

“Beyond the hungry edge” An Interview with Daphne Marlatt

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[See table of contents](#)

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“Beyond the hungry edge”: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt

LAURA MOSS AND GILLIAN JEROME

"I think the fish like their water clean too," she says with a dry laugh where: this outgoing river, this incoming tide

minge & meet. To take
no more than the requisite, *required* to grow, spawn,
catch, die: required to eat.

— Daphne Marlatt, *Steveston*

Put yourself inside the head of a bird as he's flying down a channel of water. Okay. Now the image would be what you see if you're outside on the bank looking up at him. That's not what I'm interested in. I'm interested in getting you inside his head in flight. And everything's moving. There is no still reference point because he's in flight, you're in flight. Whoever's reading.

— Daphne Marlatt, Interview with George Bowering, *Open Letter*

DAPHNE MARLATT HAS LONG BEEN INTERESTED in sustainable environmental and linguistic inter-connections. In 1974, she wrote of the Fraser River estuary in *Steveston*, “To take / no more than the requisite,” but the sentiment holds as much in her poetics and sparse writing as it does in her sustained biocentric focus. Further, in the interview below, she asks, “What do we need to be conscious of? What can’t we see, beyond the limit of our familiar perceptions and concepts? beyond the hungry edge of our personal needs, ambitions, and desires?” During the intervening forty-two years between *Steveston* and now, slightly longer than the time being celebrated in this issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Marlatt has consistently reached past “familiar perceptions” in her poetry, prose, opera, editing, activism, and community engagement. She has placed the reader in flight, as she says in the interview with George Bowering quoted as our epigraph, in

a position of immediacy that is sometimes unsettling and sometimes heartening. When *SCL* launched in 1976, Marlatt had already been writing and publishing her work for over a dozen years. She has published over twenty books of poetry and prose poetry, three novels, two oral history projects, an opera, and a collection of literary criticism. She has also been an editor for several key literary journals, including *Tish*, *Capilano Review*, *periodics*, and *Tessera*. Several times in her career, Marlatt has contributed to important writing events, including The Vancouver Poetry Conference in 1963 and the first Women and Words Conference in 1983, both in Vancouver. She has been a writer-in-residence in programs across Canada. In myriad forms, approaches, and content, Marlatt has challenged narratives of nationhood, motherhood, history, gender, consumption, and lesbian sexuality, among others. She has won many awards and distinctions for her experimental writing, including The Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize (2009) for the novelistic long poem *The Given* and The City of Vancouver Mayor's Arts Award (2008). In 2006, she was awarded the Order of Canada for her contributions to Canadian literature and in 2012 she received the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award. A year later Talonbooks released her *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now*. In 2014, Wilfrid Laurier University Press issued a selection from 40 years of her work, *Rivering: The Poetry of Daphne Marlatt*, edited by Susan Knutson.

On a rainy winter day in 2016, Laura Moss and Gillian Jerome sat down at the University of British Columbia, where they work, to draft a series of questions to begin a conversation with Daphne Marlatt about her enormous contributions to Canadian literature, her work, her poetics, and the changes in literary culture.



Laura Moss/Gillian Jerome: Hello Daphne, and thank you so much for joining us via email to answer our questions. I hope we can think of this as a kind of collaboration, an electronic passing back and forth of the paper. Please feel free to take the conversation in whatever direction you think is the most interesting and productive. This interview is being done on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the journal *Studies in Canadian Literature*, so we want to begin by asking you to compare

your own work in 1976 and 2016. How might a snapshot of Canadian literature, defined however you want, differ in 1976 and 2016?

