

9-9-2018

Four poems

Tanis MacDonald
Wilfrid Laurier University

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Recommended Citation

MacDonald, Tanis (2018) "Four poems," *The Goose*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 38.
Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol17/iss1/38>

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Syrinx

The birds were triggered at dawn. They
sang to Leonardo until he freed them. They

banded Audubon to see if he'd return.
They wrote to John Clare on their eggs:

postage due. They spoke Greek to Virginia,
told Rosa Luxembourg of revolutionary

clouds. The crows made a tiny paper
Joseph Cornell and put him in a box.

The ravens say *You lookin' at me? I don't
see anyone else here.* The finches want

to see some credentials. The sparrows
insist on their standards; they are not

speaking to the starlings. The pigeons
found it hard to tell the truth

to Flannery O'Connor and hard to tell lies
about Frank McCourt. The albatross

was in on that necktie party from the start.
Birds don't believe in big government or

omertà. We showed them the video,
and when they saw that deer

swallow a chickadee, they were
as shocked as anyone.

Roost

The worst day. Sunset
a hot pink hairband behind
hundreds of black birds

in a funnel shape,
feathered hurricane,
shrapnel that never falls.

The radio spits dead names
onto the bare road, shrieking
bodies wheel above,

shrapnel that never falls.
The morning's red-tailed hawk
is back on the streetlight.

Another day nearly gone
and she's unimpressed. She's
had enough of my looking up

with my arms full of nothing.
I can't keep me and mine
safe in these mean times,

not in this nail polish
sunset, the crows
gathering before dark.

Slough anchoress

Convey her, ferryman, across the slough.
She carries five eggs with shells written on
by their virgin mother, scored
with bird verse from a yellowhammer's
nest and aloft on a redhead's question.
She's ruthless and recruited for the watery
task of getting out of knowledge
while the getting's good. She'll aim
a microphone at the reeds and let it be
splashed. A duck's egg, Mary's, Leda's: all
those annunciations and the men
who wondered: *Evil Sow* sprayed on her
Honda Civic when she drives home to
the wetlands after telling her story
on the afternoon phone-in show. *You hate
God and just don't know it yet.* There used to
be duckings for women like her, but now
she overwinters in the marsh. Love is
a backwater where the redhead translates
the prairie pothole. A sigh is not more familiar
than her reeds, more rippled than
the pronunciation of how.

The Local

Snow in April. Canada geese are not sheep,
though they will stand in fields and graze
in flocks. Yesterday a pair trapped
a turkey on campus and bullied it silly.
It flew through a window and slashed
its own throat on the glass, left
a strangled legacy: a hole, some feathers,
and a trail of students protesting geese
as the spawn of Satan. Modern shepherds
live in caves and boast of neither earning
nor spending anything in fourteen years.
Live the dream and scour your apotheosis.

Eccentrics gambol among us, wearing
fireman's coats to lecture, choir robes
on the subway. Razzmatazz, little bro.
To say *groundhog* or *rabbit* is to believe in
occupation. In Toronto, you are never
more than four feet from a rat. In Winnipeg,
you are a mosquito laying a thousand eggs
in the standing water of a birdbath. Here,
you are a lousy shepherd but a credulous
crow. You already know how to pick up
shiny bits and drop them where they
will glint: a diamond, a razor blade
in the grass beneath the spring snow.

TANIS MACDONALD is the author of three books of poetry. Recent poems have appeared in *Prairie Fire*, *Arc*, *Lemon Hound*, *Event*, and *The Puritan*. Her non-fiction book, *Out of Line: Daring to Be an Artist Outside the Big City*, was published by Wolsak and Wynn in June 2018.