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**“I,” “UNKNOWN”: FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN MIRIAM WADDINGTON’S EARLY LIFE WRITING AND *GREEN WORLD* (1945)<sup>1</sup>**

Fifty years ago women wrote, but that didn’t make them writers. They had other primary functions that defined them: to get a husband, have children, and manage a household. Their inner lives were lived anonymously and underground. The inner underground life applied to me as it did most women writers of my generation.

– Miriam Waddington (*Apartment* 203)

In a letter to her friend Miriam Waddington in 1945, Dorothy Livesay called Waddington’s newly published *Green World* “the only probing poetry we have” (Livesay). In suggesting the need to “probe,” that is to “examine searchingly, to venture beneath surfaces, to investigate that which is not immediately evident” (Davidson 586), Livesay’s words provide a fitting introduction to Waddington’s early life writing and poetry, both of which explore the “inner underground life” (Waddington, *Apartment* 203) of her own sex. After Waddington had published two books of poems, Milton Wilson called her a “very uneven” and “unsatisfying poet” while conceding that her “work as a whole is more impressive than any poem or selection of poems can make it seem” (83). This essay attempts to fill a lacuna, a gap in critical research, on Waddington’s life writing. It argues that Waddington’s early interest in female subjectivity, in both published and unpublished work, lends

itself to the ongoing work of critical reassessment of the second wave of Canadian modernism. Although early critics of Waddington's first books failed to engage with her "probing" of female subjectivity, it is at the centre of her contribution to the second wave of Canadian modernist poetry. Attention to this central aspect of Waddington's work will explain the rewarding substance of the poetry – and its links to her life writing – which early criticism of her first books has failed to acknowledge.

As well as being part of an emerging group of female poets that included Margaret Avison, P. K. Page, and Anne Marriott who, with Livesay, used modernist techniques, Waddington is markedly different in background: not a Gentile, but a Jew, a self-described "[o]utsider" (*Apartment* 36)<sup>2</sup> in Canadian literature. Waddington spoke Yiddish before she spoke English. The speaker in her poem "The Bond," a central work in *Green World*, asserts the presence of the "twice isolate" (11) in both Canadian culture and the modernist Canadian lyric as a woman and a Jew.

This essay is feminist in its critical orientation. As Rita Felski observes in *Life After Feminism*, the "wary statement, 'if one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is,' pretty much sums up the tenor of much contemporary feminist work" (4). As will be seen later in this essay, in a 1992 interview, Miriam Waddington insisted that the voice in her poetry is neither female nor male but "without sex." I read this position as a strategic response for a female poet within a male-centred culture, arguing that Waddington used a double strategy of resistance: first, she refused to designate "the voice" in her poems as (only and always) female, and, second, throughout her writing, she asserted the presence of an outsider, a "Jewish me."

Sidonie Smith points out in *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body*, that the "history of the universal subject . . . underwrites a history of the female subject, for the architecture of the universal subject rests upon and supports the founding identifications of those that are nonuniversal, the colorful, among whom is 'woman'" (11). Numerous feminist scholars have challenged the authority of "[m]asculine disembodiment" (Butler 133),

asserting the necessity of having a body in order to write or to speak. But, as I note above, the claim to “disembodiment,” made by a female poet like Waddington, may be understood as a means of resistance to the “universal” white anglosaxon male literary establishment in which a female poet could only speak, as many did, of “Man” and “mankind,” or from the position of “other.” Within her early journals and poetry Waddington struggles to construct new representations of female subjectivity. She writes to create her own pattern.

“Language,” writes Shari Benstock in *Textualizing the Feminine*, “is not merely a socio-cultural medium of communication (a tool) but the very fabric of subjectivity” (17). This “fabric of subjectivity” is the central concern of this essay. As Liz Yorke observes in *Impertinent Voices*, the “female body is always already mediated in and through language . . . in relation to the social/political world – as well as in psychological relation to others” (12). If language has been the site of oppression for women, writing of female subjectivity can be explored as a site of struggle and potential liberation. Yorke asserts the imperative of “using the powerful transformational medium of poetry . . . to an ongoing process of re-vision and re-interpretation within cultural forms” (13). I suggest that through rereading Waddington’s life writing and poetry we can help to reframe an understanding of the second wave of Canadian modernism that includes women’s poetry.

Waddington (nee Dworkin) had a more eclectic range of influences than Canadian poets raised to speak and read only English and possibly French; always she had more than the English tradition of poetry, though she had that too. In her essay “Mrs. Maza’s Salon,” Waddington attests to the cosmopolitan influence of the Yiddish poet Ida Maza, from Montreal, who “took charge of . . . [her] reading” (*Apartment* 3) from the age of 14, encouraging her to read an eclectic range of British, Irish, and American poets as well as her own Yiddish poems.

Waddington also has noted as “an issue, gender did not even exist until the [English] publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in the fifties . . . [and f]or my part, I

accepted . . . that it would be a waste of time to try to change what John Stuart Mill called the received opinions of a whole country” (*Apartment* 34). Throughout her life, Miriam Waddington picked her battles. She was strategic: the “received opinions,” which she accepted in published criticism, she challenged in both life writing and poetry. In Waddington’s early work, poetry becomes an occasion to cast off traditional rhyme and metre, to “step out” (Waddington, “Creative” 1) of traditional patterns in poetry while simultaneously challenging female subordination in Canadian culture.

Canadian literary criticism of the forties, fifties, and sixties failed to perceive gender and race in discussions of modernism and modern poetry. “We could also define the typical Canadian poet of the forties,” wrote Waddington’s first publisher John Sutherland to his contemporaries in the forties, “as an Englishman trying hard to stop being one, but so far not succeeding” (53). The “Englishman” might want to “stop being” English, but few men in this male dominant period would have willingly chosen to “stop being” or, for that matter, to stop “sounding” male.

In her early unpublished writing, Waddington uses both journal writing and poetry to pursue what she, in a later essay, calls “leaps into the unknown by means of language” (“Creative” 3). In the following discussion of Waddington’s life writing, I use journals, unpublished poems, essays, and Waddington’s Master’s thesis (in the field of social work) as a means of contextualizing what she refers to in the epigraph to this essay as the “inner underground life” of the female writer. Within that context, I collapse the once critically maintained division between private and public in order to pursue my own probing of *Green World* as a female-centred book of Canadian modernist poetry. This essay has two purposes: the first is to offer a brief preliminary account of the material relevant to this study found in the early unpublished material in the Miriam Waddington Papers held at Library and Archives Canada; and the second, to explore female subjectivity in both the unpublished life writing and *Green World*.

Waddington's life writing includes a wide range of material: two epistolary journals, traditional verse, stream of consciousness prose, drafts of modernist poems, and academic writing. Waddington's journals tend to combine drafts of poems and stories along with autobiographical notes. This mixing-up of different genres allowed her to use the journal as a workbook in which she might begin with a note, and then proceed to a draft of a story or poem. Whatever the form of writing in the journals, female subjectivity is almost always the central concern. In Waddington's early journals there is an ongoing "audit of meaning" (Berthoff 11) from the point of view of the female subject. Ann Berthoff notes that using the journal recreates "us as historical creatures," freeing us "from the momentary, the eternal present of the beasts" (12). Such an eternal present has been the domain of both beasts and women who have been silent partners within poetic tradition. Modernist poetry might be read as a moment of rupture when the monologic address of the voice of "Man" is challenged within its own "fragments" (Eliot 75). In shifting the dialogue from himself to herself, a female modernist poet performs a fundamental act of transformation in attending to female voices marginalized in traditional verse. In Waddington's early work, the speaker is in dialogue with a "self" which most often either refuses the stable referent of gender, or is gendered female.

