

the anabasis of man



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absent itch

waxwork dummy

the darkness

an acorn's dream

of the hunt

becomes a door

cherry blossom

disused

throwing out

the lion's handkerchief

the suicide note

full of station masters

deaf worms

summer bugs

a backbone floats

beyond the boats

into maroon

an arcade cabinet

neatly lodged

anabasis

in the hedgerow

I listen

last night's takeaway

to a friend's excuses

in the child's

rain

melody

the rubbish

a dead bear

overtakes me

albion

wishes...

a balloon dreams

a cow god

of being a dream

warms the valley

chocolate moustache

in a woodland

my favourite Jesus is

the yak

willem dafoe

becomes a nightdress

things-in-themselves

a mountain range

the child's teeth

dead flowers

in an apple

become dew

rain god

the wheelbarrow

his only friend

not depending on

an invisible pylon

anyone

Horace's affection

shifting snow

hanging in anti-pigeon spikes

a man looks away

a pigeon

and becomes god

winter solstice

dregs of a pint

a forgotten hammer

a thought of Kant

in the shed

mixing mustard

lingering snow

perennial flower

only jane can sort out

a fisherman

jane's problem

becomes a peony

dead fish

ancestral sin

a low sun reflects

in the plum blossom

off a tv antenna

an infinity mirror

caught

in a gerbil's windpipe

the child's dream

the taste of orange

floats into

Heraclitus

starless night

sheet of snow

Chaplin's licorice shoe

desire

hovers above

a dead animal

Do Re Mi: more notes on parallel haiku

Johannes S. H. Bjerg created the parallel haiku form inspired by an email exchange with Grant Hackett. The idea was to have more than one dimension/meaning and additional threads of poetry in a single haiku or poem-unit. Hackett's monostich poems were written in a horizontal line and were separated by either a difference in types (normal and italics) or by (). Bjerg, on the other hand, chose to work with parallel poems in vertical form.

Bjerg's parallel form, I feel, is an attempt to bring the haiku form forward for the modern mind. I feel the urban dwelling person is, psychologically speaking, almost in a warfare-like state. There is a battery of information and emotions coming at us, and the parallel form reflects this to a large degree. It is not just the author creating the world of the poem; there is a much larger world created by the reader, too. It is the inundation of stimulation at work. This form is the order or map I've created through this

world and it is with you, the reader, to whom I loan hands and eyes to, becoming collaborative cartographers.

Chris Gordon wrote, “a haiku with nothing in it is ideal / a haiku with a thousand things in it is a masterpiece.” Ideal, yes, but probably impossible. I think it is a special place in the geography of haiku that few of us get to. The masterpiece, then, is the everyday made manifest.

I would like to conclude the first section of the notes with this quote by Robyn Hitchcock:

“Given the existence of a universe, all the molecules in it...just keep juggling around. So, you know, you’ve got three of Shakespeare’s molecules, and you’ve got two of Himmler’s (or whatever it is). Part of your fingernail was part of St. Joseph of Aramathea’s frontal lobe (or something). And large parts of you were once a daffodil in...Novia Scotia (or something). And

[Chuckling] your feet used to be Winston Churchill (or whatever it is). The same things keep getting recycled. It could be that when we pass away, our psyches dissolve into lots of, sort of, strips of feeling. All the things that comprise us that are held together by our bodies dissolve.”

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A constant theme in *the anabasis of man* is exactly how much freedom we have. I am not referring to political or hedonistic freedom. How much are we tied to our fate? Not a religious fate but a biological one. Is it written in our DNA or is it something metaphysical like the acorn in the first poem? Its fate is already written – inside that acorn is everything that will happen, a set of possibilities that, in this instance, allow it to become a door.

Is life worth living? Camus called it the one serious philosophical question. He reasons that suicide is a natural response to the absurdity of life. The aspect of absurdity, inherent

in some of these poems, is aimed towards the lengths of our knowledge, in knowing our world, or more correctly, the pursuit of happiness in knowing and being in the world. Cherry blossom, or anything else for that matter, is as valid a reason not to kill oneself as acquiring the understanding that one's depression stems from, for instance, a chemical imbalance. It is with this that life is worth living. So, find the station masters in the handkerchief and don't worry about the lions. The lions are probably just embroidery, anyway.

Absurdity comes with a great deal of humour. With all the philosophy crowbarred into this collection, I also encourage you to laugh whenever you feel it is appropriate – maybe even laugh when it is not. To find oneself thinking of Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire when a friend lets you down is hilariously overdramatic. And I'm not ashamed to say I've donned the drama queen tiara from time to time.

As a child, one of the many council estates I lived on was called Goshen. For a seven-year-old boy in the north of England,

that was a pretty weird name. So I asked an adult what a Goshen is. I was told it is a place in Egypt. At school, we'd already touched on the pyramids and mummification. At home, I'd already watched the hammer horror mummy movies and was well aware of curses and the like. This was all extremely fascinating but what got me was all the Gods these ancient people had. Growing up as an ethnic Christian with only one God seemed like a poor deal. As a result, I naturally adopted polytheism. A very crude seven-year-old theology, but none the less, full of mushrooms and river gods.

Part of my nascent interests in theology was fueled by religious movies. I watched numerous Gospel movies. But what bothered my little mind was that Jesus looked so different in all of them. If Dirty Harry was the same guy in every movie, if the Terminator was the same in every movie, then why was Jesus so different looking? As I got older, I appreciated this a little differently. For the record, my favourite Jesus is tied between Willem Dafoe and Enrique Irazoqui (but that doesn't make such a good third line).

The legacy of ancestral sin weighs heavily on the psyche of ethnic Christians. Ironically, it seems especially heavy for those who have moved away completely from the religion. The guilt of original sin, even for the most devout atheist, still echoes and haunts them, spooking them into the ghost house of new, trendier ideologies. The Friday fish my family used to eat every week now reflects in a dead screen glow – worshipping truth as if there ever was or will be such a thing. The TV screen. The computer screen. The phone screen.

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the anabasis of man is both parallel in form and its themes. You will see humour and the gravest melancholy juxtaposed. The sleight of hand that is Chaplin's shoe. Absurdity and nature. This is not an attempt to be clever but rather a way to unpack the world that you and I have inherited. There is no singular emotion or mood taking place. The world is happening now and nothing exists in a vacuum or neutrality. It is often confusing and weird but often beautifully strange.



Michael O'Brien lives in Glasgow, Scotland. His work has most recently appeared in *Cattails*, *Bones*, *Moonchild*, *Failed Haiku*, and *Quatrain Fish*, among others. An extensive list of over 100 publications is available [here](#). You can follow him on twitter @michaelobrien22.

“Finding the eternal in the quotidian, in everyday life and its happenings, is one piece of advice that is often given to writers of haiku. With Michael O’Brien’s new collection of parallel haiku, you could say, “Find the surreal in the real, the fantastic in the ordinary” – what our minds do all the time but which we tend not listen to. O’Brien has added his own voice to the parallel haiku construct and fully exploits the possibilities of making two poems birth a third in the reader’s mind.”

– Johannes S. H. Bjerg, Editor & Creator of Parallel haiku

