

The valley of the butterflies

I

Skywards they swirl, the planet's butterflies,
like coloured dust from earth's warm tenement:
cinnabar, phosphorus, gold, ochre – they rise
to form a swarm of chemo-elements.

And is this shimmering of wings a seeming
shoal of imagined particles of light?
Is it my summer hour of childhood dreaming
fractured as time-warped lightnings might?

No, it's light's angel, able to unveil
itself as black Apollo mnemosyne,
copper, poplar-admiral, swallowtail.

I see them with a mind but half aware
as feathers in a heat-haze eiderdown
in Brajchino valley's searing midday air.

II

In Brajchino valley's searing midday air,
where recollections crumble and the scene
in light's coincidence with plant-life's green
changes from scentlessness to scented glare,

I trace from leaf to leaf a backward gaze
and add them to the land of childhood's nettle,
nature's divinest snare on which to settle,
that catches what before flew off as days.

Here the red admiral still sits entwined,
while from spring-green and greedy caterpillar
it changes into what we would call mind,

so it, like other summers' butterflies,
can fetch life's concentrated purple colour
up from the bitter cavern's sombre dyes.

III

Up from the bitter cavern's sombre dyes,
where the first cellar-dark's dream-crawlers sit
and all the cruelty we would disguise
lay the foundation under mind's deep pit,

up ascend Morpheus, a death's head, all
that turn their moth-coat inside out and what
they show me is how soft it is to fall
into the ash-grey and resemble god.

The cabbage white from one of Vejle's meadows,
that soul of white whose mirror-wings display
a drawing of life's all-elusive shadows,

what is it doing in this gloomy air?
Is it the grief my life's passed on its way
that mountain scrub hides with a scent so rare?

IV

That mountain scrub hides with a scent so rare
that flowering's rooted in all that decays,
the shadowful, the tangled, matted hair,
a wild and reason-unfrequented maze,

the butterfly conceals by fluttering
that it's imprisoned in an insect's frame,
you'd think it was a flower that took to wing,
and not this whirring image-storm untamed,

as when a carpet, owlet moth or bombycid
that swirl the spectrum's cartoon figure by,
throw us a mystery that is to hide

that all our mental life can hope for through
and beyond all is grief's stark symmetry
as admiral and camberwell and blue.

V

As admiral and camberwell and blue
in colour's periodic system can
with just the smallest nectar droplet's hue
lift like a diadem the earth's whole span,

as those in colour's carefree tones of bright relief,
lavender, purple, lignite-black, when caught
precisely fix each hiding-place of grief,
although their life of joy is all too short,

they can imbibe with their probosces all
the world as picture fable and recall
the glide of a caress with their soft touch,

till every glint of love is used as such,
but glints of dread and beauty circling fly,
as peacock butterflies they flutter by.

VI

As peacock butterflies they flutter by,
I feel as if I walk in Paradise,
while all the garden sinks away and dies,
and words that could be spelt before like ice

dissolve into false eyelets seen in flight,
scarce copper, burgundy and Harlequin
whose conjured words of silicon-white nights
transform the light of day to moonlike sheen.

Here grow the bushes, gooseberry and sloe,
that make, whatever words you eat away,
life butterfly-light to recall and know.

Shall I perhaps pupate myself and drool
at all pied Harlequin can now display
and make believe the universe's fool.

VII

And make believe the universe's fool
himself to think that other worlds exist
where gods can rant and bark and call us all
a game of dice, a chance flick of the wrist,

then just remind me of a summer's day
in Skagen when the meadow blues all flew
when mating like small scraps of sky all day
with as its echo Jammerbugten's blue,

while we, who just lay lost there in the sand,
as numerous as only two can be,
had our two bodies' elements now mixed

with earth as that which is twixt sea and sky,
two people placing in each other's hands
a life that does not simply choose to die.

