*In a Stolen Wood*

Would

 that my last stand

should be as upright as this cottonwood

mast and sail, un-toppled

 in a mast-topping sea.

Would

 that I be worthy

of the gathered gaze as

this sycamore, flying

its rebel flag from

a last barricade

above the grave waiting

to gather it to ground, where

death is touched by grace, by

 the flutter of an angel’s wing,

 as a fall at the end

 of a race arrests a runner’s

suffering. Where

 the maple leaf

sets itself afire

on the brink of a first

flight destined to be

 its last as well. Would that

 my last hour in

 a last room be

an alpenglow in

 a gathering gloom, be

like a leaf that

 stirs before stillness, as

 if given breath by

the touch of death, none-

 the less lofty

 in a lowering sky for

 being unseen by all

 but a buck’s eye, its

slumber softened by

the un-lofted hay

of a hundred Octobers. All

our years, but the brief

 fall of a leaf

from the vaulted

 groins and bleeding

 loins of a dogwood,

 laid to rest with

the fallen in a common

grave, while

 the woodpecker plays taps

 in a sky grown empty

 for want of a leaf, where

a wooden cross is

 lonelier for the corpse lowered

from its arms, where

 a gnarled hand dips

 into baptismal bowls, where

 waxen skin is moistened

in a pause of purifying

 reflections, where

 every pool and back-water

is an altar burning

 with sacrificial light*.* Where

 I am

 moved to arrest

 their fall in words, to capture a fare-

well bow on a wooden stage with

 an empty page that interrupts

 the fall of a leaf

 as if capturing

 a swallowtail or an angel

 cast from paradise

 as was I

 once upon a time. I

am

 a slow bend

of the river filled

 with red reflections,

 salmon schooling

 beyond a cataract, pooled

 in a place of rest, where

 froth slows into the oils

of a floating easel, where a soul

 is held in the cupped hands

of what is not

 there. We cannot under

 stand our first years until

 we stand in the shadow

 of our last. We go

 in search of a dream

 to find, but all we know

 lies behind.

After all the friends

 we lose at last, we have

 a companion in the past. We have not

 only the present, but the past

 to keep, as drifting water

keeps reflections in the deep. The

last season of the year is

 a pool that mirrors an

 aspen, old and gold. And so am I

a yellowing pond in which today

is mirrored in yesterday, where

 the present seeps

 into the past, as if

 now and then were

 Siamese twins joined

 at the feet, as what was

 without flows within

 in a stolen wood where

 now and then chance

 to meet.