



Ecotone

~ poems ~

Poems

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Cover image: allofnature.blogspot.com

So What?

“Darwin invited our culture to face the fact that in the observation of nature there exists not one scrap of evidence that humans are superior to or even more interesting than, say, lichen.”

—Christopher Manes, “Nature and Silence,” *Environmental Ethics* 14 (Winter 1992): 337-50 (p. 347).

“The humans use Arecibo to look for extraterrestrial intelligence. ...But I and my fellow parrots are right here. Why aren't they interested in listening to our voices?”

—Ted Chiang, “The Great Silence”

What good is “Nature” poetry in a time of climate crisis? When humans are fast making Earth uninhabitable for thousands of species, including perhaps *Homo sapiens* ourselves?

[millions?]

Isn't lyric poetry one cause of this problem, given its long history of placing humans and their desires at the center of the universe? Think of the damage personification

does, and apostrophe, which sure loves addressing something that doesn't talk back ... and endless other figures of speech, including metaphor—not to mention what we're constantly doing with eulogies,

cutting flowers to strew on the grave of loved ones, writing elegies that either demand Nature mourn a death with us or scold Nature for going about its business stubbornly refusing to mourn....

Milton was uneasy with all this lyric folderol, yet in the end endorsed tropes if watered by Christianity:

*Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.*

.....

*So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves....
“Lycidas,” ll. 149-53; 168-73*

But what can we do with Christianity
now, its love of Adam’s dummy “dominion”
over all living beings—an arrogance
heightened by his right to name ‘em all too?
Or with *any* religion lusting for

purity and the end of time? Beware
the consummation apocalypse you want.
Meanwhile, microplastics rain on sea and land.
Can science de-center us instead, or
is it just another means of centering,

extracting, naming, pinning, troping,
and dominion-ating? Instruments all.
Settling scores, and not the musical kind.
It’s our lapse though—too easy to blame tools.
What should nudge us out of our damn fool selves

we grasp and bend to our self-centered will.
Can tropes ever turn and transform us, ego-
pomorphisms so so hard of hearing?
How with this rage for order can wonder
hold a plea? Or skepticism, sister

to wonder? Ramón Fernández,
tell me, if you know. And, por favor,
listen while I talk on against time,
or maybe speak with time, in time....

—Avery Slater, “Prepostrophe: Rethinking Modes of Lyric Address in Wisława Szymborska’s Poetry of the Non-Human.” *Thinking Verse* 4.1 (2014): 140-159, from which the Manes quotation is taken (156).

—Ted Chiang, “The Great Silence,” from *Exhalation: Stories*. New York: Knopf, 2019.

Chicxulub

Tcheek-sooloob
incoming!

we've igneous pride
in our Anthropocene

smarts but
—maybe—

we're obscene

& not smart enough
to not out-smart

ourselves
cooking up our own

Chicxulub
acidification soup

stir in our own
recipe

for Deccan Traps's
sulfuric spews

this new stew's
a slo-mo bolide for now

just a flash
in the bluest eye

of our globe
as it spins in space

but on course
so far—maybe—

to cenote us

who like to name
epochs after us

& dub ourselves
so sapiens

but can't seem to
see Homo

not here
erased effaced

—though
Earth can.

Proliferations
follow extinctions

but what's
extinct does not

return. Word.
Poems

pose problems
as if

to answer
you must

change your life.

Old Weeping Cherry

blur of pink

blossoms
on willowy wisps

swaying to
a rough wind's tune—

but look deeper,
down to the old

trunk-base in shadow:
gnarly, knotty,

asserting steady
holdfastnesses

May

“His eye is on the sparrow”
—Civilla D. Martin, lyricist,
and Charles Gabriel, composer (1905)

In the torrent of predawn birdsong
Melospiza's sprightly *melodia* bumps up against
the burbly ebullience of abundant robins
and even the doves aren't in mourning this morning
(*beaucoup coup coup coup* is all they call).

One voice, though,
suddenly sounds absent from this chorus,
two long whistles plus three triplets
their reedy species song:
“our” whitethroat sparrows have gone north.

