

Cottonwood

From between the dark horizon and overcast sky
on one of the last days of summer, sunset
turns the old cottonwood white as a ghost
against the darkening mountains to the southeast.

Trunk long ago stripped of its bark,
sapwood gone brittle heartwood gone to punk,
canopy a ragged grasp of branches
broken-off with age and the desert wind,

what was once a green-crowned majesty
before the freeze in Oh-one and drought since,
is now an empty hulk woodpeckers tap
without much hope, ravens land on
now and then to talk long distance to each other,
shrikes and kingbirds, redtails and owls
use as a sentinel post to spy out prey.

But at the base, below the bare-skin
broken-off limbs and vermin-infested body
a thicket of shoots is coming up from the roots:
limber saplings and heart-shaped leaves dance
to the gentle music of an early autumn breeze
remembering the past generation.

for T.S.