### **The Journals of Miriam Waddington (1933-1943)**

Twelve years before the publication of her first book, *Green World*, Miriam Waddington's earliest journal creates her first reader as an "Unknown," as "my best and most complete friend." This reader is addressed on the first page:

Dear Unknown,  
This diary is going to consist wholly of letters to you. You are somewhere and somebody, and some day I'll meet you and you shall read these letters. You are my best and most complete friend and I am going to tell you everything.  
(Notebook, 20 April 1933)

Waddington's first journal is written in a paperback scribbler with the appropriate title "The Challenger" under which Waddington, the fifteen-year-old girl, writes "what we all need, a challenger." The imagined reader is configured as both "challenger" and one who may end the state of isolation of which the "I" of both Waddington's journals and lyric poetry speaks. In Waddington's early life writing, the known master narratives which configured female identity within the bounds of passivity, service, and sleep come up against the inky hand of a modern teenage girl, and later a young woman, who ventures to address the "Unknown" in recognition that the old narratives no longer serve within her own life.

Throughout the journal, the issue of unrequited love for one "Marvin" – an artistic Jewish young male from Montreal who is "beautiful mentally, spiritually" – provides a loose but unifying theme with which the journal entries of 1933-1934 begin and end. The young Waddington critiques the conventional end of the romance plot in marriage. Throughout the four months of writing the journal, Marvin both remains with his girlfriend, Faegal, and fails to answer the young poet's letters. He is much less a real person in the journal than a muse figure for Miriam Dworkin, an Ottawa teenager, to begin to write. The focus of the journal is on using language as a mode of expression and a tool of investigation to explore female subjectivity. Dissatisfaction with women's lot both as spinsters and wives in patriarchal society is the point from which Waddington's life writing begins. She writes in the 1933 journal:

Spinsterhood does not particularly appeal to me. But then – neither does life at 40 in a kitchen appeal to me. It's so funny. I don't want to look forward to marriage like 100% of the girls I know. I won't be a slave! That's what marriage means. Slavery for the woman, & in a lesser degree, even for the man. After all – 2 years, 3 years of happiness & the rest of your life you pay & pay & pay.

Enough! I've still got 10 more years to think of it. (3 May 1933)

In configuring a self with “10 more years to think of it,” Waddington turns the attention of her ideal reader, “Unknown,” away from “Marvin,” the idealized beloved. Love poets such as Petrarch shifted attention onto themselves in claiming love for their ladies. Unwittingly parodying the convention of courtly love, the young female journal keeper uses unrequited love as a guiding literary trope through which she is authorized to explore not the indistinct “other” but the proximate self.

The dissatisfaction which Waddington records with the limited roles assigned to women extends to her critique of the patriarchal organization of seating at synagogue. When she occasionally attended synagogue with friends, “I felt out of place and didn’t like being singled out to sit on the hard wooden benches of the women’s gallery” (*Apartment* 37). Growing up in a secular Jewish family, she was sent to One Big Union summer camp organized by Fabian Socialists and to a Yiddish school with a “permissive atmosphere” (*Apartment* 38) of which she writes, we “were encouraged to question our teachers, [and] to work at our own pace” (*Apartment* 36).

Within the journal, Waddington speculates on God not as the male patriarch of Judaic tradition but as female. She reveals a questioning “I” inclined to examine the convention of female submission in love. Even as she proclaims her love for Marvin, she challenges the status quo of both Christianity and Judaism in writing: “My materialistic conception of Jehovah is that of a woman. A plain woman with coils and coils of hair. Is God the power? Is there a God? Or is the world a chaos? I think it must be” (Notebook 1933). The “materialistic conception of Jehovah” as a plain woman is not associated with the cataclysmic power of the old Testament patriarch Yahweh. Among the most Orthodox Jews, married women had their hair – a sign of beauty – hidden or shorn, so as not to detract men from prayer or talmudic study.

Having set forth the image of “God” as female the text immediately doubts this entity’s agency, wondering “Is God the power? Is there a God?” In its reference to chaos the text returns to the world before all written record. Revisioning the Genesis

account of creation, so as to conceive of God as a woman, spins the power authorizing patriarchal codes of meaning into the chaos and doubt of modernity. With the master narrative of patriarchy out of place, the female God in the text is an unstable and shifting presence, like the fairies, mermaids, and sprites the reader will encounter, later in this essay. With her long braids, God appears within textual figuration as a supreme presence who, if “she” exists at all, exists without the power conferred by traditional Western codes of meaning.

Waddington’s early childhood education in north end Winnipeg, with her parents and their secular Jewish friends, supplied a base from which to question both external (anglosaxon, protestant) authority and her own mind. Authority of any sort was not to be obeyed blindly. Having moved to Ottawa, she used her journal to question her infatuation with Marvin, and to ask herself and “Unknown” the fundamental questions which recognize the agency of the female subject beyond the constricting confines of her society’s gender patterning of the female. In her writing, the female ranges from a sister to a Caliban who does not fit with the norms of her society to the eminently questionable authority of the female God she wrote about at fifteen.

Waddington’s early journals present a textual record of bonding with a much desired future reader and with the female writing self. The bond between the “I” writing and “Dear Unknown” reader is made in entries in which gender difference, like a jazz chorus, plays a recurrent but always shifting part. The male artist ( Marvin in the 1933 journal) is allowed to be eccentric with some impunity but for a girl to pursue poetry as anything more than “an Indulgence” represents a venture into a forbidden unknown territory. Not surprisingly, the reader finds reference to a desire to rewrite, word for word, the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay. In taking poetry seriously, “Miriam” begins a life where it seems all her words may, like the female God she imagines, be without power.

The journal ends with a selection of handwritten early poetry organized like a chapbook. It begins with a verse which



foregrounds the use of writing to create the equivalent of “a room of one’s own”: “I live in a world all my own / My thoughts are my friends / and my soul is my home” (Notebook 1933). When she writes that she “dream[s] Edna St. Vincent Millay’s poems at night” (Notebook 1933), Waddington suggests the power that poetry has for her to create an alternate reality. The “world all my own” is set up in poems which, unlike the dream of Marvin, suggest not a family home in which women serve the young male artist, but a place in the world made through poetry.

The “world all my own” begins with the first poem “Ocean by Night, to Miss Jones,” in which the ocean is a sea of female-centred play. Here the “dismal things” and the “terribly tired and sad” finish of the prose part of the journal are counterpointed by the “ocean prancing” of the “mermaideens.” If the adult world threatens in the journal to overwhelm the young “Miriam,” poetry is a medium she can “own.” Here is an excerpt from the first poem:

Tiny, Tinkling Tambourines,  
Sounding from The Turf,  
Dainty, diving mermaideens  
Dancing on the surf.

Dashing – dipping – dancing  
A million milk-white steeds,  
Across the ocean prancing  
Each wave the other leads. (Notebook, April 1933)

The poem conveys a delight in play with “[s]ounding” out poetic language. Both the night world and water imagery signal a seachange from the world of daylight and solid ground. The emphasis is on the play of female sprites, “Lovely sea-nymphs of the dark” who, as “Tiny” and “Dainty,” are stereotypically feminine and yet, as “mermaideens,” charged with a “moonlight” which suggests female magic. The dance of the “mermaideens,” set in miniature scale with its “Tiny, Tinkling Tambourines,” portrays a female-centred celebration. In the fantastic realm described, “magic moonlight” plays with “dashing” steeds who move with the mermaids beyond the constrictions of girls in the “real” world.

