroom and the later development of the approach which came to be known as drama in education. There was never any question for Gavin that a debt was owed to the earlier work of people such as Henry Caldwell Cook and Harriet Findlay Johnson. Fittingly, as he himself matured as drama teacher, his exploration brought him into close contact with such significant figures in the world of classroom drama as Peter Slade, Brian Way and Dorothy Heathcote. Future generations will no doubt include Bolton in this company, but he himself resists any notion of himself as an innovator. However, he has had more than a little to do with the advancement of particular philosophical stances regarding drama worldwide, and his own contributions have been prolific.

Two intriguing points can be made about the History book project. The first has to do with the role of the author. As a significant contributor to the development of drama in education, Bolton has earned a place in the History, having devoted the greater part of forty years to exploring, promoting and tirelessly developing the field. Despite this, he has decided not to directly include his own work in the History, relying instead on the pioneers already mentioned. Something more than modesty is behind this. How can a legitimate History of educational drama in this century exclude its most prolific writer? Following his own definition of a 'pioneer' as, *"someone who's seen to make a breakthrough in practical teaching, somebody who writes about practical*

*teaching and someone who's written about in practical teaching"*, it is difficult not to locate Gavin in the pioneer category. Nevertheless, he has chosen to remain distanced, as a passionate but detached observer, and this is in keeping with his lifelong history of remaining on the periphery, determined to afford himself the widest possible perspective whilst still being able to focus on the smallest detail of importance.

The second item of interest is in regard to the conditions under which Gavin has placed himself to complete the book. Originally conceived as a long-term project for publication, the intention changed when the hint of a suggestion by a former colleague spurred Gavin to consider writing it as a doctoral dissertation instead. So, once the book is finished, Gavin will have completed the requirements for a PhD. What would cause him to seek the formality of the title, after his most distinguished career? Why would he choose to impose the academic pressure on himself? In the preface to *New Perspectives* (1991) he claims, *"one of the reasons I have enjoyed writing this book is that I have not felt bound by the rules of the 'academic game' "*; and in a later talk, *"I've had a feeling in the writing I've done in recent years, I don't care who sees this... and the titles have become more and more flamboyant, more metaphorical, arresting, I hope."* Both comments suggest a new-found sense of freedom - a release into writing from the heart.

Gavin's explanation, when pressed, is that the rigorous demands of the degree will force the standard of the work higher. However, there has never been anything but the highest standard evident in his work. As John Allen (1994)

comments, "...he pursues his theory and practice, reading more widely, investigating more profoundly, than anyone else I have come across." More easily accepted perhaps, might be Gavin's discomfort at having spent the major part of his career in a university setting, always striving (and assuming) *"to be the best at it."* Most of Gavin's former students who have gone on to influence educational drama around the world have earned doctoral degrees. Ambition, pride and dedication to the field are summoned together to complete this project/obsession.

Perhaps a further observation can shed light on Gavin's pursuit of the doctoral degree. Over the years that he spent at Durham University, Gavin diligently built his theory and practice in an atmosphere of semi-isolation. Initially disbelieving that drama education even had a place at the university level, Gavin *"stayed apart from other colleagues, in case somehow they discovered that drama was not important enough or was flawed in some way..."*; and this reluctance to enter into the discourse had significant consequences for the development of drama in education. In retrospect, Gavin was in the ideal position to forge links with leading psychologists, philosophers and sociologists, bringing the centrality of drama to all their disciplines into the open. Connections which might have been made, acknowledgement to the discipline given, were missed. But this is far easier to see from this vantage point. Gavin felt awkward talking to people who were not teachers, interested in drama in some way. He assumed that **they** knew what they were doing, that it was only drama that was struggling to find an identity, a false assumption, of course.



In hindsight, Gavin regrets not being more politically active in 'selling' drama to the public and the politicians, not just teachers:

*GB: Now, that is where I have been amiss...and I could have for twenty years pushed hard in that direction and didn't do so. If I had worked harder politically to sell the subject instead of merely working through teachers who were interested, if I had tackled all the other people linked with education, then I could have achieved something that would have put drama on a stronger footing. But I always avoided seeing myself as a political animal and I think that's been a big mistake.*

Since he has remained mostly apolitical<sup>13</sup> throughout his life, it is not surprising that he neglected opportunities to strengthen drama's shaky foothold. Drama education in Britain today is limited by government policies and an uninformed public. A real need exists for drama to be made important to the public and to other educators before it vanishes from curriculum altogether. In some way, the History may be Gavin's way of pushing for recognition of the outstanding work that has been achieved in drama education.

### **The Bridge Player**

Gavin has another major obsession: playing bridge. Since taking up the game with Cynthia, a shared activity amongst their many individual pursuits, Gavin has been a passionate player. Several hours per week are spent at the game in a variety of venues from large ballroom-size clubs, to an eightsome which was originally formed by the Boltons. Notorious for his aggressive play, Gavin

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<sup>13</sup> *GB: I'm not terribly interested in having a political ideology, so any strong feelings I have come and go according to what the situation is. I'm fascinated by Marxist theory and it intrigues me, but that's as near as I get to it. Somebody standing on the other side of the river looking across at the attraction on the other side. But that I get that far is an indication that I'm left-wing. And of course, in terms of government, I absolutely loathe people like Margaret Thatcher...ever since she got in, I've suffered.*

takes the game very seriously, noting, *"I don't have many regrets in life, but one of them is that I didn't start playing bridge earlier."* The appeal of the game for Gavin is multi-faceted. It involves skilful reading on several levels: the reading of the cards according to their distribution amongst the other hands; the reading of opponents, and matching their playing policies with the possible cards they are holding. Also, there is a competitive edge at the level of play. Gavin and Cynthia are now comfortable with, although Gavin points out: *"it's not the winning so much as setting a standard for myself that I don't want to fall short of...it's more to do with self-esteem, knowing that you've done something well, that you've pulled off something that was clever..."*. Such standards are not always easy on a player's partner, and Cynthia, asked to describe Gavin as a bridge partner replied, "he can be a real b...oh, I was almost going to swear; he can get me so mad sometimes!" Gavin readily admits that he is even willing to sacrifice domestic harmony when a game of bridge is at stake. He isn't really part of a 'team' when he's playing, and he clearly expresses his displeasure with what he sees as damaging strategies played by his partner. Ever the lone wolf...

Devotion to bridge has consumed life in the Bolton household to the point where many weekends away are 'bridge holidays', rambles around Britain in order to compete in enormous and intense tournaments. A winner's trophy now occupies a prominent place in the sitting room; last year there were several more which have now been passed on to other winning competitors. The social aspect of playing is also important to both Gavin and Cynthia, allowing them to keep a wide circle of friends and active involvement in the community. But,

Gavin's reputation is legendary. As one who formerly fit into the category of 'friendly competition', John O'Toole states, "I'd just like to mention the aspect of Gavin's personality which I find most perplexing and which I cannot fit into anything of the Gavin that I have known and worked with for years...and that is his behaviour at the bridge table! He is a ferociously competitive player, ruthless..." Although Gavin competes mostly against himself at the bridge table, he places high demands on his partner. Fortunately, Cynthia more than meets the challenge.

### **The Volunteer**

A distinct sideline to Gavin's teaching career emerged during his tenure at Durham, and that was in his use of drama to effect change among psychiatric patients. Once a week, over a period of about five years, Gavin, accompanied by small groups of students, visited a nearby hospital to work with patients. Originally, the idea came from a therapist whose notion was that Gavin would do plays, but it soon became clear that Gavin's manner of working was having remarkable results with many individuals. Although the work was unpaid, Gavin became intrigued by the possibilities and limitations of such work, developing strategies that would elicit responses. Gavin's current position as a volunteer counsellor seems a natural extension of his interests from this earlier period. In his position as volunteer, Gavin has fulfilled a personal need to give of himself to others who are suffering.

Both Gavin and Cynthia volunteer for an organization called 'Victim Support'

which can demand anywhere from three to ten or more hours a week. The organization, staffed by volunteers, exists to support both adults and children whose lives have been fractured in some way by a severe trauma, including robbery, murder, assault. Once connected with a client, there may be weekly or bi-weekly visits to deal with the recovery.

In doing the work, Gavin has found a satisfying personal return from his contact with clients. An association with one man in particular, Malcolm, has developed into a kind of extended dialogue, an opportunity for both to explore ideas that arise from the therapy sessions. Mutual respect is the basis for the success of this relationship. Gavin values Malcolm's gift for metaphorical thinking, finding in it a resonance similar to that of Dorothy Heathcote's.

It was immediately clear when Gavin began to tell me about Malcolm that he had been moved by his contact with him. Because Gavin listens deeply, the early conversations with Malcolm hinted to Gavin that here he would find valuable dialogue; fresh insight. For Malcolm, with whom I had a long conversation, Gavin is a teacher, a man who can "recognize the truth in somebody...and never ever judges." Interestingly, he views Gavin as a teacher, not because Gavin instructs him directly, but because Gavin embodies, in their sessions together, the pedagogical philosophies that make learning happen even (or perhaps especially) when it is unexpected by the learner. Malcolm observes:

He allows you to go on where you want to go...and he never ever judges. He's like a torch, helping you to light your way. But that's inanimate, not as good...if there was a place where all the answers were, that would be Gavin, a Wise Man, but once you thought you'd found the answers, it would get harder because he would show you that you'd

need to find them yourself.

In an uncanny way, Malcolm, while talking about Gavin as counsellor, found ways to address Gavin in terms that would have been equally suited to referring to Gavin as teacher. For example, Malcolm felt highly valued as an individual by Gavin, never cut short or dismissed in any way. Even when his own thoughts felt tangled, Malcolm trusted that when Gavin "...comes to a thought he doesn't understand, he will play with it." While clearly there is gratitude in Malcolm's impression of Gavin there is also deep understanding of the qualities which give Gavin an edge in the classroom. His compassion, integrity and courage registered sharply for Malcolm. In fact, Malcolm had explored some aspects of Gavin's teaching out of curiosity, including watching videotapes of Gavin teaching. Although he has no background in education, he could still make connections between the kind of work he was doing with Gavin and the work the students were engaged in. At one point, when Gavin knew he would be away for several weeks, necessitating a break from their regular meeting times, Gavin asked Malcolm to prepare a picture for his return. The picture was to be a simple representation of how Malcolm saw himself in his family. Reluctant to try it at first, Malcolm soon began to enjoy the shift of perspective he was able to gain by examining himself in this way that allowed him to stand outside himself and yet still be in control of the event. The picture became an elaborate, colourful depiction full of symbolism and rich detail about things that Malcolm could not address directly, but found a voice for through this other medium.

When I mentioned to Malcolm that Gavin had consistently referred to the

'luckiness' of his own life, Malcolm firmly shook his head and corrected me. Thoroughly familiar with Gavin's modesty, Malcolm was not prepared to let such a glib explanation pass for Gavin's accomplishments:

His courage he has always called luck. It's the kind of courage that when you see a rose, you'll take it, no matter how many thorns it has in it - no matter how much it rips your hands to shreds.

Gavin's objective for the clients he sees is basically the same no matter the specific circumstance of their difficulty: to help them find, in their unique connection to themselves, a connection to the larger human community.

It would be a mistake to believe as Gavin seems to, that his successes have been due to circumstance and luck. The absence of his own sense of agency in his telling of his life story is indicative of a selective memory, a case perhaps of the 'Director' controlling the events destined to be viewed by an audience. Gavin Bolton's writing, which always explores his own teaching and learning, reve(a)ls far more in recounting failure than success. Willingness to hold professionally difficult moments up to the light has been one of his hallmarks; especially notable because until the mid-Eighties, there were no detailed criticisms of his work being published. In essence, even though he craved criticism, it was not forthcoming and he tried to provide it himself. He was forced to move ahead in his theoretical grasp of the nature of the field by relying on his own self-reflexivity.

