AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Simon Gabriel Bravo for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing presented on April 19, 2010.

Title: Renovations or “Miracles”

Abstract approved:

__________________________________________
Karen Holmberg

Renovations or “Miracles” is a collection of poetry that exposes the miraculous within the mundane by bearing witness to where we come from and where we are going.

Ranging in style from the lyric to the narrative, the personal to the political, these poems explore the relationship between individual and collective, often by employing fractal imagery. The sense of time is vast in this collection and while themes such as war, suffering, oppression, service and love are prominent, the poems in Renovations or “Miracles” exalt the transformative nature of renovation—the making of something new and beautiful out of disparate and discarded parts.
Renovations or “Miracles”

by

Simon Gabriel Bravo

A THESIS

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APPROVED:

________________________
Major Professor, representing Creative Writing

________________________
Chair of the Department of English

________________________
Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

________________________
Simon Gabriel Bravo, Author
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Special thanks to Dr. H., *the best they is. The best they is.* To David K. for lighting the fire.

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Renovations or “Miracles”
Breadline

Her candy-cane shirt
shines beneath her gold
hijab. Eight and meek,

she queues-up boldly
in the dusty six a.m. street
as the sun peeks over

concrete tenement tops.
In Cairo today,
the eight-cent bread

is too lavish, so penny
loaves, in short supply,
warrant her wait

and jostle. She wants
to play with her sister.
The clerk looks at her

petite hand holding dull
coins. There are no
words. Rotting flour

seasoned with rat waste
makes rationed bread
taste ashy: to her,

he and his are thieves.
Walking home, she hugs
the flat loaves tight against

her chest. She knows how
the soft must be patient,
while the hard just take.
Spelunking at Nutty Putty Cave

Through an asymmetric hole at Rassle Knole
in the desert hills east of the Cedar Valley
we rappelled into the belly of the earth; only 12, my
palms burned as we lowered ourselves on ropes
below the touch of the sun. At the top of the big
slide, we dropped our butts to the damp
chert slope, and crab-scooted, with all five
points of contact, down the moderate
pitch. At the bottom of the slide I worked some
of the filmy mud between thumb and index,
surprised with its stretchiness. I put my finger to my tongue
and like licking a battery the taste was acrid
and ancient. More than a hundred feet under-
ground we sorted the small from the big and I took
my own tempo as the party moved among the rooms.
Determined to squeeze my eighty-five pound
body through to the end of the cave, I slithered
hands first, Olympic diver style, primal
as the earthworm, swimming and
scooting through the canal, inch
by inch. The cold, damp rock
shocked me through the bare
strip of my belly as I squirmed my way
alone down the unknown passage; I could feel
my breath shallowing in the stale chamber.
Chasing the end of my flashlight at a crawl,
I stopped dead. Pinned; not because I was scared,
but because I had slithered up to three tiny
gypsum flowers bursting from the ceiling
above my eyes. Each one, thimble sized,
the white crystalline tentacles gleaming back
my lamp-light, older than anyone’s dreams:
each bloom reenacting the big bang with absolute
fidelity. Their peace and their pace marked me.
Terrified of disturbing these blossoms, warm
to the touch, I had found my point of return.
I scuttled back the hundred yards, pinching
my soft-flesh through the tunnel’s entrance, where
the others waited. I said to them nothing

(No stanza break)
about the gypsum. Ascending the hidden hydrothermal chambers was easier than going down. Nearing that mystic blowhole, I was dazzled by the lone shaft of summer light and I blinked wildly ready to see the hot-blue sky glowing like a Rorschach blot at the surface of the world. I hoped to keep all these things. Nearing the top, still in the impenetrable darkness, fresh air entering the cave smacked my tongue and gut.
A Downtown Passing

I woke to a tremendous itch that stretched across my skin’s frame and out into the city. Townies idling about the riverfront fountain danced wildly beneath the waters, wishing relief. I heard it in the muffled rumbling of thousands of furious bees hauled in by undetectable nets, but neither the banks nor businesses, not the courthouse or the greyhound will confess as the cause. Whistling they carry on, planting foundation and frame, filling the skyline gaps. Full-tilt and with firm hands they carry on impressing hard corners and block edifices into the world.

