

From *Myrmecology*

When you have seen one ant, one bird, on tree, you have not seen them all. -E.O. Wilson

Army Ants

Deep in the bivouac the minims moved the brood. They
tried to hold us, we wingless virgin drones.

But from the formicarium we went in the night,
abandoned that humdrum maze with our cunning.

Over the glass gap, we linked a living bridge –
the transient womb a body of bodies.

One by one we weave together easy as twine
and escape within our ever-respiring nest.

Morphology Epigrams

integument

our rigid skin, our waterproofing, our form.
we breathe and we excrete through the same pores.

alitrunk

couples three pairs of jointed legs.
if of a male or young queen,
also bears two pairs of wings.

petiole

for bending –
the inky hourglass
at its most narrow.

gaster

its rings protract like nesting dolls.
where we stow the cuspidate weapon of our battles.

midgut

exactly what it sounds like.

crop

for storage of precious liquid food;
sometimes, we share it.

blood

a serous, colorless juice,
moved through a tube-like heart.

antennae

like a tall arm bent at the elbow;
with them, scent is found feebly,
feelingly.

eyes

a mosaic of tiny light-boxes
ordered like radii, as a machine.

mandibles

deliver, dig, defend –
our jaw-like hands.

tongue

yes,
we have one.

Honey-pot Ants

From the ceilings of our tiny tunneled chambers, we hang.
Workers bring their parcels – drops of toothsome honeydew
fallen from foreign floral nectaries. Relentlessly, they feed
us until our bellies swell into strange spherical silos and we
cannot be moved. When the rains did not come, we saved
them with our stomach-crops, disgorged the hallowed
nectar from our abdomens – we precious repletes. And after
they guzzled us dry, they devoured our brittle bodies, our
sweet corpulence – we mealy martyrs of this lean season.

Siafu Ants

A cascade of black sand, we fall to the fields.

Snatch pests from mowburnt leaves,

pluck lice from cassava's leafy hair.

In a single swoop we cover the crops

and by morning they are empty and clean.

Our dark wave washes away over the plains.

Villagers utter their respectful farewell.

Alimentary Epigrams

ants in a log

foraged from dead stumps,
our fetid corpses
found by sieving grizzly
bear scats.

ants in a web

alas, she had more legs.

ants in a box

hand-caught and hand-dipped.
placed in a tiny paper-lined compartment
beside the chocolate-covered grasshoppers.

ants in a jar

like peanuts, roast single layer of ants
on flat pan or cookie sheet
in preheated oven (350° F) for 15-20 minutes,
stirring occasionally. salt to taste.

ants on a log

on celery with peanut butter,
in your Speed Racer lunchbox
by the note from your mother.

Jack-Jumper Ants

Marooned by desert winds, she shrank
below my rock – cuddled her slender body
to its crevices. From a distant mound of fire-
ground gravel I pounced, pierced her banded thorax
and met her tremor with my venom. Her legs curled
and she spread her papery wings. I summoned
my scavenging sisters with a sweet, funereal song.