In a 1992 interview, Waddington stressed that the lyric speaker within her poems has no sex and no gender and is, in fact, an eternal child. She was emphatic:

It isn't a real, personal "I," that is the whole point. ... I'll tell you ... this is my idea of poetry. ... When nature deals out the genes she doesn't care if you're a male or a female. She deals them out and lucky you if you've got it, and also sorry you. [But] it's a ten-year-old child without sex at all who is writing that poetry, and it is always a ten-year-old child. There's no man or woman in it at all. It's a ten-year-old child and the angel of poetry that's doing that. (Personal interview)

The assertion fits, at first, only with poems such as the one just discussed. I asked Waddington what happens when that ten-year-old child encounters a world which is particularly hostile to women. She laughed, conceding that "a lot more comes into it. But that ten-year-old child is a natural force" (Personal interview). The intentional fallacy defined by the New Critics reduces such statements by an author to irrelevance. But the developing theory of life writing tends, while aware that the text and the writer are never the same, to insist on reconnecting the writing self with the text produced.<sup>3</sup> I have come to see Waddington's insistence that the ten-year-old writing the poetry is a natural force as an imaginative means of escaping cultural definition as a girl and woman; that is, as "subject to" the universal humanist "he" of the male. In modernist poetry, Waddington found a genre in which modern women poets had trespassed with men, against rules of metre, rhyme, and antiquated diction. But before breaking those rules, her early life writing – with its handwritten record of poems – suggests that poetry begins as a vehicle through which the girl is able to play with language and, in this play, to explore a generic means through which to speak in a voice which is not confined within the gender codes which configure her sex.

In subsequent journals, Waddington's writing shifts from autobiographical entries to fragments of stories and drafts of poems which focus on men and women as both intimates and adversaries.

Consider the handwritten “Weekend,” from a journal of 1939:

Men have become sterile  
Don't know how to make love anymore  
First beer, then line up single file.  
And then they sleep because they are too tired  
Yet love is admired.  
We have memorized  
Our turn to laugh. We never miss the cue.  
Smiles come single, joy is polarized  
For fantasy we have the foam of beer,  
This is now, my dear, now and here. (Notebook 1939)

The brash speaker announcing the “now” and “here” suggests discord between the sexes. “[S]terile” men “line up” in the first stanza, “single file” to relieve themselves. The reference in the next stanza to the women’s “turn to laugh” suggests a technological society of well-socialized love objects rather than the laughter of lovers. The poem speaks out of a time when marriageable girls like Waddington – as one can see her in archival pictures circa 1940 – applied fresh lipstick and swallowed their anger that their male-centred culture had seduced them into domesticity without the reward of romantic “love.” In place of a female-centred magic, evident in the juvenile poem “Ocean by Night,” we are told that “for fantasy we have the foam of beer.” The poem suggests what women have to lose when they are dutiful bed partners in a male-centred reality; they risk losing dreams of their own.

In a journal entry of the same year, Waddington again articulates a social consciousness in terms of the oppositional leftist rhetoric of the day: a rhetoric through which leftist poets tended to subsume references to women in references to “workers” and “the working men.” There are no references to contemporary women writers, other than Margaret Avison, in the brief journal entries from 1939 to 1945, but Waddington does single out Yeats, Proust, and Rilke, with particular admiration. However, Waddington has noted elsewhere that she was reading women writers too. Not surprisingly, their names do not appear often at a time when, both in life and in literature, Waddington found that male claims for attention came first.

Waddington's journals from 1939 focus not on her own relationship with a significant male – as the earlier journals did – but, rather, on drafts of poems, brief notes about her own ideas, and captured impressions of city life. Omission of the male is significant: the still fragile creation of the female writing self is the focus. Accordingly, we no longer find a verbatim record – as in the 1936 journal – of what “he” said. In fact, the journal of 1939 does not even mention her marriage to Patrick Waddington. Margaret Avison, in contrast, is mentioned twice. In April 1939, Waddington writes:

I long to be close to myself – were it even the sad old tortured self of long ago – I long to feel I am my own – but I feel not so anymore. Whose am I then, whose?

Went for a walk with Margaret Avison.

We took the Yonge Street car to the end of the line and walked over the crossroads. It was dry & cold – the wind blew us from all four sides. (Notebook, 16 April 1939)

As young but already published lyric poets, both she and Avison might well be figured at “the crossroads”: between traditional female expectations and venturing forward as modernist poets. As an about-to-be-married woman, Waddington records feelings of alienation not only from her male-centred culture but also from herself. The question – “[w]hose am I then, whose?” – posed without answer, suggests an ongoing struggle for self definition through textual process. In writing these words down she addresses not an “unknown” reader as in her earlier journals, but her own writing self. The image of the two young female poets, windblown, at “the crossroads” suggests a point of transition without offering a sense of future direction.

Waddington writes at the start of the 1940s that contemporary art is no longer a territory forbidden to women and relates that reality to the “dominating core of ... society”:

The dominating core of our society is to make money, to acquire material beauty, show possession. This preoccupation with money forms the

boundary, the frame, the skeleton of the society. Beyond is a vast “outremer” which is vague and chaotic and uneasy & which no one cares about. Here everything goes because it does not matter, has no power, and is therefore beyond the pale of serious concern. It is in this vast cimmation region that art is created, and that outlaw spirits must thrive. Naturally, only a few spirits care to venture into this vague, unknown and unadvertised region; most are content with what they find inside the circle. There are no directions, only currents, no pointers, only indications. (Notebook, 13 October 1940)

The female voice Virginia Woolf figured as “inner” in *A Room of One’s Own*, Waddington figures in terms of “outlaw spirits” on the margins in her journal of 1940. Through both life writing and poetry, the parameters circumscribing a “woman’s dream” are open to her “outlaw” revision of self. The material order is, in Waddington’s journal of 1940, embodied in the core of patriarchal values represented by “money,” “material beauty,” and “possession” (13 October 1940). This order tends to evacuate the living substance from the “half poet” without cultural authorization who remains uncertain and knows herself mainly with reference to what she calls “the core.” A self described “middle-class social worker,” Waddington writes that in 1943 “only half of me was a poet” (*John 7*), noting that in 1944 there was a sleeping artist within her which woke up only intermittently.<sup>4</sup> Waddington writes:

This problem of identity. Key to Avison that is. Kafka is occupied with it. It absorbs M[argaret Avison]. She says – “it’s all such a joke – identity.” No one can really know who he is.

To me that’s very strange talk. Maybe I’m not intellectual enough to appreciate this problem of identity. I don’t think it exists for me. I never think about it. Of course first I sink into the entity of me – Miriam. Then Miriam is absorbed & sunk & drowned in the great beard of Jew. Then, outside that circle, or interwoven, is the

area of system. I identify with a communist system. ... Then there's the world. Physical world of streets, sun, people, jazz. In all of these are me. And so easily am I lost in them. Where's the problem of identity?

Of course, when I was a lad[?] I often stopped & thought to myself. "What if this is a play, & I'm acting on a stage and someone's watching. Suppose I wake up and find I'm not me at all.

This feeling always amazed me, gave me a feeling of being a stranger in the world. I suppose in a small way it was my groping for identity. (Notebook, 22 October 1943)

The male dominant tradition they had encountered at the University of Toronto had, of course, taught both poets to question identity, or as Avison put it: "who he is." Judaism and Marxist politics also tended to sink the female self in focusing on the exploitation of another class. The writing process in the above passage displays a "stream of consciousness" (Abrams 180)<sup>5</sup> which feminist critics trace to early female modernists such as Dorothy Richardson, Woolf, Gertrude Stein, May Sinclair, as well as Katherine Mansfield. The process of writing about "identity" seems to function a little like a long hook seeking to reach for the sleeping artist, "absorbed & sunk & drowned," in androcentric-centred systems of thought. In its circling process, this passage suggests the influence of female modernists such as Woolf. It sinks, it circles, and it rejoices, as Woolf had, in the urban rush of "streets, sun, people, jazz." Even as it denies "[t]his problem of identity," the passage pursues new ways of knowing not "who he is" so much as "who" is asking. In beginning to explore the stream of consciousness of her own writing style, Waddington follows the "small way" of a groping female self which knows what she knows in opposition to received tradition.

