

The Canadian Worker Poet: the Life and Writings of Joe Wallace

By James Doyle

Joe Wallace's poetry, declared Milton Acorn in 1977, was "usually bad, but sometimes totally inspired" (38). The author of five volumes of verse, Wallace was for almost all his adult life a member of the Communist Party of Canada. He was also a reporter and columnist for several periodicals, including the three major Canadian Communist newspapers, the *Worker* (which was published from 1922 to 1936), the *Daily Clarion* (1936-39), and the *Canadian Tribune* (1940-75). Besides being an active Communist, Wallace remained all his life a practising member of the Roman Catholic Church, and the interaction between his religious and political loyalties is evident in much of his writing.

Although Wallace was little known in Canada except among members of the Communist Party, he was probably the most famous Canadian poet in Eastern Europe and China from the 1950s until well after his death in 1975. This lack of honour in his own country is partly attributable to the same political bias that prompted many people in Canada to ignore Norman Bethune until his fame in China forced him on his country's attention. But unlike Bethune's medical achievements, Wallace's poetry is open to severe criticism. It lacks the innovative techniques and ideological subtleties of the work of his great European and South American political confreres such as Bertolt Brecht, Federico Garcia Lorca, Hugh MacDiarmid and Pablo Neruda. Indifferent to most of the modernist poetic developments of the twentieth century, he derived his notions of literary form and language from nineteenth-century British, American, and English-Canadian

traditions. His favourite foreign poets were Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Robert Burns. For Canadian poetry, he preferred the work of Victorians like Archibald Lampman, Alexander McLachlan, and Peter McArthur, and their twentieth-century imitators such as Wilson MacDonald. He remained cool even to the work of modernists of leftist political sympathies, such as Irving Layton, F.R. Scott, and Dorothy Livesay. Yet in spite of the frequently derivative quality of his writing, he deserves attention because of his international reputation, because of his contribution to a tradition that is frequently ignored in the history of Canadian literature and because, as Acorn pointed out, his poetry could on occasion be "totally inspired."

Joseph Sylvester Wallace was born in Toronto on 29 October 1890, the fourth of seven children of Thomas Wallace, a travelling salesman, and Mary (Polly) Redmond. His mother died in childbirth when Joe was seven, and his father moved his family to Nova Scotia, where they lived for varying periods in Truro, North Sidney, and Halifax. In 1894 Thomas Wallace remarried, to Elizabeth Biddington (Ron Wallace, letter to author). This second wife turned out to be negligent and abusive toward the children, especially when her husband was away on the road. On one occasion, Joe Wallace recalled, "my arms were a mass of welts where I had tried to break the force of the thin iron bar sometimes used to teach me not to stray too long from my stepmother's loving care" ("The Broad Highway" 9). "One cheekbone still shows a nick where she beat me so hard that the blood flowed to the floor" ("Auld Lang Syne" 14). When Joe ran away from home at the age of eleven, his father deferred to community notions about problem children and had his son committed for a year to a reformatory, St. Patrick's Catholic Home for boys. Although late twentieth-century society has concluded that such institutions are as likely to contribute to delinquency as to correct it, Wallace claimed that he profited from the time at St. Patrick's. "I got to know boys who were mainly from the slums. They were in there for arson, for theft, for incorrigible mooching . . . and all kinds of petty crimes; but to me . . . they were just like other boys, good ones,

practically no vicious ones and ones with all kinds of promise" (Safarik and Livesay 35).

Young Joe also showed considerable promise, especially in academic and creative ways. After coming out of the reformatory he moved to North Sidney with his family, where he completed elementary and high school. Early in elementary school his love of poetry had been inspired by hearing a teacher read Longfellow's "Hiawatha." Soon he was trying his hand at writing his own poetry. Around 1910 he entered St. Francis-Xavier University, where he spent two years, and cultivated his talent by writing poems for the student literary journal, the *Xaverian* ("A Tribute from His Old School" 9). But immature behaviour resulted in his expulsion. With this dubious university record, Wallace's job prospects were not good, especially since the protectionist Conservative federal government that had been elected in 1910 over Wilfrid Laurier's continentalist Liberals had led Canada into a recession. Finally his older brother Frank got him a job as salesman for the American mail-order International Correspondence Schools. At first he was "too lazy and too timid to make any kind of a real success of it," Wallace claimed, but he soon settled down to the work (Safarik and Livesay 36). By 1911 ICS had appointed him Halifax district manager.

