*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.