VIII

A life that does not simply choose to die?
What if we have to see in works of man,
in nature's last, self-centred leap on high,
ourselves in what is lost ere it began,

to see the tiniest scrap of love, or sign
of joy in a process that no aim can save,
as part of the great picture of mankind
as grass, although the grass is of the grave.

What good's the atlas silk moth to us, his
wing-span that unfolds the earth's great map,
he looks most like a web of memories

we kiss as we would icons of the dead
with taste of death's kiss which did them entrap.
Who is it that transforms this meeting stead?

IX

Who is it that transforms this meeting stead?
Is it my very brain, so pale and drawn,
that makes light's many colours glow and spread,
that differs from the butterfly I saw.

I saw Aurora's speck of paprika,
its pallid gleam of pepper-grey savanna,
and painted lady's flight from Africa
its trail to winter climes a streaming banner.

I saw a lunar thorn's clear-cut obverse,
its charcoal-edged small crescent moons each fixed
upon the wing-tip of the universe.

I saw not simply visions or a guise
such as a brain itself can think up, mixed
with hint of peace of mind and honeyed lies.

X

With hint of peace of mind and honeyed lies,
with emerald and jadestone's downy weave
larvae of purple emperors devise,
naked themselves, to look like poplar leaves.

I saw them eat their image till, distended,
they folded up into a chrysalis
that lastly hung as what it represented,
a leaf amongst such other leaves as this.

If by their imagery butterflies
have better chances to survive by theft,
why should I ever choose to be less wise

if for what's desolate it dulls the dread
to name the butterflies as souls now left
and summer visions of the vanished dead.

XI

And summer visions of the vanished dead,
the black-veined white that hovers in mid-flight,
a cloud of white with just a dash of red
flower-traces, interwoven by the light,

my grandma in the garden's thousandfold
armfuls of wallflowers, stocks and bridal veils
my father, who to me the first names told
of all that creeps and crawls before it ails,

walk with me into this enchanted vale,
where all that is is only on this side,
where the dead also hear the nightingale,

its songs all have a strangely mournful swinging
from lack of pain to pain and more beside,
my ear responds to this with its deaf ringing.

XII

My ear responds to this with its deaf ringing,
my eye too with its introspective look,
my heart is well aware I am not nothing,
but answers with that well-known snagging hook.

I see myself in orange moths and winter
moths one evening in November's brush,
they mirror the moon-rays' refracted splinters
and play at sunshine in the night's dark hush.

I see myself in their long pupal sleep,
from which they're ruthlessly released when dread
in mirrored halls of winter cold's most deep,

and what I see from gazing in this wise,
this stripped, lost mirror look, is not just death,
it is no less than death with its own eyes.

XIII

It is no less than death with its own eyes
would see itself in me, who am naive,
one native-born who has unyielding ties
to naked self-insight in what's called life.

I therefore like to play at wood white, bring
and fuse phenomena and words once lone,
play at light emerald so I can string
a myriad of life forms into one.

Then I can answer death as the latecomer:
I play at grayling, can I dare to hope
that I'm the image of eternal summer?

I hear quite well that you call me a nothing,
but it is me, in silver-washed royal robe,
looking at you from butterflies when winging.

XIV

Looking at you from butterflies when winging
is what some coating dust does whirling past,
as fine as nothing ever made for flinging,
an answer to the fronds of distant stars.

It's swirled aloft as light in summer's wind,
as ice and fire and mother-of-pearl host,
so all that is when nothing's left behind
remains itself and never will be lost.

As copper, emperor, amanda's blue
it makes earth's butterfly from rainbow hue
in earth's own visionary, dreamlike sphere,

a poem the small tortoiseshell can bear.
I see the dust ascend before my eyes,
skywards they swirl, the planet's butterflies.

XV

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in Brajchino valley's searing midday air,
up from the bitter cavern's sombre dyes
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As admiral and camberwell and blue,
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a life that does not simply choose to die.

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with hint of peace of mind and honeyed lies
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