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Understanding The Anthropocene

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Understanding the Anthropocene

Final Anthology Project

by Monica Kramer

created for “Ecopoetry and the Climate Crisis,” ENGL071E/ENVS041

with support from Prof. Peter Schmidt

Department of English Literature

Swarthmore College, May 2024

Introduction

The current climate crisis can be a daunting, anxiety-provoking topic. Terms such as “climate anxiety” are brought up because thinking about the prospect of future warming can cause extreme dread. Our current trajectory has even pushed people to forgo having children. Yet although this dread is very warranted and cannot be minimized, simply fearing for the future does not present any solutions to improving it. Ecopoetry can give us a window into helping deal with our grief, and can also suggest solutions for moving forward. This anthology presents poems that do both, helping us to better understand our current era in time, the Anthropocene.

Poets included in this anthology: Jane Hirshfield, Marie Howe, W.S. Merwin, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Linda Hogan, William Carlos Williams, and (from 19th century England) Charlotte Smith.

Plus commentary on the “Old Growth Children” chapter from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

“Mosses”- Jane Hirshfield

Originally published in *Scientific American*, vol. 327 no. 5, November 2022, pg. 8.

Read the poem: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/150762/mountainal>.

Further reading: Hirshfield’s poem “Mountainal”

Jane Hirshfield was born in 1953 and has written ten collections of poems as well as two collections of essays (“Jane Hirshfield”). She writes on the physical world, moments of insight, and the intersection of science with poetry (“Jane Hirshfield”). The poem “Mosses” begins with a scientific explanation of a specific moss native to the Mojave desert that survives its harsh climate by growing under quartz, then relates this to how we as humans shelter ourselves under metaphorical parasols.

At first read, Hirshfield’s tone sounds gentle and unassuming, as though she is simply observing a phenomenon without judgement. But upon a closer read, we can see that Hirshfield is really asking the reader to self-reflect on the parasols we all carry, and what impact that has. She provokes emotion and discomfort in calling out environmental degradation (Amazon and Arctic burning) through images of fire. Additionally, she talks about how “we pondered our lives and the lives of others” under our parasols. The word “ponder” now typically means to think about something, often not deeply, but in Middle English “ponder” meant to appraise or estimate the worth of (“Ponder”). Here Hirshfield calls us out for the impact remaining indifferent and sheltered from uncomfortable realities has on others.

Study Questions:

1. What purpose does including scientific knowledge about the mosses and centering the mosses in the poem serve?
2. The line “An experiment not meant to last” is in its own stanza. What could this “experiment” be, and why is the line distinctly separated?

Sources

Hirshfield, Jane. “Mosses.” *Scientific American*, vol. 327, no.5, p.28. Nov. 2022.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/poem-mosses/>

“Jane Hirshfield.” *Poetry Foundation*, 2024.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jane-hirshfield>

“Ponder”. Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=ponder>.

Accessed 7 February 2024.

“Singularity”- Marie Howe

Reprinted in *New and Selected Poems*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2024.

Read the poem: <https://poets.org/poem/singularity>.

Further reading: Howe’s “The Gate” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50979/the-gate-56d22e6c97230>.

Marie Howe was born in 1950 in Rochester, NY (Howe). Much of her work is metaphysical, yet in light of her brother’s death during the AIDS pandemic she did write more direct poems, for example “The Gate” listed above (“Marie Howe”). Her poem “Singularity” is more in the metaphysical realm, thinking about deep time and the origins of the universe. A singularity in physics is a point at which space and time become infinite, or more accurately, where points are missing from the space-time continuum (“Singularity Theorems”). Stephen Hawking, who died soon before Howe wrote this poem, theorized that singularities are what happens to stars when they die and perhaps an opposite phenomenon occurred to create the universe (7).