And yet, in the park today sun shines brilliantly on an oak tree. Moss drapes the April branches; on the air, I taste hints of change.
Shovel-Ready

My whole neighborhood is too on edge to sleep. The city sent giants—machines with arms big as trees—to pluck up our jungle-gym, as if it were sticks and wheels in a tinker-toy set. We watch from the hill across the street as they haul out our merry-go-round, drop it in a pen and shuttle it away. Caution tape stretches corner to corner to corner along the park.

The thunderclap stifles the cries of a small girl, her plump white face streaked with soil. She wants to know how she will touch the sky without a swing set. Nobody pays attention to her bawling. All wound up, my neighbor whispers, "They have a million dollars." I scratch my head and keep my mouth shut as they shovel out all the old, dirty dirt through the night, and through the day.

These giants keep tunneling deeper on the pretense of pouring a solid foundation for promised tennis courts, designed to subvert the elements through its subterranean nature. My whole neighborhood can’t stop watching, rackets in hand, already envisioning their underground matches. Still the arms keep digging and digging, the giants fume at the ears and nobody but the girl asks where they’re taking our dirt.
Penny from the Sidewalk Crack

Penny from the sidewalk crack
I make you king of my pocket.
I tuck you in, head and tail, from the world.
Copper-plated 82, your shine still bold—
If I could trace your past intact,
I’d find a mirror for my life in it.
Like everyone else, I am cutting back

Even this I have made with recycled materials. The image is a crumpled pop can, melted down and reformed. These lines have been mined like precious metals from electronics before incineration, the rhythm taken on the waxy film common to paper made from paper; and like plastics changing families this metaphor has lost most of its integrity.

Words long outside their proper places rise like phoenixes from the ash of other words. Change always seems to walk into every party turning out his pockets and turning in his keys but wearing the same grand hat. So I’ve got my sleeves rolled back and I am all geared up to rein in old excesses.
Bailout

Eleven zeros are as light as hula-hoops
to men in such fine leather shoes.

Turning air into paper is just good
misdirection—a first-class sleight of hand.

Those traders nosh on our fathers’
backs and the eggs of our mothers,

and if the Wall must first fall, they will try
to hold us back from clearing up the debris.

Oz denied he was the spectacle’s source, even
after Toto pulled back his crushed velvet curtain.

The juggler, so natural, with his balls
in the air knows one slip can bring them all
down. Regardless of will, who can steer
a ship with a busted rudder?
I was first on the scene. Saw her falling out of the sky, dropping straight for the rows of Jim’s freshly-turned field.

It looked like the French front lines during the War when I’d been one of hundreds driving ambulances. The fall soil was soft and it slowed the Avian’s wheels till they sank and the plane nosed over, its propeller shattering like shrapnel as it ricocheted off the muddy earth. Amelia’d already climbed from the cockpit and was pacing in circles by the time I got to her. The thump must’ve been god-awful because she demanded three times to know where she was. I told her, Tintic. Eureka. Utah.

She nodded her head, her lips like plums from the altitude. We drank black coffee in the kitchen waiting for Hal to bring his truck down from the copper mine to tow the plane to the rail yard. For three days before she rolled on to Salt Lake City, she rested with Hal and me at our homestead. With only crude maps, she was working her way north from Las Vegas using the railroad tracks when her carburetor started coughing, she thought it was bad. When it began choking, she knew she had to bring it down quick. She asked me what I knew about carburetors. And she asked me when I was most afraid, scratching at her short hair and smiling. I most know fear, I said, when I see the emerald eyes of a mountain lion mother through the hairs of my rifle, my finger squeezing gently on the trigger. She told me,

this town has charm. I wanted to ask her about crashing, what it had felt like to fall from the azure sky to the hard land.
Instead, I asked her what it felt like to fly. She told me that the Avian was so little, it became an extension of her body. She moved, the plane responded. The wind shifted, she felt it.
A Case of Jamais-vu

I’m a foreigner choking on a pineapple Life Saver in the front room of my childhood home.

