

Tanis MacDonald

MOBILE

poems



# MOBILE

**Tanis MacDonald**

**Book\*hug Press**  
Toronto

FIRST EDITION

Copyright © 2019 by Tanis MacDonald

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

The production of this book was made possible through the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Book\*hug Press also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit and the Ontario Book Fund.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Canada



ONTARIO  
CREATES | ONTARIO  
CRÉATIF

Book\*hug Press acknowledges the land on which it operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Mobile / Tanis MacDonald.

Names: MacDonald, Tanis, author.

Description: Poems.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20190157712 | Canadiana (ebook)

20190163046 ISBN 9781771665308 (softcover) | ISBN 9781771665315

(HTML) ISBN 9781771665322 (PDF) | ISBN 9781771665339 (Kindle)

Classification: LCC PS8575.D6657 M63 2019 | DDC c811/.54—dc23

# **1. SYBIL ELEGIES**

## ELEGY 1

In the city I long for, women  
repleat their origins. We do not  
eke out evenings courting in parks.  
The light does not ride  
easy on us all. If only  
we could learn not to love  
meaning before we make it.  
If only our ache  
could arc like metal  
in a microwave. If only  
our exemplar was more  
tectonic than catatonic.  
Don't mind me. I throe  
like a girl, cacophony's  
blasted cadence. It's hard  
to undo the centre when your  
absence is  
invisible.

\*

Ai Weiwei's *Moon*  
*Chest*, like the Cabinet of  
Dr. Caligari, will show you  
all the phases if you  
bend to look. Don't be  
distracted  
by the texture of the  
quince  
wood. Don't be distracted by  
the word *quince*. (Not *quints*,  
though this is Canada.) It's okay  
if you squint. This is not  
like shopping for a bedroom set  
or agony.

I don't like it, she says, and  
wants me to agree. I point  
through the cut-outs to the phases  
ordered as a fanned deck. She won't  
even pretend to look  
until I walk between  
phases, a body dividing wood,  
then she gasps  
(I am nearly invisible though not  
yet silver) *you're the woman*  
*in the moon!*

Let me perch on the rim of my  
crater, your friendly neighbourhood  
menstrual symbol, footsore and  
ready to spit, Diana's arrow back  
from the Sea of Crises  
for a homecoming

between heaven and concrete. The city  
will be judged and found  
wanting, one more  
way to say a woman's  
body is neither null  
nor void, of course. The moon  
is always in transit.

\*

The café's circus with  
bread: the boy  
with his camera, the stoner  
staggering beneath  
the weight of three bags  
full, sir,  
the girl in the purple Joy  
Division T-shirt, the handsome  
man smoking on the patio like  
his drop-dead  
life depends on the plume  
lofting from his firm bottom  
lip, curled pout checking  
his status—still  
not satisfied. The great minds of his  
generation hysterical on  
grande extra-hot latte, naked  
in Gore-Tex. Say  
he's smoked the official  
dope before and after  
it was legal and excited universal  
admiration for his keen  
grasp of the obvious. Say  
those hipsters are angle-headed,  
acute. Say the café has wait  
staff younger than my  
pants. They practise the kind  
efficiency of trained  
millennials, not eaten away by  
the history we did not care  
to know even as it hooked  
and dragged us. Say then, we  
who used to walk here, who stalked  
these bricks, played it loose,  
uncertain of our footing, led on by  
swamp gas, foxfire  
bravado.



## ELEGY 2

I'd like to  
thank the brave women  
of this city for reminding  
me fine ironic throes  
aren't worth the bubble wrap  
they came in. My newsfeed  
says in Canada, a woman is  
assaulted every fifteen minutes.  
I believe it  
down to the number  
and frequency of  
chases and scrapes and  
*oh come ons* I heard the years  
I could not reach  
up to the poverty line, when  
riding the subway was for  
special occasions and I walked  
the twenty blocks home from  
my closing shift at 2:00 a.m.  
because every dollar was too  
hard to earn  
to waste it on safety.  
I know the dead  
women persist, but not  
through these bylaws.  
I believe it  
down to the number  
of names and frequencies  
on which we receive advice (Delta  
Oscar November Tango) to stay in,  
better to void  
the scandal of being  
than to call ourselves  
bloodied, call ourselves  
heroes by any other means.

\*

I come from the place  
beside the place  
beneath the radar  
those long  
suburban blocks  
in January dark  
walking home with my skates  
over my shoulder and  
thinking of how fast a skate blade  
sharpened that morning  
would go through a neck  
and I knew just the neck  
and you knew him too  
and you laughed at his jokes  
so don't mistake me  
for a girl who doesn't  
know don't  
think I am not  
alive and counting  
who died  
walking home  
from the store  
or their part-time job  
in the winter dark  
don't idle your car by me  
don't lean over the passenger seat  
and say *hey, get in*  
all I need is me  
thanks I don't  
want your kind  
of lift

\*

Call me a foot soldier  
in an unregistered  
army of young women walking  
home from dirty jobs, grey  
with grease, taking back  
the night by ourselves  
and not talking about  
the skirted  
subject  
of cab fare.

It was rumoured among us  
as a law never upheld  
or even tested  
that if you worked  
late enough your boss was  
legally bound to pay  
for your cab home but no matter  
how late I worked this never  
happened though we repeated  
this fake statute  
among ourselves  
and waited for those last  
few  
tables  
to leave. Those  
years, and every year,  
someone was paid  
much more than me  
to remind me of  
my job.

\*

we roll forward dull  
as tanks you shod us  
you tipped us  
you grimed us  
you would not  
notice a phalanx of your  
servers and cleaners  
on foot on the street  
a regiment of working  
class girls caught in  
your rear-view  
mirror we are  
not even vanishing  
points as you hit  
the on-ramp  
to the expressway  
to the suburbs  
and we flip  
you the bird so many  
times it looks like  
a flock of seagulls  
lifting our hands  
up and away

### ELEGY 3

the rules

never take the TTC after midnight  
never live downtown

sui generis

we are all individuals together  
never go to the park alone  
if someone follows you, let your teeth chatter  
he might believe you are someone

habeas corpus

never make eye contact  
if he whistles  
if he says he loves you  
if he makes kissy sounds  
you have the body  
you are a citizen

dux femina facti

never go north of Eglinton  
or to Scarborough  
or to High Park  
and never live  
downtown  
never live alone  
never breathe alone  
trust no one  
especially old television slogans  
the brute is out there  
lead as you have been  
followed

\*

Cheap shoes did my back  
no favours. Walking made me  
suspect and available to  
you've got to be kidding.  
The city ushered me past  
houses sleek with creams and  
powders and carved  
salad bowls and  
other people's parents who  
tossed the lettuce  
just so. Lordly and masterly,  
the city demanded my bone  
scrapings every night.

When I read that walking  
was a scholarly position,  
that men understood  
the city from their  
strolls, I drew breath  
(not for the first  
time) to say *you can't have it  
both ways.*

\*

get your ear to the ground  
this grassy hill  
gets you down  
to hear screams of women  
beneath the green

as you are passing through  
through passing as you are

beneath the green  
screams of women  
down you get to  
here this grassy ear  
to the getting ground

\*

if you turn your ankle on  
an angle turn it into  
a virtue or turn it down

stretch stirrup  
wrap bone  
sculpt arch

that's a hallucis blunder  
anatomy's bonenote  
you'd better

toe the line  
until your foot swells  
put the pain in sprain

the distal fibula  
knows where you livula