

## **A poem on the evolutionary pressures of Lepidoptera**

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### Transcend

Ancient flesh under the pressure  
Of one claw under another  
For all their crawling jaws  
Can't eat hunger  
So one by one  
They ate themselves  
The parts they no longer need  
Squeezed abundance  
Through the eye of the needle  
Beneath their skins  
Sewn bone into wings  
And rode the glittering skeletons  
To feast on what mandibles can't  
To steal nectar of heavens  
Flying in the face of faceless gods  
Above the writhing masses  
They transcend  
And before they near their end  
They join again in ancestral rite  
And regurgitate what they ate  
Pearls with the wisdom of their life  
Full of new hungry flesh

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Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated by insects, and wanted to become an entomologist. However, my career led along a different path, into becoming a high school English teacher, but the interest has never left me.

This poem is an expression of appreciation for the wonder of metamorphosis, and the evolutionary pressures that could cause such drastic change in lifestyle of organisms, particularly within the order Lepidoptera. I also intend it to show my appreciation for all entomologists and the other authors of articles within journals such as this, and the work which goes into uncovering the mysteries and specifics of these incredible organisms we share our world with. I hope to honour those who devote their time, their careers, and their lives to studying the intricacies of insects, and to give emphasis to the importance of this work in helping us understand the complexity of the ecosystems we live among.

This work was born out of a mixture of my childlike wonder at the apparent miracle of the chrysalis, alongside a deep interest in evolutionary processes. The poem focuses on the idea of intraspecific competition as a possible pressure for Lepidopteran ancestors to adopt metamorphosis as a living strategy. It imagines a hypothetical turning point where the niche of leaf-eating becomes entirely saturated, so that there is a need to find and reach an alternative food source. These ancestors are imagined as having a mode of life closer to that of caterpillars, and then finding the available niche of nectarivory. This is mainly just speculation, grounded by a reasonable understanding of evolution by natural selection. It instead could be that Lepidopteran ancestors initially had a lifestyle that was more akin to the modern adult stage, with a very brief larval phase that became drawn out, capitalising on foliage as a source of energy to fuel more extensive change in the adult form. It could also be that other pressures and mechanisms resulted in the incredible butterflies and moths we find in our gardens (and sometimes, our homes). I fully acknowledge, especially since this field is not my expertise, that this creative work might not adhere to the facts well.

Regardless of the truth of the matter, we are surrounded by wonderful insects with incredible adaptations to survive. My true purpose of publishing this poem here is to share the wonder of insects that transcends disciplines, and inspires creativity and fascination in us all.