

The Long Man

I think of black cattle cropping the chalk pasture
as I walk up the track to the National Trust gate
on Cley Hill. How do orchids survive the rip
of hungry lips and heavy cut of hooves?

I wonder idly when the flint tracks were strewn,
where the stone-age tools lie hidden,
remember the hedges in autumn are rich
with the weight of blackberries and wild apples.

The pasture, too short this dry year,
Is humped with thyme-capped anthills
colonised by companies of burnet moths.
The orchids, arid candles, wait for rain.

On the downslope from the dome of the hill
I follow the berms along the contour, then sit
to watch the shadows dive into the valley,
breaking the sweep of the crops laid out below.

I stand to add my silhouette, a long lean man,
plunging headlong to the base, giant brother
of the Giacometti manikin I found engraved
on the ancient rock of the hill fort.

This is renewal, not walking away; I photograph
each moment with my mind, camera untouched.
Reconnected by the wind, the butterflies, the flowers,
I walk back towards life again, reconciled.