For a time Wallace's life moved in a conventional middle-class direction. In 1915 he married Theresa Dorothy ("Dot") Granville, with whom he had four children. Excluded from military service by recurrent tuberculosis, he continued to work for the correspondence school until 1916, when his brother Frank took him into his new business, the Wallace Advertising Service. Since his university days, Joe had enjoyed public speaking and debate, and now as a member of the Young Men's Liberal Club of Nova Scotia he began to make a name for himself locally as a political orator. His efforts in this respect were so successful that he was brought to the attention of Wilfrid Laurier (Griffin 9).

But his political interests were shifting. His reading included books on social and political reform, such as Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879), which

helped him clarify his inclinations toward co-operative solutions to economic problems. In 1914, he had begun writing articles for the *Canadian Railroad Employees' Monthly*, a union publication that originated in Halifax in 1914 and soon became "one of the most influential Canadian labour journals," with an international circulation (Elliott 224). By 1919 his interest in radical politics had been further inspired by the Russian revolution. During his speeches at political meetings he found himself heckled by leftists, but "instead of trying to blast them or knock them down I'd say 'You're certainly right' and the effect of that was that they came to me afterwards with pamphlets" (Safarik and Livesay 36). In 1920 he resigned from the Liberals to join the socialist Halifax Labour Party, which subsequently affiliated with a province-wide organization, then with the national Canadian Labour Party.

Wallace had established ties with a few Nova Scotia writers, especially members of the so-called "Song Fishermen" group, which included the journalist Andrew Merkel, poet Kenneth Leslie, and novelists Charles Bruce and Robert Norwood, some of whom were flirting with left-of-centre politics. But Wallace's radicalism soon outstripped that of his friends. In 1922, the Labour Party affiliated with the newly formed Worker's Party of Canada. The WPC was the public front of the Communist Party of Canada, which at its inaugural meeting in 1921 had been established as a clandestine organization in accordance with current policy of the Communist International. Wallace's career as a Communist writer now began in earnest, when he became a regular contributor of poems, news items, and editorials to the party's national weekly newspaper, the *Worker*.

Wallace's first poem in the *Worker*, "Awake!" (4 July 1923), is a rousing call to the Canadian proletariat to seize the heritage its labour has earned:

. . . Now deliverance comes at last,
The world is locked in the struggle vast:
Rise to your Russian comrades' call,
Masters are nothing! Men are all!

(*Joe Wallace Poems* 93)

"Better That!" (9 Feb. 1924) conveys the same tone of working-class defiance. The poem is a dramatic monologue in the imagined words of J.B. McLachlan, secretary of the United Mine Workers' Union in Cape Breton, jailed in 1923 for sedition, one of the catch-all charges that Canadian authorities were currently using in their drive against "Bolshevism." The first of the poem's three stanzas sounds the note of defiance:

The judge's words
May pound my ears
Like a devil dancing
On a drum:
But better that
Than woman's tears
For children starved,
And I stay dumb!
(*JW Poems* 15)

His signed articles and editorials for the Worker were similarly outspoken, and included an attack on the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, an exposé of working conditions in the coal mining industry of Nova Scotia, and an interview with McLachlan.

But Wallace's commitment to his new avocation was offset by domestic and professional problems as well as by personal tragedy. The sudden death in 1925 of his five-year-old daughter was followed two years later by the death of his wife. A hasty second marriage in 1928 to Grace Beardsley soon ended in separation. As a practising Roman Catholic, Wallace could not obtain a divorce. For the rest of his life, he lived as a bachelor. In 1933, under the increasing opposition of his business colleagues and customers to his political activities, he was forced to leave the advertising agency.

"I'm out of a job for the first time in my life," he announced in an article in the Toronto-based Communist literary magazine *Masses*. But he immediately corrected his announcement: "No — that is far from the fact: the real truth is that for seventeen years and more I have been out of

work. Now, for the first time in my life I've got a job" ("So I Quit" 9). Wallace's new job was that of itinerant activist, usually unpaid, for the Communist Party. His first assignment was to run, unsuccessfully, for a Halifax seat in the 1933 provincial election, on behalf of a Communist-backed United Front Party led by J.B. McLachlan (MacEwan 173). Next, the Communist Party sent him to Ottawa as a representative to a conference on unemployment. For three years he worked in Ottawa and in Montreal with the Canadian Labour Defense League, lobbying for the release of Tim Buck and other imprisoned Communist leaders. In Montreal he met twenty-five-year-old Dorothy Livesay who, like Wallace, was contributing articles and poems to Communist publications, but otherwise he remained isolated from the Canadian literary community. In fact, for a time it seemed that his devotion to poetry was behind him: his main writing now involved polemical pamphlets, such as *Class Justice and Mass Defense* for the Labour Defense League, and articles in the left-wing and Communist press. In 1936 he moved to Toronto to write for the newly established party newspaper the *Daily Clarion*.