Similar to Hirshfield’s “Mosses,” Howe relates scientific knowledge to human experience. She appeals to a sense of wonder by having us imagine a world where perhaps we don’t test to see if elephants grieve their calves or coral reefs feel pain. In writing about this deep time of the birth of the universe, Howe encourages us to stretch our understandings of time and our place in it. *Homo sapiens* have existed for a fraction of a second when compared to the theorized lifespan of the universe thus far. So, how do we want to spend this time and treat the home we have been given? The end of the poem especially highlights how even from our common origin, we create “I” and “us,” seeding loneliness in others and ourselves as well as separation from nature and what is not man made.

Study Questions:

1. There are several lines where a sentence ends and a new sentence is started, but not finished. What is similar about these lines, and what does not finishing these sentences in one line emphasize?
2. How is the question “Can molecules recall it?/ what once was?” related to the idea of a potentially universal collective memory? If we all had a collective remembrance of the universe’s origins, could that impact our relations with others, including our tendency to “shelter under parasols” and “ponder the lives of others” like Hirshfield talks about in “Mosses”?

Sources

Howe, Marie. “Singularity.” *Academy of American Poets*, 2019.

<https://poets.org/poem/singularity>

“Marie Howe.” Poetry Foundation, 2024. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/marie-howe>

Popova, Maria. "Singularity: Poet Marie Howe's Beautiful Tribute to Stephen Hawking and Our Belonging in the Universe." *The Marginalian*,
<https://www.themarginalian.org/2018/05/22/singularity-marie-howe-stephen-hawking/>.

"Singularity Theorems." <https://www.personal.soton.ac.uk/dij/GR-Explorer/singularities/singtheorems.htm>.

“After the Dragonflies”- W.S. Merwin

Originally published in *Garden Time*, Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2016.

Read the poem: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/24/magazine/ws-merwin-after-the-dragonflies.html>

Further reading: Merwin’s “Oak Time”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=38768>.

“After the Dragonflies” offers a somber reminder of the mass extinction currently underway, largely due to human influence. W.S. Merwin was a practicing Buddhist who lived much of his life on an old pineapple plantation in Hawaii, working to restore its original rainforest (“W.S. Merwin”). Much of his extensive work focuses on ecology and humans’ attentiveness to nature (“W.S. Merwin”). “After the Dragonflies” certainly fits this theme, focusing on an often overlooked insect’s beauty. Merwin is known to be a deep ecologist, and this is evident in this poem (“W.S. Merwin”). Deep ecology is a form of environmentalism that recognizes nature’s inherent value apart from any benefit it may have to humans (Madsen).

In this poem, Merwin helps us better understand deep ecology by highlighting the inherent value of the dragonfly through its “light”, including its veins “made of light” and the light it takes “with them when they went,” referring to their extinction. Although dragonflies are not yet extinct, Merwin takes us into a potential future where they are (Rumens). The poem also focuses on the interconnectedness of nature in how the dragonfly is connected to the veins in the leaves and the rivers. The extinction of any species has been shown to have profound impacts on the environment around it, such as the famous example of the removal of wolves from Yellowstone and how their eventual reintroduction changed the physical course of the river. The extinction of a species, even as small as a dragonfly, would have substantial impacts on the environment- including us, as we cannot separate ourselves from nature.

Study Questions:

1. Google search the word “sustainability.” What is the first definition given? Does deep ecology align with this definition of sustainability? How so, or how not?
2. What emotions does this poem evoke when reading it? How are emotions important to processing mass extinction? Conversely, think about the role *desensitization* plays in understanding our current human-caused mass extinction event.

Sources

Madsen, Peter. “Deep ecology.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 28 Oct. 2023.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/deep-ecology>.

Rumens, Carol. “Poem of the week: After the Dragonflies by WS Merwin.” *The Guardian*, 10 Oct. 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/oct/10/poem-of-the-week-after-the-dragonflies-by-ws-merwin>.

“W.S. Merwin.” *Poetry Foundation*, 2024. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/w-s-merwin>.

“Old Growth Children” – Robin Wall Kimmerer

Originally published in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Further reading: The following chapter in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Witness to the Rain.”

The excerpt I focus on is from the “Old-Growth Children” chapter is on p. 278. It begins, “In those days the ancient rainforests spread from Northern California to southeastern Alaska...” and ends with “*Alone* is a word without meaning in this forest.”

