

## A FEW WORDS FROM MIRIAM WADDINGTON

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### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Miriam Waddington was born in Winnipeg in 1917 and educated in that City, and in Ottawa, Toronto, and Philadelphia. She has a professional degree in Social Work, (MSW) an academic one in English (M.A.), and two honorary doctorates (D. Litt.). After working as caseworker in child guidance clinics, hospitals, prisons, family and children's agencies in Toronto and Montreal, and as a teacher of Social Work during the forties and fifties, she changed professions and taught English Literature at York University in Toronto until she retired 1988. She has published eleven books of poetry, is the author of a critical study of A.M. Klein, and has edited the work of the Canadian critic John Sutherland as well as *The Collected Poems* of A.M. Klein. In addition she has published dozens of critical articles, reviews, short stories, and translations of both prose and poetry from Yiddish and German. Some of her poems and stories have been translated and published in the Soviet Union, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Romania and South America, and have won awards in the *Borestone Mountain Best Poems in English*. Her poems have been broadcast over the CBC in Canada, and by the New Zealand, Australian and Danish Broadcasting Authorities and her work has been included in numerous anthologies in Canada, Australia, England and the United States. Her poetry book *Driving Home* won the J.I. Segal prize in 1972, and Ms. Waddington has three times been the recipient of Senior Writing Fellowship from the Canada Council. The Canadian painters and sculptors, Helen Duffy, Jo Manning, Tobie Steinhouse and Sarah Jackson have each incorporated her poems into their recent work, and about two dozen of her poems have been set to music by various Canadian and American composers.

She has read her poetry in most universities across Canada and has frequently lectured on poetry to teachers. In 1974, she gave the annual E.J. Pratt memorial lecture at Memorial University in Newfoundland and was Canada Council

exchange poet to Wales in 1980. She has read at the International Poetry Evenings in Struga, Yugoslavia, and has been invited to work at Yaddo (a writers' retreat in Saratoga Springs, U.S.A.) on four occasions. In 1979, she was honored at the annual meeting and banquet of the Association of Quebec and Canadian Literatures for her contribution to Canadian Literature. She is a member of the judging panel for the annual awards in drama for the Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), was poetry editor of *Poetry Toronto* in 1981-82 and was writer-in-residence at Windsor Public Library in 1983. She was an advisory editor of the *Journal of the Otto Rank Association* from 1973 to 1983. Writer-in-residence University of Ottawa, 1974; writer-in-residence Toronto Metro Library June-December, 1986.

## INTERVIEW

**I know you have been interviewed a number of times and very recently you have been asked every possible question regarding your poetics, but because you have witnessed half a century of Canadian Literature I would like to hear your opinion about its development.**

—In the development of Canadian Literature three important factors have to be considered: The first one is Canada's colonial background. You don't have to forget that my country was a colony until very recently. The second factor is Canada's impressive landscape, the empty spaces having inner secret meanings, usually spiritual, mystical. The third factor is that Canada is bilingual, a fact you always have to bear in mind. There are two official languages and therefore two cultures living side by side. Nowadays they have forgotten about history. We have to remember history and that nothing happened in a vacuum.

**When do you think we can start talking about Canadian Literature?**

—Canadian Literature didn't start in 1975 but sometime in the XIX century and even before. My point of view is that the Modern Period, just after the World War I, was a very interesting portion of time that has not been explored enough. I think that our writers reflect in the 20s the modern literary trends of Europe —England and France, specially.

The 30s witness much more revolt against the colonial tradition. *New Provinces* is a landmark in Canadian modern poetry. Authors like A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott and A.M. Klein were in full revolt against Victorianism and conservatism. Their work displayed an artistic maturity that was going to have a marked influence on the innovative spirit of Canada.

I would like to mention Pratt, too, but he was a modernist. They were very pragmatic and didn't think Canada was any part of a nation because economics were important and the Depression was heavily felt over there on trade and business.

After the Second World War a great flourishing took place with the creation of some editorials, little magazines and a terrific encouragement from the newly founded Canada Council which continues to these days and gives opportunities to young writers.