In his first full-time job since leaving the advertising business, Wallace was paid the respectable depression-era sum of thirteen dollars a week (Wallace, "Side By Side" 21 Feb. 1966). As an associate editor, his assignments included feature articles, rewrite work, and a column entitled "A World to Win" (changed in 1937 to "Between the Lines"). The *Clarion* was the Communist Party's attempt to produce a conventional daily newspaper, complete with sports page, comics, and women's columns. Most Communist newspaper writing in English was hampered by a stiff bureaucratic style, probably influenced in part by European Revolutionary writing, especially Russian, which often appeared stilted in translation. But the *Clarion's* editors were eager to reach the masses by means of a popular newspaper format and colloquial language. Wallace threw himself into this kind of writing, cultivating in his columns an autobiographical rhetoric, often referring to his childhood, the abuse he experienced from his stepmother (26 Nov. 1936) or his estrangement

from his own children as a result of the dramatic change in his life's direction (23 April 1938). In a somewhat contrived fashion, he drew analogies between the violence he experienced as a child and the violence current in the world at large. At one point, he even compared his brutal stepmother to Mussolini and Hitler (10 May 1938).

The comparison may have been incongruous, but it is easy to understand how the sinister names should spring so readily to mind in 1938-39, when Nazi Germany was insisting on its right to expansion into eastern Europe, Mussolini's Italian legions had overrun Ethiopia, Japan was forcibly pressing claims to imperial sovereignty in Asia, and Franco's fascist legions were challenging the elected government of Spain. Like hundreds of Canadians of liberal, left-wing and other political inclinations, Wallace was intensely stirred by the conflict in Spain. Although Franco claimed the authority and support of the Pope, Wallace's Communism took precedence over his Catholicism, and he vigorously spoke out in defense of the Spanish republic. He even volunteered to go as a war correspondent, but in view of his age and recurrent lung problems the *Clarion* passed him over in favour of the young Ted Allen, subsequently the biographer of Norman Bethune (Wallace, "Side By Side," 7 March 1966).

While war and political crisis raged in Spain and eastern Europe, the Conservative government of R.B. Bennett followed the examples of its Liberal predecessor and the United States by ignoring the fascist threat and continuing its attempt to suppress the domestic Communist movement. Even in 1940, with Canada at war with Germany and Italy, politicians and the RCMP continued their vindictive campaign against Communism. Using the excuse of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Liberal government of Mackenzie King invoked the War Measures Act to pass a series of orders-in-council known as the Defense of Canada Regulations, effectively making the Communist Party illegal. Several of the party's leaders, including some elected members of municipal governments, were arrested by the RCMP and interned, in most cases without charge or trial (Penner 169-70). Virtually all Communist publishing activity was suppressed, including the *Daily Clarion*,

although the *Clarion* was replaced within weeks by the *Canadian Tribune*, a weekly incorporated as an independent publication, but staffed mostly by party members. The *Tribune* was allowed by the authorities to continue, but early in 1941 the RCMP began rounding up some of the more prominent Communist journalists — including, on 8 March, Joe Wallace (Foreword, *JW Poems* xvi).

The German invasion of Russia in June of 1941 abrogated the Hitler-Stalin pact, and since Russia was now Canada's ally in the war against Germany, there was no justification for detaining Canadian Communists. Instead of releasing the internees, however, the government dragged its feet. Wallace and others were transferred from Toronto's Don Jail to the army base at Petawawa, then again to a disused jail in Hull, Quebec, and kept in confinement for most of another year. Although in his fifties and suffering health problems, Wallace was defiant in captivity. On the occasion of an inspection of the Petawawa camp by a British official, the commandant referred to the prisoners in Wallace's hut as "enemy aliens." "We are not enemy aliens," Wallace is reported to have said. "We're Canadian anti-fascists." For this alleged breach of discipline he was put in solitary confinement, sparking an inmate protest which ended only when soldiers were called in and given orders to shoot if the protesters did not disperse (Repka 151-52).