The snow on the t.v. drowns my muffled wheezing and slump onto the dirt-colored carpet. I am

forgetting where I am. My mother is washing dishes in the kitchen. Hanging in the corner,

a three-foot-tall tree-knot wall clock ticks with the intensity of stones sinking into a void.

I can never retrieve those stones that fall in the well. The glosswhite fireplace surges up to heaven, the way

Brueghel painted the Tower of Babel as the candy turns like a stubborn, sideways penny clogging up a roll.

And though I cannot speak or breathe and do not know where I am, I want to scream out, I need hot cocoa for my throat.
Mission, Accomplished

When Bush touched down giddy as a monkey onto the deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln that spring in the Persian Gulf,

the sound awoke the *Mother of Exiles, Liberty Enlightening the World*, and she climbed down from her pedestal. With sensitivity and dedication of purpose,

she selected heavy stones from the shore then swallowed them. She had seen enough. Determined as a wolf, she passed into the mouth of the Hudson.

Though he hadn't held the controls coming in, he felt like his father. A real pilot. Assured. Accomplished. Smiling in his flight suit.

And he considered it a good time.
Old World

There is a crescendo happening in Belfast. Children holding umbrellas play in fountains amid a light drizzle. Trains in the distance rumble

my cup of coffee and I am jealous of the grooved, old things here in my world of unwed mothers and sniffing unemployed. Even in July, our homes

are cold, our thinking shallow. I want to climb well-worn steps to reach my bed at night. Our sense of history enters into us through our feet meeting the ground—secretly. This afternoon I too much miss the blue sky through my window, blocked by solar panels and concrete sound walls,

a synthetic sanity, a misguided commitment to the New Mexico Space Port, and a fierce desire to devour. Blossoming in Washington are Japanese cherry trees

I have never seen. And today, the BBC talks about revolution in Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe. All conflicts surface and sink like potatoes simmering in stew.

I’m jealous of the grooved, old axioms. Words travel to our eyes even faster says my Chinese neighbor. He is committed to eliminating extreme poverty in at least one neighborhood of the world. He knocks on every door of our building to read to children from *Paris Peasant*. “This is the month of Venus. This is the loveliest month of all.” Walking into a narrow alley tucked behind my apartment I glimpse Europe in hints and I am so undeniably envious of its grooved, old things—

marble statues, resilient, organized, striking souls, and the churches with their stone floors scarred by bayonets.
ii.
Theo: a shoe shiner from Lubbock

Sweat builds at his temple. He seems pleased to kneel for me who mean little compared to the heat of his toil, though his face scrunches up like a pug’s. Bound to the shine from cloth diapers and spirit, he scorns the coarse shortcut of the brush. His fingers stained by years working with the bootblack in the business of renewal. Still, a full bull polish is just five bucks. From below me, he jokes that he can see the weight on my sole. I start to ask, How, but he stops me with his smile and says: The secret to shining shoes is not telling anyone how you do it.
Service

At the Sizzler a mother waits
for her eldest son with
one hand raised to brace
a tray of waters, while
the other reaches for her
pocket of crisp white straws.

For her oldest daughter she
builds the wad in her apron.
Her little girl sniffs the lunch
money each day on her way
to the bus stop: it is moist and smells
like steak, shrimp, and licked stamps.

She waits for their brother,
her son who battles her fiercely—
the way that he loves her. An old
man tips her with free passes
to the drive-in theatre. She sees
how he leans harder on his cane
each day. For their younger sister
whose afternoon cries disturb the elderly
neighbors, this mother waits
and dizzies herself blowing-up long balloons
and carefully twisting out colorful
animals, hats, and swords.

She waits for their brother, her
youngest still in diapers and fussy
to nurse, delayed by this late lunch rush.
Under her breath she blesses the couple
who grumbled over the color of their T-bones and left her only a stick of gum.

