

## *The Elder*

*Mandatory Practices: The following forestry practices must be completed by the date indicated. Chapter NR 46 Wisconsin Administrative Code*

Bent to reach toward light,  
the lopsided oak is a pariah,  
its knobby branches clutching last  
year's leaves  
like testimonials

I spray the trunk with orange,  
its final sentence. Two smaller oaks  
nearby can use its space.  
Rubbing my hand along its old man  
skin,  
wrinkled and pocked with years,  
I picture drifts of acorns  
generations of birds and jittery  
squirrels,  
squad of mushrooms,  
the patient photosynthesis

of leaves, the cambium, thickening  
its walls with cellulose,  
fashioning each year another page of  
text  
recording its stories:  
how many days of rain, how many  
years of drought.  
how many Druids mutter at midnight,  
threatening retribution?

## *Praise the Undaunted*

*How the trees inform us,  
how they stand, how they stand!  
How they celebrate the wind,*

*divide the sky, grab each  
a share of earth for sustenance.  
Folding their tents at noonday*

*they close their stoma-eyes  
to conserve their life's blood.  
Faithfully, they follow seasonal rituals*

*like pious monks, intoning plainsong.  
How they stand! How they stand  
embracing the sun, outlasting*

*unbelievers, generous  
with succession. They breathe our smog  
without complaint and exhale life,*

*waving their colors boldly. Blithely unaware  
how much we ask of them.*

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