Shortly after Wallace's release in October 1942, his fellow internee Winnipeg journalist Mitch Sago arranged for the publication of Wallace's first book. *Night is Ended* collected a series of lyrics based on his prison camp experiences, plus several earlier poems. By way of advance publicity, a selection from the volume was printed in the 7 Nov. 1942 *Canadian Tribune*. The manuscript was also sent to the Communist editor and critic Margaret Fairley of Toronto, who wrote a foreword to the book and enlisted E.J. Pratt to write a prefatory letter. Even with Pratt's endorsement, the little volume would probably have attracted no attention in non-Communist Canadian cultural circles if it had not been praised by E.K. Brown in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. Brown described the

slim volume as "an unusual and moving collection." Wallace's "martial" poems, said Brown, were "over-rhetorical and verbally not more than half-alive, but the melancholy personal pieces are often wholly admirable in their intensity, economy and clarity" (309). The politically conservative magazine *Saturday Night* echoed Brown's praise, describing Wallace as a "poet of high distinction and accomplishment," and expressing outrage at the Canadian government's political persecution of Canadian citizens. "Shelley would have been interned under the Defence of Canada regulations," the commentator argued ("Communist Poet" 3).

Divided into sections featuring prison lyrics, "dreams and fancies," and political themes, *Night Is Ended* is a survey of Wallace's poetic career up to 1942. As E.K. Brown noted, the main strengths of the book are in the more personal poems. "How High, How Wide" is a brief, moving expression of the poet's response to solitary confinement:

My prison window is not large,
Five inches high, six inches wide,
Perhaps seven.
Yet it is large enough to show
The whole unfettered to and fro
Of heaven

(*JW Poems* 45)

As the title of the volume suggests, many of the poems of *Night Is Ended* present not an angry attack on capitalist society but a muted faith in ultimate social justice and personal vindication that is implicitly paralleled to Wallace's Roman Catholic beliefs. Wallace was not unique among Canadian writers in his dual commitment to Christianity and radical politics. Kenneth Leslie, an associate from the Nova Scotia Song Fishermen days, similarly devoted much of his creative energies in the 1930s and 1940s to explicating the consistencies between his socialism and his Baptist beliefs (Devanney 90-93). The young novelist Morley Callaghan also strove in the 1930s to reconcile what he saw as the necessity of political radicalism and his devout Roman Catholicism. Ultimately,

as F.W. Watt has noted, Callaghan effected this reconciliation by evolving a concept of individualism which allowed people a measure of control over their own salvation within the compulsions of impersonal social forces (Watt 303). But Wallace's approach to the question was more straightforward. His reconciliation of political and religious beliefs is revealed in the poem "Catholics and Communists," which first appeared in the *Canadian Tribune* of 16 September 1944. In a cheerfully jingling rhythm and rhyme he insists that these beliefs are merely different forms of the same militant revolutionary faith:

St. Thomas More (to prove my point
I bring two famous men in)
Utopia's author, now anoint,
Would be at home with Lenin.

Similarly, St. Joan of Arc, he suggests, might have led the defense of Stalingrad (*JW Poems* 61).

Even when the poems of *Night Is Ended* are invested with what Brown calls the "martial" spirit, political triumph is expressed in terms of personal fulfilment and the reconciliation of spiritual and romantic ideals.

A people in arms, we fight on as one,
The flame of the future inside us!
While the glorious dead march on ahead,
And the women we love beside us.
("Flame of the Future" *JW Poems* 48)

In contrast to such militant rhetoric, Wallace passed quietly from prison into the obscurity of the wartime working world. As a condition of release, internees had to sign documents pledging to support the war effort and to refrain from Communist Party activities (Penner 186). As a fervent anti-fascist, Wallace willingly accepted the first condition. After taking a training course, he worked for the duration of the war as a lathe operator at Ferranti Electric in Toronto. But it was not so easy for him to set aside his political ideology, and he risked police harassment by helping to organize a union where he worked. In 1944, he also began to contribute a column to the *Tribune*, although

technically speaking he was not thereby engaging in Communist Party activity, since the *Tribune* was legally independent of the party. In 1943, furthermore, as part of a deal arranged with the Mackenzie King government, the CPC had been reconstituted as the Labour-Progressive Party, a name it retained until 1960 as a means of placating right-wing politicians and police who opposed the restoration of legality to Communism.

In 1946, with the dismantling of Canada's war industries, Wallace lost his factory job. Unable to support himself by journalism, he worked as a caretaker in a hospital, thus completing his transformation from advertising executive to proletarian. As a loyal Communist, Wallace expressed satisfaction with the transformation. "For eight years I worked with my hands," he reminisced in 1960. "This was not a degrading experience for me. I felt, and still feel, that a poet should do manual labor. He should be given this chance to meet all classes of people. He must live and work with the masses if he is to be a poet at all" (Colombo 81).