**Master's Thesis (1945): "Learning to Help in the Functional Setting of a Child Guidance Clinic"**

In *Apartment Seven*, Waddington describes the year she spent "in the Advanced Course, for social workers already in practice" as "the most liberating, painful, and growth-producing educational experience of my life" (33). Where as an undergraduate Waddington had studied the thought and the literature of famous men, in social work she studied the social thought of pioneer women social workers from the Victorian period. At the Philadelphia School of Social Work, Waddington chose as a supervisor Dr. Virginia Robinson whom she subsequently described, in a 1992 interview, as her "spiritual mother" (Personal interview). Dorothy Livesay also chose to become a social worker, as did Margaret Avison. The discipline not only was open to women but to some degree focused on female-centred theory and energy.<sup>6</sup> The thesis she produced the same year as *Green World* is a document which is pertinent here for three reasons: first, it emphasizes a commitment to the process of the first-person singular; second, it focuses exclusively on women; third, it discusses the significance of accepting "the negative" in the self. Each of these concepts will be relevant to my reading of female subjectivity in *Green World*.

Waddington sets the autobiographical "I" at the explicit centre of the learning process her thesis describes:

When a student enters a new setting and undertakes to give a service unfamiliar to him, something happens to all the experience that has been gained in former training and professional practice. A mysterious disorganization takes place. If formal organization has been strong, total, the present disorganization has the same characteristic totality. And yet, somewhere in this chaotic and disorganized self something mobilizes toward this new and desired goal of development, and the first connection is made.

With me it was structure. My physical presence in the clinic, my office, telephone and mail box all proved to me that I was there. The truth is, I

needed those constant factual proofs to verify my presence, for actually very little of myself was there in the first weeks, most of myself was hanging back and cautiously waiting to see what this was all about. (“Learning” 2)

The process of arrival which she documents is analogous to the process of asserting the self as a writer. There is reference to the need for the external reality of office, telephone, and mail box and a correspondent sense of doubting the self, needing proofs to verify her presence, and even with “proofs” finding “very little of myself was there.” The thesis tells the story of conjuring the self to appear, a conjuring which foregrounds a slow, “painful” process (“Learning” 25).<sup>7</sup> The writing self is linked to an external world of physical being and historical context, which the text as physical artifact tends to flatten and reduce. In saying no to this reduction within her own thesis, Waddington uses the “cold white pages” in a new way. She insists on the connection of what she writes with a human context which may, or may not, nurture the writing self.

The textual selves in both Waddington’s life writing and early poetry might be said to suffer from the problem of “too little self” which Waddington analyzes in both herself and the female clients who are the case studies of her Master’s thesis. In both herself and the mothers she interviews, Waddington locates a fundamental lack of “self.” The first phrase of this passage might be read as a found poem:

Not enough self, or a self so tenuous that it feels threatened by the smallest breeze, or a self so entangled with the self of the child that it is no longer ... capable of independence. All of these problems which are the fundamental problems of life emerge in the interviews with parents around their relationships with children. (“Learning” 37-38)

While locating the lack of agency in “[n]ot enough self” in the client mothers of disturbed children, Waddington tellingly represses the copular verb which would give the first phrase normal syntax. Within the thesis, she comes to recognize that



her own “process” of growth in writing the thesis also has fundamentally related to problems of “self,” specifically her own self, “for it challenges her whole self and calls into question all that she is” (“Learning” 52).

In *Green World* the negative female-centred self-loathing is explored as part of what the thesis calls “two-sided nature” (“Learning” 24). Waddington writes that she sought to understand, in the negative, “the thing that says no in a person when the other part of him [sic] says yes” (“Learning” 22). This use of “him” for “person” in the abstract indicates both correct usage and immersion in the syntax of a written language still very much by and for men. The generic individual remains male, but the specificity of the thesis is that of a female writer with female clients: each of the clients Waddington mentions in the thesis is a woman. She writes that the negative is the space where the female person must enter her own thought process and go into the unknown to “t[a]ke back some of the problem into herself” (“Learning” 26). Here is the negative: “The negative can be ignored, but not eliminated. It can be diverted to channels outside the clinic so it does not ruffle the surface of the interview. But usually the child pays for it. I know now that the other side will find expression anyway” (“Learning” 22).

The emphasis of the thesis is on the relationship between the female caseworker and her adult female client, the mother of a disturbed child. From the perspective of female subjectivity the thesis considers the need to articulate the difficulty of being a fully human adult in a culture which denigrates the importance of both women and children. Both the woman client and the female caseworker must be given the opportunity to articulate “the negative,” that is their own anger, self-contradiction, rage. Waddington allows that

this new understanding of feeling in its two-sided nature was probably the most powerful catalyst in my whole learning process. It enabled me to break through a certain dead-level of tone which until now had always dominated my interviews. At last I was freed from the compulsion to recognize and identify only with the positive,

and I could range with my clients into whatever area their necessity demanded of me, be it positive or negative, pleasant or painful. I had become like the poet's mistress, who can sing both high and low, instead of monotone. ("Learning" 24-25)

The reference to "the poet's mistress" is undoubtedly positive. But to this reader, at least, the simile "I had become like" suggests a gender barrier still in place for Waddington circa 1945: the poet is male, the singing female not another poet but, rather, a mistress. Significantly Waddington figures a female "who can sing both high and low, instead of monotone." The proximity to the male poet and poetry is a liberating element for the "mistress" and, by extension, it is also liberating to the professional woman writing of the "two-sided nature" of feeling.

Not mentioned in her thesis, Waddington's mother had, for her, represented much that she, in her youth, at least, associated with the negative including anger, frustration, and "useless female rebellion" (Personal interview). Margaret Homans notes, "women have internalized their oppressors' negative view of femininity" and she speculates that if "women reject maternal figures it is because they have been conditioned to do so by a masculine culture" (15). In both Waddington's thesis and in *Green World*, as the reader will presently see, the "compulsion to recognize and identify only with the positive" is renounced. However, within the thesis, the recognition of the negative does not, in itself, allow the writing self to assert a self who is also a poet.

Waddington's thesis is a textual record of a woman beginning a lifelong process of authorizing herself and other women to "sing both high and low," to articulate their own conflicting experiences of self. Without being explicitly centred on women, Waddington observes the problems women must face in coming to terms with "the negative" in themselves and the world around them. What Avison had called "[t]his problem of identity" is in Waddington's thesis a problem of exploring the process whereby the female self gathers "enough self" to be.

***Green World* (1945): “Probing Poetry”**

In a comment which is characteristic of androcentric modernist poetics, Waddington writes: “If he is an authentic poet, the poet’s self is never just a private self. His anxieties speak for all our anxieties. He may, as John Stuart Mill pointed out in one of his essays on poetry, be engaged in a dialogue with himself; but if he publishes his poems, he wants us to overhear him” (*Apartment* 109). In shifting the dialogue from “himself” to “herself” within her own poetry, the female modernist poet performs a fundamental act of transformation. She introduces a subject which even later criticism of the fifties and sixties has not formally recognized as poetically worthy of words. Her dialogue posits a difference which she uses poetry to explore. But the premise of difference from what Sutherland called “the typical Canadian poet of the forties” remains implicit within the poetry. It has waited for readers who are ready to pause and rethink this period.

As Waddington has noted, “[p]art of the problem of modernism is to accept that not everything can be unified” (*Apartment* 160). Modernist poetry can be read as an expression of rupture within contemporary culture expressed in poetic syntax of “fragments shored against [its] ruin” (Eliot 75). But as Waddington notes elsewhere, poetry is more than an avenue into a representation of this ruin:

Poetry is the most psychically sensitive form of literature as well as being the most ancient and most closely related to culture and religion. Therefore it ought to be studied not only for its aesthetic or synthesizing qualities, but for its revelatory ones: through it we may arrive at a deeper level of awareness of who we are collectively. (“Teaching”)

*Green World* does not fit with the modernism of Eliot and Pound. It is a work which displays a shift in emphasis away from the “implicitly masculine aesthetic of hard, abstract, learned verse” (Gilbert 154) to explore a female-centred modern verse. In *Green World* Waddington responds to the questions

about female subjectivity expressed in her life writing. These questions were still largely unasked within Canadian culture when she introduced them into her poetry. Significant early published poems such as “Green World,” “In the Big City,” and “Morning Until Night” evoke what Marianna Warner (writing of Angela Carter) calls “a means of flying – of finding and telling an alternative story” (ix).

