

## Four Poems · *Don Colburn*

### FALL MIGRATION AT BRIGANTINE

Instinct is just a word for comings and goings  
we can't explain. November brings snow geese  
to where the Jersey shore begins or ends,  
this unison of marshgrass and mudflats.  
And we too have come, a busful  
up from the Smithsonian  
in boots, plaid hats and binoculars,  
our own brand of protective coloration,  
eager for a peek at a green-winged teal  
among the pintails, or a stick-rickety heron  
fishing from his standstill in the shallows.  
Before we'd left the parking lot  
someone jotted down *rock dove* and *ring-billed gull*,  
and now a coot stalks the mudbank on galoshy feet  
while redtails and turkey vultures  
kettle high and slow along the thermals.  
Across the bay the casino skyline rises  
bluish in the haze. There are thresholds  
everywhere but no clear lines:  
land and water, fresh and salt, wilderness  
and honkytonk. A season, this,  
for crossing-over: Tundra swans come  
and snow geese by thousands down from the Arctic  
turn mudflats to a white shimmer. Look!  
Another flock, high enough for twilight,  
glittery wingbeats trembling the dark sky,  
willed south by wind, shoreline, loss  
of light, and ancient pulls we don't understand—  
we who have gathered to watch  
and call them by name.