In “Old-Growth Children” in Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass*, she details the importance of *Thuja plicata* (western red cedar) to the Native peoples of the West Coast, as well as the history of the lumber industry. In the excerpt below, Kimmerer sets up the context for which *Thuja* lives- in majestic, biodiverse temperate rainforests. Kimmerer’s writing makes it easy to transport yourself right there and see the forest yourself. She describes the forest canopy as a “multilayered sculpture of vertical complexity,” evoking images of a grand and intricate work of art. Kimmerer appeals to the beauty and awe of the temperate rainforest, and wonderfully describes what these forests feel like.

Since I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, I loved reading Kimmerer’s chapters on the region, especially on the abundant plant life. Reading both “Old-Growth Children” and the following chapter, “Witness to the Rain,” were like taking a trip back home. I’ve grown up backpacking and camping in remote areas of the woods, and my parents taught me plant names and reverence for the plants from a young age. Kimmerer’s beautiful description of these woods does them justice, and importantly sets the reader up to feel discomfort when later in the chapter hearing about the mass deforestation of the region. In evoking awe at these majestic forests and trees, the call to action about protecting them becomes more effective.

What especially stood out in this passage to me was the line “*Alone* is a word without meaning in this forest.” I have felt this deeply in my own experience. Spending time in the woods, surrounded by *Thuja*, you feel their presence and the presence of every other organism there even if there are no other humans around. Here Kimmerer appeals to the intrinsic value of the woods, similar to Merwin’s standpoint as a deep ecologist. She also balances this viewpoint with the importance of *Thuja* to Native peoples for necessities. As throughout all of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer shows how nature has intrinsic value on its own and has value in providing for humans- as long as we show reciprocity with the land.

Study Questions:

1. What Native ways of knowing are embedded in deep ecology? Would you consider Kimmerer a deep ecologist? What values shape her emphasis on the importance of considering more-than-human networks and their importance for ecological health and also healthy *human* consciousness and decision-making?
2. Besides the natural world, what or who else may we tend to lose sight of their intrinsic value in modern Western society?

3. What do you think of Kimmerer's assertions that Indigenous knowledge and practices regarding ecosystems—the gifts they give us and what we owe them in return—is not just compatible with contemporary science but *necessary* for science to be done responsibly?

Sources

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Poem #1- Jimmy Santiago Baca

Originally published in *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande*, New York: New Directions, 2004.

Further reading: Poem #2 from Baca's *Winter Poems* sequence:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53240/from-winter-poems-along-the-rio-grande>

Baca, "Cloudy Day" <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49563/cloudy-day-56d22bc3b944c>.

The first poem of Jimmy Santiago Baca's *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande* takes the reader along a run with Baca in the bosque, the forested areas of cottonwood trees along the Rio Grande. The poem follows a single run of Baca's, but also follows his thoughts and personal development over his lifetime. Baca spent his childhood in orphanages, youth detention, and on the streets before being arrested and finding literature and poetry while in prison (Linthicum). This singular run follows his journey to find contentment, humility, and spirituality.

Throughout the run, Baca finds spiritual healing and guidance from nature's teachers. He speaks of the spider teaching him the craft of writing, and in interviews he credits finding poetry as a turning point in his life (Linthicum). He also learns and wishes for freedom from the herons. A large focus of the poem is on the trees. Baca progresses through the poem from wanting to connect to the trees to worshipping the trees themselves and praying to them. This shows a strengthening bond to nature and spirituality, most likely Baca's own. Wanting to connect to the trees shows an openness to faith and spirituality. Worshipping the trees represents a deepening connection to nature, and finally viewing the tree as a shrine suggests a belief that trees can strengthen prayers. An important line in the poem is this one: "the navel of the universe in the tree-trunk knot." Discuss this metaphor.

The poem acknowledges Baca's Apache heritage, including how the spider as his teacher of writing is reminiscent of "Spider Woman" stories in many Native cultures where Spider Woman is important for the creation of life as well as a teacher of weaving ("Spider Woman"). Baca's poem encourages reflection on how nature and heritage can be important spiritual teachers.