### **In the Moment**

*GB: I am at my happiest when I simply walk into my little study and work at my word processor.*

Retirement. Freedom. Time. So what does Gavin do?

Nearly every morning, he slips into that little study. Not much bigger than a good-sized closet, but with a south-facing window to brighten it, the study is a private haven, his own corner of the world. It is understood that while he is there he is not to be disturbed. Papers are stacked wall-to-wall on the floor; the desk, table and filing cabinet are home to books open to pertinent sections, and stacks of others waiting; notepads filled with quotations and references are ready for inserting into the latest project; what appears at first glance to be a disorderly chaos soon reveals itself as a place of readiness, for the work never stops, it only suffers temporary interruption. On the wall: a 1970's picture of Gavin with young students, and a picture of Andrew, probably age eight or so; both black and white.

He is an avid reader, enjoying all kinds of novels, theoretical books on education, and currently, in conjunction with his History project, he is concentrating on archival education texts. Gavin finds reading plays difficult, the dialogue is frustrating as dialogue. Ever the detective, Gavin is interested in the potential of the subtext more than the scripted text. Instead of reading scripts in their entirety, he prefers short excerpts of scripted dialogue that he can set a task to in a drama.

In retirement, it is inevitable that big questions are asked, particularly by those whose work lives have been vigorous. When a person has identified so strongly with the work that he can unflinchingly state, *"My work is very much who I*

*am"*, it is possible that the questions are intensified. Gavin has remained inspired by the field of drama in education for forty years and continues to delve into interesting pockets of theory and practice, urged on by his *"immense curiosity."* Still, there is now a greater consciousness of age than ever before, a knowledge that the formal work is done and a pressing need to push further on, *"trying to see a complete picture."* For Gavin the awareness centres around a perception of Being: *"You begin to say: 'What sort of age am I, who am I supposed to BE now that I'm retired?'"* It seems that Gavin has sought answers to the questions by continuing to involve himself in active pursuit of the kind of work he most enjoys - writing and working with notions of drama.

The ongoing dedication to the writing still provokes a resigned response from Cynthia, for it means that he is often "holed up in THAT room again" leaving her to maintain social contacts and keep up with her own activities for considerable blocks of time. The writing has always been an integral component of Gavin's academic career: never a chore and, during his tenure, not the pressurized prerequisite for academic advancement it has since become. The impetus to write grew out of the practice, not from academic ambition. Gavin notes that when he was awarded a senior lectureship and an accounting of articles was made, he substantially outstripped his colleagues, but he makes clear, it was *"never with that intention."*

The time Gavin has spent on his great passion for drama has had its effect on family relationships. The relationship between father and son is more strained than Gavin would like it to be, but it is difficult to turn back time. Andrew's



family visits to Gavin and Cynthia are infrequent, which is disappointing for them as grandparents and uncomfortable for all when the visits do occur. Although Gavin and Cynthia were thrilled to become grandparents, proximity to their two granddaughters is not easily arranged and they do not have as much contact as they would like. Ironically, Gavin and Cynthia are quite close to the five nieces and nephews, children of Gavin's brother. They have made a sort of 'favourite uncle' figure out of Gavin, a role he relishes.

Andrew Bolton is now an accomplished music teacher, and Cynthia points out that recently, he and his father have enjoyed talking about their work together, a common ground for discussion and discovery. Discussing any personal issue is uncomfortable for Gavin; he is far more at ease with his professional interests than with emotionally-based discussions. [After reading this Gavin responded: *I may not choose to discuss personal issues - but not out of discomfort*]. It is easy to see how his connections with his son are strengthened by their common professional backgrounds.

Gavin does not hold sentimental views of his world. He is most concerned with present time in his own life. Paradoxically, a great deal of his work centres on historical time, seemingly in an attempt to make the past alive for students, but perhaps also a chance for him to capture a rootedness and connection to what has been.

*GB: If at any point in my career or in my life or in my marriage you'd said, 'what is...have been, your happiest moments?'... the answer's always been NOW. Every, everything, every phase has somehow felt, this is it, this is right... and that's how retirement has been, for both of us. We cannot think of anything that's been better.*

The eagerness with which Gavin embraces the present is equally matched by the enthusiasm with which he discards the past. (What **has** survived in the Bolton household are paintings by a much younger Andrew; still displayed with pride). Gavin was astonished to find the picture of himself with the Youth Theatre Group which opened this (re) telling of his story. Oddly, it had survived several purges of 'clutter' deemed unnecessary by Gavin<sup>14</sup>. And, although he was surprised to have found it, he did not allow his pleasure at seeing a very happy moment from his past to become sentimental. It was important, he said, *"because of what it reveals"*, although as he studied the forty year old photo, I could see a nostalgic sparkle in his eye.

Gavin often appears to be withholding his feelings from public view. Whether conscious or not, his intense preoccupation with observing and absorbing his immediate circumstances leaves others guessing about his inner responses. Occasionally, while watching television, Cynthia has even prodded Gavin to laugh at something he has, in actuality, been enjoying immensely, but appears to be scowling at while he deciphers the techniques of the performer. His reluctance to be engaged in spontaneous emotional impulse can easily be misread. It stems not from someone cold and unfeeling, but, paradoxically, from someone who feels and experiences even small, ordinary things, profoundly.

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<sup>14</sup> Gavin is quick to discard his past, to move beyond remnants and reminders. He dwells as much as possible in the present. He does not keep a journal, old letters, or photographs. That a few remain in an old shoe-box was a piece of luck for this biography. The only exception, which even surprised Gavin, was a single letter from a former student. When I asked why that particular one had been preserved, Gavin replied, "Because I think someday that person will be famous."

Gavin notes a tendency in himself to become bored with successes. He dispenses with the past and neglects aspects of his work that don't appeal to him, dwelling instead on areas which excite his energy. This has had consequences for his work in drama, creating blindspots which invite criticism. For example, although Gavin has been aware of the subject-specific vocabulary in drama education, he has not given much time to articulating useful definitions for other educators. Similarly, although claiming an understanding of and empathy for the daily classroom requirements of regular teachers, he has given short shrift to anything to do with assessment and evaluation. Despite the disclaimer in the recent publication, *New Perspectives*(1992): "*such neglect does not mean I have no ideas on the subject*" there is a disappointingly limited discussion of this pertinent contemporary educational issue in his work.

Just as in his professional work Gavin avoids the less appealing (to him) aspects, in his home life he is likely to ignore such 'chores' as putting up a shelf, washing the car or writing thank-you letters, although he does most of the household cleaning. He calls on Cynthia, who is naturally handy, to fix the vacuum cleaner when it needs repair, to fasten the electrical plug to the wire, and to do all the gardening. The unusually high standards he holds for work and bridge collapse in front of less weighty responsibilities!

Gavin seeks intensity from his life. He is not interested in second-rate performances from himself or others. He willingly gives of himself, more often liking than disliking someone, generously extending his time to those who need it, complying with professional requests to lecture, even when it would be

easier not to accept. It is difficult for Gavin to relax fully, to let go of the rigorous, self-imposed need to *"be the best"* that has defined him since childhood. His passions have been more worldly than earthy. His chivalrous images of 'woman' have held true. She is to be adored from a distance, gallantly flirted with and left forever, pure. While he may not be sentimental, this romantic notion of a distant love fits well with his role as the loner. His castle has always been Cynthia's, his quest ever knowledge. Those who have glimpsed the spontaneous, fun-loving Gavin though, know the heartiness of his laughter, his impish delight in a shared moment of humour, the mirth that bubbles under the surface, (particularly merry on the infrequent occasions when he is slightly tipsy). Even his joy is intense, although not easily detected by an observer. He personifies privacy, but needs a public world.

## **INTERVAL 6**

Friday, March 17, 1995

Gavin is not good at sitting still when TIME is a factor, so we leave for the bus station one hour before my scheduled departure. It's just as well, as Gavin takes the wrong bridge into town and we end up further away than expected. Again, he insists on carrying my bag to the check-in and then - we both don't quite know what to say. So we hug and say nothing but "Thanks" and off he goes.

The journey back to London is momentous: heavy rain, sleet, gale-force winds and snow! I settle in for the trip with the Iris Murdoch novel Cynthia has given me, one of her favourites.

### **London**

When I finally return to the hotel, I take a moment to savour the week. For a moment, I enjoy the release from worry about everything going smoothly, and the satisfaction of knowing that this phase is complete with only the final leg ahead. For five days I have been privileged by the proximity I have had to my subject. I recognize now that the time signifies a much deeper meaning than I could have imagined before experiencing it. I left Canada not knowing what I wanted to know, trusting that my instinct would guide my choices and it did. Whatever it has been, cannot be changed. I would not change it if I could.

**MEDITATION**  
**PERSONAL PEDAGOGY: WRITING a CREDO**

Finding a way to teach is the most prolonged professional journey.

How does a teacher come to discover the kind of teaching that is personally significant, and further, having an inkling of what and how that teacher might be, how does a teacher go about integrating the deeper felt, intuitive self into the rigidity of systematized education?

What shapes us as teachers? Significant events? Childhood passions? Adult dreams? Family background? Former teachers?

Are there particular qualities recognizable as unique to teachers?

## **Chapter VII**

### **A PLACE OF PEDAGOGY**

Knowing where we come from in our pedagogical practice isn't always easy. Sometimes we can identify a particular teacher whose style we wish to emulate. Perhaps we have experienced a personal struggle which has been overcome in our own learning that makes us want to help students with similar difficulties. Maybe somewhere in the past, a teacher or friend recognized the 'teacher' in us and named it, so we, too, could recognize it and carry it to new places. Only one thing is certain about teaching: when we find the place where who we are and where we are become synchronous, pedagogy becomes a lifestyle, not a practice.

The learning that is shared between teachers is not often acknowledged so openly as the exchange between Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote has been. It might appear that the ideas have flown more freely from one than the other, Bolton more often on the receiving end. He has always regarded her as his mentor. But, for a period in their respective careers, these two unique practitioners consciously influenced each other. There were things to be gained on both sides. Dorothy Heathcote describes their working relationship as characterized by the different challenges they've thrown out to each other, a habit which developed early on and still continues; not really competitive, but stimulating. Gavin has the sharp analytical skills which detect Heathcote's labyrinthine strategizing; Dorothy possesses the metaphorical mind which intrigues Bolton and inspires his deeper study.

Heathcote has always been more comfortable in the role of maverick, confident in her intuition, unconcerned about whether or not anyone else understood what she was doing. Bolton, conservative and a historian at heart, has left a trail. The task has fallen to Bolton to articulate what both of them believed to be 'right' about the work, to find the drama in learning.

I have compiled, edited and reconstructed the two monologues which follow from interviews with Bolton and Heathcote. Although earlier in their careers both of them have written about their impressions of the other elsewhere, these views are recent, recorded during the last year. I think a shift in perspective has come for both of them with the distance of time. The words are their own, the structure imposed. The reader might discover that much is revealed about each speaker as they talk about the other.



