

Material for Cascadia Poetry Festival Breakout -- In Process

Poems and Quotes honoring butterflies.

“The mind is a body, with shinbones and wrists
and roots, milkteeth and wings,
ankles and petals, fins,
feathers and dewclaws, leafstalks and lungs,
It is larva, pupa, imago, sea urchin,
tree. Ripening ideas drop from its limbs.”

-- Robert Bringhurst - from *Conversation with a Toad*



The Butterflies of Billy Meadows — Robert Michael Pyle

First, of course, the swallowtails catch the eye:
Papilio zelicaon, *rutulus*, *multicaudatus*,
and *Parnassius smintheus*, Apollo's alter ego.
Then the whites flit by: *Pieris occidentalis*
and *Pieris rapae*, cabbage butterflies even here.
Anthocharis sara with her orange-juice tips,
and the butterpats of sulphurs: *Colias interior*,
their bright pink edges, their lime-green eyes.

Of the blues, *Euphilotes* occupy the buckwheat
mounds, *Icaricia* the lupine, named for *Icarus*,
that wax-winged wannabe. *Plebejus saepiolus*,
greenish blue; *Plebejus lupini*, spangled blue.
And *Glaucopsyche* — that means blue soul! — *piasus*
and *lygdamus*, the arrowhead and silvery blues.
Pyrgus communis, skipping on checkered wings,
just looks blue. *Lycaena heteronea* shines bluer
than any blue, though it's really a copper — like
mariposa flashing purple in the sun, *nivalis* of the
lilac edge, or Edith's, named for her finder's lover.

I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am
a man.

~Chuang Tzu

Island Marble Butterfly

And the browns: *Cercyonis pegala* and *oetus* — O,
ye Wood Nymphs of Summer! Plus their fair sister,
Erebia epipsodea, flitting cinnamon and chocolate
through alpine hellebores by Billy Creek. *Boloria*
epithore, violet and rust, in bog with Ochre Ringlets.
Vanessa the Lady flies by, like a cinder on the wind;
Erynnis the witch, black as a burned-out coal. The
anglewing known here as Zephyr; the tortoiseshell
of fiery rims; and blue-flecked *Antiopa*, the Mourning
Cloak — all brilliant above, all hide behind dark rags.

Look, here come the checkerspots and crescents!
Phyciodes mylitta and *pulchella* “the beauty”;
Euphydryas “(lovely dryad)” *colon*, and *E. anicia*
veaziae, named for Portland dryad Agnes Veazie,
who caught Oregon silverspots in Ocean Park in '16.
Now, all these silverspots at their violets: *Speyeria*
hydaspe, *callippe*, *zerene*, *coronis*, *hesperis*, *leto*,
and *mormonia*: one pair of Mormon Fritillaries,
in copula, of course. Lastly, at Buckhorn Lookout,
Danaus plexippus — one lone Monarch, beating
its way back north, high above Imnaha.

In the Last Oak Meadows – Greg Darms

The *Large Marble* is extinct, unknown
why, probably fed on wild mustard.
Thirteen specimens are held
around the world: last taken, 1908.

The *Zerene Fritillary* ate violets
as a larva. It can't be found.
It's a name no one can trace.

Propertius Dusky Wings hides in ground debris
over winter. They're raked
and bagged, they're burned
with trash from urban forests.

Moss's Elfin lives with rocks.
The *Ringlet* prefers grass.
Where we see such empty space
we build.

The *Common Banded Skipper* – but try
to find one.

The last meadows are fenced.
The ministry would like to spray, and will.
and will we know
when iridescent wings,
quiet as the oaks,
are gone?

Look close by lupines –
Icaroides Blue is possible.
They say one lives
in a recent clearcut near Shawnigan.

Darms' information came mainly from "Butterflies of Garry Oak Meadows" by Crispin S. Guppy, Entomology Collection Manager Royal British Museum, in *Proceedings of the Garry Oak Meadow Colloquium, Victoria, B.B., 1993*.

Note from Greg: "Garry, or Oregon white, oak (*Quercus garryana*) has its northernmost range on southern Vancouver Island. When this poem was written in 1993, the Vancouver Island subspecies of the Large Marble (now called Island Marble) was considered extinct, and The British Columbia Ministry of Environment was preparing to spray the oak habitat with *Bacillus thuringensis* to eradicate a suspected appearance of gypsy moths. There was and is considerable concern that many other lepidopterans would also be adversely affected by the biocide. In 1998, the presumed extinct butterfly was rediscovered on San Juan Island, between Vancouver Island and the Washington mainland."

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
~Li Po

Halloween

let pass let pass
the butterfly

the dark spaces between
larkspur

in the city-twilight
the winking pumpkin

laughter, not a ghoul
or skeleton among them

tutus, and gypsies
in the child's eye languor

sweet, burned face
of imagination

clowns, and raggedy ann,
red-headed

sweet, burned hands
gathering bags of

smarties and gum
drops

violet, red, orange, green,
pink, brown, yellow and

chocolate surprise leopard
and wonderful sorrow.

- Robin Blaser

[dear dusty moth]

dear dusty moth
wearing miller's cloth,
Sophia Nichols' soft
voice calls wings
at dusk

across railroads
and sagebrush
to lull me to sleep,
'Come to these window corners,
come, rest on my boy's dreams

and flight,
come tonight'

- Robin Blaser

Poem in Two Voices: Struggling to Distinguish
Butterfly Species:
The Lupine Blue (*Icaricia lupini*) and the Acmon Blue (*Icaricia acmon*)

Dorsal iridescent hue of cyanic overlay?
A thicket of specifics,
Extension of dorsal forewing marginal line
often barely distinguishable,
towards base along veins -- absent, faint,
that we attempt to parse
or prominent? Caterpillars buckwheat
and interpret as each creature
or lupine feeders? Early generation or late?
goes on, not oblivious exactly
Lowland or high-ridge citizens?
but preoccupied with the avid,
melded, quick acts and judgments of survival.

