

# PUTTING ON AND TAKING OFF

poems by

*Miriam Waddington*

## My Travels

I have looked at beautiful things in the museums of foreign countries all over the world and I can report they are still mourning for Christ on the tapestries of Bucharest while in Moscow the gold ikons are blazing with the intense motherhood of dark medieval madonnas.

On the mountains of new Jerusalem in a house of glass and stone I read in a broken alphabet the deed of sale written in the hand of my forefather Bar Kochba a brave warrior and later on the cliffs of Jaffa (spelled Joppa) an old papyrus dating from the time Rameses the second warned me what may befall the traveler in a strange country: thou dost sleep for thou art worn out a coward steals thy bow they sheath-knife and thy quiver thy reins are cut in the darkness thy weapons are become dry land.

And from Warsaw where I went much later I can report that the war is not over yet the stones of the ghetto still whisper at night the old city cries from the cellars the Vistula moans the music of summer hides nothing in Warsaw on Saturday afternoons when the Lazienki park is empty and Chopin is dead and I study the clever walls of the Satirical Cafe in the square of the three crosses.

And in Hamburg I discover the Germans are still-hating the Jews and in Kiel the same and in the quiet gardens of Munich still the same it was no pleasure being a Jew in Bucharest I did not mention it to anyone in Moscow I softpedaled it in Warsaw while in Jerusalem where everyone is some kind of Jew or other it was no pleasure either: thou dost sleep for thou art worn out a coward steals thy bow thy sheath-knife and thy quiver thy reins are cut in the darkness thy weapons fall to the ground thy weapons are become dry land.

I am homesick I am packing up I am going home but now I don't know anymore where home is.

## You as the Baffled Glance

You are the baffled mild glance Chekhov gave over his spectacles in his house in Moscow full of August sunlight sitting at his cherrywood desk under photographs of Olga Marie and brother Michael writing under the breath of their tuberculosis on fairly good terms with death

## You as Real

I imagine you as real somewhere in a city that doesn't exist my poem keeps changing you but you don't see it don't hear it are blind deaf and I recognize I am powerless so I am powerless it does not stop me from imagining you as real

## You as Flowering Logs on the Gatineau

You shine like the wood of the grand piano make designs like the mosaic of cut logs floating downriver from Ottawa to the Chaudiere where the match company saws them into matches a few float away later flower with garlands and ring their white bells in the trilliumed valleys of my country's spring



Mrs. Miriam Waddington, a vivacious member of York's English faculty joined this university after many years as a social worker. ('I couldn't see myself spending my life in the stacks as an English grad'.)

Currently on a Canada Council Senior Fellowship in creative writing, she is continuing to write poetry and literary criticism. Her books include *Green World* (1945), *The Second Silence* (1955), *The Season's Lovers*, *The Glass Trumpet* (1966), and *Canadians--The People* (commissioned by the National Film Board and scheduled for publication this year.)

Mrs. Waddington has written reviews for the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and *Canadian Forum*. Her poetry has been included in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* and the *Penguin Book of Canadian Poetry*.

For Miriam Waddington, 'poetry is a way of coming closer to reality, of discovering', and these poems--published for the first time anywhere--breathe her conviction.

## Runners

Our open hands encounter the closing flower the early hour and we run with the sun fly against wind high-jump the rainbows until we become the enchanted land of ourselves

## Leaf

Curly leaf uncurl to white ungrow back to seed to wind unclasp to carrying air that landed you here on earth in tree in branch in bud and in the lighted bay of my imagination

## The Eight-sided White Barn

I know now for whom I was saving that eight-sided white barn at the corner of Dufferin and Steeles avenue every time I passed it the morning would shiver and dance and I wanted to frame it all into a poem so

I have just given you an eight-sided white barn-boat and it has a little ramp (or gangplank) in front of it for the animals to come in on and it has a turret on top of it for someone to gaze out of and see the dove the leaf and the lay of the land;

and it has a field around it full of ploughed-up earthen waves crowned with the foam of snow and the blown straw of Toronto's skimpy winter and it has an endlessly unrolling slapdash tablecloth sky stained with wind blown by rain covering everything.

Between the plangent sky and the ploughing sea in the sun-ice of Ontario on the snowish shield of the brittle world we are land-ploughers night-skaters we are seafarers in the flood who journey out in a barnboat to touch the broken leaf to hear the dove to brush through the boundaries of whatever keeps us from being the wide new world

## Putting On and Taking Off

this putting on and taking off of worlds smiles words those lectures in red auditoriums wired for blue sound

I don't want to work at language anymore I am tired of thinking

I want to lie on my back in a forest of grass just be a grasshopper an ant just bend my jointed legs and

leap through the jungle of stems or I want to go to sleep in a picture frame in an old Marsden Hartley mountain

or why doesn't somebody put me into a poem where I could just be and not mean where I could just keep mum blank siiiifiiiiiiiiilent

I don't want above all to talk lecture be teacher at least not for a while

## Pont Mirabeau in Montreal

What happened to Apollinaire's Pont Mirabeau to his nostalgic *sonne l'heure* and *je demeure* we transported it to Montreal's Lafontaine Park and every Sunday we walk there in a jungle of birds French words we stand on his Pont Mirabeau throw popcorn to the swans eat peanuts watch the bicycle racers receive kisses from their girls ribbons from the mayor nobody needs to translate anything anymore every gesture is international with the Pont Mirabeau we have changed the locale of the world every city intersects us