

Title: “The Measure of Liquidities: An Immeasurable Duration in Daphne Marlatt’s *Vancouver Poems*”

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Abstract:

In this paper I will discuss how a reworked collection of poems on Vancouver transmits the mercurial nature of civic presence across four decades. Engaging in a revival exercise with adaptations as well as changes to *Vancouver Poems* (originally published by Coach House Press in 1972), Daphne Marlatt notes in “Then and Now,” her introduction to *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* (2013), that an afterlife of the Vancouverite “*shite* or inhabiting presence” takes forms that “merg[e] images in an ongoing flow” (xi). The recent edition of Vancouver poems consists of new poems as well as revisions of various poems originally collected in the first version. The long lines used in the 1972 version and even longer sentences of *Liquidities* serve, I claim, as a poetic device to simulate the forty-year-old liquidities of Vancouver, a metropolitan city which has been going through cultural transformations as a result of its migratory past and present.

Marlatt contemplates the meaning of form in ways that indicate this simulation. In “The Measure of a Sentence,” Marlatt refers to “the actual context of the moving sentence spinning meaning in its movement, accumulating significance as it moved rhythmically toward its end,” whereas the expedient caesura also creates the length of each line so to move the poem toward its conclusion (91-92). Marlatt gives the term “a measure” to the poetic actuality that moves a poem forward, and the extending, moving lines in both versions of *Vancouver Poems* activate a shifting and thus immeasurable duration, the unrepresentable of different temporalities of a city. I submit that the duration of Vancouver can be of two kinds: Vancouver of the same, meaning the West Coastal city in British Columbia, and Vancouver of liquidities, meaning that which cannot be represented but only hinted at through poetic form and content. It is precisely in this sense then that the long lines of the 1974 version resuscitate in advance of the 2013 yet to come. Hence, Marlatt’s long lines involve at one and the same time “verbal collisions” (Marlatt, “Then and Now” xii) of local and national history, and consequently, as two versions of *Vancouver Poems*, potential connections between First Nations art, Japanese Noh theater, The Bay, Carnegie Library, and so on. Marlatt’s poetry on Vancouver produces and so performs a different combination, a different transmission of the repositories of local documents. It is this immeasurable duration that gives *Vancouver Poems* their cross-cultural but also their civic and poetic character. It is the lengthiness that makes a line a temporal

continuum affirming various liquidities such as climate change, cultural alienation, and even landscape configuration.

Keywords: Vancouver, duration, poetics, prose poetry, Daphne Marlatt