And for their father, her husband,
who is her partner and shares
her burden, she waits, bearing lashes
of a sharp-tongued manager

(No stanza break)
with as much resoluteness as
the forest withstands a clear-cutting

in the fullness of time. She waits
full-time and has six at home,
more on the way, waiting
for her to cook them dinner
and wash their towels and
shop their groceries and write

them checks and sign their
permission slips and give them
rides and know their friends’
names and birthdays and check
their homework and dress their
wounds and show them God.

This mother at Sizzler so like
my mother, in divine service.
Letters from and to Bagram Air Field:

Mother, it isn’t easy greasing
the wheels of the war machine.

When I asked if God still came
down to walk the earth, you said, child
the sky without birds is useless.

And when I asked why the body
has to pass while the soul is let
to live, you said, labor without

the birth, hollow; and so it is
the same with me—these hands, empty
without my tools. Tell me, how is

it sin to turn a wrench on
overworked machines? The
Falcon Fighter is the backbone

warbird of ours and our allies
and the buzz and hum of its jets
rattles not just still windows,

but it stirs and thrills this blood,
and my blood is your blood, mother.
What pulls at you to write me,

“What you sow Jesus our Christ
sees, and son, it is murder.”
I am just a grease elbow, standard

rank and order, only a tooth
on the key to our safe, mother.
You can sleep easy by turning

your thoughts from me—I’m not looking
for praise or thanks, but know that I
have little use for your hard words.

(Stanza break)
Would you want me to shoulder a cross lighter than the one given me? I do not fire my gun. And I
do not load the bombs. While I am not the one who scoops up brains, or guts, or bones, I don’t pretend

no soldier does this work. If my work is messy, mother, my heart is clean.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Son, the hardest thing is sleeping without rest.

Wars are most cruel to those who watch.

I toss my joy to lions, hungry

for the living, I do not blame

the Bedouins, but those in suits

and ties. My boy, why do you help

bring death before he’s called? The Lord

he sees your work and feels betrayed.

Did you not hear, a school was bombed

just yesterday? Come home my son

(Stanza break)
and together
with the Virgin

your sins we'll pray
away. Do not

mistake the devil’s
keen trickery

for your true cross.
My son, I love

only the good
that you insist

upon hiding.
Come home, my boy,

then I'll be safe.
Dinosaurs in the Desert

Lisa works in HR at the zoo in Washington D.C. We were in Las Vegas when she said to us, “the people I meet often behave like captive beasts. Especially the birds,” she sang. “Believe me,”

she pressed, “I have taken enough walks on my lunch breaks to make this connection.”

My cousin was marrying a lawyer, but not for a day, so we all had drinks—seventeen tequilas each round. As Lisa licked the salt from the flat of her thumb she repeated, “Especially the birds.” All of us were fairly well in the tank by then and though

I did not disagree with her, I flung back, “In the desert, they recently uncovered dinosaur fossils clearly revealing brilliant plumage, linking seed to stock their relation to modern birds. What fossil feathers link people and pelicans?” Her eyes flashed under the lights of Freemont Street. We both knew that people flock to Vegas hoping loose machines or strangers will soften life’s flight. “For one,” she grinned and said, “You can tell so much about their habits by the shape of their beaks.” We laughed

and ordered one last round. Lifting our glasses, we tilted our heads back and let the tequila slide down our gullets past the heart and into the pit of the belly.
We pop the hood and tuck our shit
in with the air-filter, pinching out
just enough to skin up along the way.
The sun is dropping in the southwest sky
as we look east, this time on to Tennessee,
and Bonnaroo—two years removed—we
trip back easily into our deep cut
groove.  The dreads, Wade says, are a gift

from the beaches of Costa Rica, where
he learned to twist his natty hair
between his palms in time with the rhythm
of the waves.  Europe tickled us both to a similar