**Friends and Colleagues**  
Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote  
March, 1995



### **Bolton on Heathcote**

*Dorothy has taught me so much about how to work with children that it would be difficult to know where to begin. Some of the conceptions that she shared with me that changed my whole professional style of teaching include things like: creating drama with the whole class; taking risks - to start things off not knowing where they're going to go; the use of teacher in role; and she taught me a seriousness... how to adopt a seriousness in drama-making which at the time was very useful, but I think has become too much of a posture among drama teachers and a little bit of relaxation should have been retained in my view. I mean, Dorothy's whole demeanour is so serious in the doing of the drama, everything taken so seriously, nobody's allowed for one moment to be flippant. This impressed me and I adopted it and used it and it was only as years went by that I realized it had been overdone.*

*Early on, Dorothy and I set ourselves the task of attending whatever conferences were going on in drama, and we'd watch Peter Slade and Brian Way work. But she also hid herself under a bushel all the time! I knew people around England who were interested in drama, but she didn't and they didn't know her. I would go to a conference and mention Dorothy Heathcote and they'd say WHO?*

*So I brought her out!! I used to insist that she attend conferences with me...I used to drive her around...and she didn't really fit in. I think she felt she was under some obligation to please me and go along. And people didn't like her. She was too strange...talked a different language.*

*I once wrote a short paper and it included a summary of how I saw Dorothy Heathcote's approach to teaching drama which didn't please her too much, I realized afterwards, because she said she'd read it. Subsequently I realized THAT was very unusual and she said she'd read it and it was so good she wished SHE'D written it. It was then I realized that at that stage, Dorothy had not put anything on paper that could be satisfactorily understood. I think she recognized that what I was saying was true to her work, but I think she would have preferred to be the one writing it at that moment. But I didn't see it that way, I just knew there was something not quite right in her reaction.*

*Perhaps most interesting in my developments are the periods I've gone through since meeting Dorothy. Fortunately, we moved away from the 'gut-level' which was virtually impossible for teachers. I think the way Dorothy and I went about teaching this new approach to drama did a lot of harm.*

*I've just examined a doctoral thesis where the writer talked about the influence of Dorothy Heathcote, Augusto Boal and Brecht as the three dynamic teachers of the twentieth century. You know... Dorothy would never read a book on education...or never read a book that somebody's written on drama education. If I write a book I send her a copy and I know she's not going to read it...she'll say things like "I passed it on to Marianne" (her daughter).*

*Now, of course, I have this astonishing position<sup>15</sup> of recognizing in an unqualified way, the strength of Dorothy's Mantle of the Expert approach; seeing it as the way of teaching for the future, whilst remaining uncomfortable using it as a method myself. All my professional life, anything I've said that should be done, I've been able to stand up and be counted and say "I will show you how to do it." So with my head, I'm recognizing that it (Mantle of the Expert) should be the basis of all teacher training, with my heart I'm keeping quiet about it!*

*Dorothy and I took to each other straight away. I think she was looking for a soulmate. Meeting her was the luckiest moment of my professional life.*

### **Heathcote on Bolton**

I had a friend, in Durham she was called Mary Robson...and she said, "There's a new Drama Advisor - why don't we have him over?" So Gavin came with his son who was then about two and with Cynthia for tea. Andrew was trundling a little bus along the corridor and I walked in and I had a very bad cold and there was Gavin. I remember thinking, "Right, the thing to do here is now to say, "why don't we go into a school together?" and so I said "Would you like to go to a school together and I'll teach a class and you'll teach a class and he said, "YES!"

So the very next week, Gavin and I sail into a school and it was decided that Gavin would teach first and I would teach second and I knew from the beginning, I mean I knew right from the very first that here was a person that was worth contending with. And I mean that in a positive way and there's never been a patronage either way.

But he started teaching and he was going through exercises, lying on the floor relaxing and I thought, "Oh, this is it! I either say nothing and we're off on the wrong foot forever, or I say "What the hell are you doing?" and I knew I had to do that. So, we talked at playtime and he was quite pleased the way the children had behaved. He said, "Well?"

And I said, "Why did they have to lie on the floor?"

and he said, " Well, I wanted them to get relaxed."

and I said, "Why did you want them to get relaxed?"

and he said, "Well, I think it's a good way to get them started."

and I said, "Well, I think it's a STUPID way to get them started. I think it's nonsense!"

... and that stubborn wall comes up, it still does happen you know.

So he said, "Well, let's see..."

And so I went straight into the energy they'd brought in - red cheeks and bushy tails, so I began with red cheeks and bushy tails, you see.

That was our first lesson together and we went away quite thoughtful. Him

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<sup>15</sup> Gavin recently co-authored Drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert' approach to education. Heinemann, 1995.

more than me, because he'd be thinking, digesting, sorting out what he would keep. And I was thinking, "I know I'm right." That's the way I am.

I've always been very intrigued by where Gavin is, because he's moved in and out of what I'd call neat layers of development. I don't mean without inspiration and new thoughts, he's always getting a new thought. So that's how we met.

I might refine, but I don't think I've ever changed, but with Gavin, his changes are like layers of silt and soil from the early sun; whereas mine is a vortex, a cauldron...I see his layers and layers slowly built up with rockbottom theoretical understanding. My theory is always flying in at one ear all the time and being churned around, joining up in some vague way but only affirming what I knew for years...which is absolute arrogance, of course.

We don't meet socially, we always meet when we have some reason for meeting, but it's a warm friendship when we're at it. I wouldn't be interested to go and have coffee with him regularly unless we had a reason. Because in a way, I carry him around anyway, you know he's just up the road, and he's just here (patting shoulder). Like most people you're concerned with, you know they're only just there...

When he does come about something, it's always THAT interesting - Right, come on then, I'm going to take you on again... and I know that he'll tidy my writing and he doesn't do a bad job, but he doesn't get me. But I don't mind because I don't care about books like that...

He's a very practical man...

I've always loved teaching with him...

He's constantly experimenting...

He'll have obsessions - "Why does that work?"

Gavin is so open to other people's ideas that he can hear what they are saying...

Gavin doesn't blame, never blames...

He is total attention - watching, rationalizing, understanding, comprehending, considering...

I think he's enormously warm and kind. He's been such a joy to work with.

He really cares about his ideals for learning...you know, his writing will be remembered and he'll leave a much clearer vision and mark which is generous, whereas a lot of people will only leave ungenerous...If you think of a footprint in the sand, I think Gavin's will go forward, whereas I will become a myth. They'll probably have a notion there was once this really unusual teacher who maybe thought she was God, or a bit guru-ish; nobody can be her again,

nobody can do what she did... But I don't think there'll be a sort of considering of what I tried to say...Now Gavin always says, and he says at the end of our book, "She's a teacher that is ahead of her time" and I think he's right, I think I am; but it's no good being ahead. So, maybe Gavin's PhD will leave the odd footprint that might be possible for people to follow, to know...

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Anyone who has studied with Gavin Bolton or has been a colleague, or an observer, will have seen a Master teacher at work. All would agree that he achieves his goals effectively, even if they might disagree with the objectives and approach. Yet, my hunch is that Gavin is not a 'natural' teacher.

He has had to 'learn' what teaching is to him. By testing his thinking over time, evaluating techniques, devising strategies; analyzing experience, and writing he has forged a theory that is grounded in the most practical terms: the life of the classroom. It is important, I think, to reiterate that his theory has emerged from his knowledge of classroom practice. He has been there. He knows it. The school culture is part of his experience. He has designed a theory and practice of drama education that reflects his own need for personal distance, which, paradoxically, is the very thing that allows students the safety to probe deeply into important issues.

It has been said by some observers of Bolton and Heathcote that he has always played 'second fiddle' to Dorothy. Early on, while he was actively in a state of inquiry about her work it may have appeared that he simply mirrored what he understood about Heathcote's practice. I think it would be false, however, to

assume that the range and direction of Bolton's work has been dictated by Heathcote's - their respective contributions are distinct in theory and practice.

Conversely, many people would consider Dorothy Heathcote a 'natural teacher' because her approach, although tested in the classroom experience, relies to a great extent on her trust in herself, her knowing, her intuition. Dorothy and Gavin have complementary but vastly different styles of thinking. Dorothy does not have the ingrained reflex of day-to-day instruction and school system realities that Gavin does. Perhaps this is partly responsible for the frequent reaction teachers have when considering both Heathcote and Bolton - that Heathcote is magical, but Bolton is practical. Gavin recalls someone once saying, "I watch Dorothy Heathcote teach and think, 'How wonderful, I could never do that.' And you watch Gavin Bolton teach and think, 'Ah that's interesting, I could do that!'" which prompted Gavin to comment:

*It may be that I've made a different approach, from the traditional teaching of theatre accessible to teachers, accessible in practical terms and in some theoretical terms. So if I've been influential at all, that's the line of influence, I think.*

Teachers are seldom rewarded for their pedagogical expertise aside from the intrinsic rewards of the classroom. Many would be unable to articulate a statement which could sum up their philosophy toward education and their profession. Gavin Bolton's pedagogical credo: **to always dig deeper**, contains the kernel of all his work. In helping to reveal the underlying subtext of human events to students, he propels them toward a connection with the world and their own humanity. Bolton's style, strategies and jargon may have changed but the pedagogical purpose has been constant. Each participant in drama deserves

to examine their own beliefs in the light of the broadest socio-cultural context they can manage.

## INTERVAL 7

March 21, 1995

Vancouver, B.C., Canada

When I arrived yesterday at the airport, I was overwhelmed with the deep joy I feel each time I return to Vancouver. The air, the colours, the expanse of ocean pull and hold me to this geography. Of course, I appreciate it even more by contrasting it with the grimy, chaotic density of the London I have just left behind.

I position myself in front of the computer in anticipation. Will the words now come as they must? How do I give the reader a glimpse of the week I have just spent with Gavin? I don't feel panic. I must trust that the ideas I have about Gavin and his life stories will appear as I write. The task must be taken in small chunks. I will write every day for a month. I promise not to censor my words. I will not play editor before I have let my thoughts spill onto the page. My goal will be one thousand words each day. My place of writing will become my haven. I must dwell in the writer's space with pleasure.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **GEO/GRAPHIC: AN INTERNATIONAL PROFILE**

In 1991, Gavin Bolton, as Keynote speaker, addressed the British Columbia Drama Educators Annual Conference with a paper which began "As I was walking on Wreck Beach..." and of course with the actor's skill he possesses, paused appropriately for the wave of laughter that engulfed the audience. The paper, concerned with what drama teachers need to look at in the classroom, invited teachers to question the ways drama is used in the classroom. Wreck Beach is a 'nude' beach. Bolton's suggestion that in an effort to look between the bodies in an attempt to avoid meaningful awareness, a great deal is lost, was apt for the audience that day. It also demonstrated a sense of the connection between the body and space and the direct impact that relationship can have on how new understandings are written into experience.

Bolton was invited to Lesotho, Southern Africa in 1969. For the first time, a group of teachers outside Britain would hear about this approach to drama in education. Over the next three decades the drive to make his work international in scope would take Bolton to more than a dozen countries. Two or three times a year Gavin would leave England to lecture and give workshops, often six to eight weeks at a time.

Repeat visits were made to many countries, but he has forged stronger affiliations in some places than others. Where interest in the work has been highest, new generations of educators have opted to continue exploring the



work, making it the basis for their university teacher training programs. (Ironically, while the 'torch' illuminating drama in education was taken up by scholars around the world, in Britain, the depressed economy and government policies in education were snuffing out any real chance to advance the work in English classrooms. A back-to-basics philosophy, coupled with the reality of an unskilled labour force means that the arts in general and drama in particular have been marginalized).

Nevertheless, there can be no question that his influence has been felt around the globe. In 1975, he received the Phi Beta Award from the American Theatre Association bestowed on those who make outstanding contributions to Children's Theatre. He is in constant demand as a Keynote Speaker at major international conferences. Perhaps most telling, his work is still the cornerstone around which the work of many educators is centred, as well as the spark which ignites controversy in the professional journals of the field.

