*The Truffle Hunter*

I come

a-hunting, loud

breathing, loud

 stepping, undaunted

 in my decrepitude, an

aged season

 on the hoof, my cane

 tapping fallen trees that slow

the drift of slack-water

 through reflections pooled

 below a grey snag

 trimmed in snow, probing

fallen leaves, searching

 for a truffle

of the wood, of a season under

 stood if taken

 in hand, where a stained

leaf is a lantern

 in the dark, a campfire

 kindled from a curl

 of bark and light, each

a spark that keeps an autumn

night at bay. In April

the wood is a bud

 whose blush brings a sigh, in

December, a gnarled branch

 against a sky that makes

me wonder in the fall

 what is the reason

 of it all? It

makes no pretense

 of being green, long forgotten

leaf and bud, winnowed

 by every wind it’s ever seen, limbs

 twitching in the flood. An oak

 needs an April rain

 to bear its buds. Not so

 a heart whose blood

 is thin with Time, when

 a blade of grass

 on a blond hill

 is enough to green

 a thousand twigs

 within.

 This wood

 is my dim cloister,

 on a pew of fallen

 leaves, my soul kneels

 before a cottonwood

 cross, fingering

 rosary beads

 of quietude, my steps

guided from the votive

 candle of an under-lit

 leaf to the stained fire

 of lofty stone, from

 a niche

 where water stands

 robed in lace, wreathed

 in the incense of its devotion,

 rising heavenward in prayer

 even as it’s falling

 into the abyss. Robed

 in the ritual light

of vaulted groins, the season

mouths its psalm

 in the altar tones

 of a cataract

 whose tongues divide

 and come together again

 and again. I

 worship not

 with a throng, but deep within

 a wood by the stained

 light of October, and

the bark caned

 as I go by, my staff

.

 aimed now at the leaf

 soft trail, now at

 the leaf-empty sky, at

 a floating fire on a pond, that keeps

 what cannot be said aloud, where I catch

a glimpse of what lies

beyond in the sunken fire

of star or cloud. And

so I come, a truffle

hunter, with gnarled cane and

a nose for that which hides

 though very near, for hidden things

which come unbidden

when the belly growls

its hunger to the wood

like a grey owl. When hunger

walks the stilled wood, beauty

 stirs from its nest, roused

 by the eerie shriek of a soul

 that makes it move

against its will, by the too-hoo

hoot of hunger that gives

 a twitch to something still

 that pricks an ear amidst

 the fern on which it feeds, that gives a start

 to the sun bittern, or to the coot

in the reeds. A head

 swivels, a talon flares

 under wing. With a final

swoop, hunger is fed and

 I go on homeward

 pinions through a wood

darkening.