

**Miriam Waddington, *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington*. Edited with an introduction by Ruth Panofsky. 2 Volumes. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2014), 1109 pages.**

These two beautifully published and scrupulously edited volumes represent the first time that all of Miriam Waddington's verse has been collected in one edition. Waddington was one of the major Canadian poets of the middle decades of the twentieth century. She wrote short stories and essays in addition to poetry, but it is as a poet that she made her mark. She was remarkably prolific, publishing 14 books of verse during her lifetime, not to mention numerous uncollected poems in a variety of journals. In these two volumes, published under the aegis of Editions of Modernism in Canada and edited with an introduction by Ruth Panofsky, Professor of English at Ryerson University, we finally get a comprehensive critical and scholarly edition of all of Waddington's published poetry, as well as a selection of her uncollected and unpublished poems. The second volume also contains examples of Waddington's translations from Yiddish, German and Russian into English, a welcome inclusion, since these translations testify not only to Waddington's skill as a poet, but also as a translator, and they provide a testament to the wide scope of her literary interests.

In her excellent introduction, Panofsky contends that Waddington's career as a modernist has not been sufficiently studied. Despite, or perhaps because of, being a contemporary of Louis Dudek, A. M. Klein, and Irving Layton, her poetry has received much less critical attention than theirs and consequently her significance as a leading Canadian poet has been under-rated. One of the aims of these two volumes is to right that imbalance. Waddington herself identified the reasons for her neglect by critics and scholars as follows: "I'm a Jew, a woman, I don't write out of the Christian tradition."

Waddington was the first Jewish-Canadian woman to publish poetry in English. But while she wrote in English, her first language was Yiddish and her intellectual formation was strongly influenced by Yiddish culture and literature. This Yiddish ethos can be felt in many of her poems and may account, as Panofsky suggests, for the intimate tone of her poetic voice. Some poems, like the early "Lullaby" (71), with its reference to a prince bringing almonds and raisins make explicit reference to Yiddish folk motifs.

As Panofsky notes, Waddington – who was born in Winnipeg, the only daughter of her parents' four children – felt herself to be simultaneously an outsider and a native-born Canadian. Many of her poems, such as "Bond" and "Second Generation" – both from the early collection *Green World* – deal with the uneasy reality of being Jewish in a non-Jewish land and of being a child of immigrants, thus reflecting the dual vision of a Canadian-born patriot and Jewish outsider.

Canada figures prominently in Waddington's poems, which range geographically all over the country, from Winnipeg to Grand Manan Island, from Montreal to Toronto, Sudbury to Charlottetown. The poems deliberately invoke Canadian street names and Canadian neighbourhoods, mythologizing them in the process. Waddington is a Canadian poet celebrating her home country, but she is also a Jewish poet, who carries all the historical baggage of that designation. In "The Transplanted: Second Generation," (710–11), Waddington addresses her son, whom she imagines making a trip back to the Russian homeland of Waddington's own parents. The poet reminds her son that Jews were once forbidden to stay overnight in Leningrad. Even the great Yiddish writer I. L. Peretz, who once delivered a speech to a packed hall in Leningrad, was forced to spend the night in a suburb twenty miles away. The poem juxtaposes the palaces and "kingly treasure hoards" of Leningrad with the pasture lands of Nova Scotia; and it juxtaposes the vast distances of Russia with "my" Winnipeg, with its lakes of fish and skies of snow. The poet ends by telling her son: "And you will read/ the troubled map of our/ long ancestral geography / in your own son's eyes." (711), suggesting thereby that exile, like a problematic inheritance, can be passed on from one generation to the next.

Panofsky notes that Waddington's early exposure to Yiddish poetry taught her the power of socially conscious verse delivered to a receptive audience. Her work as a social worker also contributed to a focus on the problems of the day and many of the poems reflect her professional life. In the best of these, she melds several of her on-going concerns, for instance, the awareness of being an outsider in a Christian country, with the need to feel compassion for the prisoners who are her clients, as in the first verse of "My Lessons in the Jail": "Walk into the prison, that domed citadel..Walk under their mottoes, show your pass,/ Salute their Christ to whom you cannot kneel" (189). A later verse reminds her to "Be faithful to your pity, be careworn, / Though all this buffet you, and beat and cruelly/ Test you – you chose this crown of thorns." (189).

Waddington is especially sensitive to the problems of women. Her poem, "The Women's Jail," suggests the envy that her own law-abiding self secretly feels for the incarcerated "velvet" cheque forgers and the "skyblue-eyed" drug takers. Several of the poems describe the loneliness of solitary women, especially as they age: "Old women/ should live like worms/ under the earth,/ they should come out/ only after a good rain" (700–1).

The poems from Waddington's 14 volumes of poetry are arranged here in chronological order. This gives readers a chance to observe the changes in the poet's gift as she matures. Waddington's poetic line grows shorter as she ages; its focus becomes sharper. She permits herself more playfulness. The self-conscious abstractions of the early verse fall away and the poems shimmer with unabashed emotion. Those on the death of her husband, whom she had divorced several years before he died, are especially moving,

It is also wonderful to have Waddington's translations into English of poetry written in Yiddish, German and Russian, which permits readers to get some sense of Waddington's skill as a translator. And that skill was considerable, especially given the difficulty of translating poetry. For instance I J. Segal's "Rhymes," a rhyming poem about rhymes is made to rhyme naturally in the English, not an easy thing to do. Waddington herself was a rhyming poet, especially in her early work, so she clearly has sympathy for Segal's complaint about the modern world's preference for blank verse.

I have one quibble about these two volumes; namely, that there is no index with page numbers that can guide readers to individual poems. While there is an alphabetized index of poem titles and a listing of poems by the collections in which they appeared, neither of these indexes gives page numbers for individual poems. Nor are the excellent textual notes, which appear at the end of Volume 2, keyed to the page numbers of the poems they are explicating. This is very frustrating if one is trying to locate a specific poem.

But this is a minor flaw in what is otherwise a major work of scholarship and retrieval. *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington* has just won the 2015 Prose Award in Literature, one of the American Publishers Awards for Professional and Scholarly Excellence, an award that is richly deserved, given the level of scholarship, care and commitment that have gone into the publication of these two volumes.

**Goldie Morgentaler**  
University of Lethbridge