

ALLISON FUNK
Metamorphoses

—*Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717)*

One

Not from dew. Not from cheese or wool.
Not from rain. Hair or horse dung.

Not from cabbage. Cobwebs. Sweet basil.
Vapor. Oxen or mules.

Not spontaneous generation.
But metamorphosis? In insects?

Nature's lowliest. Unseemly.
Even unholy. Not unlike Satan

Twisting into a woman,
Witches multiplying like maggots.

Two

With a mortar and pestle
She ground, she mixed pigments.

*Not from dew. Not from cheese or wool.
Not from rain. Hair or horse dung.*

Green from the buckhorn's sap,
Gold scraped from mouths of volcanoes.

*Not from cabbage. Cobwebs. Sweet basil.
Vapor. Oxen or mules.*

On lilies and hyacinth
She'd find larvae to raise.

*Not spontaneous generation.
But metamorphosis? In insects?*

Some with blue arrows down their backs,
Others dusted yellow and snow.

*Nature's lowliest. Unseemly.
Even unholy. Not unlike Satan.*

What's more amazing
Than a pupa swaddled like a child?

*Twisting into a woman,
Witches multiplying like maggots.*

Three

Female painters?
Guilds bolted Germany's doors.

*With a mortar and pestle
She ground, she mixed pigments.*

She studied the pupa that frees
Itself from its case.

*Green from the buckhorn's sap,
Gold scraped from mouths of volcanoes.*

Were the household chores never finished,
The spinning of wool into yarn?

*On lilies and hyacinth
She'd find larvae to raise.*

Along muddy banks, alone in her garden,
She followed the insects' fruity scent,

*Some with blue arrows down their backs,
Others dusted yellow and snow.*

With the care she'd take with her daughters,
She tended each chrysalis.

*What's more amazing
Than a pupa swaddled like a child?*

Four

The larva, a spirit; the pupa,
A girl; imago, full grown and ready to fly.

*Female painters?
Guilds bolted Germany's doors.*

Reliquaries—the *Wunderkammern*
Housing insects fuzzed with dust.

*She studied the pupa that frees
Itself from its case.*

She fed them sugared water, the newborn
Garden Tiger, Hawk Moth, and Emperor.

*Were the household chores never finished,
The spinning of wool into yarn?*

With brushes tipped with marten or sable
She recorded molt after molt.

*Along muddy banks, alone in her garden,
She followed the insects' fruity scent*

Beyond the camphor of wonder rooms
And their musty habitats.

*With the care she'd take with her daughters,
She tended each chrysalis.*

Five

What if she found species
No European had seen?

*The larva, a spirit; the pupa,
A girl; imago, full grown and ready to fly.*

Not divided in boxes, moths from cocoons.
The White Witch drying its wings.

*Reliquaries—the Wunderkammern
Housing insects fuzzed with dust.*

From which plants did they lift,
Which return to, to feed?

*She fed them sugared water, the newborn
Garden Tiger, Hawk Moth, and Emperor*

She engraved in *The Caterpillar's*
Wondrous Metamorphosis.

*With brushes tipped with marten or sable
She recorded molt after molt.*

Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Amsterdam.
In the New World, what might she become

*Beyond the camphor of wonder rooms
And their musty habitats?*

Six

Far from what she'd known.
Surinam. Unmapped. Interior.

*What if she found species
No European had seen?*

Caterpillars turning crimson
And cream in the guava's leaves.

*Not divided in boxes, moths from cocoons.
The White Witch drying its wings*

Glimpsed through a blur
Of heat or rain.

*From which plants did they lift,
Which return to, to feed?*

A tarantula. Leaf-cutter ants.
Larvae with venomous spines

*She engraved in The Metamorphosis
Of the Insects of Surinam.*

Uncased, wings stretched
Wide as a woman's hand.

*Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Amsterdam.
In the New World, what might she become?*

Seven

Spider-like: the strangler vines,
Webbed trees, the tail ends of monkeys

*Far from what she'd known.
Surinam. Unmapped. Interior.*

Species teeming
From canopy to floor,

*Caterpillars turning crimson
And cream in the guava's leaves.*

Is it fever?
Between leaves, a flash of azure

*Glimpsed through a blur
Of heat or rain.*

Glints of carmine, indigo,
Ochre, and ultramarine.

*A tarantula. Leaf-cutter ants.
Larvae with venomous spines,*

A Blue Morpho,
Sphinx moth, Ghost

*Uncased. Wings stretched
Wide as a woman's hand.*

Eight

*Spider-like: the strangler vines,
Webbed trees, the tail ends of monkeys,*

*Species teeming
From canopy to floor.*

*Is it fever?
Between leaves, a flash of azure,*

*Glints of carmine, indigo,
Ochre, and ultramarine:*

*Her Blue Morpho,
Sphinx moth. Ghost.*