Study Questions:

1. See the prompt at the end of paragraph #2 above.
2. What does the meandering layout of poem #1 suggest about Baca's run? His life's path so far?
3. What may the cyclist Baca has to "quickly get out of the way" for at the beginning of the poem represent? Why is this detail important for the poem?

Sources

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. "1." *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande*. New York: New Directions, 2004.

Linthicum, Leslie. "From Prison to Poet." Mirage Magazine, 2 May 2022,
<https://mirage.unm.edu/from-prison-to-poet/>.
"Spider Woman." Encyclopedia of World Mythology, 21 Feb. 2024,
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/spider-woman#:~:text=Spider%20Woman%20appears%20in%20the,by%20teaching%20them%20survival%20skills>.

“Young Sycamore”- Williams Carlos Williams

Reprinted in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, New York: New Directions, 1986.

Read the poem: <https://allpoetry.com/Young-Sycamore>.

For a reproduction of Alfred Stieglitz’s photo of a New York City street scene, “Spring Showers—The Street-Cleaner,” that that apparently inspired Williams’ poem, see the National Gallery of Art website: <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.35410.html>

Further reading: “River Rhyme”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=22754> .

“Young Sycamore” was written in the 1920s by William Carlos Williams, a doctor and writer from Rutherford, New Jersey (“William Carlos Williams”). His poem describes in detail a sycamore tree photographed by Albert Stieglitz in Manhattan. The tree in the photo is nothing special, in fact, it looks particularly forgettable. The sycamore is small and scraggly, confined in a wire cage and growing out of a hole in the cement. It is one of those trees you would walk by in a city and never pay a thought. Yet Williams’ poem casts the tree in a new light, personifying it in saying how the tree “rises/ bodily” and explaining its presence with a certain energy and vitality.

Several poets have written that Williams’ poem portrays the sycamore as a “tree of life” (Gray et al.). His poem starts at the base of the tree and then explains how the sycamore branches out, with its branches described as “young” and how it hangs cocoons, portraying a new generation and continued life. Then the poem describes the sycamore thinning “till nothing is left of it,” like aging. Interestingly, the top of a tree is young relative to the rest of the tree, so this imagery is somewhat backwards. Critics have written about the upside-down nature of the poem, with the beginning of the poem being about the bottom of the tree and end of the poem being about the top (Gray et al.).

That is, as the poem’s grammar proceeds down the page, we appear to move not just from descriptions of the bottom to the top of the tree, but discover the tree’s hidden life force (its will to live). We seem to move from the tree’s young unstoppable energy for life to its old age—though the last reference in the poem is to the tree’s seeds that may create the next generation of sycamores. The photo that inspired the poem (see below) is a static image, but the poem itself suggests the tree’s life cycle in *time*. How does the poem both visually and temporally?

As other works of ecopoetry have done, Williams’ poem helps us connect the physical world with time in a unique way. He takes what is assumed about time and flips it around, almost literally. His poem also helps us see urban nature in a new light, encouraging us to see the value and beauty in even the most unassuming sidewalk plants.

Study Questions:

1. Consider the first line of the poem, where Williams addresses the reader directly. In one sentence, what do you think Williams “must tell you”?

2. Does the pacing of the poem feel consistent, or are there parts you feel “go faster” than others?

Sources

Gray, Richard, et al. “On ‘The Young Sycamore.’” *Modern American Poetry, Made in America: Science, Technology, and Modernist Poets*, Yale UP, 1987. http://maps-legacy.org/poets/s_z/williams/sycamore.htm.

This website includes brief excerpts of other good critical commentary on Williams’ poem. Especially recommended: Hugh Kenner’s comments on the poem.

Stieglitz, Alfred (photographer). “Spring Showers—The Street-Cleaner.” <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.35410.html>.

Williams, William Carlos. “Young Sycamore.” <https://allpoetry.com/Young-Sycamore>
“William Carlos Williams.” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-carlos-williams>.

“The Swallow”- Charlotte Smith

Originally published in *A Natural History of Birds Intended Chiefly for Young Persons*, London: J. Johnson, St. Paul's Churchyard, 1807.

