



## Parliamentary Poet Laureate



### POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

**Daphne Marlatt** (1942 – ) was born in Australia but has lived most of her life in Vancouver. She was a key constituent of the early 1960's "Tish" group at the University of British Columbia and has published numerous books of fiction and poetry. Since the 1970's she has been a major participant in feminist writing and critique and, recently, has written for Noh theatre. Her poems here resonate with two earlier books (*Vancouver Poems*, 1972 and *Salvage*, 1991) in her ongoing interest in what might be considered a "poetics of renovation" that attends to texts of revision, rewriting, and extension. In 2006 she was made a Member of the Order of Canada.

#### Poems for discussion:

##### **Wet fur wavers** and **animal sheen**

From: *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now*  
Talonbooks, 2013

##### **Wet fur wavers**

up a long eye-line Sunday sprays  
interior city ground. Aqueous cut of the sea's  
a bottomless lagoon. Logs lash on. The grey  
stretch of sand I walk, footsteps sucked. jumped.

Changes air now wet as the sea, the *sh'te*

comes walking up thru humor in the way of

vision, salt. Cedar all over. Cedar for headdress.  
 Beaver or bear, what is there to the touch of,  
 you said. Come well back into view.

Trappings, change,  
 what runs in the middle, gestures, wired for  
 vision. Spiral back through city even underground

(the esplanade traffics in waves to the point  
 that all of your faces echo, through one I. white.

Small figures as blue and white when shadows come,  
 down alleyways of sight, peri winkle, *vinca*, small  
 single flower

by the sea (Salt does. Asphalt  
 cuts through time, your eye, my tongue, down where a  
 culvert mouths on the beach the city's underground:  
 you come through walking, corpses, bits of metal,  
 bird cry.

### animal sheen

on skin's oil spotlights raise the old  
 Alcazar tap of heels' hurried exit then the Little boards  
 its must of makeup floats the York's art deco  
 lights theatre velvet drawn live over gesture body thump  
 a shriek or flounce blue gel dims the thrill it's curtains  
 for new wave

or New York boom (grunge Nirvana even)  
 alternately live and celluloid (see Palace cum Raja beauties  
 close up) from 1913 on (stage presence gone) til demolition  
 time and tense (historic) inter-

venes  
 echoic applause  
 surf traffic braking and start-ups glassy

towers loom pitfalls in memory netted as once who or  
 what was gutted contrail dust in collective amnesiac  
 flaneuring poses open stairwells

she was walking  
 her twenty something self of questionable wants  
 through shared streets thick with passing

fly tower and proscenium arch inchoate dark on the  
 blank side of the news is crow murder an act in disappearing  
 communitas coyotl paws this permeable

spasm in continuity

whose?

**For discussion:**

1. In what ways do both of Marlatt's poems imagine someone walking through places haunted by historical presences?
2. The *sh'te* referred to in "Wet fur wavers" is a classical noh performer, whom Marlatt tells us "can be a ghost deeply attached to a certain place because of some event or relationship that happened there in a previous life, or s/he can be a god/spirit who inhabits that place" (*Liquidities* 71). Do you think this poem is addressed to a ghost or spirit of the place? What kind of place is it? What might be troubling this *sh'te*?
3. The York referred to in "animal sheen" was a theatre (see "York Theatre Saved," *Plank Magazine* December 21, 2008, online). List all the things mentioned in "animal sheen" to do with theatres, performances and shows.

4. The poem "animal sheen" ends with a question. How would you answer the question? Who is coyotl and what does he have to do with this question? What is communitas and how is it important to the question?
5. List all the words and phrases in "Wet fur wavers" that have to do with seeing and sight. What do you think "alleyways of sight" are? Give examples from your own experience.

**Writing prompts:**

1. Both of Marlatt's poems break words in the middle ("peri winkle," "inter-/ venes"). As rapidly as possible list at least 20 long words. Now try splitting them in various places to make additional meanings emerge. Build a poem from these. Experiment with starting a new line in the middle of a word.
2. Choose a venerable or historic building in your neighbourhood, region or town. Rapidly jot down as many memories and associations as you can think of to do with this building and whatever history of it you can find. What kinds of activities go on there? Who lived in or used this building? What is it made of? What does it look like? Build a poem out of this research you've just conducted.
3. Sound patterns are very important in Marlatt's work. Notice how consonants in the title "Wet fur wavers" echo and repeat: 2 w's, 2 -ur sounds, an f followed later by a v, which is a voiced f. Notice the repeated l's in the third line, and the way the u sound in "sucked" is echoed by the u sound in "jumped." List as many pairs of words as you can whose sounds at the beginning or in the middle of the words repeat or sound similar to each other. Build a poem from some of these.
4. Notice how the first verse paragraph of "animal sheen" runs together phrases without using conventional sentence structure. For example the lines "spotlights raise the old/ Alcazar tap of heels' . . ." make the word "tap" refer first to a brewery tap and then to a sound, effectively overlapping two completely different phrases and ideas in the word "tap." Rapidly jot down memories, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches associated with a place in your neighbourhood. Experiment with jamming them together so that they overlap in this way. Avoid conventional sentences as much as possible.
5. Who are some of the ghosts or spirits that haunt a place in your neighbourhood? Write a poem in which you speak directly to one or more of these.

(Notes prepared by Meredith Quatermain)