Daphne Marlatt: Any such snapshot would of course be subjective, and in my case, from the point of view of a West Coast poet. The 70s in Vancouver was a strongly collective decade in its movement for social and political change. There is still a very active current of socio-political poetry here, inheritors of that spirit. The 70s were a time of great experimentation in the visual arts and this affected both writing and publishing (concrete poetry, sound poetry arrived on the scene). A time of innovative new presses and little mags, of great reading series at both the Western Front and the Literary Storefront in Vancouver, as well as connections with other like-minded writers and small presses across the country, whether Coach House in Toronto or Véhicule in Montreal or NeWest in Edmonton. A very collaborative energy sparked much of this experimentation — we took pleasure in and learned a lot from collaborating with one another. In addition, the Canada Council had begun sending poets to read across the nation, as far north as Inuvik. So it was a yeast-time, a sense of breaking through the confines of what had been previously defined as Canadian poetry, Modernist Canadian poetry. This movement occurred with immense generosity, communication, and innovation. The publishing industry didn't yet view itself as an industry and, as a reader, it was still possible to keep up with many of the new releases. However, Asian Canadian writing hadn't begun to appear. Except for Maria Campbell, Indigenous writing and publishing was unknown. Same for Black writing, except for Austin Clarke's fiction. So, a smaller population then and a smaller readership with much less racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity than we have now. It seemed more possible then to be in touch with an active and enthusiastic readership, albeit a small one, a readership aware that something newly Canadian was in the making. The collective spirit I'm talking about still exists in small pockets, but only on the fringes of a top-heavy structure of large US-branch publishers, best-sellers, and competition for big-dollar literary awards, a structure that is very much Toronto-based. And of course fiction and non-fiction, not poetry, now establish the high-water levels of the market. And then too there's the digital revolution, which has led to more diversity in forms of self-publication, whether blogs (where a lot of critical discussion can occur) or books.

LM/GJ: Let's pause for a moment on the idea of "the digital revolution." How have changes in technology had an impact on your own writing?

DM: When I bought my first PC in the 80s, I left it in its box for a year before I could bring myself to use it. I loved my Smith-Corona electric typewriter and the hands-on way I could just pencil in second-thoughts on the page even as it was still in the roller. Even now I often begin a poem on paper before transferring to screen. Of course, editing *Tessera* long distance, or editing anything, became so much easier with email and attachments. And writing prose is easier on screen because my handwriting can be so illegible. Then, too, a manuscript page on screen looks much closer to how it will read when published, so transferring to screen offers a good method for final editing. And, of course, I love the quick access to a huge range of information online. This makes any sort of background research a lot quicker. And there are excellent poetry blogs to read with lively commentary, but I'm still essentially a book reader. I don't do anything on social media because it can absorb so much time, and as I'm a very slow writer I have to safeguard my writing time, but it IS distressing to miss a reading because it's only been advertised on Facebook.

LM/GJ: *SCL* is not alone in looking back and forward right now. House of Anansi recently re-released *Ana Historic*, Ronsdale reprinted *Steveston*, Vancouver 125 re-issued *Opening Doors*, you published *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* — which is in part what Fred Wah calls a renovation of your 1972 collection *Vancouver Poems* — and a selection from your body of work, *Rivering: The Poetry of Daphne Marlatt*, was recently published in the Laurier Poetry Series. We also understand that you are currently at work on two new projects. Why do you think that there is a renewed interest in your older work as well as your more recent writing? What do you hope a new generation of readers gets from this work?

DM: Well, perhaps because my work reflects certain periods that have now become "history" to younger generations? I've always liked Nicole Brossard's statement, "I am a woman of the present." Still, the issue of history is interesting because in *Steveston*, *Ana Historic*, *Liquidities*, and particularly in the aural history, *Opening Doors*, there is lived "history," the textures of others' experience, the rhythms and

associations of memory within contexts now utterly changed, even disappeared. I've always wanted to convey a sense of immediacy, so when that arises in what is clearly the past, perhaps it creates an interesting friction for a younger reader. Then, too, my work conveys the experience of a woman or other women in various periods, depending on whether it's poetry or fiction. There's a strong sense of physical location, of interrelation with that location. But really, you should ask younger readers what they get from it. As a writer, I put the work out there with the hope that any reader will somehow connect with it, find some resonance with her or his lived experience. By "lived" I mean fully experienced. Our lives may feel long but they're actually quite brief, and most of the time we don't really register their texture, the rapidly shifting stream of moments that compose them.