Read the poem: <https://allpoetry.com/poem/8480475-The-Swallow-by-Charlotte-Smith>.

Further reading: “To the Shade of Burns” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52386/to-the-shade-of-burns>.

“The Swallow” by Charlotte Smith

[emphasis added]

THE gorse is yellow on the heath,
The banks with speedwell flowers are gay,
The oaks are budding; and beneath,
The hawthorn soon will bear the wreath,
The silver wreath of May.
The welcome guest of settled Spring,
The Swallow too is come at last;
Just at sun-set, when thrushes sing,
I saw her dash with rapid wing,
And hail'd her as she pass'd.

Come, summer visitant, attach
To my reed roof your nest of clay,
And let my ear your music catch
Low twittering underneath the thatch
At the gray dawn of day.
As fables tell, an Indian Sage,
The Hindostani woods among,
Could in his desert hermitage,
As if 'twere mark'd in written page,
Translate the wild bird's song.
I wish I did his power possess,
That I might learn, fleet bird, from thee,
What our vain systems only guess,
And know from what wide wilderness
You came across the sea.

I would a little while restrain
Your rapid wing, that I might hear
Whether on clouds that bring the rain,
You sail'd above the western main,
The wind your charioteer.
In Afric, does the sultry gale
Thro' spicy bower, and palmy grove,
Bear the repeated Cuckoo's tale ?

Dwells there a time, the wandering Rail
Or the itinerant Dove ?
Were you in Asia ? O relate,
If there your fabled sister's woes
She seem'd in sorrow to narrate;
Or sings she but to celebrate
Her nuptials with the rose ?

I would enquire how journeying long,
The vast and pathless ocean o'er,
You ply again those pinions strong,
And come to build anew among
The scenes you left before;
But if, as colder breezes blow,
Prophetic of the waning year,
You hide, tho' none know when or how,
In the cliff's excavated brow,
And linger torpid here;
Thus lost to life, what favouring dream
Bids you to happier hours awake;
And tells, that dancing in the beam,
The light gnat hovers o'er the stream,
The May-fly on the lake ?

Or if, by instinct taught to know
Approaching dearth of insect food;
To isles and willowy aits you go,
And crouding on the pliant bough,
Sink in the dimpling flood:
How learn ye, while the cold waves boom
Your deep and ouzy couch above,
The time when flowers of promise bloom,
And call you from your transient tomb,
To light, and life, and love ?
Alas ! how little can be known,
Her sacred veil where Nature draws;
Let baffled Science humbly own,
Her mysteries understood alone,
By Him who gives her laws

Charlotte Smith was an English poet important to the Romantic movement and women's poetry, and became well-known due to her public opposition to class inequality (Britannica). Her poem "The Swallow" explores where the swallows might go during winter, as was a hot topic question for naturalists at the time (Reece). A bit similar to Baca, Smith's poem explores the freedom and mystery of the birds. She wishes "that I might learn, fleet bird, from thee,/ What our vain systems only guess," with "our vain systems" referring to her time's capabilities to know where the birds go. Her poem then goes on to imagine where the swallows do go, whether to Africa, Asia, or hiding somewhere nearby. All of these ideas were theories of naturalists at the

time, and as Josephine Reece mentions in her article “Charlotte Smith’s Intertextual Ecology,” all had valid and supportable arguments (Reece).

In the poem, Smith weaves together fables about birds with supportable scientific theories (Reece). As other ecopoems do, such as Hirshfield’s “Mosses,” this bridges the gap between thinking strictly scientifically or strictly in fables. Reece argues in her article that by weaving fables and natural history, Smith places the textual environments of birds as part of the physical environment of birds because what we have written about birds informs our relationships with them in the physical world. Smith’s work in 1807 is then relevant now to the emerging study of weaving Indigenous teaching with scientific knowledge to better understand the environment in the United States, as scholars like Kimmerer have pioneered. In order to gain a full picture of human’s interactions with the natural world, we must look at both scientific and traditional knowledge, as well as stories, entertainment, and folklore. Smith’s poem also, Reece argues, undermines scientific claims of authority by juxtaposing its discourse with that of speculation and fable, treating all on an equal plane.