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### **Contrasting Sites**

During the last quarter century, Bolton's visiting lecture appointments and keynote speaking engagements have taken him to South Africa, Canada, the United States, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Iceland, Finland, Israel, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Portugal and Italy. Each visit has sifted its own layer of understanding onto the existing layers of Bolton's knowledge. Each new place has opened up vistas of possibility for hundreds of teachers and Bolton as well. It would be true to say that in each location, some have resisted

the work and some have embraced it. This has meant an ongoing, public and passionate dialogue about what it means to use drama in classrooms. This is what has pushed the work beyond itself. Teaching is about moving further.

### **Toronto, Ontario Canada**

Gavin first visited Toronto, Ontario, in 1972, at the invitation of John and Juliana Saxton. It was the beginning of a longlasting relationship between Gavin and Canadian teachers that Gavin recalls commenced with a very funny incident:

*GB: The man who invited me wanted to vet me first and come over, and his name was John Saxton. He was staying in a first class hotel in Newcastle and I was to meet him there. I remember being early in the foyer watching people come out of the lift wondering which one was going to be he; suddenly this very big man with huge check trousers, vivid check trousers, stepped out, and I thought OH, I hope it's not going to be him and of course it was! And I had this picture of taking him around school; it wasn't a piece of fantasy on my part because the very first school we arrived at, we arrived at playtime when the schoolground was full of children. And every child on that playground stopped playing and fell silent as I walked through the yard with these check trousers!*

The first of several visits there in the seventies, he would return to Ontario and British Columbia many times. At the University of Toronto, he found a soulmate in Norah Morgan, who was teaching in the Faculty of Education. So precious was the working relationship and friendship shared by Gavin and Norah that he dedicated his first book to her. (I wondered momentarily, how that had felt to Cynthia). They valued each other for the clarity of thought and integrity each brought to the work. Norah recalls:

He visited me at our home in the country at weekends after the courses

finished. We sat in the sun and talked about 'work'. He spoke of his failures in Toronto that summer, never his successes, but during the reflections, he showed me what he had learned from those failures. He taught me to reflect critically and honestly on my work.

In Norah, Gavin found a warm and intelligent teacher with whom an instant bond was created which flourishes still. Mutual friend and colleague Juliana Saxton winks and says it has something to do with their both being English! Hours were spent *"sitting on her balcony or by her pool, hammering out a concept of drama education."*

(During my visit to England, a recent picture of Norah's husband and grandson is retrieved from amongst the very few photos that Gavin keeps. They are heading out in the sunshine to cut the grass - carrying scythes!)

It is difficult to tell where any single influence will lead in a teacher's life. In Norah's case, belief in the work she has explored with Gavin has only intensified over the years, leading to her long distance, successful collaboration with Juliana Saxton on several informative texts for teachers.

There appears to be a distinct correlation between one's conception of education in general, and the degree to which Gavin Bolton's approach to drama can be embraced. If the philosophical thrust is towards a critical pedagogy, aiming to empower, seek equality and collaboration, then Bolton's work provides a challenging model. If, on the other hand, the desired outcome is product oriented, his theories may appear to be too ambiguous and mystifying. In the most general terms however, teacher education programs in some parts of Canada, predominantly British Columbia and Ontario, have paid close attention to Bolton's work, merging his theoretical foundations with their own practical applications.

**Lesotho**  
**Southern Africa**

The luxury of using education solely for entertainment is not feasible, appropriate or possible in South Africa. According to Esther van Ryswyk (1995):

So significant was Gavin's contribution to the conference (1980), and to the development of educational drama in South Africa that the time before Gavin's visit is still referred to as 'the pre-Bolton era'. Alternatively, people discuss the 1980 conference as 'the Bolton experience'. Without doubt, the work and influence of Gavin Bolton on the thinking, understanding and practical implementation of educational drama and theatre was a watershed in the history of education in this country.

It seems that no matter where Gavin has gone, certain groups are ready to grasp the full range of what he is offering and others are not. There is no big leap to be made in order to see how South African teachers, aiming to make steps towards ending Apartheid, could interpret Bolton's approach as "a way to bring about a change in understanding in the hearts of South African people on a political level" (van Ryswyk, 1995). Lesotho holds a special place in Gavin's memory:

*GB: This was my first time in any other country! It widened my vision of the world; made me conscious of apartheid, as I had to pass through Johannesburg. My lessons related to the school textbooks on learning the English language (compulsory and very old-fashioned) so I tried to teach how they might dramatise the recitation of phrases. With the teachers I did "What shall we make up a play about?"; when they chose 'witches' I did not at first appreciate that this was for them very real and taboo - the school inspectors watching got very hot under the collar, especially when the participants chose to be 'witches that danced naked in the forest at night'!*

It is inspiring to see the long-term effect that one man's ideas can have on generations of students and teachers. As van Ryswyk notes:

Now we have our first democratically elected government. Now, as

before, there is much work to be done. SAADYT (South African Association for Drama and Youth Theatre) members, some of whom go back in their knowledge and experience of drama as far as the very first contact with Gavin and most of whom have wrestled with his theories and practices in their own contexts for years, are now in positions of authority and influence. They are involved in setting up national arts education policies, and Gavin's influence can therefore be felt at the heart of the emerging new drama syllabi.

The travelling has also had some effect in reverse, for naturally, Gavin has been shaped by his exposure to new cultures, new values, new artistic motivations, different educational settings and agendas. Gavin demonstrates an awareness of world issues in his work, although they are not a focus, a negligence for which he has been criticised. His sensitivity to the immediate setting in which he is teaching is also evident in the work he does. Gavin would be the first to perceive a group's discomfort with an idea and would be able to turn it to a teaching opportunity, whether the discomfort was language-based, cultural, or artistic.

Exposure to an international stage has put Gavin in contact with some of today's most influential practitioners in theatre and education. Gavin was a participant in the first English speaking group that Augusto Boal was contracted to teach. He has observed and participated in several Boal workshops over the years, and has a critical admiration of his work. Although Bolton values the imaginative approach that Boal employs, he is less keen on the heavy emphasis given to games, and the seeming lack of effort on Boal's part to adapt the contextual roots of Forum Theatre<sup>16</sup> to other foreign audiences.

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<sup>16</sup> Boal's technique of Forum Theatre was devised to empower South American peasants with political awareness and to arm them with an active tool of resistance.

Further, Bolton sees Boal as being uninterested in the work of anyone else (similarly, Dorothy Heathcote), a position which, in Gavin's opinion, is untenable.

Despite Bolton's good intentions, sincerity and total attention to the moment, it is still virtually impossible to forget that here is a privileged, highly educated, white male whose every utterance proclaims the Queen's English and a set of values that is embedded deeply in his life. Every time Bolton arrives at a new location, a whole set of expectations about his demeanour and character have already been determined. People expect a VIP with the stature of an international scholar. It isn't necessarily a clash of cultures, simply that there must always be some distance between the students and the teacher because of the places in which their experiences have been written<sup>17</sup>. To some considerable extent, Gavin can overcome the shortfall because of his acute attentiveness and ability to read the students with whom he is working. There may also be a possibility that the age difference that now exists between Gavin and students (adult and child alike) could contribute to slightly awkward interactions. Age can have a distancing effect, both sides feeling the other slightly 'out of touch'. The barrier reflects another instance where Gavin has chosen to remain slightly removed from a deep connection. Granted, present day classroom teachers are well aware of a new and brasher student who plays the school game by a different set of rules, more difficult to reach, more resistant to connection.

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<sup>17</sup> Observers of Gavin and Dorothy at work in the North of England have commented that there is no sense of this kind of barrier as teachers and students share the same geographic experience. Ironically, Bolton at least, seems to have had a greater influence around the world than in his own immediate vicinity .

Still, in the end, drama seems able to create the bridge that can transcend age, culture and experience.

## INTERVAL 8

April 15, 1995

Bowen Island, B.C., Canada

It is Easter weekend. We have sailed over to Bowen to spend three days away from routines and the city. I am caught by the double bind of this excursion: I want my husband and son to enjoy this long weekend, all of us together, playing; on the other hand, I want, need to keep working on Gavin's stories, as a day away breaks my rhythm of thinking and writing. It throws me a bit, and I feel quite protective of my status at the moment. So, we compromised. I agreed to go sailing, as long as I could work in the mornings while Albert and Eric explored. Thank goodness for technology; we borrowed a laptop and were off.

Surprisingly, as I sit here at the salon table, the warm sun pouring down the companionway, prepared to resent the fact that the other two are off having a good time, I realize that I am enjoying this. I can't leave Gavin behind, so he's here on disk and I am here on a holiday, content to be in my various worlds at once.

The work is progressing at a satisfactory pace, although I'm not sure yet whether I'll meet my goal of 35,000 words by the end of the month.. Nor do I know exactly what form the stories will take in the final text. Still, I sense that it will work itself out, and I now know that the less I worry about it, the more easily the imagination compensates the process.



## Chapter IX

### A FUTURE STORY



**At Home Now**  
Gavin and Cynthia Bolton  
March, 1995

Late afternoon, with Cynthia, in the lounge.

**LJ: Tell me about the Gavin Bolton you know.**

CB: That's awfully difficult to say because there's so many facets. There's the ambitious Gavin...I knew Gavin would do what he needed to do because he has that driving force and that singlemindedness of purpose. He lives for his work still and has always done that. Still doing it actually, still living for his work. It's so important. And it doesn't matter what Gavin is doing; if it's something that he's chosen to do. It's got to be good and it's got to be right.

I think on the sidelines that other things get forgotten and discarded. Doesn't talk about anything much apart from work because that's so important...

**LJ: What's that like to live with for 43 years?**

CB: Ahhh. Difficult at times, and difficult for Andrew to have a successful father, one with a powerful driving force. It has been difficult, I don't think it is now. I think, over the years Andrew has found it hard to live up to. I think Gavin's tried to do his best as a father, but I think there have been times when he's just not been there for Andrew.

They're closer now than they have been for a long time because Andrew likes to talk about his own work (teaching) and how things are going. But then, Gavin was never close to his father, very close to his mother. Tremendous relationship there. But not with his father. I suppose it's a pattern that repeats itself.

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A pattern repeats itself.

A story gets retold.

A life layers pattern over pattern, creating a unique design.

[Gavin replied: *...we just cannot recognise that kind of parallel in the father/son relationships.*]

**(A)Lone**

...best men are molded out of faults,  
And, for the most, become much more the better  
for being a little bad.

Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*; V i 442-44

I think most often we are unaware of the patterns we repeat. Coincidence may answer for some visible patterns in Gavin's life. He has been comfortable with standing on his own since early childhood. Encouraged by his parents to explore, get involved and be active, he ultimately chose a career that would ensure his contact with people. Paradoxically, it also became a career that afforded great individuality, privacy and individualistic pursuit. Gavin has sought professional distance; his allegiance has been to his own exploration of the craft of drama. By working solely with graduate students, at least in later

years, he ensured that he would be involved with committed, stimulating people. Fortunately, the demands on Gavin's time and focus were accepted and supported at home.

Each move to a new location has been the answer to another piece of the puzzle that Gavin set out to find for himself, and each new place offered the right environment for discovery. At the same time, each locale has been more and more remote - distanced from large centres (and one might add, interference). What might have happened had Gavin gone to London instead of Preston?