LM/GJ: Critical engagement with your writing in venues like *SCL* and *Canadian Literature* has focused on the ways that you have developed feminist poetics, reconsidered history, written "lesbian quest narratives," and innovated with language and syntax. Critics have displayed a particularly sustained interest in your feminist writing. We wonder what gaps you see in critical conversations. Think of this question as an invitation to readers to imagine/take your work in other directions. . . .

DM: My comment above [about history] is one direction. Further, the effects of climate change that we are now beginning to experience and witness, and this is only the beginning, require a huge shift in public consciousness if we are to register the environmental effects of this hugely consumerist culture and the resource-extraction industry it requires, if we are to shift it to something more environmentally aware and do it in time to avert — well, what is disaster? — a massive dying-off of other species as well as our own. So, the issue of consciousness [is] larger than feminist consciousness or social conscience. I remember when Fred Wah was editing my first selected writing for Talonbooks; he would ask me, what do you mean by consciousness? Now I know that's a pedagogical trick of Fred's to elicit further thinking, but it's a very useful question and one we need to keep asking. At this moment in time, what is the nature of our consciousness? What do we need to be conscious of? What can't we see, beyond the limit of our familiar perceptions and concepts? beyond the hungry edge of our personal needs,

ambitions, and desires? Pushing the limits of diction and syntax has to do with widening what we're aware of and it's a technique that underlies a lot of what I've written. This is something I wrote about in a recent statement for the online journal *The Goose*.

LM/GJ: How does the knowledge of such consciousness come out in your work? Can you give us an example of where you engage with environmental changes and the effects of climate change?

DM: The first act of my chamber opera, *Shadow Catch*, attempts to express a more biocentric consciousness. Almost all the recent poems in *Liquidities*, in both technique and content, take this on, as do a number of the poems in the manuscript I'm just finishing, *Reading Sveva*, due out from Talonbooks in October 2016.

LM/GJ: What do you think of the new generation of eco-poets, writers like Christine Leclerc, Jordan Abel, and Angela Rawlings, among others, all of whom are responding to our ecological crisis in such interesting ways? Does their work give you hope?

DM: Yes, and to this list I would add recent work by Rita Wong, Sonnet L'Abbé, and Cecily Nicholson. These poets see the ecological crisis as one inevitably bound up with social justice issues and the residue of colonialism. This is an ongoing concern, which first came to my attention in the late 70s with the work of the American eco-feminist Susan Griffin. The poetic challenge, as I see it, is how to write about relating to other-than-human living beings in our environment without reducing them to human use values. This is the challenge I just mentioned, the one that requires a huge shift from our prevailing urban exclusively anthropocentric awareness to a larger consciousness of wonder and respect for natural phenomena, even cosmic phenomena, the kind of consciousness that almost three decades ago now the American eco-cultural historian Thomas Berry was calling for in *A Dream of the Earth*, as have many others more recently. Naomi Klein points out in *This Changes Everything* that what is at stake is "a fundamental shift in power relations [her emphasis] between humanity and the natural world on which we depend" (394). All this work, as well as the remarkable strategic efforts of various communities around the world, gives me hope. It's interesting that in his book Berry pointed to the significance of Indigenous cosmologies with their inherent respect for, and awareness of kinship with, other creatures, the elements, and Earth itself. We

are coming to recognize the significance and utter importance of this cosmology, especially as Indigenous communities are those now on the front line of resistance to further damaging industrial developments on their territory.

LM/GJ: In an interview with Beverley Curran and Mitoko Hirabayashi in 1999, you comment that you're "looking for books that take on really big questions about the nature of reality and what we're doing here and the phenomenology of our lives. What are we doing here? What's this all about?" (111). Are these questions still as urgent for you now in 2016? Are some of these phenomenological questions now connected with your environmental concerns? You also said, "What I think of as ghosts are what haunt us, what lie outside the systems of thought that we've been trained in" (120). What haunts us now?

