*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.