*GB: Circumstances never allow you to change, and that puts you in a new route, so you never finish up...but, if I had the choice again, I would go to theatre school to train... and that it never entered my head...If I could change anything, perhaps I would come to America and take a director's course.*

A director's life, for all its contact with people and with each aspect of production, is a solitary life. A director must be comfortable making tough decisions, owning a vision that others may or may not care for, bringing the vision to life. Still, evidence of the Gavin who is Director is prominent in his work and in his life. It is odd that at the time when he was at his most promising and fulfilled moments as a director, via the Youth Theatre, he chose to leave it behind to pursue an administrative path. At the time when he could have been most supportive of classroom teachers in his position as a Drama Advisor, he shifted to academia, repeating the earlier pattern which continued to ever-widen his sphere of influence. It was not until Gavin felt that he had reached the outer radius of the sphere that he could consolidate his theory in books through his practice, teaching small and select groups of graduate

students.

Gavin knew a life of single-ness as a child. Distanced from his mother because she could not participate actively in his life, he found the world of imagination to fill the void. While they were close emotionally, he separated his life from hers when he finally left Crewe, now married, at age twenty-five. His father, remembered by Gavin as the 'Dour Scot', left no lasting impression beyond his desire for a better education for his children. In fact, Robert Bolton remained a mystery to his family even after death; Gavin and Cynthia were startled by the crowd of friends gathered at his funeral in Wales. Gavin's brother, being six years older, has been somewhat a stranger to him all his life.

In this context, becoming 'the historian' may be Gavin's answer to finding a connection through the history of drama to ground his own life in a 'family' of sorts. He had no influential adult relationship with anyone in his extended family, knowing only one of his grandparents with any intimacy, and a warm acquaintance with a spinster aunt. Perhaps the state of alone-ness benefited Gavin in his resolve to 'dig deeper' into the mysteries of drama education, a subject whose essence is human connection.

While he may be a loner by nature, Gavin has nurtured some close friendships, with both men and women; the duration of some which surprises him. To an outsider, though, even Gavin's closest relationships have a reserved appearance, a formality, a measured quality. Gavin feels that Cynthia has had the most influence on him; certainly she has been the constant of his life. He reflects on

their life together with a touch of gratitude and respect:

G.B:She makes sure I don't take myself too seriously, and allows me to be me. She's taught me how to be both dependent and independent in marriage, which is something that I'm proud of. We share a lot, even when we go our different ways because of our different interests, and we still come back and listen to each other and share the different experiences.

Of course, not many people know Gavin as intimately as Cynthia in a relationship forged from time and shared experience, but under the right conditions, his generosity, playfulness and, one guesses, deep loyalty, are abundant, accessible and can be earned.

He admits to a fascination at every stage in his life with women. He's been able to adore them from a distance, enjoying the mystery of the unknowable. Despite his reserve, he might occasionally be perceived as flirtatious, although his own code of propriety holds a tight rein on his actions. Gavin fondly (I think) recalls a young mathematics teacher from his grammar school days whom he revered so passionately that he used to stand outside her house hoping to see her; even dragging a friend along for company). The ideal of Romantic Love with none of the encumbrances of uncomfortable reality has always appealed to Gavin. His infatuations along the way have met with tolerance from Cynthia, from whom Gavin did not keep them secret. There is an element of reserve in the expression of his affection which reveals the conscious effort he sometimes seems to make to push himself toward a warm hug or an easy grin. Once earned though, the warmth is steadfast. He does not 'suffer fools gladly' as I was told more than once, and that is to do with a certain impatience along with the need for things to be 'right'.

## **A LIFE STORY: A LOVE STORY**

At some point in the study of a life, the biographer relies on intuition to make sense of certain aspects of the subject's life. By the time the subject becomes familiar, the biographer feels confident enough to ask the questions that will help to deepen the experience of knowing the subject for both the writer and the reader. It is anticipating the tenuousness of the journey that can free the biographer to rely on their own reading of the subject. Biographers must learn to trust instinct, to bring intuition to the surface over logic, to celebrate the ambiguity of the task. I had a question at the back of my mind from the beginning of my study of Gavin Bolton, about a particular piece of text that he has used with great success. When I first encountered the short narrative, I was intrigued by its simplicity, brevity and utter poignancy. As I began to know more about Gavin Bolton, the story itself seemed to take on a role of far greater significance; hidden personal meanings that might not even have occurred to Gavin, but that rang out loudly in the context of his life, as seen from my vantage point. The story is:

This is a love story.  
Once upon a time  
There was a young man who loved his mother.  
He fell in love with a girl  
And asked her to marry him.  
She said she would marry him  
If he would bring her the heart of his mother.  
So he killed his mother and cut out her heart.  
He carried it to the girl  
but on the way he stumbled and fell.  
And the heart of his mother cried, "Are you hurt my son?"  
That is a story about love.

(source unknown<sup>18</sup>)

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<sup>18</sup> Although it must be traceable to someone and I'd like to know...

The story never fails to evoke a strong response from participants who meet it in a drama classroom and explore its richness through a dramatic deconstruction. It is a powerful, evocative narrative that clearly exemplifies the postmodern notion of intertextuality. In reading the story, I connect/reflect my own experience on many levels: as child; mother; once-young-woman who captured mothers' sons. I also see it as teacher: what richness the text might provide the impoverished television-generation I teach. I now see it as biographer: a place where textuality, life story and fiction intersect for this subject.

Through a strategy which denies individuals the usual dependence on voice, movement and facial expression in their interpretation and performance, participants in groups of three or four unpack the story word by word. The objective is a performance told symbolically through gesture accompanied by narration from a seated position. Already, students are aware of a disruption to their expectations. It catches and intrigues participants by its unique structure.

It might be hard to identify the theatre elements and pedagogical implications of the activity from such a brief description; still considered as a story, without any drama activity involved, the impact is forceful. So, I wondered, early on, "What has been the experience of this man (Bolton) that motivates him to choose a story like this, and to be able to devise a strategy to help students comprehend its scope?" Then, I began to wonder how much a teacher's personal life influences their choice of curricular material. In a subject area such as drama, there might well be a correlation between the topics and scripts

chosen for use with students, even if the teacher uses a collaborative approach. To what extent can our life story infuse our teaching, and does recognizing how we have written our own lives make a difference in our effectiveness as teachers? In drama, conceivably more than in any other subject, the teacher must possess a high degree of willingness to enter honestly and critically into interactions with students. There is no middle ground for hiding behind if a drama teacher is to connect with the human experience of the classroom.

I shelved the question for many months. Then as I recalled conversations with Gavin about his childhood and family, the thoughts were triggered and I could revisit my initial instinct. Gavin vividly remembers his relationship with his mother as warm and nurturing, in spite of the heavy emotional and physical demands that caring for an invalid imposed. Not quite twelve when his mother became severely stricken with rheumatoid arthritis, Gavin entered adolescence full of responsibility. He didn't dare to misbehave:

*GB:...I was just naturally good because I didn't see any point in doing anything other. I rarely got into scrapes of any kind and there was of course an awful pressure from age 12 on - you had to be good or else you would upset Mother. I don't know if that put a great deal of weight on me because I was already bent to be good...which probably means I was boring...good and boring (laughing) well I have to live with myself now! ...Where I was supposed to be, I'd be there on time, and still am today (laughing)...I'm still pleasing my Mother...*

Gavin took his first teaching post in Crewe because he wanted to be at home; still helping with his mother; still feeling the weight of responsibility (and love) towards her; still needing to be there for her. When Gavin and Cynthia married, they lived in the Bolton seniors' home. He says that he felt no strong feeling of loss when his Mother died. How difficult it must have been for Alice Bolton to



see this son, her youngest, whom she loved, depended on and enjoyed so much, depart with his new wife to a different city the year following their marriage, after spending an uncomfortable year in her home. I thought, upon letting these thoughts filter in, that surely these reasons alone justified Gavin's obvious affinity for the story and explained why the exercise he created to explore the text resonated so profoundly for participants.

Something Cynthia said about life patterns repeating seemed to surface...

What had we been talking about when she said that? Ah, yes...Gavin's relationship with Andrew...how they were the same age when they married...

The news that Cynthia had become pregnant and that they were to be parents stands out, Gavin says, as one of the most wonderful moments of his life. Yet, an uncomfortable distance characterizes the relationship between Gavin and his son; tension between Gavin and his daughter-in-law. It is distance that Gavin remembers with his own father. Distance between his father and grandfather...

A story is told and retold as past, present and future collide.

## **Te Deum**

Patterns of experience and spirituality merge repeatedly through Bolton's life and work. Brought up as a Methodist, Gavin attended church and Sunday School. It was the thing to do and although his parents were irregular churchgoers, both sons were part of the church community. Gavin became Anglican to conform to Cynthia when they married, not feeling strongly one way or the other; not exactly ambiguous, rather more conscious that the surface changes didn't really mean anything.

*GB: I would not until recently have voiced it in this way...but just as the arts are a dimension of different order of things, so another dimension is the dimension of the spirit. And just as we cannot always see the meaning in an art, most of the time, for me, I miss all the meanings to do with the spirit.*

*I believe that God is everywhere and I believe that God is particularly in relationships, and that God is manifested through the expression of love and kindness between people. And I believe in an afterlife. I've got this horrible tendency to believe in reincarnation, which I can't explain to people because there's absolutely no logic about it; but I, it's probably what I want rather than what I believe...I want to go on after one death and be resurrected in another life, rather than this idea that O.K., you rise from the dead and there you are stuck in heaven! That sounds very boring, undemanding, playing a harp.*

*I find that bit very difficult, so reincarnation suits my book that the spirit lingers...but you see that spirit might linger in the things you leave behind, the people you leave behind.*

*I wonder if it's easier when you're committed to believe...than if you are like me; not committed to any particular theology, but who has this strong sense in all the ambiguities there is a God. It's very difficult to get hold of as a belief.*

It may be that it is in the rituals of belief that Gavin finds the most pleasure.

The church provided a vehicle for theatrical expression; Gavin became highly sought after even as early as age six, as a performer of monologues, often

billed as a feature performer. The audience, the rituals, the universally understood codes of behaviour all resonate for Gavin. The place of worship called 'church' is a powerfully written chapter in many lives. Yet for Gavin, it seems more a place where interesting things can happen; and he is sharply conscious of the drama of religion. A recent event during the service seen through Gavin's eyes reveals his utter attention to the theatricality of the moment, the detail with which he observes the action:

*GB: A voice from the back of the church, articulate, measured and formal, as if taking up a response from the blessing we had just heard from the priest at the high altar demanded: "And what about me?" We turned to see a scruffily dressed man move forward with rhythmic processional pace, continuing with, "My son is dying and I cannot feed him. What about me?" As if part of a rehearsed ceremony two church officials placed themselves either side of him. He and they together, in unison of movement, turned around, faced the back of the church and in a similarly ordered fashion, no-one touching him, proceeded to the back of the church. At the exit, he apologized to the officials for interrupting.*

## **Nexus**

Years following retirement can be fraught with difficulty. For some, as the so-called productive energies dissipate, motivation vanishes at an astonishing rate. How can the connection between the real present and the remembered past remain fluid? For Gavin, retirement has meant increased productivity, the pleasure of which is only slightly diminished by a recent diagnosis of angina. Perhaps the curtailed physical capacity fuels the hours at the word processor. Still, an imperative avoidance of overexertion and a conscientious effort to maintain a reasonable level of fitness must occupy a corner of Gavin's day.

The History of Drama project, its completion earning Gavin a PhD, is presently an all-consuming effort, although he has several other writing ideas to bring to fruition when that is completed. Will the future be challenging enough for Gavin, I wonder?