DM: Yes, those questions are still urgent, especially the question: What are we doing here on this earth with its marvelously complex ecological interactions between an uncountable array of species and their environment? What are we doing to the seas? to the soil? to the flora perfectly attuned to their natural habitat? to the atmosphere? all of which are interlinked. And where does all of this place us? These are pressing questions we need not only to ask but to act on. There's a terrific public desire to turn a blind eye to what we're doing, a kind of massive inertia rooted in fear of change that paradoxically intensifies the need for change. We can no longer, and quite literally, afford this inertia, which is, perhaps, our current "ghost" in the sense of something that haunts us.

LM/GJ: In *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now*, you revisit and re-vision the city of Vancouver in the "then" of the 1970s and "now" of the twenty-first century. You wonder about "the shape of the city's *shite* or inhabiting presence, its ghostly energy for self-transformation" (xii). A *Quill and Quire* reviewer reads the collection as providing "a relief topography of the ways in which neo-liberal globalization and demographic shifts have transformed" the city. Tanis MacDonald, in her review in the *Malahat Review*, talks about how the collection is "not nostalgia by any stretch of the imagination, as Marlatt's skill as a poet and historian has always been to note the simultaneity of memory and the present" (90). How has Vancouver been a character/muse/place of

return/local/home, both then and now? How might you reconcile now and then? How do you see simultaneity of memory and the present?

DM: Reviews are always interesting because they convey as much about the reviewer's concerns as about the book under review. That said, both quotes apply to *Liquidities*. So I'd like to point out that memory in this instance is not only personal, it's also collective, as embodied in the history of Vancouver and its historical photographs. Anyone has access to this in the many books that have been published now about the city, far more than when I was writing *Vancouver Poems* in the late 60s, early 70s. There is something of the *flâneur* in those poems (I'd been reading both Baudelaire and Rimbaud), but they also took their impetus from archival material (J.J. Matthews's collection and the remarkable collection of historic photographs in the public library and the city archives). When you encounter this material and bring those memories into your walking about, you encounter the lived depth of the city, even as you are experiencing it in its present form. This is most intense for long-term residents who have their own layers of memory interwoven with these collective layers in time. In the mid-70s, when Carole [Itter] and I collected and edited our oral history of Strathcona, the neighbourhood we live in [*Opening Doors*], we encountered this over and over again. Often a historic photograph from the public library would prompt the personal memories of someone who'd grown up here in the 20s or 30s. This is "the simultaneity of memory and the present." A small but intense experience of this now is when you stop to read one of the historical sidewalk mosaics and streetlamp placards that dot our neighbourhood and elsewhere downtown. So yes, Vancouver has been a muse from the moment I first started writing, even before I got to UBC and encountered the locale-focused writing of the *Tish* poets and the work of Charles Olson around his fishing town of Gloucester, Massachusetts. My take on the city is first and foremost a woman's experience of the city and, as such, a differently embodied one — I wrote about this first in the 70s in "Litter. wreckage. salvage," a serial poem that opens my 1991 book *Salvage*. That was a young woman's poem and looking back I see the characteristics of one's interactions with a city change over time with one's aging — and with the city's aging, or to use a current word, development, too. I'm reworking an autobiographical/historical essay about the interaction between my writing and this city, the various phases of each, but finding it difficult to sum up because we ourselves

are always changing, just as this rather young city does too. There is no fixed vantage point.

LM/GJ: When one reads about the literary history of Vancouver in the late 50s and early 1960s, lots of credit is given to people like Earle Birney, Malcolm Lowry, and Warren Tallman at UBC, and of course the *Tish* poets — Frank Davey, Jamie Reid, Fred Wah, and George Bowering, as well as yourself. Then there was Lionel Kearns, David Cull, David Dawson, Robert Hogg, Dan McLeod, but also Carol Bolt, Judith Copithorne, Gladys (now Maria) Hindmarch, Maxine Gadd, Pauline Butling, and others. In *When Tish Happens*, at one point Frank Davey describes you as his muse and recalls how he wrote poetry to impress you. What was it like to come of age in a literary world with differing gender expectations for male writers and for women writers? What did you learn?