Hard not to translate it as only our species can
into a goodbye song sung in a minor key
like a candle mirrored in water while time's

s t r e a m f l o w s
quavering quavering quavering

In memory:
Elizabeth Bishop
Lorine Niedecker

Produce

To water South Jersey beans, tomatoes, peppers, and whatnot
a large hose with a cannon-sized nozzle
is sometimes wheeled out between the rows and opened up.

At the base of the nozzle is a long metal arm
attached at its middle, with a weight
on one end and the other end spatulate and spoon-like.

As the water jets, this thing-a-ma-jig floats like a see-saw
until the spoon-y end swings from the side
and suddenly thwacks the water as it shoots from the hose.

The spoon-end is then thrown backwards until the weight
at the other end makes it swing slowly
towards the jet to crash into it again. What's it there for?

To nudge the water's angle steadily to one side?
For the hose spurts water out
at regular intervals, moving just a little to one side each time,

until it meets the limit set for its motion, when it quickly
swoops back to its starting position and
begins again. But there may be something at the hose's base

preset to handle this, to wet solely the right segment of field.
Maybe the thwacker gizmo
is there just to change the way the water spreads and falls,

so the jets don't uproot the crops. It strikes the spurts just
at their base, making the spray spritz.
But the spouts would soften anyway, never pummeling

the plants, for they lose motion swooping to the end of their flight
and fall gently in silvery sheets and veils.
Maybe instead it's there to spray plants near the rainmaker's base,

while the nozzle douses those at the far end of the arch,
rain for one and rain all around,
neither too little nor too much, no hail or lightning,

no stalk-twisting gusts, just a shower on wheels,
though not for free,
a port-a-storm complete with a watch-a-ma-call-it mister,

a clanking cumulo-nimbus cloud towable by tractor.
The produce takes it all in.
Soon there will be containers stacked at the end of each long row,

long hours and sweat from nose and chin watering the sandy soil,
quick wrists and español
rising and falling, row on row, dolores para dólares,

while it all becomes someone else's store-bought bounty
sprayed in front of mirrors
and bushel baskets as if it just spilled over.

Alluvial

discursive: a) rambling; b) proceeding coherently
Latin: *discurrere*, to run about

Visits to the Jersey shore are like a trip
back in time. '50s roadside attractions
decay and make it a trip through
sweet Benjaminian melancholy,
for he loved and loathed dreams of the future
becoming phantoms from the past. Going
“offseason” intensifies everything. Resorts seem
like a last resort: Victoriana restored
to look like Disney’s Yesteryear Street.
One of the huge condo complexes even calls
itself “Somewhere in Time”: become
a child in a house with a tower
and wraparound porches, once upon a time. . . .
The strip motels sell different mirages:
rooms filled with fleur-de-lis or boomerangs,
Hawaii-Tiki-Copacabana-Cali-Mex motifs
whirled in a blender, but if you walk
behind, in the alleys away from Ocean Avenue,
these filigree and tail-fin dreams become row
upon row of exhaust vents and air conditioner
grills puncturing cinder-block walls.

Go

to the sea instead and see if the news of its
breaking the dike of the dunes during last winter’s
storms was true. Water and sand still
lie strewn about the streets, and the first
line of dunes is stripped of its grass
and made smooth as a wave. We poke about
dune and saltmarsh ecosystems hiding
from the stiff March wind; their story
is survival in the midst of pounding,
salty overwash turned into replenishment.
Rhizome networks rasp in the lowlands,
hold on, and thrive.

This trip also becomes for me
a visit to the future, to facing death for the first time
(a sheltered life) at the pivot of middle age,
thinking about many friends of my generation
passing early, another just last week. Imagine
being stowed in the roadside Mater Dei Nursing Home
passed on the way down here, the mother

of all frightening nursing homes. The room
where we die these days is often a rented room.
A TV we can't turn off stands at the foot
of our bed, and down the hall
another one blares in the "community"
room where the chairs are put in rows each night
and the floors are waxed as severely
as the halls I remember from high school.
I can see and hear that waxing machine now
arcing gently back and forth along the floors,
and the dolorous janitor who guides it.
Mater Dei: calmed by the purr of a waxing
machine we want to nurse at last at
the breast of the Mother of God. It's true:
that's what Mater Dei implies. The Victorians
tried to turn death into sleep; more ambitious,
or more frightened, we seek to store it away
in institutions dispensing "managed care"
and "palliatives." A rented room becomes
a way to nestle against a mother's body again,
turn our heads from the long bright
corridors, from the wandering eye
of the TV feeding on endless images. . . .
(But that's a sign of the end. Earlier: "I got used
to TV when I lived alone after Walter died.
I'd turn it on first thing whenever I got back
from going out, to have a voice in the place.")

