

An Editor's Homecoming

Ruth Panofsky, ed. *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington* (2 vols). Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2014. xlv + 1114 pp.

The first thing one notices upon perusing the two volumes that make up *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington* is that—for editor Ruth Panofsky—the undertaking is both academic and personal, marking a profound and enduring relationship between scholar and subject. Panofsky has no interest in adopting a distant critical persona, stating explicitly in her rich introduction, “this project has felt like a homecoming and resonates for me as a tribute work” (xxxii). Panofsky’s own status as one of the foremost critics on the work of Canadian Jewish female authors, from Adele Wiseman to Helen Weinzweig, not to mention her consistent attention to matters of publication history and the exigencies of archival research, give this “homecoming” many layers. When Panofsky compares her editorial practice in dealing with multiple, often undated, variants and drafts of poems to Waddington’s own comments on Dorothy Livesay’s previously uncollected work, she implicitly marks a genealogy of women working in Canadian letters.

In her Introduction, Panofsky offers (the somewhat customary) grounds for the importance of the volumes, noting “Waddington’s poetry has not received the critical attention it warrants” (xi), and, indeed, the publication does realize the objective of filling a scholarly gap. In addition to Panofsky’s lengthy introduction—which I will speak to more below—the volumes contain all of Waddington’s previously published poems, arranged chronologically “according to [the] date of earliest publication” (xlili). In the Textual Notes, contained in Volume II, Panofsky details the various publication venues for each poem, and indicates the copy text she has made use of. The decision to collect such notes at the end is—at times—irksome, as there is a good deal of flipping back and forth between volumes, and one loses any sense of the arc of Waddington’s individual collections. That said, this choice of arrangement allows for new relationships among poems, as the matter of poetic development is made paramount; one notices, for example, the waxing and waning of Waddington’s experiments with open and closed lyric forms and the short line, or how her broad political consciousness links up with inquiries into more ordinary social relationships between teachers and students, between parents and children, or between lovers. Further, the very issue of arrangement in publication emerges as a critical question, as the choices Waddington and her editors

appear to have made in crafting her collections are set in relief. The Textual Notes, together with Panofsky's commentary on how she approached the massive amount of archived material, give a more transparent picture of Waddington's complex relationship to her own unpublished work, and—by extension—to the sheer labour of rethinking, revision, and selection the poet undertakes.

Also included in *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington* is a selection of previously unpublished material and a selection of Waddington's translations, the inclusion of which produces an important recognition of her wide-ranging preoccupations: though Waddington's status as a Jewish Canadian poet and an important figure in the recovery and translation of Yiddish language work has been noted by scholars, the two strains of her work—the “cultural” versus the “lyrical”—are sometimes examined in isolation. As Panofsky notes in her introduction, while Waddington may indeed have felt “compelled to translate the verse of Yiddish poets whose culture and readership were decimated during World War II” (xxxv), her often “free” translations also represent poetic inquiries into “themes of loss and loneliness, dislocation and exile” (xxxvi), which are explored throughout her writing. Among the previously uncollected poems are some early treasures: along with further examples of Waddington's lyric sensibility (in “Tea Leaves” or “The Pattern”) is the wonderfully self-reflexive “Biology Room” (written c1934-35), in which the poet queries her own standing as a modernist: “Dare I go modernistic in such a place / As the Biology Room” (3, 4). The later previously unpublished poems include an ode to Terry Fox (“A Garland for Terry”), as well as several—sometimes pessimistic—poems about old age, for example, “[How bitter it is],” in which the speaker notes that “everything now reminds me / of cemeteries” (15, 16). As Panofsky explains, the unpublished material held in the Waddington archive far exceeds what she was able to include in these two already capacious volumes, suggesting that still more work is required to expand our understanding of this poet's productivity. That said, Panofsky's descriptions of what motivated her editorial choices—whereby her intent was to “include poems that reflect the broad thematic concerns of Waddington's published oeuvre,” as well as to “feature a number of whimsical, playful poems...to showcase a less familiar, more private side” of the writer (xliv)—again reflect the important interplay between editor and subject.

The issue of editorial matters forms an important undercurrent in Panofsky's introduction, as does the relationship this particular publication has to the broader enterprise of the Editing Modernism in Canada (EMiC)

project. Panofsky's mentions of EMiC go far beyond the standard "thank you" in the Acknowledgements (although that is there too). After providing a meticulous biography of Waddington, which includes details about the poet's private life as well as discussion of her working relationship with writer, critic, and publisher John Sutherland and of the (sometimes mixed) critical reception of her work, Panofsky moves to a discussion of her own encounter with the Waddington fonds. After building a multifaceted picture of the poet's relationship to her work, a narrative all the more engrossing because it exceeds a strictly scholarly profile and because it pays attention to the way institutional forces shape the writer's public persona, Panofsky draws attention to the way an institutional context – such as the EMiC project – provides a framework for scholarship. Further, the detailed examination of the way Waddington's work was reviewed, which draws attention to the "critical bias against Waddington's poetry...among Canadian critics who sought to articulate a modernist literary practice that excluded much writing by women" (xxiii), resonates with current discussions about the way a gendered review culture still acts as a detrimental institutional force. Panofsky's explanation of how she determined a copy text, especially for poems for which multiple versions were available, is juxtaposed with discussion of the way Waddington's work was edited by Sutherland, as well as with Panofsky's notes on Waddington's own editorial practice. Panofsky explains that—in producing *The Collected Poems of A.M. Klein*—Waddington worked from "a deep personal desire to honour Klein and a critical orientation" that reinforced her own scholarly work (xxxvii). While Panofsky asserts that her practice "is less intrusive than Waddington's," I would submit that it is in the moments of "homecoming" and self-reflexivity that this publication is most compelling.

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