suffering of itchy feet, a wanderlust.  My trekking
companion has assumed an Encino Man’s look
after seven days spent in Zion at a feast
in the Utah desert where he ate little but dust

and sun.  A modern shaman.  He has changed
in predictable ways, like nephew or niece sprouted
from five to ten while all you’ve done is grow
a beard or read a book.  He’s rolled in to town

and now we readying to head down South.
We crack a beer as we cram my gear with
his into the trunk of his little blue Corolla.
“The poor rolla,” he says, and he’s right.  It’s a

sensible make that suggests a speed
that Wade hasn’t found yet, but he
likes the low profile.  The hundred
thousand miles of repair-free reliability.

*   *   *

My post is the night shift
and we stop the car on a farm
outside of Limon to pass a j
on the hood. The moon, between
new and crescent, bounces back
a strange light that transforms
these stalks into bones
and for 450 miles they dance
like skeletons wearing top hats,
whispering. I whisper “look”
to Wade who is sleeping as I turn
my headlights off and drive along
at 70 for a stretch that lasts as long
as Prince’s *Raspberry Beret.* The car smells
of stale cigarettes so I light a fresh one
and watch the cherry glow against the
As we pass the Gateway Arch, Wade wakes
saying: “Abandon all hope.” We pull over
for the coffee I needed hours ago. Adding
whiskey to mine, I toss the keys to Wade.
At last we cross the muddy Mississippi, inching
across the atlas, making our way to the Manchester
farm 20 miles from Jack Daniels’ plantation.

*   *   *

Getting in, the last mile takes the longest.
New Bushy Branch and Ragsdale Roads
shake off 51 weeks of neglect with a rebel dusting
of the moist air. The line of dope-filled cars
outpaced by those on foot, the hitchhikers
with hair ratted to a paste who’d rode long
enough. The few homes along the way have
set up booths selling jewelry, jam, and PBR’s

(Stanza break)
for a dollar. We feel invited to open our own beers though it’s barely time for breakfast and opt for a smoke to boot. But my unskilled attempts at rolling cigarettes are complicated by the June sun. Tobacco strings stick to my fingers and I slobber all over the glue-strip. I have to shore it up with a second paper; it still droops a little.

Wade’s is nice and tight, his hands precise as a factory. We put the car in neutral, cut the motor and walk the three hour mile. Our shoes are the brakes, our calves the gas. The trunk is too hot for our bare hands now, so we use our shirts as gloves.

Baking red in the sun, we smoke and push the car all the way to the gates. My rollie won’t stay lit. The smell of freedom is already strong in my armpits; a dust has covered us in a shadowy film. Echoing off the oak lined road we can nearly hear the Black Crowes starting to call. People keep telling me, this is nothing like the real South.
Presence, Again (a found poem)

i.

It’s the old notes, the old questions, the old examples that seem to be leaving me cold. All of this may have worked wonderfully well before—and might work again, if I could feel the same edge going into it.

ii.

Of course, I still do it a lot, but more covertly and quickly. I find I have to leave myself free to remake things on the spot—the next time I take a walk, I will be, once again, somewhere I’ve never been.

iii.

At any moment things may want to take an unanticipated swerve.

iv.

Presence is more likely if I stay aware of the people in the room, of how they, collectively and individually, seem to be engaging and if I stay in touch with my own interest, with the sources of my own energy on this day, at this moment.
iii.
Shuffle

My brother erected a city of cards
and surrounded it with an army of green plastic
guards. He closed every window in the house,
banned the use of ceiling fans, and banished
the dog to the back yard. Making substance
out of the insubstantial was his object of special
pleasure. He froze his daily gains with hairspray.
Clubs and diamonds, spades and hearts stretched
the length of the downstairs hallway and climbed
in places to inches from the ceiling. The card city
was a spectacle, a favorite of all the neighbor
kids. Before they were allowed to visit
the wonder, he made them run around the block
twice and interlock their fingers as if in prayer.