To be a poet, however, also required access to an editorial and publishing infrastructure as well as to a community of readers. During the war poetry was not high on the list of priorities for the Labour-Progressive Party, but in the late 1940s circumstances began to improve. In 1947, under the initiative of members like historian Stanley B. Ryerson, journalist William Morris, and writer Margaret Fairley, the party established a cultural commission to look into ways of encouraging activities in the arts. Among the results of these initiatives was the creation in 1952 of a literary magazine, *New Frontiers*, with Margaret Fairley as editor and Joe Wallace as a member of the editorial committee.

The magazine lasted five years, a not inconsiderable life span for a limited-circulation arts magazine, especially in the culturally apathetic atmosphere of 1950s Canada. During these years, *New Frontiers* sent Wallace on readings and promotional tours across the country and on a cultural visit to eastern Europe, besides publishing two new collections of his poetry. The first, a thin but elegant

edition of twenty-two short poems, *All My Brothers* (1953) was more upbeat in theme and imagery than *Night Is Ended*, although there were elegies for the dead of World War II ("Requiem," "Last Will and Testament of the Unknown Soldier"), and poems protesting recent examples of capitalist injustice such as the execution of the Rosenbergs in the U.S. ("A Cry In the Night"). There were also more introspective poems, based on Wallace's consciousness of aging and the elusiveness of happiness. Other poems, such as "Early In the Morning" and "Making Hay," express youthful joy and exuberance.

Once again the *University of Toronto Quarterly* led the non-Communist critical reaction to Wallace's work.

Following the lead of E.K. Brown's 1943 judgement on Wallace, Northrop Frye described the poetry of *All My Brothers* as written in a "familiar Communist idiom, sometimes laboured, especially in the Yanks-go-home passages, sometimes corny . . . but sometimes also clear and precise," deriving "much of its strength from the sheer intensity of the Marxist view of the capitalist world" (Frye 1953-54: 260).

With his work winning brief but friendly academic acknowledgement outside the party and unqualified praise within it, Wallace was by the mid-1950s the most prominent Communist creative writer in Canada. As such, he was a natural choice for inclusion on a cultural tour to Rumania, Hungary, and Poland in the summer of 1954, organized by *New Frontiers*, and led by the editor, Margaret Fairley. As Fairley subsequently noted in a *New Frontiers* article, the visitors were impressed by the efforts in the peoples' republics to preserve the traditional cultures of their countries, through theatre, museums of folk art, and restoration of heritage architecture. This "reverence for the past," combined with "love of country, a longing for peace and [an eagerness to] work for socialism" (30), must have been especially eye-opening for Wallace, whose life experience in working-class and commercial urban Canada was far removed from this kind of heightened consciousness of cultural tradition. Wallace was also surprised and pleased to find that Catholicism was still flourishing in Hungary, and wrote for *New Frontiers* an

account of meeting two elderly devotees of both the church and the party-sponsored peace movement ("Three Grandfathers").

In 1955, Wallace reached the mandatory retirement age of sixty-five, and was now able to devote himself full-time to writing, speaking engagements, and cultural exchange tours. In that year he edited for *New Frontiers* the first of a proposed "series of pamphlets on the Canadian Arts and Sciences" (according to the title page), a 32-page anthology of work by four nineteenth-century poets entitled *The Stone, the Axe, the Sword and Other Canadian Poems*. The project was a labour of love for Wallace, taking him back to some of the poets who had inspired him in his youth. Most of the poems deal with work and Canadian patriotism, two themes which Wallace favoured in his own poetry. His title came from three of the selections: Peter McArthur's Whitmanesque tribute to the pioneer, "The Stone," and two poems by Isabella Valancy Crawford, "The Axe" (an excerpt from her long poem *Malcolm's Katie*) and "The Sword." From Alexander McLachlan, he chose such poems as "The Workman's Song," the immigrant's complaint "Old England is Eaten by Knaves," and "Young Canada." Archibald Lampman's famous satire, "To a Millionaire" was included, but from Lampman and Crawford he also chose nature and personal lyrics, reflecting the fondness in his own work for a blend of public and private themes. In a brief foreword Wallace further indicated his identification with these early poets by representing them as isolated voices in the new world "jungle" speaking to a miniscule audience but laying the foundations for a cultural tradition that would ultimately form part of a glorious new civilization. "We hope that after you read what they have to say here," he concludes, ". . . you will go on with them to the people's poets of today, who bear their banner, out of the jungle around us on to a joyful Canada where there will be peace forever with beauty and abundance for everybody"

In the summer of 1956 Wallace also brought out a new collection of his own poems, *Hi, Sister! Hi, Brother!*, under the New Frontiers imprint. The *Tribune* was predictably enthusiastic, and once again Frye gave his

approval, praising Wallace's work not simply for its emotional qualities, but for its craftsmanship as well. The new work, says Frye, "looks at first like naive verse, but a second glance indicates that a skilful and astute versifier is only pretending to write naive verse" (1956-57: 301). Several descriptive and evocative pieces were inspired by his 1955 trip to eastern Europe (e.g., "Warsaw Ghetto Memorial"), some were nationalistic ("All Compasses Point to Canada"), some satirical ("The American Way of Life"), and some personal and lyrical ("Tunes from an Old Music Box," "My Daughter").