Study Questions:

1. In Smith’s time, the question with an unknown answer was where the swallows go. Now, a somewhat analogous question may be: *How much time do we have until catastrophic global warming?* If Smith were alive today, what may she write about this question? Keep in mind that Smith wrote some darker poems, i.e. “To the Shade of Burns” linked above.
2. What is the importance of imagination in Smith’s poem? How does imagination help us connect more deeply with nature? Reece’s article on Smith’s poem argues that the poet intentionally supplements and questions scientific claims of authority by juxtaposing its facts with speculation and fable, treating all as equally interesting and contingent (or incomplete) ways of “knowing” a swallow and its habits.

Sources

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Charlotte Smith". Encyclopedia Britannica, 30 Apr. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charlotte-Smith>. Accessed 10 May 2024.

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“The Age of Tree Rings”- Linda Hogan

Originally published in *Orion Magazine*, May 2022.

Read the poem: <https://www.everand.com/article/594575149/The-Age-Of-Tree-Rings>.

To read the poem online, you will need to give your information to *Orion* to start a free 30-day subscription that can be cancelled later if you don't want to subscribe.

Further reading: “The Sandhills” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56188/the-sandhills>.

Linda Hogan was born in 1947 in Denver, Colorado, and is a member of the Chickasaw nation (“Linda Hogan”). Her work focuses on environmentalism, ecofeminism, Native culture, and Native histories (“Linda Hogan”). Her poem “The Age of Tree Rings” was published in *Orion Magazine*’s 40th anniversary edition, where the magazine asked 40 writers and 40 artists to write on when the Anthropocene, or era in Earth’s time defined by human impact, began (2). Her poem, then, aims to answer this question. She does not answer it explicitly, but suggests time as circular rather than linear. The narrator of the poem is a tree who talks about having been human once, and contrary to common thinking of humans being the most superior living creature, says that they’ve “ascended” in being a tree rather than (just) a human. The narrator tree speaks of how in the past, humans drew cave art where they are much smaller than the animals they face. Hogan’s poem suggests that humans today have lost this sense of humility and place in the universe, believing we don’t have anything to learn from trees and animals. In reality, we have much to learn, for example from the solidity and knowledge of history the tree carries in its rings.

Several lines in the poem hint that the being who speaks this poem has been reincarnated many times, a different species perhaps each time. the first line, for example: “The last time I visited earth I wore a skin of human flesh.” This is unusual in a lyric poem. It’s not just a human that is speaking the poem, nor a tree, but a being conscious of living many lives?

Although the poem’s tone at first sounds a bit bleak and judgmental, Hogan’s appeal to circular time offers hope that we can return to such humility. The tree narrator says “It is time they learn to care for what is gone, to return there, to become/ a just organism, a moral creature.” Seeing our current levels of environmental degradation caused by humans can feel defeating. But in viewing time as more circular, we can gain hope that the Anthropocene is not forever. Humans that came before us had a deeper sense of humility in their relation to nature, meaning we can again, too. To do so, we must learn from the trees by seeing our own human history, like the tree carries theirs.

Study Questions:

1. Who might this poem be intended for or addressed to? Also, does this poem help you appreciate and understand tree rings better? Discuss.
2. Think about the structure of the poem: it has long lines and is comprised of full sentences. The last stanza of the poem is particularly striking: it’s a single sentence strung over 3 long lines. Discuss reasons why these long lines in the poem fit well with the ideas about trees and tree rings that the poem presents.

3. Consider the line “It was their life in a mathematical moment of learning again, again, the concept of zero.” What might the “concept of zero” refer to, both in the time of cave art and today?
4. A few times in the poem, Hogan mentions the Milky Way galaxy and space—the entire universe. Why might these references be included? What does thinking about deep time help us understand about circular time?

Sources

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<https://orionmagazine.org/issue/summer-2022/>.

“Linda Hogan.” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/linda-hogan>.