*GB: I see a future of writing. The project I'm on now will be for another three years. Bridge playing features of course...always one more competition...another prize to win...*

Time affords Gavin the luxury of bridge competitions around the country. Since bridge is an activity shared passionately with Cynthia it provides a bond of common interest, wisely established some years ago as a pre-retirement pastime.

Gavin does not romanticize about life. He acknowledges that the next phase of life brings death. Typically forthright in his attitude, Gavin seems to be directing his present and future script by staying in the moment. He consciously gives of his time and energy to those who need it; investing in living, not dying.

*GB: A future that includes death...I'm very conscious of death, preparing myself for dying...so I could die now...and I hope I see dying as an achievement...I'm very positive about dying. I would like really, not to have a future, as much as have a now. That's more important than the future.*

I think that Gavin has finally found the occupation that was always awaiting him - the writer. Happiness is being alone in his study, word processor humming. If the teaching was a means of getting material to write about, it is as writer and analyst, one who stands outside and examines, turning experience over and over under the magnifying glass, that is Gavin's great joy. Able to detect the flaws, but see them as part of the whole...the necessary but niggling

imperfections that make something REAL, he interrogates his work as a refined practitioner.

More than anything else, Gavin values the ability to be able to stand outside oneself or situation and look at it... *"to see what you are doing in relation to other people, yourself, where you are going and to read for the truth of what is going on...to be able to see the whole and not just the part you've selected to see."* For Gavin, that whole has to do with *"Love and Responsibility and Spirituality."* He is at an advantage, for he knows how to be both inside and outside the work. Whereas some people find careers in criticizing the work of others, for Gavin it is enough to scrutinize his own work<sup>19</sup>, and he does it with full knowledge of the Other-ness of self that brings perspective.

He has reached a phase in life where he can feel confident that he has fulfilled a large part of what he set out to do, but still has new discoveries on the horizon. There seems to be a tendency for Gavin to want to give even more: to his writing, to his family and friends, to the pursuit of the study of drama in the research of others, such as mine and the desire to push forward nonstop. He no longer wants to *"be in the position of one who leads the way, suggesting methodology and so on, I've gone beyond that"* clearly inviting others who can, to take up the challenge.

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<sup>19</sup> At times, however, the self-deprecatory explanations for weaknesses discovered in the work lead me to believe that the role of 'sophisticated failure' has been usefully employed by Bolton as a non-threatening posture rather than a conviction he truly holds towards his own work.

## INTERVAL 9

May 11, 1995

The more I write about Gavin and the whole process of biography, the more I need to know. This is the endless looping, the impossibility of closure, the quest(ion)ing I seek to become familiar with in all aspects of my life. I've grown much more aware of a sense of time suddenly slowing down. It reminds me of the way Gavin teaches: always look for the small moment of significance, the one that holds the most meaning. For the last several months, as I've been the detective, always on the alert for the piece of the narrative that might amplify Gavin, my senses have tuned in to those fragments in my own day-to-day.

There has been so much to learn on this path of life writing. How could I have known that in writing the life, I would write a different life? Why did I ask the questions I did and what questions did I fail to ask? What questions would others have asked? I will never know what I don't know about Gavin. He, gentlemanly as always, answered every question I asked, even if he could not see why I was interested in an area, even if the question made him uncomfortable. But he did not volunteer (I suppose no one really does) to offer unsolicited information. In a way, that makes me happy: there is mystery and magic in the unknown.

I think, for the most part, I was successful in deflecting the Director in Gavin, the part of him that might have wanted to control the outcome. His willingness to journey along this unpredictable path with me required him to trust me and

the process. Neither of us could know where it would lead. To a degree, his life defied the possibility of ever having a traditional biography written about him, he has lived it against the grain.

Now, I wonder how this biography will speak to the future. Whose stories will intersect here?

**MEDITATION  
IN PROCESS**

Where do life stories enter research?

What are the implications of biography for the future?

How might biography evolve?

Should biography include the biographer's process?

How can biographers stretch narrative boundaries?

Why is biography inherently interesting?

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## **Chapter X**

### **RETROSPECTIVE**

The traditional summation of a life accounts for the twists and turns the story has taken by placing a template over the whole and seeing how the pieces fit together. This review of the process of writing biography and Gavin Bolton's life story is more concerned with freeing the reader and writer to play with many interpretations of the stories they have read.

I would like to use this chapter to muse over the impressions I have gathered, ponder the ideas that went unwritten, put forward the thoughts that need further exploration, and explore the possibilities that may exist in this type of research. It is my hope that an open-ended narrative approach to Bolton's life has made the reader more curious than satiated. I too, would like to know more of this man, whose ambiguities and complexities leave me intrigued.

It is not fitting to call this chapter a conclusion, for any life story remains inconclusive. Similarly, it is inappropriate for me to close with a discourse which presumes authority about the subject. Instead I offer my thoughts of the moment regarding Bolton and biography, knowing that, even as I write, my connection to the text shifts and (re)presents itself to me anew.

#### **Impressions**

I had hoped that this final section of the thesis would be shaped around a

dialogue between Gavin and me with the intention of exploring the nature of biography and our respective journeys through the process. In the light of what I hoped to be able to call feminist research, I perceived that particular dialogue to be an important, even essential component of the thesis. I felt that while I had a grasp of my effort as biographer, I had only assumptions about the ways in which Gavin had coped with being subject. When the idea was first suggested to Gavin, it was met with a degree of curiosity regarding perhaps its value, maybe its form, possibly its inherent challenge. Having opened the window of possibility, I did not refer to the idea again until I neared completion of the project.

As I mapped out the kinds of issues I knew I was interested in having Gavin respond to, unknowingly I sought to occupy a space of closure. What I wanted, I suspect, was affirmation that I had been on the right track, that I had dug deep enough, that I had handled my responsibilities as biographer with sensitivity and thoroughness, that I had not treated my subject as an object, and that I had honoured and yet been sufficiently critical of the life story in my representation. It was a disappointing moment when I received a reply in the negative to my final request for a collaborative finish.

Did I know the man at all, I wondered, since I had failed to deduce that he had in fact, coped with being subject by the very distancing manoeuvres that had become so apparent in his past? It was the distance that had given him the freedom to participate in my project, to willingly allow my questions without having knowledge of or responsibility for the outcome. It would be up to me to

fill the gap I perceived.

Thus I was brought sharply back to the reflective questions I had posed throughout the thesis, questions which I hope will point to new directions of research. A glance back at the Meditations, which I had hoped would form the basis of a dialogue with Gavin, leaves me with two basic questions: "How do I now understand my subject?" and "How do I understand the place I have occupied as biographer?"

### **(Re)Visioning the Subject**

In the early days of thinking, collecting stories and writing about Gavin Bolton, I was tempted to name him a 'man of contradiction'; then I realized that we are all contradictory, an implicit condition of postmodernist thinking. Consider that "to speak against" implies a refusal to be named: confusion, elusiveness and debate about the subject. For every side(self) that is presented a contradictory side must appear; perceived by some under certain circumstances and never seen by others. So, it would in fact be misrepresenting Gavin to target the contradictions as indicative of his unique character(s).

Many facets of Bolton continue to puzzle me. I see a man who socially is somewhat withdrawn. He is not easy to chat with in an informal way, although he is adept at eliciting information from others. One of Gavin's skills is his precision in questioning. Possibly because he is an acute listener and observer, he seems to be able to sense the appropriate next step that the person with

whom he is speaking desires to take in the conversation. Obviously, in his capacity as volunteer for Victim Support, this works to his advantage, and, as long as Gavin is in a work-related area, this skill is fluent and effortless.

Gavin has spent a lifetime developing strategies to improve the clarity of communication between himself and teachers; himself and students; teachers and students; and students and students. In lectures and public addresses he sparkles with humour, warmth and intellectual acuity. However, access to his books and articles remains difficult for many and this may account for the relatively limited understanding of his work by drama educators. In a sense, history is catching up to Bolton. Many of his views may, in the future, be seen as ahead of their time, valuable in the broader scope of education in general, not just drama.

I am uncertain about the vigour with which Gavin has embraced Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to education. The book he has recently co-authored with Heathcote was, from the start, I think, his project. In a rather odd way, it typifies the kind of professional distance that Gavin has always insisted upon. The process of developing the book did not really follow a collaborative model: Dorothy would write reams of material, and it would arrive at Gavin's house through the mail slot. Gavin would edit the writing to suit his understanding (and the space limitations of the publisher) and thus compiled the manuscript. Unquestionably, he is attracted to Mantle of the Expert for its emphasis on the growth of the learner on multiple levels. His own use of it as a strategy remains somewhat awkward. He himself admits to

being a novice at its intricacies<sup>20</sup>, but is steadfastly convinced of its untapped potential for education.

I know that Gavin has maintained a strong sense of mission throughout his career and that the commitment to his professional agency has coloured his portrait in terms of his family, friends and leisure. With a steady hand he has guided the work through years of growth and has never wavered in his conviction that drama is the core experience to which all humans relate, whether or not they are able to articulate its presence or impact in their own lives. A good deal of his journey as an educator has been spent seeking that articulation - digging away at the mysteries of meaning expressed in social, artistic and educational milieus.

### **(En)Visioning the Biographer**

I entered the landscape of biography as a foreigner, unfamiliar with the discourse of a burgeoning theoretical field; the debates about narrative methodologies multiplying exponentially even as I raced to discover the latest contribution. To me, the topography was fertile and uncharted - I had to decide on a route of my own, since I could not begin to follow each vision of life storying.

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<sup>20</sup> During the 1994 summer graduate course at UBC, Bolton experimented by contrasting the Mantle of the Expert approach in the morning and his own, more theatrical episodic style in the afternoon, using the same material. The afternoon was far more engaging for both Gavin and the participants.

In the emerging conceptions of feminist biography, I found the invitation to circumvent traditional stylistic conventions and a philosophical foundation which embraced open-endedness, dialogue and recognition of the whole fabric of life.

In acknowledging postmodern concerns of multiplicity of selves (both subject's and biographer's, in this case); (inter)textuality and multiple truths; and the celebration of ambiguity, I recognized remarkable parallels with the nature of drama.

Then, by interpreting and blending these two stances, I devised the structure that would support my conception(s) of Gavin Bolton. Finally, the positive implications of both of these stances for education research became apparent to me as a teacher and researcher as I found the resonances of Bolton's lived experience in my own.

Many of my experiences as biographer will stand out as milestones in the development of my personal knowledge. For example, I have developed a more intense interest in listening to the moments of disclosure which draw us together in dialogue. I also sense that people are more than willing to divulge personal anecdotes if the research is conducted with an openness and obvious commitment on the part of the researcher. In fact, more often than not, I felt I was gathering autobiographies from the people that I met with in regard to Gavin, so easily did they share details of their own lives with me. This bodes well for biographical research in education, I think. I am learning not to be

fearful of the intimacy which accompanies this type of research; the researcher gives equally but differently to the process. Biography cannot be written without a personal investment in the process. The biographer gives up a certain portion of consciousness to the subject for the length of time that the project consumes. There is a point in every day when an event in the biographer's life causes a fictitious corollary in the subject's life. The biographer wonders, "What would\_\_\_\_\_ do in this situation?" Or " What has the subject concealed from me? (Often an interesting flight of fancy). It means trusting that it is impossible to know everything and enjoying the disruption of the unpredictable and the anomaly. It is as uncomfortable to write biography as it is exhilarating. From the viewpoint of the biographer, the limitations of the research also seem to be its strengths. Critics will question the lack of certainty, indeed the fictitious character of the product. There may be questions about the data collection and whether or not it reasonably represents the life of the subject, given the author's literary license in this genre. To some degree, there may be concern regarding the value of the research as relevant and fruitful, particularly if the biographer has taken a particularly broad or narrow stance.