But in the night, with little more than a whisper,
at the closing of mom’s upstairs closet door
one of the shear walls gave way and most
of the citadel collapsed to the ground. A sticky,
shaky mess, half the tower precariously held,
kept itself up at the end of the still hall.

Now, I am working double time with my brother
to repair his fallen city. But, it’s like throwing
clay on an elliptical wheel: what was left
standing doesn’t fit to what we’re building.
After a Phone Call with M

You wanted to know why anyone would choose to be so strapped. But I can tell you, penniless is different from poor. I walk with the swagger of an untrammeled soul;

my friends and I own these streets and hold this city between our thumbs and fingers. Every day in opening our eyes we bring life to the world. Our troop knows penniless is the freedom from certain chains, the daily zeros and ones that come with holding a 401K. Poor is a steadfast cord that binds wrists and ankles and gags the mouth before finally cinching around the gut or mind. You see, we are not poor. We are fractals of God, rich as the sun, whether you believe it or not. The story of the forest is in the individual trees, branches, and leaves. And the veins in the leaves, too, re-present a view of the whole.

So I am giving you these lines, like the incessant ocean song beating along the coast, to bear it out: we are all just bursts of those before us, these instant events our only participations.
Resolution 1860

i.

The third-world is a bar-rag
sopping up the whiskey spills
of a handful of inebriates

whose warming, cold tumblers sweat
rings after each swill; these revelers
use delicate fingers to work the vessels

into hovering a moment on the bar’s
viscous surface. Whole afternoons,
they whittle out their schemes.

The third-world is a desert sandal
with a broken strap but a still useful sole.
The strengthening of worn things comes

only after the sharp pop. Its repair
will be frustrating and humbling, but
if sewn with caring hands, worthwhile.

ii.

Dissenting involves thorny vigil
in every rebel house. Abstaining,
on the other hand, is effortless. For those

who dare to smuggle-in rice or meds, Gaza
is a death-sentence at the border of hell.
The checkpoints have become choke points.

Today, between the Medi-
terranean and the river Jordan
white phosphorus kindles a hydra

in the desert sky; its tentacles reaching out
to blind young, prime, and old and peel
strips of dread from their charred faces.  

(Stanza break)
Today, between 1st Avenue and the East river, a handful of men carouse and drink their whiskey as if it were any other Thursday.
The Weight of Carbon

Smoking cigarettes
outside in the garden, I
sit and listen to the pop

of fruit too full
for its stretched stem.

What boldness is in
the whispered snap
of an apple dropping

from its bough.
From this cherry-tip
a thin smoke stream

pours up to copulate
with stars, while I work
a long spiral from the edge

to the center
of this ashtray.

I can hear the waste
shifting. My blackened
finger reminds me

I am only dust. Growing
heavy in my drift,

bound by the choking fabric
of time and space,

I reach down to collect the fallen apples.
Sedition

i.

In my local coffee shop,
I saw a fluorescent leaflet that read:

*I’m afraid we are losing our voices*
to the future. So I’m pushing this campaign
of resistance and calling out to people
to be frugal with Google; to reconsider
Twitter; to flog the blogs; to hex the text;
to attack the Mac; to impale g-mail; to
dethrone the i-phone; to space cook
with rage their bloody Facebook page.
I’m taking up the gauntlet: accept only
genuine corpus and no longer
stand for the virtual.

The leaf was left unsigned but directed
interested parties to my address.

ii.

My fingertips tap lightly away
on the desktop echoing the
pattern of the rain slapping
my windowpane. The last
fall leaves still clinging
to the moss draped branches
are putting on a show—
their stems holding fast
against the howling showers.
The shakeup going on
outside my apartment
moves in through these walls
with tiny vibrations,
rattling frames on
their hooks. Countless
invisible forces
pack a mighty wallop
it is the nature of resistance.
This is the mission: make your home the hub of the world and from there spread the message—

*a pen is sterile without ink*

*but a sword lost of its edge is still a sword.*

*Keep your inkwells full.*
Chainsaws cut thin slits into the sides
of this church: from the corner, I watch
mercenaries pull down dark brown siding
to squeeze panes of stained glass around
the giant hat-box that is St. Mary’s parish.
Leaves are glowing as they fall to the ground.