DM: The first thing I learned was to stand up for my own voice, my own perceptions, and this was early on at UBC, 1962 or 3, when a group of young poets, possibly associated with *Raven*, the student magazine, I don't think it was exclusively *Tish* poets, were asked to give a reading. I was nervous about reading to an audience and one of the male poets, I don't recall who, offered to read my poem for me. I hated the way he read it. So from then on, I always read my own work to audiences. And when Frank rejected one of my poems for *Tish* I wrote back arguing with his critical principles. My poem was an amateur one that didn't deserve defending, but that says something about a willingness to stand up for myself. I was always willing to argue, uninformed as I was, at the off-campus writers' workshops that were held regularly in various faculty members' houses, which is where I met most of the *Tish* poets. At the same time, I learned a lot from those heated discussions. Yes, literary power was still in the hands of male mentors in the 60s, but older women writers could be very supportive. I remember Denise Levertov generously having coffee with me during the 1963 Conference when I was going to be married immediately right after it.¹ She reassured me that I could certainly continue writing after marriage (despite what an older male poet had told me), just as she was doing. Well, neither of those marriages lasted, but that's another issue. During that time, Dorothy Livesay invited me to her apartment to discuss my reading performance. She objected to the way I was observing line

breaks and I understood that her sense of the poem was not influenced by the breath line. Still, I was grateful that she'd taken an interest. It really wasn't until the 70s, when American feminism became a powerful influence with us, that I felt a strong sense of shared experience with women writers like Gladys, Max, and Judy, and Pauline too when I got to know her much better in the Kootenays.² That was followed by the sense of solidarity generated with the organizing of Women and Words, the ground-breaking conference that Betsy Warland initiated in 1983 at UBC. Then, co-editing *Tessera* with Barbara Godard, Kathy Mezei, Gail Scott, and later Susan Knutson and Louise Cotnoir, put us all in active contact with one another and with a range of feminist writers across Canada. That was a high-energy period for me, the 80s and 90s. I found the feminist writing theory of that period particularly stimulating and supportive.

LM/GJ: What was it like for you to finally feel as if you had mentors and shared experience with other women writers? Were mentorship, power in numbers, and shared experience some of the motives for your collaborative work?

DM: To feel that kind of support from other women writers, to feel that we were co-engaged in the consciousness-raising project that was second-wave feminism, all that was ground-breaking for me. It was a stimulus for both my collaborative work with other women writers and for my teaching. I was astonished in 1988 when I was the Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair in Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University and several grad students came to ask me to give them a reading course in modernist women writers because they weren't hearing about their work in the English courses they were taking. That sparked several further workshops and courses I taught elsewhere focusing on modernist and postmodernist women's writing. Now I want to see that kind of enthusiastic inquiry and energy go into the movement to increase awareness of this living planet and ameliorate the limiting use-vision that has generated climate change.

LM/GJ: Who are your "literary mothers" in the past and in the present — the women writers whose work has had the most influence on your reading and writing? How have your collaborative writing projects with other women (Betsy Warland and Nicole Brossard, for instance) influenced your thinking and practice as a writer?

DM: Literary mothers (a concept important to me): I think my first were Stein, Woolf, and HD, whose work I encountered as an undergraduate. Robert Duncan was of course talking about Stein and HD so I started reading them. And I took a wonderful course from John Hulcoop [at UBC] featuring the work of Virginia Woolf. I felt a strong kinship with both Woolf and HD, especially HD's fiction, and I was very interested in Stein's almost oral approach to language and the sentence. I first encountered Nicole Brossard's writing through the Coach House translations series and through an inspired and inspiring essay of hers that spoke about being a woman writer. This was in an issue of the bilingual journal *ellipse* that was lying on Fred and Pauline's coffee table in their house in the Kootenays where I was staying one summer in the mid-70s.³ At that point I had no idea that I would eventually translate a poem of Nicole's for Colin Browne's transformation series. Nicole's poetry, fiction, and theory have been important for me. But then, so has Robin Blaser's writing. The first collaborative writing I did was with Penn Kemp when she was visiting Vancouver in the 70s. Then the much more extensive writing Betsy and I did together in the 80s as both lovers and individual poets. That was a very close-up experience of collaborating, even though it was strongly informed by the feminist theory we were reading at the time. We had different approaches to writing so it taught me a lot about hearing language filtered through another speaker/thinker's patterns of thought — perhaps that can happen most deeply in a shared mother-tongue. It's not like translation, though both are rooted in semantics while sound is certainly a factor. It's more like listening on several levels at once, all of it complicated by our daily life together. I think that's why our collaborations had so much wordplay in them. A balance to this has been Phyllis Webb, whose work from *Wilson's Bowl* on, each poem's surprising turns of image and insight, their unspoken resonances, has prompted a greater freedom, I hope, in some of my later writing. It's a move towards a more spiritual reading of the deep interconnectedness within which each of us lives. In that sense, a connection with Woolf — so it seems I've come full circle in this reply to you.