I feel that despite the limitations mentioned above, and in some views they may be substantial limitations, biography offers enormous potential as a tool for educational research. We live in a world which exists through our stories. We write our experiences as educators based on personal knowledge more than any other source. Teachers seem drawn to the profession because of its intrinsic returns, suggesting backgrounds worthy of exploring. Insight into the worlds of

other teachers, whether they be leaders in the field such as Bolton, or classroom teachers who are open to publicly exploring their stories, can enrich, affirm, inform and challenge all professionals. The world of education is a rapidly shifting, contentious arena. If biography can celebrate the extraordinary in the ordinary by illuminating teacher's lives, then it deserves an audience in educational research methodology<sup>21</sup>.

I suspect that biography for educational research must be undertaken with some guiding principles in mind. At the risk of attaching to a model that suggests closure, I'd like to offer some insight into my own current belief about the nature of biography.

I now feel that I was quite timid in the way in which I approached the project. I would encourage anyone willing to write educational biography to do so with confidence: in their choice of subjects; in their exploration of structure and style; in their belief that biography can benefit others by illuminating one person's stories. While there have been exceptionally readable biographies written, both in the traditional sense and in more recent efforts, the field is open for exploration and can easily accommodate a more radical style of reading and writing life stories than has appeared to date. The researcher who

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<sup>21</sup> Note: Researchers in this decade have the luxury of electronic advantages heretofore unknown. I fully expected that my project would be informed by the presence of e-mail, fax and global information networks. How was I to predict that: 1) my subject resists more than a passing interest in computers; whilst claiming to see the advantage of their application; and 2) that drama educators in general are probably amongst the least informed and inactive users of the net. I encourage a greater effort amongst those interested as a means of promoting communication about our subject world-wide.



chooses biography must be willing to give a great deal of consciousness to the lived experience of another person, to get used to having that person 'beside' them every hour of every day while the project unfolds. It is an absolute necessity to give up the idea of controlling the ultimate direction of the biography itself. It will shape itself, given opportunity, to represent the life of the subject, informed by the life of the biographer, in the context in which it is created.

I have found the experience of writing biography to be intense, joyous, demanding, rewarding, intriguing, and elusive. It has taught me to seek the extraordinary in the ordinary and to revel in the storied world of our experience(s).

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **CHRONOLOGY**

This chronology was compiled by Gavin Bolton.

1890	Robert, Father, born
1895	Alice, Mother, born
1915	Robert and Alice marry
1927	Gavin born February 13th
1932-38	Gavin attends elementary school
1936	Start elocution and piano lessons, regularly taking grade examinations in each. Eventually drop piano and continue with what became 'Speech and Drama'
1938	First stage performance - as Tiny Tim in <i>A Christmas Carol</i>
1938-43	Attends Crewe Grammar School
1943-46	First job as trainee 'Cost and Works' accountant with British Railways
1944	First examination in Cost and Works accountancy
1946	Switch to teaching (unqualified, resident) Blind and Deaf School, Stoke-on-Trent
1948-50	Sheffield City Training College, University of Sheffield Institute, qualify as teacher, specialising in English and trained for Secondary work
1950-52	First post - Adelaide Street Primary School, Crewe; under enlightened headmaster, Geoff Durber
1951	Cynthia and Gavin marry in July. Live in two rooms of parents' house for first year of marriage
1951	Graduate with Royal Academy of Music and Drama as a Licentiate of Speech and Drama

- 1951-61 Every summer, attend Summer Schools on Theatre (with the exception of two conducted by Peter Slade called 'Child Drama')
- 1952-59 Live in Nuneaton, Warwickshire near Stratford and Coventry. ( the Belgrade Theatre opened in Coventry, 1957). Teach at Arbury Secondary School. Promoted to Head of English, 1957
- 1953 Buy first house  
Start Youth Drama, extracurricular  
Form Nuneaton Teachers' Drama Society  
Attend first course by Peter Slade
- 1956 Seconded from teaching to attend British Drama League (London)course on Directing in the Theatre
- 1957 Son, Andrew, born
- 1958 Peter Slade invites Gavin's Youth Theatre group to join a session at his Rea Street centre in Birmingham
- 1959 Mother dies
- 1959-62 Move to Preston, Lancashire; Fishwick Secondary School as Deputy Headmaster  
  
Form Preston Teachers' Drama Group; arrange many weekend courses including visits from Brian Way  
  
Attend course on directing at Salford University; gained A.D.B. (Associate of Drama Board)
- 1962-64 Move to Durham as Drama Adviser to Schools
- 1963 Father dies
- 1964 Appointed as Lecturer in Drama Education, Institute of Education, Durham University. Responsibility for in-service training of teachers in Drama. Later to become Senior Lecturer and then appointed Reader in 1985.
- 1967 First experience teaching abroad, Lesotho, South Africa
- 1968 Durham University confers a Masters' Degree (M.A.)
- 1969 First visit to Canada (University of Toronto Education Dept.) at the invitation of John and Juliana Saxton
- 1966-72 Direct for the University Dramatic Society



1964	Publish first article
1969	Publish first book dedicated to Norah Morgan: friend, mentor and counsellor since 1969
1976	Son, Andrew begins career in music at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. He marries in 1981; has two children
1987	Retire from full-time employment at University of Durham
1988-89	Visiting professor at University of Victoria, B.C. Canada for academic year.
1990	Teach a University of British Columbia summer graduate course, attended by Laurie Jardine
1995	Goodbye to teaching!

Note:

This chronology represents significant life events according to Gavin Bolton.

## APPENDIX B

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## APPENDIX C

### TRACING FOOTSTEPS: EXCERPTS

The passages from Gavin Bolton's papers that appear here have been chosen to reflect in a small way, the direction of Bolton's thinking over his career to date. I say reflect and not represent because it is but a small sampling of the extensive body of Bolton's writing. It by no means conveys a total picture of the impact of his writing and thinking. Interested readers should refer to **APPENDIX B: A Bolton Bibliography**

I selected the passages on the basis of how they spoke to me as teacher. I asked myself, "What would be important to me if I were beginning to teach drama at this moment?" Thus, others may disagree with the significance of the passages which appear, finding different connections to Bolton's writing, other aspects which resonate. My wish is for the reader to trace the footsteps of time and space through glimpses of Bolton through thirty years of academic writing.

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1964

#### *"Support from the Local Authorities"*

Drama is a tool in the hands of the teacher for developing the personality of the child; to give him an awareness of his own potentialities in every form of self-expression; to help him acquire self-discipline; to help him think more deeply, to feel more sensitively; and to make him aware of other people's problems.

Every child has his own natural way of learning about life: he creates a dream world in which he can believe that he is somewhere else, that he is someone else, and in this way he copes with the manifold problems of existence. It is this capacity for imaginative play that the teacher must observe and harness.

I believe that movement and language go hand in hand, with the voice regarded as the fifth limb of the body, so that as a child experiments with the quality of a movement, he is able to produce, if required, the appropriate sound and on occasions, the appropriate words.

If it could be accepted that we are all experimenting in drama, that there is much to be learnt from each other, then, with the professional barriers down, we could make progress.

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1969

*"Drama in Education"*

I believe that drama is operating at its highest level of achievement when it becomes a collective playmaking, so structured that the implicit feelings, attitudes and preconceptions of those taking part are brought to the surface and made explicit.

...educational drama is an intellectual as well as a physical and emotional activity, a shift in emphasis more consistent with the aims of teaching English than many texts on creative drama appear to suggest. Indeed a useful way of defining the nature of drama may be to examine it in relation to literature.

It is the physical element of drama that sets it apart from other literary forms...Because drama depends for its expression on the spoken word, movement and other visual and aural aids, it can only represent a particular action, in a particular place at a particular moment in time.

...where children are motivated to care deeply about a human problem, they reach a stage when they begin to be concerned with its expression. This only happens when there exists within a group a serious attitude to the work that is genuinely shared by the teacher and when a teacher has the gift of recognizing the needs of the children in terms of the true nature of the medium.

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1971

*"Drama and Theatre in Education: A Survey"*

What is drama? When is drama, drama? When does educational drama go to the heart of drama? What is the nature and function of drama when it operates at its highest level of achievement?

And it is the teacher and only the teacher, who can dig deep and make a frivolous or a trivial (in the eyes of the adults) suggestion something worth pursuing, something worth getting to grips with, so that there is a deeper understanding of a fundamental human issue. Things that the children have always understood implicitly will come to the surface as they do it as much as

when the teacher asks the question after it is done. They suddenly know that they have learned because they have been allowed to verbalize it and the verbalization is rooted in the concrete sensory/motor experience of the dramatic action.

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1977

*"Creative Drama and Learning"*

Let us now list all the kinds of learning that seem to be possible:

- A. Acquiring or refining FACTS
- B. Acquiring or refining SKILLS related to external action:
  - i. motor
  - ii. memory
  - iii. simulation
- C. Acquiring or refining SKILL relate to the combining of internal/external action - the aesthetic skill
- D. Acquiring or refining value-laden CONCEPTS
- E. Acquiring or refining SOCIAL SKILLS - sometimes independent of artistic activity

It is theoretically possible that there could be no learning or every kind of learning.

*"Psychical Distancing in Acting"*

The dynamics of the experience lie not in the consistency of a special level of behaviour, but in the interaction that is set up between more than one level. So there will be moments when the participant is caught up in the actual practicalities of the activity alternated with moments when he has removed himself from such practicalities. In a child's dramatic play there is always this ambivalence in both depending on and being independent of the practical meanings in a particular context: if it rests for too long at a practical level the make-believe is lost and yet without the practicalities of the physical environment the make-believe cannot be created. This is equally true of the actor on stage.

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1978

*"The Concept of Showing in Children's Dramatic Activity"*

Drama is a metaphorical form in that it is created by the juxtaposition of two concrete contexts: actuality and fiction.

One sees, particularly in our secondary school, a perpetual working in product rather than process. Teacher and class may discuss a significant (often socially significant) topic such as immigration, and the class are required in their groups to enact what they know about it. But from the beginning, like the child who knows before he puts his brush to paper that his painting is for putting up on the wall, the instrumental mode of action is adopted in order to 'make a statement' to show the rest of the class. Any attempt to work in (process) is eclipsed by the need to work for product. So these pupils never *experience* immigration, they simply demonstrate what they already know.

*"The Aims of Educational Drama"*

Working in drama today, my top priority must be that drama is seen as change in understanding... this is for me the major justification for having drama in our schools at all.

It seems to be that we can talk about the activity of drama in two broad ways: a) as a complex art form, and b) a much more simple, functional use. Having divided them into these two parts, it occurred to me that in terms of teacher training one would expect our drama specialists to know how to handle the first, and one might assume that all primary school teachers-in-training could use the devices that belong to the second, whether they are 'drama people' or not.

One of the effects of drama happening all the time is development of language use; particularly language as the mental activity that it is: the relationship between thought and word...language of hypothesis...language of style.

\*\*\*

1979

*"Some Issues Involved in the use of Role-Play with Psychiatric Patients"*

Once a week in the University term time, over a period of three years, I have conducted role-playing sessions of about two hours duration with a selected group of about five or six patients in a large Psychiatric Hospital. What takes place during these sessions is regarded as an extension of or as an alternative form of treatment the patient is already receiving. Indeed, one of the criteria for reselection is that the patient's problem does not appear to be responding to other treatment.

