

Ode to the New

*A Poem for the Inauguration
of Brian W. Casey
as the 19th President
of DePauw University
October 10th, 2008*

Who doesn't want
you as a coat
for warmth against
an old old wind?
Or a cart to carry
away what's broken?
Who doesn't want you
for a window
to let in air, a boot
to kick a rusty can
just to hear its spook
and rattle and clank?
Who doesn't love
your small hands
opening, that flutter
before your heart
starts its canter,
your scent barely
an inkling of ripe?
Who can stop their ears
when you let go
your gleaming music?
Who doesn't want
you to trace
some misty line
they might step across
to start over?

But so often I forget
you're here
when I open
my eyes from sleep
or when I watch
the moon rise
in the dusk's pale blue.
I forget how
you lurk
in every second
like a syllable in a word
not yet spoken,
like a dream
someone's yet to tell.

You're no less
common than a crow
perched on a sycamore's
white bone branch.
You're no less ordinary
than its caw.
But you're the part
that has no name:
the sudden flash of wing,
the nameless tremor
of the branch,
the way the feather's spread.
New, you are that crow,
let loose to cut
across the sky. New,
you're as old
as they come,
always looming, here,
ready to speak.

Joseph Heithaus