LM/GJ: You wrote in "musing with mothertongue" about the androcentric nature of the English language and of syntax. You ask a question that is at the heart of *écriture féminine*: "where are the poems that

celebrate the soft letting-go of the flow of menstrual blood as it leaves her body? how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows?" (55). So much of your work takes up this challenge of interrupting the predictable syntactical structures of English sentences. How do you think now about that very particular time in literary history when feminist writers like you were responding to what was then exciting, radical thinking that encouraged literary experimentation and play as a kind of counter-discourse to male power? What do you think the long-lasting impact of feminist ideas about language and voice has been?

DM: Difficult questions. On the one hand, in general Canadian culture, I don't see that much has shifted at all, which is disheartening and, given the gynophobic bad-mouthing that goes on in social media, frightening. Furthermore, within Canadian literary circles there are still male dinosaurs, male poet-critics who assume that only their views have critical value, without even trying to understand the ethos of women poets, as Jan Zwicky found out several years ago.⁴ Individual entitlement, rather than a sense of collectivity, is still a huge current in our capitalist culture. However, there's been a big move forward since the 60s in recognizing lesbian and gay identities and legal rights. And, since the 80s, identity explorations have continued to grow much more complex and interesting — take, for instance, the moving work of both Erín Moure and Dionne Brand. And now, there's a younger wave of female poets like Rita Wong, Marilyn Dumont, and others I might name, who move a feminist sense of social injustice into the pressing concerns of both environmental and racial politics against dominant unconsciously colonizing systems. All of this work is very necessary and it speaks to an audience ready to hear it. There's a continuum here, one I delight in.

As for genre and syntactical experimentation and word play, well, as many of those poets know, these are useful techniques for disrupting any dominant structures of thought and they go on being so. Language is germane to how we think, so disrupting old patterns of binary thinking feels essential to changing social realities.

LM/GJ: You've spoken before about the relationship between your experimentation with the poetic line, especially the long line, and a sense of space. But what about your sense of the line and its relationship

with time? History is a recurring subject in so many of your books. How does your sense of the line reflect your interest in the historical?

DM: Time flows incessantly, as does a river, that was the basis of the long line in *Steveston*, with its eddies around particular moments or people or places. Still, that's obvious and a concept. I wanted immediacy. So I began working with a run-on sentence earlier than *Steveston*, in *Vancouver Poems* and in parts of a piece called *Rings* published as a Georgia Straight Writing Supplement book in 1971. In both series, the forward movement of the sentence in English is interrupted internally and rhythmically with a lot of commas, sometimes spacing and periods without beginning a new sentence. In *Rings* it sounded hesitant — which it was; that was very interior writing about the end of my marriage and the birth of our son. But I was after the immediacy of tracing thought after thought, and in one section that writing reaches back towards another sense of descent through time. That's the doubleness of how we're situated, both in the present moment and in our harking back to the past (history included) or anticipating the future. The long line can register those quick turns in thought, present/past, through internal punctuation, through the right margin with its capacity for double meaning, and enact the quick perceptual shifts of experiencing something or someone.

LM/GJ: In a discussion with Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy in 2005, you said, "I think that the spiritual may be actually where we transcend gender. It has to do with pure awareness, not locked into time and place in the material" (39). What do you think of spirituality now? Another way of asking this is to ask how your Buddhist practice has influenced your writing.

