

EAT poems #23



# HOOVED

TAYVE NEESE

## TRACKS

1.

**Prophecy of the Four-legged 00:42**

(previously published in *The Comstock Review* and *Blood to Fruit*)

2.

**Coyote 01:20**

(Previously published in *Blood to Fruit*)

3.

**Cradle Song 01:08**

(Previously published in *Blood to Fruit*)

4.

**Piranha's Noon Conversion 00:49**

(Previously published in *caesura* and *Blood to Fruit*)

5.

**Still We Wait for Sounds of Plumage 00:40**

(Previously published in *Blood to Fruit*)

6.

**I Am Tired of the Intricate 00:40**

(Previously published in *Blood to Fruit*)

7.

**Blessing the Locusts 00:37**

(Previously published in *Vox Populi*)

8.

**Inside Her Muscle, A Blossom 01:06**

(Previously published in *Vox Populi*)

9.

**In Egypt at the Gates of the Afterlife 00:57**

(Previously published in *The Lake Rising: An Anthology*)

10.

**I Can Feel the World About to Fall 00:55**

(Previously published in *Silence: An Anthology of the Vice Chancellor's International Poetry Prize at the University of Canberra, AU*)

11.

**Evolution Psalms 03:42**

(Previously published in *diode*)

12.

**In Spring My Denial Still Will Not Fall 00:36**

(Previously published in *Pirene's Fountain*)

## ALBUM NOTES

### SEEING NEESIAN

We're in the stomach of a climate slowly digesting us. We see that now, most of us. If we know the Biblical story of Jonah we think it quaint to get only as far as the leviathan's mouth, not to have to endure being swallowed, tumbled and compressed by an undulating esophagus that deposits us into stomach acids of our own making.

And of the leviathan? It knows more than we do about what matters, and tries to tell us that, with, if not its gentleness, its forgiveness. And Tavye Neese knows what the leviathans know—what all the animals in the Greek chorus coaxing us know, all that the jester tries patiently to get across to the throne. Neese is a volunteer, midwifing that wisdom, translating it into poetry.

Have you ever seen a veterinarian, arms past the elbows and almost to the shoulders inside a cow, willing a twisted calf to cross the boundary and live, if only for an hour?

Residue of suffering is balm.  
– “Coyote”

*Hooved* puts its hands around a “we” comprised of ancestor and descendent, flora and fauna, the so-considered inanimate, and even, in its grace, the climate deniers, anti-vaxers, and general holdouts among us for whom the brain is less thinking instrument than model car the joystick of which is in the hands of, if I can be as kind as Neese, the fearful, or if I am more myself, which is to say less gracious . . . well, you know who and what they are.

Nobody goes to the Fleet Farm looking to pick up a bag of starling food. Nobody I know has seen a starling look pretty like they do in some of the images Google serves up. The starlings I know are objectively ugly, especially next to the chickadees, cardinals, woodpeckers, waxwings, and bluejays. Their mismatched, quill-forward, slept-in, bed-head, rode-hard-and-put-away-wet feathering makes them even less desirable than the khaki ubiquitousness of the common house sparrow. To love a starling, seemingly always in a state of shabby molt, requires you, in fact, to first love the bland homeliness of the sparrow as a stepping stone. Then maybe you can make the leap, maybe see in the starling and its crusty legs and toes something like the resolve of the gutter punk who relinquishes the easy pleasures of the world as protest, a perhaps vain attempt to make the world a better place, someday, somehow, someday. If you can do that, you have a chance of seeing like Neese. You have chance to come upon the starling and the starling-esque in the light you bring yourself.

And what turns us gray at the temples is our desire of antlers.  
— “Cradle Song”

Have you ever wanted to sing a lullaby as a gift to the distressed? Or just the stressed? Or for the whole wide world? Neese does. But she wants to sing you off not to sleep, but to a waking sense of unity, to an understanding that is also a responsibility that goes beyond both ways, whipping back to make a circuit along which Neese reminds that you can stop, change your mind, change things, change your life, and start out in the other direction.

Tayve Neese has left the cave and returned. She has brought us poems that present dimensions beyond our rudimentary three. She has brought us the thing at the very core of the colors we know that serves as their engine—and as many of them as there are hues. She has brought us not bird flight, that celestial intimation, but a way to see ourselves as we are; always in flight, better-than-mimicking with minds and hearts the hawks that surf thermals, the nuthatches that Spider-man trees, the swans that stroke through the fog that announces them, outdoing all with an essence that has never been adequately named. She has translated a sense of the Good in these readings of a dozen poems that we without the assistance of a Rosetta Stone must translate, the labor not seeming like work but deliverance.

I've heard of bats that turn from blood to fruit, of men, even, turned comrades by way of heat.  
— "Piranha's Noon Conversion"

Spoonbills, our earth's last guardians.  
— "Still, We Wait for Sounds of Plumage"

Nobody loves a spatulate bill. Not really. But sometimes they're in your backyard, or just beyond it, part of the landscape, the view, in the pond where you get close every morning on your walk, the spoony wading the shallows, feeding, maybe resting on a old dead limb that arcs over the water, you its witness, sharers of an autobiography. It's not a matter of elevating its personality in place of its lack of collectively determined objective beauty. It's a matter of finally seeing the two flat bones extruded as instruments of its piercing eyes, tools enabling a new kind of tentacled seeing more vitally revelatory than the reflected, the refracted, the lit, henceforth to be known as seeing Neesian.