Driving past, I suddenly remember
a magazine story about a middle-aged
man dying of AIDS who was being
cared for at home. One day when he was
feeling better he suddenly tried
to dump empty all his bureau drawers,
undress, then run out into the street.
Was he trying to run away from death
by running away from home? Or
was he trying to run *to* death by undoing
all the signs he was adult,
going backwards in time, step by
step, Mother may I. . . ? And then
I thought of Edward Hopper's
austere painting *Rooms By The Sea*.
It's more a haunting than an image on canvas.
Just a bare room with late afternoon sunlight
slanting down a wall, an open door
—"unscrew the doors from their jambs!"
we once quoted proudly—and

outside the room, so close
it must be almost *under* the house as well
as on every side of it —the ocean,
open, endlessly in motion and empty
and full at the same time.

Campgrounds
named King Nummy or Old Stagecoach
fly past the car window. Billboard ads
are filled with teepees, boosting lots
with both electric and septic hookups.
Some of the roadside houses farther on
have little monuments in their front yards
called “gazing globes.” An obelisk-like base
about 3’ high is topped with a sphere reflecting
the whole house and yard and even toys and
auto parts in the driveway. Some are chrome,
others fierce and sparkly as muscle-car paint
jobs like “Emerald Glo” or “Tahiti Lagoon.”
Everything warps to the sphere’s curve, outside
becomes inside, safely enclosed, suffused
in a metallic sheen—is that what we want?
Rome was obsessed with obelisks too,
and sphinxes, spheres, and everything Egyptian.
There are tales of 40-ton obelisks
brought back to the capital by slaves from
Africa. These obelisks were filled with stories
imprinted on each of its sides. Conquering can be
erasure, salt sown in the fields of Carthage,
but it can also be just accumulation,
layering what you think of as your own
on top of what came before you,
asserting your right to be next,
to outdo and tell the story. (Yet
are those African lions reposing
so regally with crossed paws by the fountains
resigned to be ornaments, or are they gazing
into the future watching one Rome ruin
and another rise?) Now our monuments
are carried about in wheelbarrows
for front lawns by the side of highways.
But they are still supposed to let us gaze
at the whole, to tell a story winding up
to the top of a column, to put it all
inside a sphere, like one of those snow-bubble
scenes to shake and put on a table
by the nightlight, where the storm swirls
about the little house and then gradually
becomes calmer, quieter, and hushed.

Think
of Vézelay, France—a bright cold day years ago,
much like today. The cathedral was organized
like a great chain of being, a Jacob's ladder
of symbolism. Gnarled rough-cut stone
underground, saint's relics lit by
tiny lights, commoners' bones looming
in the shadows, stuffed mishmash into
crevices, charnel grotto grotesqueries
to mute persistent human pride.
Upstairs, directly overhead, stands the altar,
the place of translation. Above the choir soars
sand-smoothed stone columns and rib vaults.
Ribs added a new feature to the Romanesque
and point to the future, but they're borrowed
from medieval mosques in al-Andaluz.
You can just feel a ribbed ceiling breathing,
stone aspiring upward. We are told by the tour guide
that at summer solstice, as the hours slowly
pass, lozenges of prismatic light play over
the congregation assembled in the coolness of the nave.
Later, facts emerged that are not so mystical.
Vézelay's tympanum, uniquely, touts the Crusades,
the town a staging-point for Richard
the Lion Heart and many others. Vézelay
suffered when they lost sole claim on Mary
Magdalen. A rival in Provence better marketed
their remains as those of the penitent; pilgrim
thongs and coffers declined. What a fate for Mary
from Magdala, a Jewish fishing town on Galilee,
her seven demons cast out, cast by some
as outcast, by others as a rich donor, or as
a witness to Jesus' penultimate, very human
words, forsaken and doubting everything
he'd done. The cathedral network in Europe
circulated the coins of all these versions,
turning Magdalen into a body birthing over
a hundred profitable bone-parts. That sure is a
different loaves-and-fishes tale.