DM: This is difficult to talk about but it's a legitimate question and one I can only answer by talking about some of Buddhist philosophy and how I came to it through feminist theory, which may sound counter-intuitive. In the 80s and early 90s, my reading of Teresa de Lauretis, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Julia Kristeva, among others, made me very aware of how binary thinking conditions so much of our awareness and so much social injustice in our culture, how the very language we use is based on such distinctions. Around that time I had the opportunity to again meet the Tibetan lama who would become my

root teacher, Zasep Tulku Rinpoche, and I heard his Dharma teachings on what is known as the Middle Way. This teaching encourages us to investigate the impermanence and lack of inherent existence of not only ourselves but all phenomena, that nothing is as separate or as individual as we habitually think, yet acknowledges that we need to live our daily lives pragmatically, recognizing for instance that we can set a coffee cup on a table and it won't fall through that table, even though both table and cup are composed of atoms. The inter-connection and inter-dependence of all phenomena is very much part of this teaching and of course very much part of an ecological understanding of our so-called individual lives on this earth. And it applies to all genders. How has this influenced my writing? I think it's enlarged my view, it's given me a better understanding of the semantic limits of language (how, for instance, "he" is not "she," which pushes gender-neutral persons to use "they," a solution in gender but not in number). These limits always imply a binary of some kind, they have to in order to designate anything. But we take that process of designation to isolating lengths with damaging social and psychological repercussions. Against this, Buddhist Dharma posits all beings as our mothers — how to understand "mothers" as both isolate noun and ongoing verb in the active environmental mesh that surrounds each of us?

LM/GJ: Before we conclude, we want to return now to ask you to speak more about publishing and some of the material aspects of a writing life. Daphne, you, as well as other writers and editors we know, speak fondly of the collaborative and collective energy of the 1970s. It seems like it was exciting to be part of building the infrastructure of Canadian literature and publishing. Often, however, the very same people lament the corporatization of the Canadian literary field. Could writers of the 1970s get by on less money and afford to write because of housing and food co-ops, co-operative childcare, and the collaborative zeitgeist of the time, not to mention the lower cost of living in general? From your point of view, are the material challenges of living and surviving as a writer different now? Are any of these exigencies particular to Vancouver? Is it more difficult to survive as a writer in Canada? Is there, from your perspective, a discernible shift in values and practices that appear more "careerist" or even "corporate" among young writers?

DM: During that period in the 70s when I was a working single mother, I couldn't have survived financially without communal housing or sharing an apartment with a friend while working on grant-sustained projects and teaching half-time at what was then Capilano Community College. Everything was generally more open with LIP [City of Vancouver, Local Initiatives Program] grants as well as arts grants, and there was a smaller number of writers competing for those grants. Now in this city, rents have soared (while the availability of rental accommodation has dropped precipitately), food costs keep increasing, as does clothing, plus the technology costs we never had then. I suspect it would be much more difficult to survive as a single mother/writer now. And yes, there is a much greater sense of careerism among Canadian writers now, due in large part to the system of lavish awards, the hype around them, and, related to that, publishers looking for big-name writers and best-selling novels, all of this centered in Toronto. Smaller presses have had to become middle-ground presses in order to survive, and independent bookstores, as we know, are having a hard time competing with online Amazon. The corporate push everywhere is huge. Here on the West Coast we are fortunate to still have a number of smaller presses, as well as more mid-size ones like Talonbooks and New Star Books, who are willing to publish experimental work and younger writers, especially poets.

LM/GJ: You have published prolifically across genres and in a variety of publishing outlets. Some of your work has been radical as you challenge conventions of form and content. Has it been difficult to get your work published, particularly at the beginning? Did you run up against conservatism in expectations of form or did you choose presses that might be more open to experimentation?

