

Regrets Concerning Trees

1.

I should know the name of this tree
outside my door, shielding me as I step out,
if for no other reason than to respect
those who named it, who cataloged
characteristics of it, described in long detail
the cycle of its life, of the lives of whatever
lives in it, or on it, or near it. I should know
why it's here, why it might die,
how I could stop that. I should know
how its name resonates once understood,
what long threads of history are clearly conveyed
to those who, when they hear it, look up.

2.

Sitting on my bike, kickstand down,
watching workmen of our village
wielding chainsaws by the dozen
against tree after tree after tree, one
end of the block to the other, the cathedral

formed by the tops brought down, sun
suddenly unrelenting, nowhere left
to be left in shadow. The buzz
unrelenting as the sun. We were awestruck
at the process, at the small men high
in air and branch after branch coming down.
We knew they were Dutch Elms, because
we were told. They were right outside
our doors and then they were gone.
I will never hear the words “Dutch Elm” again
without thinking “disease.”

3.

That doesn't explain my ignorance about trees
on these blocks since I must concede
it's willful. I could learn. I could take out books,
or go online, take photos with my telephone,
ask people at the store for home supplies. What
is this bush? What light should reach this flower?
When should I fumigate my grasses? Trees
are the least of my worries in this so-named
urban landscape. They've always cared
for themselves, or at least indicated no needs

to me. Even when a saturated snow
weights down the slight branches, snaps them
near the trunk, they clear themselves by spring
and I carry out what's fallen. But still, walking
streets in fading light, when I come upon a tree
cragged and ancient, that's bent down in triumph
against all that time's tossed on it, I regret
not having a proper name to celebrate it with.

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