In Our Lady’s freshly weeded front garden,
roses have swollen to the size of cantaloupes.
The field out back is peppered with children
and seminarians playing soccer. A Knight
of Columbus has tapped the keg and the sweet
scent of cornbread dawdles down our block.

The tug-of-war, too, is under way and people
are digging in their heels. Everyone’s ready
and pulling for the guest of honor and the show
of miracles. All that happens is the day.
The sun’s leaving comes too early
and the field begins to clear, the game
and the war ending in a draw, with everybody lost
to darkness. As people file into the broad church
doors for Mass, I hold back to this hillside.

I hear the organ warming up the choir inside,
yet here, traces of cornbread linger in the still air.
The night brings forth new glory as light breaks
out the church’s windows like water
seeping between the fingers of a cupped palm.
I imagine the beams dripping off me like a baptism.

I see this annual clutching to the untouchable
things that define community. People
here are the other end of a Chinese finger trap
pulling against a God who won’t let them loose
until they first come toward Him
without resistance.
Deathday (a morning poem)

You see,
I ignore each day the way
I am quickly left more solid
and tensed; the way the hard
rock of myself enters an earth
undented by cons of rain.

Understand,
I am unsure: though I will have died
another day, this still is labor.
Even the fetal heart moves itself
to near a hundred surges each minute!
We all know what work is.

This is what I'm trying
to say: To die this day
makes it possible to live again
many times, many lives.
Ant

There is something glorious going on inside of anthills. Some colonies have grown big as an inverted Sagrada Familia, hollowed straight down through the desert floor. Their underground chambers stretch like coral, fingers, or roots, furiously pushing out at the edges.

I’ve seen a plaster cast of one dripping empire towering over a man. The sense of one soul subdivided among so many parts is the casualty of language. But the systems that take away my words as I stare into fire, flowing water, or swirling wind impress on me:

There is only one pattern, inconspicuous as it is ubiquitous, subtle as it is certain. The tree, the reef, the ants, and my body all share one pulse.
Winter Solstice

Each day the sun slides steadily across the sky until the solstice cord yanks it back, reversing its descent. Then the dark halls of Newgrange bathe in sunlight, brightened by math and a small opening as the earth’s axis tilts back to the sun. Stone spirals smile in the light, touched by an old friend’s fingers. And here in our bedroom, the early morning sun slipping through the blinds to warm the sleeping face of my wife suggests that love is an artifact and the patience of the paintbrush has more glory to better reveal its power than the quick of the chisel. Even the apostles confess: recognition takes time. Lovers’ eyes do more than their hands and their hands more than their lips, brushing dust from treasures.
NOTES

Penny from the Sidewalk Crack

This poem is in response to Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “Flower in the Crannied Wall.”

Old World

*Paris Peasant* is a 1924 surrealist French novel by Louis Aragon. The two sentences that I quote in the poem actually appear as a couplet amidst the novel’s prose. In the book the lines are broken as follows:

This is the month of Venus.
This is the loveliest month of all.

Presence, Again (a found poem)

The text for this poem was taken from the article “Presence and Teaching” by Jerry Farber, published in the Spring 2008 issue of *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*.

Resolution 1860

On Jan. 8, 2009 the United Nation’s Security Council passed Resolution 1860, calling for an immediate, durable, and fully respected ceasefire in Gaza. The resolution was adopted by 14 of 15 countries, but it failed to gain unanimous support when the United States abstained from voting.

Deathday (a morning poem)

Line 12 is a variation on a line from the Philip Levine poem “What Work Is.”

Winter Solstice

The Newgrange complex in County Meath, Ireland was originally constructed sometime between 3100 and 2900 BC as a prehistoric passage tomb.

On the winter solstice, the rising sun enters through a specially constructed opening above the main entrance and shines directly along the long passage way, illuminating the subterranean chamber’s floor.