Although reviews were favourable, the year 1945 was not an auspicious moment for the female poet’s “dialogue with [her]self” to be heard. Carole Gerson notes that female poets like Waddington who did use modernist methods were “seldom taken as seriously as their male counterparts” (55). Reviewing *Green World* favourably for *Contemporary Verse*, Alan Crawley found that “much of the charm of the writing comes from the skillful recording of visual beauty and from [Waddington’s] sensitive feeling for the loveliness of language” (18-19). Ten years later, Desmond Pacey called the “dominant theme” of *Green World* “the beauty and goodness of the natural world, suggested by recurring images of greenness and growth” and set in contrast to the “twisted and frustrating nature of contemporary urban society” (56). In addition, Pacey commented on the volume’s “straightforwardness of . . . technique” (56) in contrast to the early work of P. K. Page and Patrick Anderson. The dominant tone of both reviews suggests that while *Green World* displays “charm” and “loveliness,” there is little else, really, to say about this first volume of verse.

Numerous critics have tended to find *Green World* “boring” or, as Maria Jacobs surmises, “too simple” (26). One of the difficulties in writing about *Green World* has been the range of my own response to the volume. I thought, for a time, that reviewers had been kind in their perhaps rather deliberately vague comments about the book. There are definite flaws in the prosaic phrasing and lack of attention to structure in a number of poems.<sup>8</sup> Certain phrases tend to jar, such as “[f]ame’s blandishments grow sour to the taste” and the “thought that waggles in my brain” (in “Dog Days”); a clichéd reference to “the surge of blood” (in “Into the Morning”), a somewhat awkward refer-

ence to hands and feet as “end organs” in the same poem; an antiquated reference to “the blooded stars,” and the inexplicable allusion to “your sombrero accent / Roll[ing] over my senses like prairie sunshine” at the conclusion of “Uncertainties.” These defects undermine the poetry, as does the declaration that in time of war “[n]othing can save us but our own reserves.” None of these flaws in the poems are cited by Crawley or Pacey.

Yet, in their faint praise, these critics also have tended to overlook the complexity of the “I” within *Green World* which, in fact, is neither “charm[ing],” “passive,” nor “simple,” but consumed with the “exploration of contradictions” which makes the book, flaws and all, a work of art. Northrop Frye seemed to recognize this when he wrote that the most successful poems in *Green World* are “strikingly original” and display a “distinctive quality” (51).

In *Green World*, female figures are portrayed in the contexts of mourning, prostitution, and economic oppression, and in fear of violence in poems such as “Ballet,” “The Bond,” “Girls,” and “In the Big City.” The young female is figured repeatedly as hunted and hurt within her own culture. The few older women represented in *Green World* offer no answers for the younger ones. In the poem “Ballet,” the women in mourning can present only a “flowerwise” pattern, an emblem of grief. The “foul granny” (5) in “Investigator” has no answers as she “[s]its counting last year’s newspapers lost in a timeless litter” (5). But there is also in these poems an assertion of strength and a transformative power centred around the lyric “I.”

It is the lyric “I” addressing a changed world, an “I” not always identified as female, which offers an altered vision both of self and “girls,” and the recognition of a “twice isolate” (10) “woman” as “kin to me” (9). I focus on the most successful poems, which include “Green World,” “Gimli,” “The Bond,” “Investigator,” and “Summer in the Street,” as well as the final poem, “Morning Until Night.” These poems are vital to the overall process which I read as the “probing” of female subjectivity to make visible “the inner underground life.”

Both L. R. Ricou and D. G. Jones describe the title poem, “Green World” as, to quote Ricou, “mark[ing] the fundamental direction of her poetry, and its fundamental strength” (146). While praising Waddington’s “Green World” as both “rhythmically and aurally beautiful,” Ricou regards this poem as dealing with a “conventional situation: the speaker of the poem steps out of doors, perhaps on a late spring morning” (145). My reading is markedly different from his, for what he finds “conventional” I read as charged with significance. In this first memorable poem the speaker ventures forth as a voice, an “I” (1) without sex within a text which is resonant of the child’s first landscape: the mother’s body, “curving” (1), alive to the “green rhythms” (1) of the first metric marker, the heart. The poem is a “step out” (1) and away from the past, “[c]ast[ing] out of focus” (1) all that is known of the world. The “I” is catapulted with the first phrase into the poetic space of “feel[ing] the green world” (1).

The green world, into which the “I” ventures in the first seven-line stanza of the poem, is not, as Ricou would suggest, simply “a metaphor ... [for] the growth of a plant” (144). Instead, this world is described as a space of poetic revision “[b]eyond all geography,” a “transparent place” (1) which nurtures a growing self. I read this space as both suffused with the presence of the maternal and, for all its register of trouble, as “the inside sphere” (1) of poetry in which the speaking “I” can play out a transformative process. This enclosed space in the first stanza is as close to a womb as language can bring us. In this receptive, alternate green world the subject both steps out and is held:

When I step out and feel the green world  
 Its concave walls must cup my summer coming  
 And curving, hold me  
 Beyond all geography in a transparent place  
 Where water images cling to the inside sphere  
 Move and distend as rainbows in a mirror  
 Cast out of focus. (1)

As was noted of her first collection of unpublished poems in her 1933 journal, Waddington claimed poetry as a distinctive

generic space, “a world all my own,” here represented as a green world.<sup>9</sup> The feeling “I” enters the green world of free verse contained in the traditional length of the sonnet, in order to pursue the compelling “must” (1) of its own need to be held, not as a lover holds the beloved but, rather, in the “inside sphere” (1) of a mind conceiving the possibilities of selves within the charged language of poetry. The phrase “water images” (1) draws our attention to poetic construction as artifice, the means of poetic signification. The imagery intensifies in complexity at its centre, with the “sphere” / “mirror” end rhyme emphasizing “mirror” (1).

The mirror in “Green World” is not that of the evil queen of fairy tale, nor is it Ovid’s bucolic “pool, silver with shining water” where Narcissus “mistakes identity for difference” (Williamson 177) and, reaching for himself, drowns. Instead, “Green World” creates a topography in which the speaker first “step[s] out” (1) of what I read as the known world of patriarchy – the father’s house – into an alternate poetic enclosure resonant of the first home one has before birth, in the womb. “Green World” observes neither fixed metre nor rhyme. Instead, it moves in the lineation of its own “step out” (1), jettisoning the metric contract of traditional verse in favour of a lineation which begins with odd numbers of feet (nine, eleven, five syllables). Two lines mention the “inside sphere” and “mirror” (1) within the first stanza. The even lines offer just enough balance to provide a slight pause. The mirror is contrary to Ovid’s deceptive double. Waddington’s mirror opens a territory of imaginative possibility, an “inside sphere” of prismatic possibility “as rainbows” (1). The womb imagery of the “concave walls,” which “must cup” the transitional self in the “distend[ed]” (1) abdomen, and the explicit reference to water imagery underscore the fluidity of movement.

