

The Ants at War

by [Michael Odom](#) (January 2019)



Ants, Mircea Constantinescu

The Colony Crosses a Stream

Ants build bridges from bodies; bolts of rigor

Mortis and half-drowning ant clasps.

Like philosophies. Live souls walk on corpses

Over never-ending crisis,

Paving impermanence with a host of either/ors,

If/thens, ands, and first premises.

Rigid tenets. Antennae. Ants lose their grips,

Break or drop from even ant dreams.

Which of the ants...? How could ants know which is

The shore worth death, worth bridging seems

For need of is?

The Ants at War

I

Ninety

Degrees to clouds,

Girded to sky and earth,

A human mound. Scaling the side:

One ant.

II

Circles

Reel in the wind,

Spindling, spindling

Air, like fear, like panicked blind canes:

Ant eyes.

III

Bach suite.

A din of points

Of harpsichord tapping

In the mite's ear. The ants at war,

Silent.

IV

For you,

Larvae in tombs,

We have lived out ant lives,

Lived out life on the floor in dirt,

Eking.

V

Running,

Like men through tires,

The ants work through the weave—

Broad red, broad white, vast blue—or stand

On stars.

VI

One. One

Spun antenna

Tires in time and stops

Still and blind in shadow and space.

Ant. Earth.

VII

Listening

Ant. The closed ranks

And larvae underneath

Have never known this chemical.

Silence.

VIII

Soldier

With no army.

Worker with no work.

Carpenter, no queen. Forager,

One ant.

IX

Trit trits—

Harpsichord runs

To beetles, timpani

To mites, stampeding ballet troupes,

Ant trails.

X

Wear ash.

Bite skin that's bone.

Drag sinew from your teeth.

Heads walk nude on sticks in a row.

No grief.

XI

One ant,

Mad with feelers,

Stands in the canopy

Of blades and flowers, alert,

And stopped.

XII

One ant

From the tunnels,

From the body traffic

Of queen and ground, in the cyclone

Feels sky.

XIII

The flood
Comes down the hole.
And the goddess of bugs
Floats with her faithful foragers.
What's hell?

XIV

The roads
Arc like gentle
Horizons, grades are hills,
Mountains are plains, drips of sweat, ponds.
Ants cross.

Michael Odom is an American poet and translator, the author of a collection of ekphrastic cinquains for children entitled

Ick! Fran's Tick!, a book of translation from Catalan, *Count Arnau & Other Poems of Joan Maragall*, and his own collection of poems playing on the rhythms & themes of Catullus, Selene.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)

[Back to Home Page](#)