

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Early Studies

by Michael Todd Steffen

Graham moved his finger, pointing out the butterflies he'd captured in Gloucester, back East, in Massachusetts during the months in summer his family spent there.

The undersides of American Lady butterflies made for one animated topic of conversation between the two young friends. Mounted on one of Graham's bedroom walls, glassed-in wooden cases with light tan paper or dark blue velvet backgrounds displayed pinned specimens of butterflies, netted by Graham in the fields during the family's summer holidays.

The young lepidopterist spoke with authority. The white pin dots always give the Monarch away, he said, moving his finger over the glass case. He traced the dark hem of the orange pattern on the wings, veined like stained glass. Otherwise, he observed, they're commonly confused with Viceroy's—shifting his finger—with the flatter forewings, here. American Ladies—Graham slid his index again—this is a dorsal view. You see? The tips are shiny watery brown. You see the tiny violet dots? He moved his finger one specimen over. Here's the underside. See? The cobweb pattern? These are eyelets. They mimic the eyes of a larger animal to scare off a spider or small bird.

Graham set his jaw and smalled his eyes:
*I have my war face for that bully Daimon at school
when he comes at me in the cafeteria.
He thinks he's so tough. He disintegrates.*

The Wares were Boston clergy. Graham's mother's
grandfather had been a Methodist saddleback preacher
in vast Ontario before moving to Nebraska.
Graham related stories of his family
tree that widened Morgan's eyes. Really?
No kiddin'? One of the Ware ancestors
way back when in England had preached a sermon
to King Henry VIII against his marriage to
Anne Boleyn. Another of his forebears
had presided at the witch trials in Salem.

Recounted in passing, these stuck in Morgan's mind
and increased his admiration for Graham Ware.
Morgan took the stories to the Taggart home
in Minden, entertaining the supper table
with one about the Gloucester fishermen
among the early settlers; how a preacher
admonished them, saying they'd come to the New World
to save their souls, and one of the fishermen
gave an Amen, adding—And to ketch fish!