

The moth collector

'One could not help watching him'

Virginia Woolf

The moth collector spends his Friday nights
identifying moths. It frustrates him when Virginia

Woolf doesn't name the moth. Only several
species are attracted to the light. It isn't moths

themselves that eat our rugs and woollens
but the hatched larvae laid by certain kinds

of moths. Some of them are Angle Shade,
Cinnabar, Scalloped Oak, and need to be dissected

to be named. In the moth collector's
world at night he doesn't change into a moth.

The moth collector in his shed, a single lamp
burning, categorizes moths by the aid

of factual books. He subtracts moth from moth
until he has removed the bead of life,

he pins their wings, lays them out, nothing left
beneath, behind or within to learn about

the moth. The moth collector goes to sleep.
And while the moth collector sleeps, he breathes

into the room an eclipse of Hoary Bells
and Chimney Sweepers, Poplar, Lime and Privet

Hawks. Though only in his dreams does
the moth collector witness how the unnamed circle

a dangling moon.

first published in *The North*