In the second stanza there are also seven lines. Where the first stanza cups, the second stanza serves to “uncup” the speaker from the “crystal chrysalis” (1), represented here at the instant of change. What is “out of focus” within the first stanza comes to a “gold point” within the second stanza which “warms,

expands, / Until walls crack” (1). The transformative imagery draws together the “green rhythms” (1) of free verse with images which suggest the female-centred process of birth and metamorphosis as the waters break before birth:

And this crystal chrysalis  
 Shapes to green rhythms to long ocean flowings  
 Rolls toward the sun with sure and spinning speed  
 And under the intensely gold point  
 Warms, expands,  
 Until walls crack suddenly  
 Uncup me into large and windy space. (1)

The poem constitutes a poetic space at first “hold[ing]” the speaker and then, in the second stanza, enacting the passage of the as yet ungendered “me” “into [the] large and windy space” (1) of modernist verse.

“Gimli,” the second poem in *Green World*, also contains two matched stanzas of equal length: in this case 16 lines. As in “Green World,” the word “I” (1) occurs only once, in the first line of the poem, and is not identified as either male or female. The “inner sphere” of the first poem is gone and we find, in “Gimli,” the geographic specificity of a known Canadian place. The “I” of this poem travels over the “you” (1) of linear track while pursuing its past in the trajectory of the poetic line. The first line situates the metaphor-making process of poetry on the free verse line and the modern “track” (1). The “railway track” accompanies memory, “[s]pinning” back to witness the fecundity of nature as “Frog ditches pockets of jelly eggs / Hanging from banks” and “July lilies / Bursting orange from nests of grass” (1). In this poem, the lyric “I” that “travel[s]” (1) reads something like the “I” that Waddington, in a journal entry of November 1943, calls “the voice”:

Always in her the voice. The voice always telling her. Always in her. Saying you’re a writer. Be a writer . . . Listen to that voice. It goes on all the time never stops. In me like a child I’m carrying it. Will it ever be something? (Notebook 1940)



The territory of “the voice in me like a child” is the one celebrated in this poem, and that voice takes us back into its past. The poem functions as a metonym of “the green world,” not only of “dark spaces” but also of poetic process. The reader may recall Waddington’s insistence that the poetic voice is “without gender,” “a voice” I read as strategically refusing to be either decisively female or male within specific poems – notably the first three – in *Green World*. This “I” sees the fine detail of a particular landscape and also sets forth a roaming “I” in the lyric:

I travel over you a swift railway track  
Spinning to Gimli’s summer sudden beach  
Rusty well-water, bitter, iron-tasting  
Frog ditches pockets of jelly eggs  
Hanging from the banks. (1)

The technological world, which can diminish the human self attempting to speak in modern verse, is here an engine assisting the “[s]pinning,” “[h]anging,” “blowing” (1) process of memory. In the first line of the second stanza “you” (1) repeats. The “you” in “Gimli” is “a swift railway track,” able in the second stanza to “lead” “straight to” (1) the past.

There are two women in the poem. Neither is described as a mother, but both offer children milk: the “shrill-voiced English woman handed us / Sad blue milk for our red pails,” while the Polish woman is the “bright kerchief keeper of two cows” with “[r]ich milk foaming” (1). English milk is “[s]ad blue milk,” while the Polish woman’s milk is “[r]ich” (1). The “voice” speaking in “Gimli” celebrates the memory of a Canadian childhood which neither is sustained by things “British” nor centred on men.

Like “Green World,” with its “rainbows in a mirror / [c]ast out of focus” (1), “Gimli” reflects back on its speaker, as mirrors do. The last lines read: “All those castles we planted in childhood / Now bear their fruit of lighted aching windows / My grief of waiting” (1). Like “Green World,” “Gimli” conjures a transitional “I” able to move backward and forward through poetry. The text of this poem, and the two which bracket it,

suggest the protective “cup” of “the green world” and the sustenance and encouragement of childhood summers in “Gimli” within which the lyric speaker pursues alternate visions of what it is to “step out,” to “travel” as “I” (1) alone with words on a line. In the last line of “Gimli,” “[m]y grief of waiting” (1) reminds the reader of a future time and place, a world beyond the parenthetical space of the poem.

In the third poem, “Into the Morning,” power is conjured by the “strid[ing]” self of the first line: “Into the deep mountain of morning now I stride” (2). Once again the first line of the poem emphasizes a subject in motion. Although her family, the Dworkins, were secular Jews, Waddington knew the Orthodox Jewish male’s prayer said every morning, thanking God “I” was not born a woman. While “Into the Morning” is not a terribly successful poem, with its mixed images of “[w]hite sailboats” and “wall of vein” (2), it is memorable to me as a lyric prayer which introduces the theme of a divided self – prominent in the last poem in *Green World*, “Morning Until Night.” The image of hands dominates this poem; the reader is told “[m]y two hands breathe in their separate ways” (2). The image suggests differences within the subject, differences which the speaker prays to nourish as part of growth.

The first line places the subject and verb at the end rather than the beginning of the line, suggesting the somewhat daunting significance of the day world – “deep mountain of morning” – into which the “I” ventures forward:

Into the deep mountain of morning now I stride  
 Holding my heart a folded bird inside one hand,  
 My other hand upturned splayed out against the sun  
 Catches and holds the light,  
 Burns fiery red, measures life’s concentrate  
 With rhythmic pulses, scuttles (2)

There is no magic phrase in this poem to open the mountain, only the dual source of energy drawn from the inner space of the heart held as folded bird in one hand, and the sun to which the speaker presents “[m]y other hand upturned and splayed out” (2), open to wonder and pain. The speaker’s desire is to “stride”

empowered by the “rhythmic pulses” (2) of the breath line and to grow.

As in the two opening poems in *Green World*, the “I” is not identified as male or female. In “Weekend,” a poem written in 1939, “[t]his is now, my dear, now and here” was proclaimed with the last line of the poem in the name of a “we” highly critical of “men.” In “Into the Morning,” the first line’s proclamation “now I stride” (2) can be linked not to the description of men or women but to the process of the lyric text, now opening a liberating space in which the speaker moves into the deep beyond the constraints of gendered subjectivity. Three lines of six feet suggest long strides, unhobbled by the social impress of second sex status, which I observed in the clipped phrases of “Weekend.” The tone of “Into the Morning” is close to prayer: “oh let / All end organs draw the sun to them, and let / All growing points turn outward” (2). If the night world often is associated in poetry with dream and with female lunar imagery, the day world may be seen as territory of the male sun and of reason. In praying to be allowed to “let” grow, the speaker strides forward into “the deep mountain” (2) world of morning. The plea to be granted permission to “grow” (2) has particular significance in the context of the constraints upon female subjectivity as represented in both Waddington’s early life writing and the poems in *Green World* which follow.

In the poem, “Unquiet World,” the reader moves from “Sunday,” sacred to Christians, to “Friday’s festival” (3) and the Jewish heritage. In “Unquiet World,” the Old Testament “Prophet” is kept offstage like a muse for a speaker who, while using the imagery of the Jewish Sabbath, speaks of renewed vision and hope for the entire “world” (3).<sup>10</sup> The image of the pious wife is at the centre of the poem, and one notes that the pattern of imagery moves from the all-consuming male “beard of Jew,” referred to in the 22 October 1943 journal entry, to the “[f]old[s]” of the female’s “shining hair” (3). Both reader and speaker are “[f]old[ed]” (3) together in sleep:

Fold us smooth as shining hair  
of a pious wife in slumbers sweet,  
then wake us fresh with sabbath bread

from enchanted sleep and look  
 with us past templed ruins,  
 deep as the cratered earth  
 plumb our purpose and hallowed be  
 the heady wine of our hope. (3)

This brief poem has within it a dense cluster of imagery. It draws together the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty, the tradition of patriarchy within Judaism, and the “temple ruins” (3) of post-war Europe. None of the imagery is developed. Instead, consistent with Waddington’s modernism, the reader receives fragments. The “[p]rophet” is invoked like a male muse to “look” “deep” and “plumb our purpose,” then, having done so, to bless “the heady wine of our hope” (3). The waking from “enchanted sleep” in the centre of the poem suggests a challenge to pursue a transformative vision centred around women waking within a changed world; the old world is in “ruins” (3) and the new one remains to be raised.

