

One night a moth flew into the candle, was
caught, burnt dry, and held. I must have been
staring at the candle, or maybe I looked up when
Line a shadow crossed my page; at any rate, I saw it
(5) all. A golden female moth, a biggish one with a
two-inch wingspan, flapped into the fire,
dropped her abdomen into the wet wax, stuck,
flamed, frazzled and fried in a second. Her mov-
ing wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the
(10) circle of light in the clearing and creating out of
the darkness the sudden blue sleeves of my
sweater, the green leaves of jewelweed by my
side, the ragged red trunk of a pine. At once the
light contracted again and the moth's wings van-
(15) ished in a fine, foul smoke. At the same time her
six legs clawed, curled, blackened, and ceased,
disappearing utterly. And her head jerked in
spasms, making a spattering noise; her antennae
crisped and burned away and her heaving mouth
(20) parts crackled like pistol fire. When it was all
over, her head was, so far as I could determine,
gone, gone the long way of her wings and legs.
Had she been new, or old? Had she mated and
laid her eggs, had she done her work? All that
(25) was left was the glowing horn shell of her abdo-
men and thorax—a fraying, partially collapsed
gold tube jammed upright in the candle's round
pool.

And then this moth-essence, this spectacular
(30) skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burn-
ing. The wax rose in the moth's body from her
soaking abdomen to her thorax to the jagged
hole where her head should be, and widened
into flame, a saffron-yellow flame that robed her
(35) to the ground like any immolating monk. That
candle had two wicks, two flames of identical
height, side by side. The moth's head was fire.
She burned for two hours, until I blew her out.
She burned for two hours without changing,
(40) without bending or leaning—only
glowing within, like a building fire glimpsed through sil-
houetted walls, like a hollow saint, like a flame-
faced virgin gone to God, while I read by her
light, kindled, while Rimbaud in Paris burnt out
(45) his brains in a thousand poems, while night
pooled wetly at my feet.