As in all his work, his most successful pieces are brief meditations on some fleeting but striking encounter or observation. "Chinese Army Girl," for instance, was inspired by a moment in Bucharest on the 1954 tour, as he watched a young visitor from China joining in an exuberant European dance. The poem brings together the vitality and innocence of youth and the joy of a Utopian vision of international harmony, and places them against the grim background of revolutionary struggle. The "mischief and affection" in the girl's movements "makes it seem incredible," says Wallace,

In spite of recollection
How recently
How decently
How long she danced with death
(*JW Poems* 92)

In January of 1957 Wallace embarked on a ten-month visit to the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, at the invitation of the writers' unions of the two countries. The trip was part cultural tour and part rest cure for the ailing sixty-six-year-old poet, as he revealed in reports printed in a series for the *Tribune* entitled "On My Way." Sailing from Canada in January, he spent the winter and spring in a writers' rest home near Moscow and at a spa on the Black Sea, before going on to China in the summer, then back to Russia in the fall. In Moscow he saw a performance of Glinka's opera *Ludmilla* at the Bolshoi, but was impressed less by the music than by the enthusiasm of the working-class audience for this kind of culture (28 Jan.)

Also in the capital he was pleased to see some of his poems published in the *Literary Gazette* in translations by Samuel Marslak, chairman of the translators' division of the Union of Writers. The local writers' union also showed him convivial hospitality during his stay — but, he notes wryly, he got a very cool reception when he went to pay a courtesy call at the Canadian embassy (25 Feb.).

In March he took up residence at a Writers' Rest Home near Moscow, then at a sanitarium at Sochi on the Black Sea, and compared the almost luxurious free health care available in Russia to facilities in Canada. In May, he was back in Moscow to speak at a sesqui-centennial conference on the poet whose work had first inspired him as a child, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Once again he was taken on a round of operas and concerts, which included a recital by another visiting Canadian, Glenn Gould. In late June he began the long train journey into China, arriving in Peking (Beijing) on 2 July. With a collection of his poems recently published in China, he was enthusiastically greeted by the writers' union, and introduced to local notables, including veterans of the Long March. In August he returned to Russia to attend an annual youth festival, which featured a dancing performance of his poem "Making Hay," with a musical setting by his old friend Mitch Sago. Finally, late in October, he sailed for home.

The whole trip was for Wallace an exhilarating experience. "I now have unforgettable friends in Nepal, South Africa, Israel, Greece, Argentine, Ceylon," he wrote, "all met in the USSR" (16 Sept.). The most gratifying consequence was the knowledge that in China, Russia, and other eastern European countries he was famous, and his writings were known in Marxist Revolutionary circles all over the world. Early in 1958, soon after his return home, the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow issued *The Golden Legend*, an anthology of Wallace's poems including new work, plus selections from all his previously published volumes, and with a title adapted from his childhood favourite, Longfellow. Russian- and Chinese-language editions of the new volume appeared simultaneously with the English.

After the demise of *New Frontiers* in 1957, all the first English-language editions of Wallace's new books were published in the Soviet Union, and no new editions of his work were published in Canada during his lifetime. Nor were any of his foreign-published books reviewed in Canada outside of the Communist press. But by the late 1950s, Wallace was thoroughly discouraged with the prospects in Canada for his kind of writing. As he declared in his preface to *The Golden Legend*, he believed that poetry had become a "lost art" in all the English-speaking countries, "because the poets are writing to poets, to critics, to professional intellectuals" (19), instead of to the common working people. He believed as thoroughly as he ever did that the purpose of poetry was to inspire the proletariat with faith in the possibility of a world far better than the strife-ridden, greed-driven societies of western capitalism, but in 1958 the prospects for creating such a world in North America seemed bleak. The collapse of *New Frontiers* and the reluctance of other Canadian publishers to handle Wallace's work reflected the Cold War atmosphere of the late 1950s, when Canada was infected with the fanatical anti-Communism that plagued the United States of Joseph McCarthy and John Foster Dulles.