More memories,
quandaries involving faith. Inside a squat
cathedral like some kind of cement UFO,
a funeral for a friend, Pennsylvania, 1993,
I consoled myself with festoons of cheery
banners until a disgusting sermon inserted
in the middle of the memorial mass
insisted animals have no souls, only humans.
I know this is doctrinal, but what set

that petty pastor off? Someone earlier that week
too loudly grieving for a pet? Also befuddling:
communion made a module in a funeral service.
That was new to me. The priest held a round
cracker high above his head then sharply broke
it in half, sweeping both hands downward in an arc.
Pure theatrical theology, but I had to admit it was
effective. As far as mysteries go, I am drawn more
to the obelisk than the wafer, to wondering what those
slaves said to each other riding the boat back to Rome,
freed for a moment from pushing stone uphill.
It has to do with how mementos shrink and morph
as they drift in time, until small enough
to be like a pet globe in the yard telling
a story not of emperors and their catalogues,
nor of saints and their body-parts, but of
a globular dream-space perched by the roadside,
obscurely speaking our need to imagine
everything we love translated inside of it.
Suffering was supposed to remain outside, but
of course, being stubborn and human,
it refused.

When we arrive at last
we head straight to the beach. Low tide.
I walk around the edges in a trance,
taking photos. The sand is scored with rills
and runnels—water heading back
to the sea, making small alluvial fans
and deltas, intertwining fractals into
layers, carrying along sand-grains, shells,
and galaxies quickly in quicksilver light.

Speck

An ant crawls up my leg to my knee, tickling me.
I flick him (?) off with my finger, sending the black
speck

tumbling through air into long-bladed grass
over a yard away. How can he survive such a blow?
(Ants

mostly do.) Is flying just another event for him, nothing a
compound eye can't handle? How does he figure out where he
is

when he lands, and what to do? I've disrupted his scent trail. The grass
must seem a jungle, so different from the patio desert we were in when
he

decided to ascend, threading through hair forests and over strange knobs
in quest of I have no idea what. Does he just adjust bravely to each new
world

and set off on his journey as if it's still all of a piece?
I can't know for certain, but as I sit here dreaming
I

somehow know he knows precisely where his ant-hole is.
His task remains fixed too. He searches anywhere he is.
Six

legs planted on whatever surface comes his way, he raises those delicate
ant mandibles, calipers for the infinite, and gets on with job
one.

The Sore-Foot Sierra Club Trail-Worker Blues

Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Texas

Cedar logs for the trail are lugged up by a pack-horse crew
Cedar logs for the trail ... *lugged* up by a pack-horse crew
Put those erosion-protectors in, you'll feel like a pack-horse too

You can pay to volunteer when you've earned a good pay-scale
Admit it, you pay to volunteer since you earn a good pay-scale
And economists at their desks still call low-wage work "unskilled"

Sotol cactus with its sword-plumes, coyotes callin' just at dawn,
Listen: sotol with its sword-plumes, coyotes callin' just at dawn,
Desert life defends itself or else is quickly gone

Those Guadalupan winds are either blowin' or gettin' ready to blow
Yes, those Guadalupan winds are either blowin' or gettin' ready to blow
And the trail-workers say, "look for us under your boot-soles when you go"

Eastern Tailed-Blue Butterfly

Common they call you
though graced with orange chevrons

and a millimeter-y “tail” on each hindwing
fluttering close to the ground

you feed on clover and vetch
and fall into this sunlit morning of mine

like a fleck of scree flung down
to us from azure on high

Parallelepipeds

Meandering through woods heading to salt marsh
I see a spider-web struck at eye level by a shaft of sunlight.
In one corner a slim willow oak leaf is suspended,
veins and tributaries threading cell upon cell
caught and glowing in honeycomb clusters.
The spider's somewhere else, the work abandoned
and a little frayed. But careful parallelograms remain
strung among lines radiating from an empty center.