“The Bond” suggests a female-centred alliance between the “twice isolate” – two female Jews – of “varied low estate” (10). The poem eschews the free verse and unrhymed stanzas which are used throughout most of *Green World* and uses quatrains, repetition, and rhyme. The traditional form is in contrast to the poem’s highly unconventional subject matter. Once again, as in “Tapestry” and “Girls,” the oppressed individuals are not the oppressed “working man,” the focus of “social consciousness” in Waddington’s journals, but rather women of “varied low estate” (10). The poem makes a crucial connection between different types of oppression – of race, class, and gender – that are missing in the prose passages of Waddington’s journals. The speaker in “The Bond” states that she “sense[s] the evil at the source” of “misdirected social force” (9). Rhyme helps make the analysis aesthetically pleasing:

I sense the evil at the source  
 Now at this golden point of noon,  
 The misdirected social force  
 Will grind me also, and too soon.

On Jarvis Street the Jewish whore  
The Jewish me on Adelaide –  
Both of the nameless million poor  
Who wear no medals and no braid.

Oh woman you are kin to me,  
Your heart beats something like my own  
When idiot female ecstasy  
Transforms in love the flesh and bone;

And woman, you are kin to me  
Those tense moments first and last,  
When men deride your ancestry  
Whore, Jewess, you are twice outcast.

Whore, Jewess, I acknowledge you  
Joint heirs to varied low estate,  
No heroes will arise anew  
Avenging us twice isolate. (9-10)

This middle section of “The Bond” sustains focus on female subjectivity in modern Western society. In this poem, one woman speaks to another about the complicity of females with men, both individually in the sexual act when “idiot female ecstasy / [t]ransforms in love the flesh and bone” (9), and also collectively, as “shriek[ing]” supporters – “a hundred windows high” (10) – of men marching along Toronto’s Adelaide Street on their way to war. The emphasis is not on “men” (9) as the enemy. Those tense moments first or last when they are with men suggest, instead, the bond between women and men. Between the first verses and the last two stanzas of “The Bond,” the reader moves from “dawn” (9) through noon into “the heavy night,” territory which, for the speaker, “[s]ignal[s] omens everywhere” (10). If direction has been lost in the day world, the night world opens a space from which to question who is “[b]ond[ed]” (9) with whom, and why.

While the women within this poem are joint heirs to “varied low estate” (10), the conclusion to the poem suggests an alternate possibility of new self-definition through female alliance:

The heavy night is closing in,  
Signal omens everywhere,  
You woman who have lived by sin,

And I who dwelt in office air,  
 Shall share a common rendezvous (10)

The two “isolate” females share a bond with those who are disempowered, as well as the proclamation, “Sister, my salute to you! / I will recognize your face” (10), through which they will save themselves.

In “Investigator,” the probing of the one who investigates is directed to the decay of urban civilization. With the first line of the poem, the speaker is not only “street-known” but “also street knowing” (5). The repeated play with the verb to “know” (5), which continues in the first and second stanzas of “Investigator,” suggests an emphasis on ways of knowing. Beginning with “I” and ending with “me,” “Investigator” is, nevertheless, a poem in which the opening premise is not to be believed for this is a poem about a “knowing” which seems to preclude being “known” (5).

The “Investigator” delves into “knowing” nothing but darkness and debris, opening before us a “timeless litter” (5) of the modern world, and anything other than urban refuse and squalor remains outside the parameters of the poem. We are presented with a record of urban grotesques: “foul granny,” “hunchback son,” and “old man” (5). In “Portrait I,” the reference to “cities” only suggests, but does not tell, what is “secret” (2) and hidden. In “Investigator,” the lyric “I” both describes the “hot streets” (5) and sees inside dwellings:

I could tell you and no exaggeration  
 Of the in and out of houses twenty times a day,  
 Of the lace antimacassars, the pictures of kings  
 and queens,  
 The pious mottoes, the printed blessing, the dust  
 piling up on bureaus,  
 The velour interiors, the Niagara souvenirs,  
 The faded needlepoint, the hair pulled tight  
 And the blinds drawn against day and the feel  
 of sun. (5)

There is no patriarch in the “once-mansion,” only the “drooling senile decay” of “the old man” who sits “[p]ast the garden” and “[l]ets the sun slip ceaselessly through his fingers” (5). The old

markers of beauty, order, and symmetry so evidently remembered in "Portrait," are gone in "Investigator."

In *Writing in the Father's House*, Patricia Smart writes of the feminist critic as the "investigator" (26) of matricide.<sup>11</sup> In this poem the lyric speaker is the "investigator" of an urban world in which women disappear into interiors of "faded needlepoint, the hair pulled tight" (5). There is no specific crime here but, instead, a death in life extending to both sexes. The urban scene is one of oppressive containment. What is of interest here with regard to issues of female subjectivity is that these perceptions are expressed in a book of poems with the unlikely title of *Green World*. "Investigator" contains a chronicle of an urban culture full of "dust" (5). As such, the "Investigator" covers the "waste" (5) land beat of what Waddington referred to in her journals as "T. S. Eliot and the gang." Whereas many of the other poems in *Green World* suggest a dichotomy between "green" (1) nature and a decaying urban world, the "Investigator" is confined to recording decay. The irreverent tone of ironic distance is set at the start ("Just ask me –") and affirmed again at the end of the poem when a "long lean lap-eared dog . . . Blinks wet eyes at me" (5). The image of a garden and dog echoes images found at the end of "The Burial of the Dead," the first section of *The Waste Land*, where one finds the lines:

'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?  
'O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,  
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!' (Eliot 29)

In "The Investigator," the dog is both present and passive rather than absent and menacing. The "dog sitting on the roof" suggests a poetic remove "for humour" (5). The narrator of the poem responds with immediacy to the scene observed. There is no received mindset or formula of belief displayed here; the investigator moves about unfettered. There is no possible "friend to men" (Eliot 29) – or women, for that matter – in Waddington's poem. The dog seems more alive than "the old

man” “drooling” (5) in the last stanza. *Green World* begins, and concludes, with a very different version of subjectivity than Eliot’s speaker offered in 1922 to “You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!” (Eliot 29).

In other poems in *Green World*, such as “The Sleepers” and “Lovers,” the emphasis is on heterosexual love. These are successful poems worthy of separate treatment. But romantic love is not, as I read it, a central concern of *Green World*. Instead of romance, I find references to love as a culturally favoured sleep-in-life, a sleep in which the female may or may not remain. The “enchanted sleep” of Sleeping Beauty is a recurrent motif; the most haunting question, raised in “Lullaby” is “If he never comes?” (15).

In the opening three poems of *Green World*, as well as in “Summer in the Street,” the lyric “I” waits for no man. The lyric speaker in the latter poem claims her life, her city, and the space of the free verse line to explore her own process of “passionate transport” neither stopped nor “dead-end[ed]” (13) in “a hundred years” (15) sleep:

Summer in the street was a warm welcome  
Drowning me in trucknoise and the shouts of children  
Laving me deep to my tanned arms.  
Summer in the street was a sudden river  
Eddying me from the long rain in the mountains  
Lifting me from the introverted undertones  
Of the deep St Lawrence brooding in its banks,  
Erasing the endless landscapes  
Of green and white silences. (12-13)

“Summer in the Street” opens the street as a physical territory, a home place of welcome, a space analogous to the nurturing green world of feeling within the first poem. The street is a force larger than the self, “[d]rowning me” (12), “[e]ddying me,” and “[l]ifting me” (13). Summer, too, is figured as a moving force larger than the speaker. Here is a poem which stresses the inter-subjectivity of a woman in an ecstasy of being-in-relation, not to a man but to her own “city and summer and the street” (13):



... Summer piloted  
The sunless channels of my private mind.  
Until I was a woman in passionate transport  
Of love for my own city and summer and the street,  
The meadowed hush still fallow in my mind  
Waking to tramcars whistling at intersections,  
While my eyes joyfully accepted their new focus, saw  
Faces of strangers each the flag of his own nation  
Sail past me. Like allied ships  
We read the signal of rescue and recognition  
And saw the coast of our only comfort  
Rising from maze of streets and dead-end lanes  
Turned inside out, the known confusions  
Transformed to brilliant pointers. (13)

The “brilliant pointers” come after “the known confusions” (13). Transformative process seems a matter of walking through the world as both witness and celebrant open to accepting “new focus” (13).