Yet in spite of this atmosphere, Wallace continued to gain recognition in Canada outside of his partisan circles. In 1957, he was praised by F.W. Watt in his groundbreaking doctoral dissertation "Radicalism in English-Canadian Literature" as the "only consistently dedicated and genuinely proletarian poet" the country had produced (261). F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith included three of his poems in their anthology of satirical Canadian verse, *The Blasted Pine* (1957). In the 1950s Wallace also found a devoted disciple in young Milton Acorn, whose admiration for the older poet outlasted Acorn's sojourn in the Communist Party. In 1960 Wallace was the subject of an interview by John Robert Colombo for the University of Toronto student newspaper the *Varsity*. Although Colombo found him in indifferent health, living in "two poorly heated rooms in the basement of an old house . . . overlooking the ravine in Toronto" (80), the fact emerged from behind Wallace's soft-spoken modesty that Colombo

was talking to a Canadian whose fame in Eastern Europe and China rivaled that of Norman Bethune. Colombo's article was reprinted in the *Canadian Forum*, thus ensuring Wallace a further modicum of national publicity.

But to enjoy a full measure of literary fame, Wallace had to look to the Communist countries. In the spring of 1960 he embarked on another visit to Russia, again invited by the Union of Soviet Writers for "an unlimited period of rest and work" (photo caption, *Canadian Tribune* 23 May 1960). Wallace spent the next two years in Russia, based primarily in Moscow, from which he embarked from time to time on speaking and reading tours, rest cures, and vacations (Frank 7). In 1965 a new edition of his poems, *A Radiant Sphere*, was published in Moscow. This volume included poems introduced in *The Golden Legend*, as well as some new poems and a few of Wallace's old favourites, such as the elegy, "Lenin Lies Asleep in Moscow." The most significant section of *A Radiant Sphere* was a collection of poetic renderings into English of work by eleven Soviet poets. Wallace could neither read nor speak Russian, but working from prose translations prepared by others, he produced lyrics that incorporated the Russian poetic thought into simple English idioms and conventional metric forms which reconfirmed Northrop Frye's observation of his remarkable skill as a versifier. A few of the poems he chose dealt with militant political themes, but most were lyrical expressions of romantic love or nature, as in this excerpt from his version of Andrei Voznesensky's "Mountain Springs":

A mountain girl
Comes to a fountain
Falling near
Flicking her heels
Like a forest deer
Dips and quaffs
Slips and laughs
Under a cascade of water
Dances the mountain's daughter
(105)

By the mid-1960s, Wallace's work had become

enormously popular in Russia, often used in English-language instruction as well as in literary study. In 1966, as a mark of his celebrity status in the Soviet Union, he was the guest of the Soviet government on a summer cruise to Denmark and Russia on the luxury liner *Pushkin*, which was inaugurating service between the USSR and Canada (Wallace, "Side By Side" 13 June 1966). In Canada, meanwhile, his writings and reputation were subject to new adverse factors, in addition to the continuing hostility to Communism. The younger generation, stirred by anti-establishment, anti-war rhetoric from the United States and elsewhere, was looking in new directions for models of radical thought and expression. Disillusioned by the ideologies of old-line political parties, more and more young people were turning to anti-rational, romantic, self-indulgent forms of behaviour to express their anger and gloom about the political and ecological prospects of the world. Wallace's wistful lyrics and satires sounded increasingly irrelevant to the new generation, who sought objectifications to their intense emotionalism in rock and neo-folk music.

In 1968 Wallace moved to Vancouver, to take up residence in a retirement home. He continued, however, both his writing and his travels, visiting the Soviet Union for the last time only a year before his death. In January 1975, shortly after returning from Russia, he was interviewed in Vancouver by Alan Safarik and Dorothy Livesay, and revealed his contentment with his life and his continuing confidence in the ultimate triumph of the Marxist revolution. As he realized, however, he would not see the new age. On 1 December 1975 he suffered a heart attack, and died later that day in Vancouver General Hospital.

Except for a few poems in anthologies, all of Wallace's work was out of print by the time of his death. In 1981 the official CPC publisher, Progress Books, prepared a selected edition, under the title *Joe Wallace Poems*. As in the old days, a few non-Communist critics made polite noises about his skill as a versifier and the sincerity of his political ideals, but the volume did not reach an audience any wider than the small partisan Canadian readership he commanded

during his lifetime.

