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All Nature Sings

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All Nature Sings

Dave Schelhaas

All summer long,
just before dawn,
crows
in their sleek black
robes
gather for worship
in my neighborhood.

A solo voice begins with four
or six quick caws and answers
come
from several blocks away, in throaty,
stumb-
ling unison, like soldiers marching
out of step on morning drill.

The call goes out again
and other voices, closer
now, join the gargly
hymn.
A makeshift choir composed of
tin-
eared crows has gathered near
my bedroom window.

Edgy altos swoop into maple tree
pews
shrieking off key descants
before the leader can complete his
second call; sleepy stragglers, satiate
from late night gorging, flap into
view
to add a random note or two.

When all have
come,
the songs grow loud and louder.
Starting low, they rise, get
more belligerent and impatient
till they seem like threats and curses
flung
at the creator.

And as they keen their
high, harsh hymns,
crows flit from dome to dome.
What starts out in my neighbor's
ash
makes sacramental drift to my
bird bath and lawn, and then, dark
flash,
to an adjacent basswood tree.

Not angry that they've roused
me from my sleep (one can't
stay mad all summer long), I
lie
awake and
try
to figure out how God
receives this raucous, pesty praise.

Surely the creator must prefer
wren song,
lark hymn,
oriole alleluia
over all this ugly, off-key, croaking
crow noise.

Or is it all the same to him:
cathedral choir anthem,
mourning dove dirge,
crow caw,
mosquito whine,
hog hum?

Are rats,
doing their
scratchy
rat thing behind the corncrib
slats,
making music to the Lord?