

## RAINBOW IN BLACK

*How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?  
(William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *A Memorable  
Fancy*)*

**The raven's voice  
perhaps in another dimension might be  
the most beautiful sound in the world**

**if the shape of air was different  
or our ears could hear like night vision goggles**

**It's the strength of it makes me think this**

**like calligraphy**

**the firmness of the strokes  
the force of attention  
character and expression**

**And sometimes  
when the big-throated crow in our street  
grasps a high-enough point to share**

**from a certain tree or powerline crossbar  
or the particular pitch of one gabled roof**

**Beyond the utilitarian urgency  
of the first three notes  
the fourth will be allowed to die away**

**in a kind of sigh towards quietness**

**like a decoration on the last letter  
combed below the line**

BP16

**A soft-nibbed sign-off**

**An unstressed introspection  
of sudden complexity and harmony  
like a rainbow in black**

**lingeringly  
curiously**

**as if it's always been apparent  
and we've been always  
slightly at the wrong angle to see**

**or God put this bird's voice box upside-down  
sideways to breath  
or back-to-front as a swallowed harmonica**

**And I think of Harwood  
and her half-blind forest raven  
thinking of Wittgenstein and eternal life**

**poised in a rowboat at the centre of the universe**

**Think of the twa corbies  
with their perfect knowledge**

**dispensing a forensic kind of comfort**

**that should any of us stop moving long enough  
theirs would be the first beaks  
scissoring in our eye-sockets**

**Think of Tolkien's dragon-mountain birds  
keeping their secrets  
keeping their counsel**

And think of a line  
any line we might care to argue  
or no line at all

between wisdom and opportunism

The intelligence always there  
The chance always taken

And all the ruthless things I've seen  
while trying hard not to notice  
in places of plenty

like a little bird snapped up on the wing  
six feet above children dropping crumbs  
eating ice creams and vegetarian pasties

Had they looked up that moment  
there'd have been  
deep-eyed horror and screaming to deal with

the whole thing some twisted painter's  
vision of the last judgment

ice cream  
I scream  
eye scream

Or a crow flying as the crow flies  
with a white white egg in its beak  
pursued by two murray magpies

a hatchling monstered from a pigeon's nest

or two ravens trying to out-manoeuvre  
a hawk from her nesting tree

Tricksters when they need to be  
or even when they don't  
lying low and strutting territory

But when one died by some mischance  
spreadwinged and huge

in the middle of our thin street  
like a broken umbrella

I dug a wide hole for burial in the driveway

its partner swung above for weeks  
and hung around our front yard

Carn the crows  
Carn ravens  
sporting emblems of choice

We barrack and slander and flatter

A crow is like our own mind in the suburbs  
fiercely ignoble and loyal

And for that reason perhaps  
its actions more beautiful to us  
even than the sound of sirens

the crystal whirr of stars  
or the strains of one furtive tear

sung by Jussi Bjorling