...if the work is to be effective the leader and the group must work at risk. Having said that, let me emphasize that the leader in practice keeps the nature of the risks to himself and often the atmosphere is one of light-hearted fun. Perhaps one of the most subtle techniques I have had to learn is to relieve tension with laughter.

\*\*\*

1980

*"Assessment of Practical Drama"*

It seems to me there is always a product; even in the most loosely structured improvisational dramatic activity there is some kind of contrived, self-contained entity that can be observed as "a thing created".

Drama is, in my view, not so much concerned with the uniqueness of the individual as with the meaning created when a participant aligns his individuality with whatever is universal in the subject matter, topic or theme. Drama perhaps more than any other art form celebrates what man has in common with man.

Traditional acting skills may or may not be part of the dramatic product, but the examiner is concerned with something wider and also deeper, to do with the participants' grasp of how the very clay of theatre works. It is so basic that the drama/theatre dichotomy becomes irrelevant.

*"Theatre Form in Drama Teaching"*

The principal function of a drama teacher, then, is to use theatrical form in order to enhance the meaning of the participants' experience: by using the theatrical elements of tension, focus, contrast and symbolization, actions and objects in the drama become significant.

A drama teacher is consistently working in theatre form.

\*\*\*

1981

*"Drama as Learning, as Art and as Aesthetic Experience"*

...the skill which is basic to all kinds of acting, which is: an ability to engage with something outside oneself using an 'as if' mental set to activate, sustain or intensify that engagement.

But drama as an art...is on a different plane of experience to do with

consciousness of form...for dramatic action to qualify as an art form not only should these three basic elements of focus, tension and symbolisation inhere within the form, there should also be a consciousness on the part of the group that a form is being created.

The conscious creation of an art form is a sophisticated group responsibility that requires tacit or explicit agreement on choice of focus, injection of tension, and sensitivity to shared meanings that may resonate from the continual focus on a particular object or action or language image.

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1982

*"Drama for the 80's"*

In teaching drama in schools my long-term aims are:

- 1)to help the student understand himself and the world he lives in
- 2)to help the student know how and when (and when not) to adapt to the world he lives in
- 3)to help the student gain understanding of and satisfaction from the medium of drama

*"Philosophical Perspectives on Drama and the Curriculum"*

I have attempted to show that the contribution of drama to education depends on what general educational philosophy is in the air, or what status is given to drama as knowledge and on the degree and kind of authority a teacher can exploit.

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1983

*"The Activity of Dramatic Playing"*

It is perhaps in terms of structure that dramatic playing differs fundamentally from symbolic play.

...the meaning which the teacher wants to draw out from a context is not necessarily the meaning immediately available to the children. Thus a teacher's responsibility, if drama is to be used as a medium for learning, is to structure the experience so that learning can take place.

The most significant change in understanding through drama must be at the subjective level of feeling. By 'feeling' I do not imply untethered emotion but as mentioned earlier, a 'feeling-value', that is, a feeling tied to judgment.

I hope I have now made it clear that in terms of learning potential, dramatic playing has the greatest educational value. Its strengths lie in the unique relationship it offers in combining theatrical structure (not outer shape, of course) and a quality of spontaneous living that belong to both symbolic play and to games.

*"Drama as Negotiation of Meaning"*

...it is wrong to regard the senses as pivotal in drama, for dramatic behaviour is a **special state of mind**...Metaxis is the capacity to hold two worlds in mind at the same time, the actual and the fictitious. It is the special imaginative power of dramatic behaviour that what is absent can be made present, 'present' in both senses of the term, in 'time' and in 'space'...What is present is not displaced by what is absent - the stick the child is using as a sword is still solidly there as a stick - but the present and absent object are in a dialectical relationship.

What does being good at drama mean? First and foremost, it means having an eye for what is truthful, for the integrity of one's own and other's behaviour within the fictitious context. It means the ability to perceive the richness of a situation, to see many layers of meaning, many angles within perhaps a seemingly ordinary event. It means having a sense of dramatic form. It means an ability to signal to others in the group effectively and economically. It means having a sense of style in speech and movement.

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1984

*"Teacher-in-Role and the Learning Process"*

I have suggested there are two major functions of teacher-in-role: as problem poser and as artist. There are of course a number of extrinsic functions which a teacher may have to use his role for, such as keeping control, supporting

diffident pupils, making the fiction credible, extending vocabulary, developing a healthy attitude to drama, etc. In practice, these kinds of intentions may be uppermost in a teacher's mind and indeed would have an important place in a discussion of methodology, but they are not relevant to this paper. Teacher-in-role can, and indeed must whenever there is an opportunity, function at the level of *symbolisation*...Symbolisation refers to the deliberate use of time, space and objects to create a significance in the way a playwright, director or actor would do. It is in attempting to describe the dramatic experience at this level that the concept of learning may not seem entirely appropriate, for it is to do with the participants' gaining a sense of form, picking up nuances, becoming aware. It implies a change in understanding at a deep affective level, in contrast to the greater cognitive application required of problem-solving or of recognising a change of perspective, the most effective use of teacher-in-role will of course combine the two.

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1985

*"Changes in Thinking about Drama in Education"*

Of all the arts, drama is a collective experiencing, celebrating, or commenting, not on how we are different from each other, but on what we share, on what ways we are alike. To encourage individual children to search for a drama within themselves is to distort the meaning of dramatic form. Drama is not self-expression; it is a form of group symbolisation seeking universal, not individual truths. Progressive educators throughout the century have been mistaken in their view of drama as child-centred and self-expressive, and drama teachers have been foolish to believe them!

Distancing is the key to understanding drama as education.

Learning in drama is essentially a reframing. What knowledge a pupil already has is placed in a new perspective.

Most educational institutions fail their pupils in developing natural understanding. The need is urgent. We are not teaching pupils to cope with the complexities of relationships in a modern society; in future years drama may become one of the important means of dealing with this pressing concern.

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*A Reply to Jon Nixon*

...Nixon begins to open up a philosophical perspective on drama teaching in connection with which criticisms of leaders in the field, including myself, might well be justified. He begins to write of the social content of the arts in a way that suggests he means more than using drama as a springboard to help pupils to understand social and political issues. There is a hint that the shift of

parameters for which he is searching requires the teachers to see drama *as* social and political. Now such a view is in keeping with a new wave of thinking about drama education which has been emerging from new leaders in the field over the past few years and with which people like me must come to grips.

*David Davis Interviews Gavin Bolton*

...dramatic playing has to be right and if the ingredients are not mixed right, then the moment which is supposed to be a moment of awe simply is whittled away and we miss the chance, whereas in all the other forms (of drama) you are allowed to make mistakes, you can move in tentatively, your starting point may be one where you are only engaged superficially to begin with, and gradually get caught. In dramatic playing you've got to be fully engaged or else nothing will happen.

...when children enter drama, they don't **intend** to learn - indeed if they did, then this would undermine the drama altogether. The drama as such would never start...So we have the strange situation whereby the learner in drama must not have that as an intention. His real purpose must be to create a drama...

\*\*\*

1986

*Weaving Theories is not Enough*

What we need is an approach to all drama teaching, whatever the age group, that uses theatrical form...I am not here talking about acting technique, but about the very clay of the dramatic medium - to do with focus, symbolism, tension, resonance, ambiguity, contradiction, ritual, simplicity, simplicity, contrast, anticipation, resolution, completeness and incompleteness, humour, magic and metaxis, etc...

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1987

*Off - Target*

Participants in drama need protection from experiences that are too painful. Drama needs protection from trivialization. the two are sometimes connected, for deliberate attempts to trivialize can be the participant's defence mechanism against being hurt. Sometimes however, trivialization can be the norm, where there is a kind of unspoken agreement between class and teacher not to take

anything too seriously. By protection then, we do not mean protection from emotion, but rather a carefully structured protection into emotion so that participants are engaged but not threatened.

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1988

*Drama as Art*

...although conflict is usually present in drama, that is not what makes it dramatic, in fact the opposite applies. What is dramatic is the constraint on the expression of conflict, or indeed on any unqualified expression of raw emotion.

All art is concerned with the exposure of truths about ourselves and the world we live in. Now drama operates paradoxically: it seeks to expose truth by withholding it. the more the exposure is delayed the more effective is our understanding of it when it is finally expressed, and when it is revealed, the drama, or that part of the drama is over.

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1992

*Piss on His Face*

I believe that for too long some teachers have ignored 'development in drama' as an important objective. Hornbrook has rightly drawn attention to this gap.

I like David Hornbrook's use of the term 'text' to cover a wide conception of something that is made. However, whereas I believe process and product both need our attention, especially when it comes to evaluating, I'm afraid that Hornbrook appears to discount the former.

I believe that Hornbrook is right that we and our pupils together should evaluate the drama work. I have been remiss in not tackling this issue...

I believe Hornbrook is right that a mystique has developed round the teaching of drama that invites teachers to feel they are failures.

I believe Hornbrook is right when he complains that not enough attention has been given to helping those teachers who are involved in examination drama.

I believe all theorising in drama should be drawn from practice. Hornbrook's practice is empty of substantially new ideas; he does not have anything to offer

apart from widening the scope of theatre art and craft for examination students.

### *A Balancing Act*

There are two key features of my approach to drama education. One is that the teacher and pupils are fellow artists in a joint venture - finding the right balance between the contribution from each is what I am calling the balancing act; the other is that this joint venture is an engagement in meaning-making.

### *The Changing Room*

I have attempted to look at the changing aspects of reality in a spread of contexts extending from the actuality of a sense experience, through day-dreaming to a social reality, continuing into dramatic art in its various forms, including children's play, classroom dramatic behaviour, TIE (theatre in education) participation and Performance in a theatre. I have tried to show how sense or physical meanings become subordinate to social meanings in drama. I have suggested that the existential aspect of dramatic experiences is like entering a room which changes as one invents it. I have suggested that the purpose and structure all dramatic experiences have in common is their meaning-making through form.

...I would go so far as to claim that 'understanding form as a means of meaning-making' is why we are teaching drama in schools.

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1993

### *Writing a Book about Dorothy Heathcote's Dramatic Approach to Education*

'Mantle of the Expert' is not about pretending to be experts. It is a carefully graded, task-oriented project that starts with whatever knowledge and skills the students already have (for instance, it would be reasonable to ask grade 2/3 student in their collective role of being an educational consultancy to give advice - on behalf of some fictitious client - of what kinds of activities should be catered for in a Kindergarten play area). From a confident start, the students move forward to more complex tasks until they are ready to tackle the subtleties and skills of investigating the problem of (Melvyn's) truancy. Notice this collective role. This is the key to setting up 'Mantle of the Expert' work: the baseline of the students' activities is some kind of enterprise. This established, the work can go in any direction and any aspect of the curriculum can be covered.



## In(ter)vention

Who is the one  
at the edge, watching?

Who asked the first question?

How did that glimpse  
(of you, well hidden)  
sneak out - allow itself a voice

Unexpected. Even you were surprised.

Did the one who never lingers  
in past tense(s)  
step outside for just a moment  
hoping to be seen and remembered?

And what of the one who says *"only funny things,  
not important things,  
remain in my memory"*  
did that one  
run  
from the story  
not wanting to be rewritten?

We stopped        together        for a moment.

Met. Searched. Questioned. Invented.  
Concealed.  
Revealed.  
Opened long-locked chambers.  
Punctured time with our probing.

Now there is a space where we are bound  
pushing away  
moving closer

I come between you and your stories  
writing new stories.

Laurie Jardine  
September, 1995