Let wild hooves remain only thunder, so no arrow will follow.  
— "I Am Tired of the Intricate"

A single firefly, noticed peripherally, reigns first as optical illusion. Did I see what I thought I saw? If the first flash is the last flash, one chalks it up to residuals, a reemergence of old hallucinations. Fireflies, though, on a humid August night, starting slowly with their luminescent flexing, loosening the actions in their on/off switches, practicing scales with their very throats of light, building up, a many from a few, a one from a many, a net of light over crops in awe, the rarest of songs in that it's soundless, the best of songs in that it's communal, one silent aria from a thousand thousand thousand sources, cells of a body in unified service to the heretofore unexpressed: This must be how Tayve Neese sees the world, in a way impossible to describe except by its effect, which here is immersive, such that one feels buoyed by the light of these poems, held aloft, sure that it's impossible to fall.

There is what the tumor had done: reduced the whole world to nothing but metaphor.  
— "Inside Her Muscle, A Blossom"

Part of the human conundrum, or perhaps it's the human safety lock, is how we are wired, it seems, to, perhaps perversely, acknowledge the individual over the communal, the suffering or death of one running a bristled rod through our cores, the suffering or death of many like a story problem we know the right answer to, so we dutifully write it down in the space provided. We use old rhetoric to describe ourselves as otherwise, donning the many-colored robes of empathy in our various social media feeds as we work or play from home.

In dioramas not to scale but participating in the infinite as they are made not of that which we can touch, bend, mold, and position, but of the elastic beyond elastic that comprises words, the poems of *Hooved*, without agenda, acknowledge that these robes are no robes at all, presenting not just the egalitarian nature of disaster and death, but revealing like the prophecy not of one so cursed as Cassandra but of one with a voice too light to carry through the pollutions of modernity (unless you cup your ear and get close) a

beauty like relief, an exhalation that is accessible in all disaster, all death, be it to one or many, its language that of one hand holding another.

The hermit crab makes its home in a plastic doll's head.  
—“I Can Feel the World About to Fall”

The dark matter the holds the center, that keeps *Hooved* from Tilt-A-Whirling gone wrong, from uncoupling into chaotic expansion, from thinning out to what our meager sense would perceive as the imperceptible—a risk for all art that risks—is not just an adoption of the persona of “apprentice to the world, amateur at life,” the one who watches, the one who learns, the one who attempts and tries, who via innocence and freshness innovates, ever and always working toward mastery, the very incarnation of the participle “to love,” but how Neese imbues this apprentice/amateur way of seeing, understanding, and being in the world with a kind of pure and secular holiness that precedes and in fact excludes, if not repels by oppositional polarity, dogma.

I am not the bullet. I am not the edge of a knife.  
—“In Spring My Denial Still Will Not Fall”

Where I live it doesn't rain anymore, not like is used to, or it rains and rains and rains and drowns and floods, like it seldom ever did, willy-nilly from month to month, season to season, year to year. The rather predictable winters and their snows are little more than lore, legend. The sun this summer through wildfire haze that the authorities warned has diminished our breathable stuffs, such that the AQI (Air Quality Index) recommends we “avoid all physical activity outdoors,” the warranting assumption being that all of our domiciles are equipped with AC, was one of the most beautiful suns (though I know I see only the one) I have ever seen, able to look at it without the aid of protective eyewear, such that if it were a used lamp in thrift store I would have overpaid for it, not even bothering to haggle, so that its light would inhabit my places of residence always, as long as harnessed electricity lasts.

And the bluejays, traditionally a slightly more southerly bird, have moved in with the painted suns, expanding their range, going where the going's good if you're a bird with specific needs, specific requirements of habitat, of diet, and I have discovered, now that I am often beneath them, watering and weeding or simply surveying and enjoying the edible plants and the aesthetic plants and the etceteras in the gardens that almost moat the house, having become for the bluejay over the days another part of the scene, nothing to be feared—I have discovered that they sing a song separate from their signature screech, via which their presence in a neighborhood is announced, such that you know they're there when you can't see that they're there; I have discovered that the bluejays have a second song, one I have never noticed in the many years (I used to live in more southerly climes) we have cohabited in the great outdoors. Some internet searching reveals that bluejays have a wide range of sounds, many of which—the R2D2-esque whisper song, for example—very few humans have ever heard. Yet none of the recorded bluejay calls online are like the one I heard, a kind of woodwind instrument, popular among faeries, run through a synthesizer, intended, no matter how shitty the day, to sooth. I had heard it many times this spring, disembodied, and wondered what bird was its headwaters. It has only been the one time that the song was accompanied by its source, serenading all who needed it from a crab tree on a being-rebuilt Grand Avenue in South Minneapolis. Now when I hear it—and I often do—puzzlement had been replaced by knowledge, and I am doubly soothed, thinking it may sing just for me, filler of the basin from which it drinks.

With that sun that I want to light my spaces, and that bluejay song that I want to say yes to, the poems of Tavye Neese's *Hooved* find and make good company. They are light and song and wisdom as invitation to see, hear, feel, think, and act. Differently? Yes. We have given planet earth an addict's trajectory. Our response to it and to our complicit—because we are—selves must include balm. As the expressions of



beauty and what is seen as the beautiful changes, it can be a good thing to be a follower, to not have to see everything first, and an even better thing that Tayve Neese is among those in the lead.

MM

Matt Mauch is the author of four poetry collections, including 2021's *We're the Flownover. We Come From Flyoverland.*, *Bird~Brain*, *If You're Lucky Is a Theory of Mine*, as well as the chapbook *The Brilliance of the Sparrow*. His work has appeared in numerous journals, and has been recognized by the Minnesota State Arts Board and the National Poetry Series. Mauch lives in Minneapolis and teaches in the AFA in Creative Writing program at Normandale Community College. He and his books can be found online at [mauchmauch.com](http://mauchmauch.com).

## CREDITS

All poems written and read by Tayve Neese

Editor and Producer, Mark Ari

Assistant Editor, Natasha Kane

Album Cover Image and Design, Hadley Hendrix

Album notes, Matt Mauch



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