A number of the final poems in *Green World* pose questions for which there are no simple answers. We are challenged to respond to a female-centred poetry which has “probed” modern life and is “electric[ally]” charged even as it reaches with Adam for “heaven” (14).

In “Investigator,” I noted the ironic play between being “known” and “knowing” (5) set out in terms of what is observed on the contemporary street. “Morning Until Night” presents a coming to terms with inner division. Anyone who doubts Waddington’s recognition of female complicity within patriarchy need only reread the last poem in *Green World*. It records a subjectivity split between “fresh and forgetful” innocence and the “dark interiors” (15) of a night world of “secret” (16) experience. The “know[ing]” of this lyric speaker involves following her “[i]n the wake of alley cats” “smiling and secret” (15) as she moves out of doors. What this speaker seeks to “know” (15) and name is her own complex and complicit female self:

Who could know my gothic garish life  
Starts so simply from morning  
When fresh and forgetful I emerge

From my red-brick tower to stride through fog?  
 Then I walk milk-young and innocent  
 In the wake of the alley cats  
 And I am smiling and secret  
 Against the uneasy memory of night.

The marble steps are white in the morning  
 Pale and white they lead to dark interiors  
 I turn my eyes worshipping to the sun  
 See far ahead of me the rainbow roofs  
 The white spear of the Italian church.

Everything praises this first moment of morning  
 Which loops and sings into the early sky  
 And spreads its pure curves over the angled  
 city. (15)

This final poem repeats the “step out” (1) of the volume’s first poem, which I read as a spatial marker of change within the lyric self. But this time the “gothic and garish” confusion of life in the “red-brick tower” (15) is, according to evidence later in the poem, precisely what cannot be escaped. The “I” (15) of the poem looks a little like the fairy tale heroine for she, too, is “milk-young and innocent” (15), but she leaves her home with a sense of inner division which is typical not of fairy tale but of a modernist text. The first stanza jettisons the objective modernist line in favour of the clutter of “gothic garish life” (15). The “dark interiors” suggest a return to the “night” (15) in which the no longer innocent woman plays out her subordinate role as mistress to master within the old hierarchical tower. The poetic text, part tapestry, part choral arrangement, “loops and sings” and “spreads its pure curves” against the linear logic of the “angled city” (15).

With “Morning Until Night,” the speaker returns to the everyday world of the street, teasing the reader who may still be unable to follow the process of “Miriam,” named moving between “morning” and “night” (16). In place of rhyme, the poem repeats compact arrangements of sound: “gothic” and “garish,” “[s]tarts so simply,” “fresh and forgetful,” “morning,” “milk-young,” and “memory” (15). In contrast to the repetition of consonants and sibilants “starts so simply” (15), certain other

words gain emphasis. The words “wake” and “night” seem to stand out to summon the descent toward the female unknown, the “sudden wolves” (15) of the second part of the poem.

The next three sections of the poem use images from the natural world: “dogs,” “foxes,” “wolves” (15), “crows,” and “doves” (16). I noted in “Investigator” that the “dog” (5) at the end of the poem may suggest a connection with poems which come before and follow and which refuse to accept the waste land as final. The nightmare “dogs” and “wolves” (15) of the second part of “Morning Until Night” insist on having an audience with the secret self in part three. It is here that the speaker both anticipates finding her name written in wind and discovers a broken face:

Gradually I enter solitude,  
I open the door and where I thought to see  
Green meadows flowering with my name  
Miriam written in wind, a star on the sea,  
I meet only the broken face of pain  
That has dogged me all day and now has found  
the way  
To my secret self. There is no place left  
Hidden and whole, I turn and cry  
O God deliver me from that sad and broken face  
The crippled laugh and slow relinquishing  
Of life, I would be transformed swift  
As lightning, my evil discovered utterly  
And proclaimed in its own season. (16)

The first section of the poem seems to play with the female as a “milk-young” “innocent,” but the second and third sections shed “innocence” (15) as the “chrysalis” (1) is shed in the first poem. Through this repetition it would seem that the lyric speaker is bringing the reader back around, once again, to the departure, the “large and windy space” (1) of the book’s beginning.

Waddington’s Master’s thesis affirms the need for women to claim the “dark interiors” (15) of female subjectivity, to recognize the self as complicit in whatever problems emerge in their lives. The thesis provides a useful background against which to read this last poem. The speaker is now explicitly

female as she is named. What has been denied in the self – imprisoned crows – must be known and released. In Waddington's "Morning Until Night," the "world mingles" in the last two lines: "Now world mingles, feathers brush my sleep / And doves and crows fly free" (16). With this final image, the poem and the book close. In this modernist text, the disparate parts of the self are not unified but released in "free" (16) form with *Green World's* last line.

In *Green World* the modern, modernism – and the crisis of modernity – are all brought together. Perhaps it was this bold quality which Frye recognized when he called the most successful poems in *Green World* "strikingly original" (51). As already has been noted, Livesay, too, recognized the book's "probing" quality. I began this discussion with a note about the uneven quality of certain poems. However, Waddington's *Green World* represents a significant moment of accomplishment in the context of English Canadian modernist verse.

If Canadian women poets have been left out of the critical scholarship on the making of modernist poetry in Canada, their published and unpublished life writing may well provide a basis on which to reevaluate their work. Unpublished archival letters by modern Canadian women poets also may help critics to arrive at a more accurate version of modern Canadian poetry in the making, a feminist version which will include, along with the ongoing and worthy study of male poets, a female-oriented exploration of modernity and the Canadian modernist lyric.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the poems cited throughout this essay appear in Miriam Waddington's *Collected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>Modernist technique moved away from the routine use of end rhyme, regular poetic feet, and antiquated language to include the cadences of modern speech as well as free verse.

<sup>3</sup>Marlene Kadar's two books on life writing celebrate this "reconnection" from a feminist perspective.

<sup>4</sup>See also *Apartment* 157, 166.

<sup>5</sup>As M. H. Abrams notes, "The stream of consciousness, as it has been refined since the 1920s, is a special mode of narration that undertakes to capture the full spectrum and the continuous flow of a character's mental process" (180).

<sup>6</sup>One of Waddington's undated journals in the Miriam Waddington Papers contains notes on the social thought of pioneer women social workers.

<sup>7</sup>In the thesis she writes of "the hardship in getting going" and notes "my teachers believed that growth is always accompanied by pain" ("Learning" 3).

<sup>8</sup>"Ballet," for example, has a first stanza of six lines and a second stanza of five lines. I can find no reason for this structure. Waddington's unrhymed quatrains in "In the Big City" work less well than in "Who Will Build Jerusalem?" The most successful quatrains appear in "The Bond" where Waddington uses rhyme skillfully.

<sup>9</sup> The line "a world all my own," quoted earlier, is from the introductory epigraph to the handwritten poems in the journal of 1933.

<sup>10</sup>It would make an interesting study to compare and contrast Waddington's poems with recent poetry by Rhea Tregebov, a contemporary poet born in Winnipeg in 1953 and now living in Toronto. Both poets are Jewish women interested in female subjectivity, history, left-wing politics, and both often write with insights which belong to what Tregebov, in her poem "The Bloor Line," calls "my little shadow, the Jew" (19).

<sup>11</sup>See Smart 3-20.