

# NOEL CROOK

## Crows

What is it the crows know this first real day of fall  
when the sky's gone vacuous and the air thins?  
They bark on the lawn in their raucous code,

plumage blue-black smoke of a city  
smoldering. Already they have performed  
their daily harassment of the owl,

old hunchback in his snag in the backyard oak,  
have communicated the exact coordinates  
of the buff-colored cat and patrolled

the bedraggled roses where our best dogs  
are buried. They wing in from Indian mounds  
down in the woods, the back pasture

where slaves' headstones list in the fescue.  
Last week I found a black widow fisted  
and gleaming in the sandbox—scarlet hourglass

against black carapace—and this morning  
over the bubbling of oatmeal, the low drone  
of war on the television set, I felt it again:

that pang that comes with the changing  
leaves, frail unease as the world tilts again  
into winter—some forgotten drumming

in the marrow that should have me filling  
the woodpile and rasping the axe.  
The crows call in threes:

*Watch, watch, watch.* Shadows of wings,  
they say, and gather the seeds.  
Count the children again.

—Originally published in *Southeast Review*