I touch one silvery sliver of a strand with my index
finger and gently pull it toward me. Others follow.
Tensile net lines stretch and stretch ... and recombine
to make a 3-D parallelepiped stuck to my fingertip.
I hold it for a long moment and time seems to stop.
Then with another digit I dislodge it and watch
as it snaps back into flatness, gently vibrating. Later
on a pier over the marsh soaking up its buzz and pulse

I hear a kind of soft quiescence waiting
under all those seething riffs. It's late August.
Spartina nickers to itself in sea breeze and a marsh hawk,
pissed off at my presence, soars and rasps its cry.
It's hunting and marking dominion all in one motion.
Moments like these are like seeing gravity curve the space-
time grid—big thing :: grand effect, small thing ::
picayune effect, but they aren't separate, they're all

converging parallels bent by something even bigger
but unseen. A fingerprint whorl touches
galaxy whirl and self sifts to selvage, empty becoming
opening. Walk and seek to leave your leaves behind
until suddenly the scalar new catches and holds,
fills, filters, and warps you into ... wait for it ...
something else anew again, a set of silver
-pipeds, lively selves sent spinning by someone else's

fingertips.

Strand

Hold this whelk to your ear
and what do you hear?
A strong stirring like the sound

of the sea seething as end-
less combers crest and collapse
surging up then slyly

drawing back? Or is it just the echoing
absence of the shell's rapacious maker?
Such sonorous euphemisms we have

for undersea warfare: *columella*
the axis of the spiral the gastropod secretes;
operculum for the infantry "foot"

driving its tank along subtidal sands.
Make no mistake: this beast is weaponized.
The shell's carbonate tip works like a knife

to prise the prey's clamshell apart.
The snail's *radula* buzz-saw teeth
then do their mince-meat dance.

Yet there's another answer
possible, plausible, just
as full of ghosts.

The shell's susurrus may really
be the sound of our own blood
circulating, concavity as

echo chamber or calcium
mirror recalling that human blood
is almost as salty as seawater—

whelk and ear whorled worlds
history hissing in a word
as deep time circles within itself

and so too beauty and brute force
while you wonder and wander
this beach aimlessly—so you believe—

until all of a sudden
without a moment's
thought

you stoop down
to pick up a
shell

.

Evening Shift at the 7-11

Black wasps sip
persimmon juice, stinger tips throbbing;
grey blotch blooms on sassafras.

A new mother hired by 7-11
stuffs newspaper inside old jeans and a shirt,
pantyhose for a head

plus a Halloween mask. No crows
to scare, no Dorothy either,
the creature slouches deluxely

into hay bales by the parking lot,
staring at something blank
on the move beyond all traffic.

The evening shift comes on.
Overhead, clouds sail by,
their holds filled with light

and winter in their wake.

November Harp & Mirror

A cricket's insouciant
late-summer
song

polyphonic
robusterium as
scat

singing cross
talk a come-on from the
get-go

come down
just to skittering
creaks of late

broken
questionings left hanging
in the dark

Harp and Mirror

With crickets, one wing covers another, a pair for each side of the body. The cricket's song is made when these pairs are rapidly opened then closed using a special rhythm; the closing stroke rubs a specially designed scraper against a "file," a series of ridges on one of the prominent veins in the lower wing. The produced sound is then amplified by two regions in the lower wing called the **"harp" and the "mirror,"** both of which vibrate to the sound produced by the scraper and file. "The relatively small amplitude of vibration generated during stridulation may be considerably increased by the resonance of the radiator" [Michelson and Nocke, 258]. These devices in the wings are constructed of chitin, a semi-transparent bone-like substance part of the insect's exoskeleton.

Crickets have many different songs, including rivalry and courtship songs. Not much is known about how these different songs are produced (with the same equipment) or what their actual social functions are.

The Tuned Singing Burrow of Mole Crickets

There is one kind of cricket, the "mole cricket," that uses another means of amplifying its song. "They are the only known insects to modify their surroundings for acoustic purposes. They build their burrow as a double exponential [with double openings] horn, ... [which] acts as an acoustic transformer considerably increasing the efficiency of sound emission by the harps vibrating at the horn throat." The burrow's double opening helps ensure wide distribution of the amplified sound, and a "bulb" or bulbous widening of the burrow around where the cricket's head will go allows the cricket to slightly "tune" the sound by increasing or decreasing the side of the surrounding chamber in the earth.