- Bill Yake

Orion Magazine (June 2015)

A Discovery -- Vladimir Nabokov

I found it in a legendary land
all rocks and lavender and tufted grass,
where it was settled on some sodden sand
hard by the torrent of a mountain pass.

The features it combines mark it as new
to science: shape and shade -- the special tinge,
akin to moonlight, tempering its blue,
the dingy underside, the chequered fringe.

My needles have teased out its sculpted sex;
corroded tissues could no longer hide
that priceless mote now dimpling the convex
and limpid teardrop on a lighted slide.

Smoothly a screw is turned; out of the mist
two ambered hooks symmetrically slope,
or scales like battledores of amethyst

1942 (pub. in *The New Yorker*, 1943, as "On
Discovering a Butterfly")

cross the charmed circle of the microscope.

I found it and I named it, being versed
in taxonomic Latin; thus became
godfather to an insect and its first
describer -- and I want no other fame.

Wide open on its pin (though fast sleep),
and safe from creeping relatives and rust,
in the secluded stronghold where we keep
type specimens it will transcend its dust.

Dark pictures, thrones, the stones that pilgrims kiss,
poems that take a thousand years to die
but ape the immortality of this
red label on a little butterfly.

The caterpillar does all the work but the
butterfly gets all the publicity. ~**Attributed
to George Carlin**

The Cabbage White – Robert Graves

The butterfly, a cabbage-white,
(His honest idiocy of flight)
Will never now, it is too late,
Master the art of flying straight,
Yet has- who knows so well as I?-
A just sense of how not to fly:
He lurches here and here by guess
And God and hope and hopelessness.
Even the acrobatic swift
Has not his flying-crooked gift.

White Butterflies - Algernon Charles Swinburne

Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
Frail, pale wings for the wind to try,
Small white wings that we scarce can see,
Fly!
Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
Some fly soft as a long, low sigh;
All to the haven where each would be,
Fly!

from When the Music's Over -- Jim Morrison, The Doors

Before I sink into the big sleep
I want to hear, I want to hear
The scream of the butterfly.

...

We're gettin' tired of hangin' around
Waitin' around with our heads to the ground
I hear a very gentle sound
Very near, yet very far
Very soft yeah, very clear
Come today, come today.

What have they done to the earth?
What have they done to our fair sister?
Ravaged and plundered and ripped her and bit her
Stuck her with knives in the side of the dawn
And tied her with fences and dragged her down.

Butterfly associations in literature and mythology:

- Among the Zuni, the sacred clowns use butterflies as magic to lure folks into the dance. Especially *Lahacoma*, the brightest of all -- yellow with spots of red, white, and black. It makes the young girls follow the one who has it. It is as if they were crazy. Dancing.
- In the 1600s, in Ireland, killing a white butterfly was prohibited since it was believed to be the soul of a dead child [khandro].
- Many cultures relate butterflies to the human soul. In ancient Greek the word for butterfly is "psyche" which means "soul" and was also the name of Eros' human lover.
- Native South Americans also integrated various Lepidoptera into their mythologies. To the Goajiro of Columbia, if a particular large, white moth is found in a bedroom it must not be mistreated for it is the spirit of an ancestor come to visit. If the moth becomes troublesome, it can be removed only with the greatest care or the spirit may take vengeance. Among the Aymara of Bolivia, a certain rare nocturnal moth was thought to be an omen of death [Native-Cherry].

Possible Butterfly Poetry Prompts:

“My pleasures are the most intense known to man: writing and butterfly hunting.” Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*.

“...recall that these insects are two separate kinds of animals at different times of their lives. They begin active life as crawling, chewing, worm-like neuters, and finish as flying, sucking, highly sexual creatures.” -- *Butterflies of the Pacific Northwest*, Robert Michael Pyle & Caitlin C. LaBar

“...it is astounding how little the ordinary person notices butterflies.” Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*.

“...take notes: don't squander your original observations in the dimstore of your memory.” -- *Butterflies of the Pacific Northwest*, Robert Michael Pyle & Caitlin C. LaBar

“I know blind butterfly lovers who enjoy [butterflies'] smells, touch, and metamorphosis with windowbox rearing chambers.” -- *Butterflies of the Pacific Northwest*, Robert Michael Pyle & Caitlin C. LaBar.

To Bring

Participants should bring a notebook (Rite-in-the-Rain might be best given weather uncertainty), a pen/pencil, outdoor clothing, and sturdy shoes. Binoculars and a camera might also be helpful.

Relevant Field Books, other texts, sites

Washington Department of Fish & Game site for Island Marbles:

<https://www.fws.gov/wafwo/articles.cfm?id=149489714>

Butterflies of the Pacific Northwest, Robert Michael Pyle and Caitlin C. LaBar. 2018.

The butterflies of San Juan Island National Historic Park. A final report to San Juan Island National Historic Park. **Pyle, R.M.** 2004.

Pacific Northwest Insects, Merrill A. Peterson. 2018.

Macromoths of Northwest Forests and Woodlands, Jeffrey C. Miller and Paul C. Hammond. 2000.

Material assembled by Bill Yake