

Winter Fire

In the cold, cedar burns slowly
but sweetly. Sagebrush is quicker,
shooting white smoke when flame hits a seam.
Snow seeps between my small cairn of stones
till a ring of dark earth
moats fire from ice.

I am outside that ring
though within the heat, for now,
and can almost imagine my fuel in the mix,
that my bones are burning, too,
driving back the dark, turning demons to swine.
It is that warm with the wood stacked high.

But how brittle I have become.
I have not seasoned well, would only flash
thinly like dry grass:
Without the fire and the fire without me,
I will not burn, only not freeze.

When it comes down to ashes
I will bury them, scatter the rocks
leaving little trace, and return home.
For now the smoke is in my hair;
I imagine it swirling about my head
like fire through trees.

—C. Wade Bentley