Wallace's "failure to achieve fame was his own damn fault," Milton Acorn complained. "He published good poems, some stunning ones; but many so bad they made readers wish never to hear of him again" (38). Acorn was not strictly accurate about Wallace's failure, since he had achieved fame abroad, but his neglect in Canada was certainly attributable in part to his lack of self-criticism. His failure to achieve recognition from Canadian critics and other poets might also be attributed to his conviction that the most suitable poetic idiom for his purposes was to be found in nineteenth-century verse. Most of his compositions employed the closed forms favoured by his nineteenth-century poetic masters. His favourite rhythm was a simple, almost metronomically regular, iambic tetrameter; his poems were usually arranged in aabb or abab rhyming quatrains. He did disperse other metres and rhyme schemes throughout his work, and once or twice he even came perilously close to free verse. But he never thought of poetic form as flexible material for experimentation. As he indicated in his preface to *The Golden Legend*, he rejected most of the new literary fashions because he did not want to write for poets, critics, and "professional intellectuals." His intended audience was the working-class reader, and his poems deliberately recall the schoolroom verse that has formed the idea of poetry for several generations of such readers.

Even as early as the 1920s, when Wallace was just beginning to publish his poetry in the *Worker*, his devotion to nineteenth-century literary models would have been despised as archaic by young poets such as the members of the McGill group, who were recreating Canadian poetry in accordance with the international ideals of modernism propounded by poets like Eliot, Yeats, and Pound. Throughout his career, in the late 1940s and early '50s when Raymond Souster, Louis Dudek and others were importing American post-modernism to Canada, and on into the 1960s and '70s, Wallace paid no attention to new poetic fashions.

Throughout his poetic career, furthermore, Wallace

seems to have interacted with few living poets. He evidently had no contact with Canadian literary circles outside the writers' groups of the Communist party. His attitude to poetry in some respects resembles the attitude of E.J. Pratt, who also went his own way in defiance of modernist fashions and preferred ostensibly simple and naive closed verse forms that would strike some readers as old-fashioned. Like Pratt, Wallace could be rather cryptic and subjective, especially when, as he often did, he blended his ideology with autobiographical allusion. But Pratt's complex views of history, social progress, human spirituality and cosmic irony were far removed from Wallace's own simple blend of Catholicism and faith in the working-class revolution. On the whole, he preferred his poetic statements to be simple and clear. Philosophical profundity or complexity of language and poetic technique were in his opinion merely self-indulgent attempts to be fashionable:

That poet who is worth his salt
Finds clarity a fatal fault
His verse is surely heaven-sent
When only God knows what he meant.
("Fashionable Western Poetry," *JW Poems* 180)

Even poets who shared his interest in Marxism, including poets he knew and liked, had little influence on him. Dorothy Livesay and Milton Acorn shared Wallace's respect for the conventions of musicality and proletarian language while they were young members of the party, but when they moved on to more varied conceptions of poetic form and purpose, Wallace lost interest in their writing.

"He was a fanatic about rhyme in a day when most poets were fanatic about not rhyming," Acorn observed. "Not only did he deny poems which didn't rhyme. He thought something was necessarily a poem if he managed to rhyme it" (41, 42). Such an obsession could make Wallace's work sound like a parody of amateurism, a mere recitation of discursive lines wrenched into rhyming shapes, as in his "Saga of Doctor Bethune":

Our land with many kinds of wealth is blessed

Beyond the Ophirs Solomon possessed.
Yearly our prairies yield their flowing gold
Not far beneath lie lakes of wealth untold.

(JW Poems 63)

But when his rhymes are combined with a satirical purpose, appropriate images and a clear sense of musicality, the results are more successful, as in "Peace on Earth":

On Wall Street, where the itch for gold
Makes hands as hot as hearts are cold,
Their temples rise like soaring stones
Above a bed of human bones
But air-conditioning hides the smell
Of this and other things as well
While nothing good taste might deplore
Pierces a sound-proof wall or door . . .

(JW Poems 53)

This is not to say that Wallace's poetry could succeed only when it was wedded to a political purpose. Like other Communist poets, he began by assuming that political purpose was primary; but he soon realized that political purpose could be an all-encompassing ideal. In the 1930s Dorothy Livesay began her poetic career, like Wallace, by writing propaganda poetry. But by the early 1940s she was convinced that the proper direction of the poetic eye was inward rather than outward, and the proper stance of the poet towards the political world was detachment. These convictions, combined with her increasing interest in formal and linguistic experimentation, contributed to her decision to leave the party. "Freedom for the artist [is] the necessity of knowing himself [sic]," she declared at a Communist-sponsored cultural conference in Vancouver in 1952. "The artist . . . must stand above the struggle" ("Magazines Meet" 13). Wallace, by contrast, became convinced that there was no contradiction between a poet's concern for politics and a poet's concern for anything else, because all subjects are part of the human condition. The artist does not stand above anything, but