People in the early 40s were pioneers. They wrote without hope of reward of money. They wrote for the love of their work. I would like to mention two very good critics: E.K. Brown, the first critic to place our literature in its proper context—a national interest free from the excesses of nationalism—and Desmond Pacey whose survey *Creative Writing in Canada* was to become the standard text on Canadian Literature.

**And would you also include John Sutherland considering that you were the editor of his works?**

—Yes, certainly. He was a non-academic critic; nevertheless, he was a gifted one. He also has to be mentioned, of course.

**Do you think that the search for a Canadian identity has played a role first in the development and afterwards in the flourishing of Canadian letters?**

—That's a good question and I would have to think it over to answer you, but after our long walk through Gallipoli I am a bit tired. So let me put it this way: Certainly the search for an identity has played a role in the literary explosion from the 60s, but I would add that only for a short period. You know, Lourdes, artists never question their identity and it is from their identity that they write. The critics are the ones that have that question in mind.

**From your long teaching experience what would be your advice to us, European teachers, beginning to deal with your country's literature?**

—You have to relate Canadian literature—which is still young and developing—to the context of Modernism in all the countries of Europe and you have to see it in relation to the different schools of Criticism, Futurism, Dadaism, Imaginism, Surrealism even Marxism and Feminism as well, and all postmodern movements. Don't study and don't teach it in isolation.

On the other hand, what I am noticing in different Conferences in Europe and in Commonwealth countries is that the teaching of Canadian Literature in foreign places skewed in favour of the writing that happened from 1975 or 1977 without considering the Modern wave, that struggle to be born from 1920 onwards. Those pioneer writers—creators of our Modernism—are now never mentioned. I don't think that it is possible to understand the present without taking into account the past. As Thomas Mann stated "very deep is the well of the past".

You should also be aware that some writers are now being considered Canadian only because they write from Canada where they have been offered a post, and now I ask you, Lourdes, would you consider Spaniard a Cuban writer working in Spain only because he happened to write Spanish and lives in your country for some time? Well, that is, precisely, what is taking place in Canada.

**It is a fact that the majority of research papers presented on Canadian Literature in ACLALS or EACLALS Conferences in the last few years are dedicated to writers who became famous from the mid 70s onwards.**

—Yes, yes... No scholar seems to be interested in our pioneer authors here in Europe. You should write a paper on Emily Carr for one of these Congresses.

**I will, Miriam, I will... Now I would like to know your vision as a poet of the future of our society.**

—With my head I am very pessimistic but with my heart I am optimistic. Men and women have many possibilities both for good and bad, for the individual and the collective, and it is the responsibility of everyone to make a choice, and my choice is a human one. People need to dream their dreams and they live by their dreams and art does that. And, as far as I know, man is still the only animal that possesses language and imagination.

**Well. Thank you very much for devoting your time to me after such an exhausting day.**

This interview was held on 7 April 1990 in Lecce, Italy, during  
the Conference of European Association for Commonwealth  
Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS)

### **Books**

GREEN WORLD, 1945. First Statement, Montreal.

THE SECOND SILENCE, 1955. Ryerson Press, Toronto.

THE SEASON'S LOVERS, 1958, Ryerson Press, Toronto.

THE GLASS TRUMPET, 1966, Oxford, Toronto, London, New York.

CALL THEM CANADIANS, 1968. (edited by Lorraine Monk) National Film Board, Ottawa.

SAY YES, 1969, Oxford, Toronto.

THE DREAM TELESCOPE, 1972, Anvil & Routledge Kegan Paul. London.

A.H. KLEIN, 1970, Copp Clark, Toronto.

Ed. JOHN SUTHERLAND ESSAYS CONTROVERSIES, POEMS, 1972. McClelland & Stewart, Toronto.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF A.M. KLEIN. ed. 1974. McGraw Hill Ryerson, Toronto, London, New York.

THE PRICE OF GOLD, 1976. Oxford, Toronto.

MISTER NEVER, 1978, Turnstone, Winnipeg.

THE VISITANTS, 1981, Oxford, Toronto.

SUMMER AT LONELY BEACH (stories). Mosaic Valley Editions, Oakville, 1982.

COLLECTED POEMS, May 1986, Oxford, Toronto.

APARTMENT SEVEN, ESSAYS SELECTED AND NEW, 1989, Oxford U.P., Toronto.