To use the burrow, the cricket digs it as it has learned, then crawls in head first, so that its vibrating wings (over the rear of its body) face outward, just below where the burrow forks into two openings, a few millimeters from the surface of the ground [Michelson and Nocke, 265-66].

Axel Michelsen and Harald Nocke, "Biophysical Aspects of Sound Communication in Insects," *Advances in Insect Physiology* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), pp. 247-96.

See also Vincent Delthier, *Crickets and Katydid, Concerts and Solos* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992).

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"If you can't sleep because a cricket is chirping, here's a sure cure. Put a wet washcloth in your kitchen or bathroom sink at night---you'll find your noisy neighbor hiding there in the morning."

---from a 1989 issue of the *Ladies' Pork Journal*, the official publication of the Iowa Porkettes, the Women's Auxiliary of the Iowa Pork Producers Association.



## Bye-Bye, Woolly Bears

So what if the woolly bears  
inched along to say I told you so?  
So what if the season's good riddances  
won't say goodbye? Here, cats,  
scrap in the corner for the year's leftovers.  
Possum's got the suet, ghost in the night.

Today I find stalactites  
hanging under bridges, minute salt  
accretions leaching from slush.  
The wind's swung around  
to north-northeast; the sky will drop  
another notch nearer earth.  
Planes make a low approach, their foglights on.

Then evening, Tom Titmouse at the feeder  
for just the seed he wants. My stove tick-talks  
to itself enjoying its big beech chunks.  
Outside, the Thompson's ax-crack arrives late  
from its trip across the field, and  
a break in the clouds as the sun goes down  
is a yellow ribbon laid across a gray daybook.

Snowfall and snowrise, ring around the moon;  
melancholic echolalia, so long, goodbye.

## Northern Snow on Mardi Gras

No wind, and mini sprinkles  
in the air. Then, quickly,  
crystal upon crystal,

fat bunches drifting down,  
and bunches next to bunches,  
without sound. Try to scry

one cluster at a time, the window  
as your frame and measure.  
Not a fall at all, but dance—

each flake rotating earthward  
twirls a long slow-motion spiral,  
end-point out of sight.

Enter wind, roughly exhaling,  
and now this afternoon's  
white flotilla of schooners

suddenly sails sideways, doubloons  
thrown as if they're just for you  
from a krewe like Zulu Social Aid

& Pleasure tossing whiffs of Tropic  
into our Nordic evening glacé.  
Those flakes continue to festoon.

## Like a Leaf

Like a leaf that's lost  
its tree, spiral down  
until you light on  
water or earth.

If you think nice  
similes will stop  
dying or help  
you recollect

your future in  
tranquility, though,  
no, they won't.  
*Timor mortis conturbat*

*me* and all that,  
plus the night's long  
march through  
sleeplessness, pain

sharpening its  
hacksaw  
for the slow rending  
apart. What words

can do is cast a counter-  
spell. Go micro and think  
*glucose*. Sweet must  
when crushed,

simple sugars  
with linear or cyclic  
structures assemble  
polysaccharides

for both cell fuel and  
building-blocks,  
branching clusters  
bursting with OH OHs

and HO HO HOs that,  
pronounced in a poem,  
sound just like  
the human comedy

as well as chemistry.

It's elemental. Maybe pain  
is leaves going from  
green to gold or red,

then brown into black,  
layers and layers  
of black. Cells  
fire up growth and

movement, even as  
this carbon-sink  
miracle body is linked  
to its opposite,

decay as cells dis-  
solving make  
*sylian* and *sully*,  
all forms of *soil*,

dust to dust. Press  
us like sphagnum  
moss to mucky  
peatlands, then repeat.

In nature  
(if not in our fucked  
up human world)  
these black lives matter.

