

BRISTLECONE PINES

“A great reluctance to die is common among bristlecone pines...”
— sign in Great Basin National Park, Nevada

Isn't it enough
that this one, say, has been around
longer than Jesus or Buddha
and that one's older than Pliny the Elder
or Roquefort cheese and most if not all
dirt? Can I look at survival
in a weather-beaten tree
and call its twisted beauty
beautiful? The mortal sign maker
insists on more, insists
the ones that faced the worst adversity,
the most relentless wind and drought,
wound up living longest,
outlasting death even, like bones.
That makes a good story,
maybe a fable, and it's true
their bony branches bristle and snag
the dying light this afternoon.
But I've watched for a while now
and the great reluctance isn't theirs.