DM: The West Coast has been blessed with an abundance of small presses, many of which are and have been interested in experimental writing. That said, there is still, and was then, Coach House in Toronto when I began publishing in the late 60s, early 70s. My first book, *Frames of a Story*, was actually published by Ryerson and I was lucky because Earle Toppings was my editor and he suggested that my unconventional prose be broken into poem fragments and prose fragments, which made sense to me, given what I was doing in that book. Then Black

Sparrow Press in Los Angeles published my first collection of poems, *leaf leafs*, which was more radical in its language use than much of what I've published since. After that I went to writer-driven Coach House, Talonbooks, and House of Anansi, all interested in experimental work. In all those instances, publishers were suggested to me by other writers and then I submitted work to them that was accepted pretty much as written. That was a much more free-wheeling time and I think we were all, publishers and writers together, learning as we went along, feeling that somehow we were creating a truly contemporary (as opposed to colonial-influenced) Canadian literary culture.

LM/GJ: In addition to your own creative writing, you have a long history of working to create spaces of community and for a broad range of voices to be heard. You were very supportive in the early days of Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA) when we saw the need to try to quantify gender inequities in Canadian literary culture.⁵ Indeed, it seems like an organization such as CWILA was created in the spirit of your earlier work. Can you talk about your work as an organizer, editor, collaborator, and public intellectual? Where is this work going next?

DM: That makes me happy to hear that CWILA was created in the spirit of my earlier work. CWILA, in its investigation of male dominance in reviewing and in its networking capacity of putting women writers in touch with one another, is doing very necessary work that still, STILL, needs to be done. Although my own concerns have shifted to what feels like the most urgent and immediate issue, namely what our corporate economy is doing to this planet, I know that we still need to make progress on equity for women in so many areas.

As for what I'm up to now, let's be realistic (there would be a little wry laughter here if we weren't doing this by email). I'm in my mid-70s. Those activities you mentioned, editing and co-founding the literary magazines I did, co-organizing feminist conferences, editing oral histories, writing reviews and essays, collaborating on writing and theatre projects and, yes, on one short film, much of this while teaching and mentoring as writer-in-residence at various universities; in short, all those activities I undertook and loved doing from my 30s until late in my 60s call for an energy I no longer have. However, I'm still writing

and publishing books. I keep thinking about stopping, to follow up on the question Phyllis Webb asked herself, who might I be if I'm no longer this writer? But writing offers a particularly rich field for thinking and it offers the possibility of changing readers' awareness, so as of now I would/will miss it whenever that might happen. So, the writing goes on. At the moment, it seems crazy, but this year I will be working on three new books while the one I've just finished is due out from Talonbooks in fall 2016. This new book, *Reading Sveva*, is a series of poems in response to a remarkable series of paintings and commentaries by the Canadian Italian painter and poet Sveva Caetani, herself a remarkable woman. Her "Recapitulation" paintings of the late 70s through the 80s are autobiographically moving but they are also philosophical, socially acute, and environmentally aware. Her work should be much better known than it is, which is what prompted my book.

LM/GJ: Daphne, we really appreciate the time, energy, and care you have taken with our questions here. Thank you.

NOTES

¹ What has come to be remembered as the "Vancouver Poetry Conference" was a poetry seminar held at UBC in the summer of 1963, with contributions from Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Margaret Avison, and Denise Levertov. According to Frank Davey, Warren Tallman, the event organizer, called it "a month-long poetry klatsch," and Marlatt called it "one extraordinary summer school on poetry and poetics at UBC in the summer of 1963" (both qtd. in Davey, "Conference").

² Gladys Hindmarch, Maxine Gadd, Judith Copithorne, and Pauline Butling.

³ Fred Wah and Pauline Butling.

⁴ In 2012, an essay by Jan Zwicky on review practices, "The Effects of the Negative Review," first published in the *Malahat Review* in 2003 and then republished on the Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA) website alongside the first CWILA Count, was met with sharp criticism by some poets and critics, particularly Michael Lista in the *National Post*. It sparked an important debate about review practices in Canadian writing.

⁵ CWILA was founded by Gillian Jerome in 2012 when she saw the need to provide quantitative backing to anecdotal stories of inequitable reviewing practices in Canada and she began what has now become the annual CWILA Count. Laura Moss joined her in the early days to provide the count for *Canadian Literature* and then to serve with her, and others, on the inaugural board of directors of the organization.

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