

## Mosquitoes

A slight pressure on the thorax kills it.  
Hold it by a wing and remove the legs one by one.  
To empty the insides when they are swollen with blood,  
Pierce the cloaca with a very sharp needle  
And extract the guts gently backwards through the anus  
Leaving the insect's oesophagus till last.

My uncle George dissected mosquitoes.  
I imagine the precise but essential cruelty  
Of this white-coated Achilles mutilating his Hector:  
A way of expurgating fear and expunging the horror,  
Of taking control of this nimble harpie  
That feasts on blood and transmits slow decay.

Anopheles. The name means, simply, useless.  
What savage god creates such pestilent squadrons?  
George fought this deity with observation and logic:  
The bad air of mythology became  
The sporozoites and the oocysts  
Revealed beneath the entomologist's lens.

An old photograph shows my uncle George  
Raising his head from a world measured in microns  
Wondering where to begin in a landscape  
Of corruption, foul water, famine, ignorance,  
Where armies of anopheles transfer the plasmodium  
Through each arrow-like proboscis, gland and duct.

For my uncle George, men had collided with nature  
Like maimed victims of some hidden apocalypse.  
Such catastrophes are approached in small steps:  
The inert, disembowelled corpse in saline,  
The capture of the virus beneath the slide,  
The post-mortem that helps to apportion blame.

I imagine his eye returning to the lens,  
Dissected bodies recorded as statistics,  
The months of close study, the final publication -  
The effectiveness as a vector of anopheles gambiae -  
And the misery avoided, the lives saved  
By this pensive inquisitor in a sepia image.

That was then, and George is long since dead.  
But now the anopheles, recalling its murdered ancestors,  
Knows revenge is best served cold and in small steps.  
Legions of insects slowly gather, drip-feeding sickness,  
Suckling on neglect and killing by degrees.  
And the saviour in the white coat cannot help us.

Start small, George would say. Clean water. Sanitation.  
Infrastructure. A fair price for goods produced.  
Look into the microscope and see your enemy defeated.  
We've got all the weapons but we need a fair fight.  
As with malaria, so with all. With a slight pressure,  
Each problem can be dissected and a cure extracted.