

## 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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