

October Asylum

They are hatched on the underside
of milkweed, absorbing the bitter chemicals
to fend off birds, birds who fly
along the coast or the Rockies, same flyway taken every
year,
worn out sky.

Or the Pacific gray whale,
forty-five feet long, forty-five tons lugged from the Bering
Sea
to Baja California, to breed in lagoons
off the Sea of Cortez. When you get there turn around
and come back again.

But the traditional Monarch
has six weeks to live, and dies during migration, never
dipping
into the same sky twice. Why here? How do they know
to cluster the coastal cypress and claim sanctuary?
The caterpillar leaves the milkweed
for a bare branch, where it attaches by spinning a silk
button,
to hang itself upside down.

-Zachary Asher