

The Black Bird Gang

“crows break off from the rest of darkness” (Mary Oliver)

You speak of crow and
I will tell you of raven
his eye a bold black bead
his ruff of head feathers
a well-oiled pompador
his three-pronged talons
a scaly imprint
of his dinosaur relative
his beak a magnificent wedge
the profile of a roman emperor.

I will tell you he is trickster
who rides the wind
with such skill I mistake him
for soaring eagle,
yet on the street, he hops absurdly
sideways and swaggers with the strut
of a spaghetti western cowboy.
He lords it over us
showing off his ventriloquist voice
quicksilver shift from underwater gurgle
to commanding squawk,
yet he hangs out in the bed of a pick up
shoving his buddies aside
over garbage bags
like bored teenage boys.

Come night, he's left town
rounded up his rowdy comrades
returned to darkness
known only to him and his kind.
I tell you he'll be back
freewheeling into town where
he sideslips through
the windstream of our days
one steady eye
watching out for us.