We *are* matter,  
we soon-to-be  
ash people, we  
hum the *humus*

in *human*, all the low  
notes (*humilus*),  
and without us  
there is no

fructifying change, no  
black *sillion* shining  
as it bonds and re-  
bounds into the new

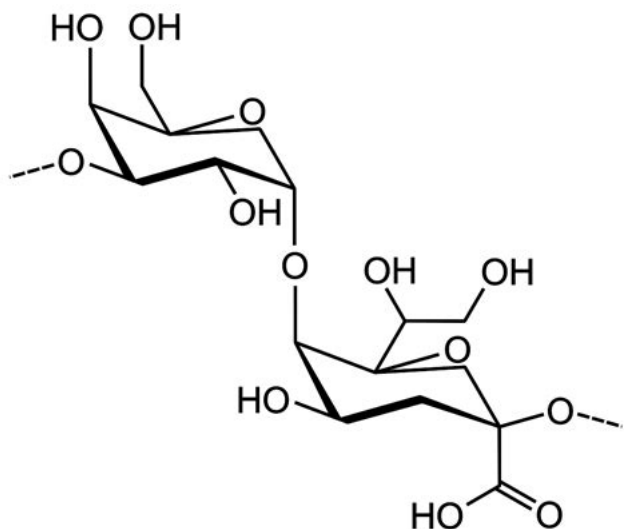
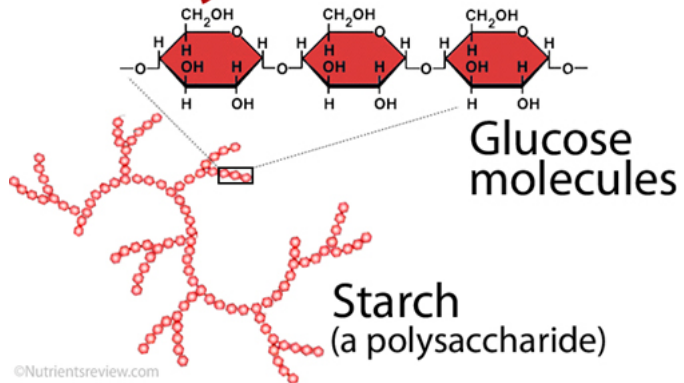
carbon-based and  
occasionally awesome  
creatures that we are.  
You feel me?

Remember  
this OH OH so  
compostable spell  
as each leaf flow-

ing down and  
down follows  
its foreordained  
yet free and

chiral path.

## Polysaccharides



## Fly Fishing

Lumber out  
    in comic  
clunky  
    waders

    uncertain  
        footing  
wet line like  
    liquid fire

        in the sun  
            flick  
the wrist to  
        lay the

            lure  
                softly  
on the  
        gentle

                    current

                    ...

                        waiting  
                            breathing  
ripple  
                        birdsong

                    ...

                    tease it up  
                        and down  
lay it back  
    upstream

        belay belay  
            the moment  
hand-tied  
    flies

            bright  
                feathers  
in your  
        cap

## Dreaming on the Night Shore

Nightmare rides me  
head-first down a tunnel  
arms pinned to sides  
buried-alive grit in my mouth—  
think instead of people

exploring a beach at night  
flashlights poking  
into darkness—  
we seek shelter in a cave  
of comforting but blinding

light—on the stone jetty  
night fishermen perch near  
the lantern lights, fling  
bloodworms and poppers  
onto the surge of

a heaving black swell  
while far off, invisible,  
a buoy tolls its mourning bell—  
come day, offshore,  
a dredge goes down

and, hunkering, does what  
dredges do, chuffing up  
sand to replenish the beach—  
O to be liquid sand  
in a dribble castle

or glowstick O's  
in the hand of a child—  
if you want to see Andromeda  
look a little away from it  
into the darkest dark

and don't miss Dolphin arching  
her back beside the Milky Way  
or Orion the hunter, lust to kill all  
creatures burning like a nebula  
below his belt—we are the stuff

of nightmares, the ones  
when the mare tramples you,

[stanza continues]

when you can't wake up  
before hitting bottom—  
so some nights I cup

a candle in my hands,  
flame aquiver,  
don't go out,  
knowing we're still drawn  
to darkness, blood-soaked

night-soil, our wretched  
worst, yet make  
the only reply we can,  
sounding a unicorn  
rampant on a field of stars.



[Monoceros and Orion. See also lower left: L'Atelier de L'Imprimeur]