

**POIÉMA**

*A Pageant of Assorted Parables*

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Georgia Theta Chapter

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# POIÉMA

## *A Pageant of Assorted Parables*

Noah R. Hunt

Shorter University  
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Here you will find seven parables, unrelated in narrative but bound in intent. Look, and you will see that words are more than ink and paper. Read, and read with pleasure! Journey to other worlds, far off and open spaces. Remember what you find there, and live!

### 1. Transformed

I woke with a start. I sat up. The bed was there and the chest of drawers too. The nightstand and bookshelf. Nothing had changed. Had it? Something was new...

I lifted a hand to wipe the sleep from my eyes. As my fingers touched my eyelids, I felt an alien warmth. Through the thin membrane between my eye and finger there was a luminous glow. I opened my eyes. My hand beamed softly with a cool golden radiance. I stood up in fear and darted to the full-length mirror behind the bedroom door. My jaw dropped.

Wings! There was a pair of feathered wings protruding from my shoulder blades and running down the backs of my arms. The mystery didn't stop there. My feet! They were covered in writing, a foreign script. I could read every word. It was the most beautiful story ever written, so rich and so good. It was magnificent, otherworldly.

My mind raced with a quickened alertness. I had a viper-like sense of speed and wit. This was matched with an overwhelming tranquility, like a mourning dove in the spring rain. This was not natural. It was organic, but this was beyond reason.

One thing was certain. Something old was gone. Something new had come. I was no longer simply man. Neither was I entirely "other." I was a new creation.

### 2. The Gentle Giant

There is a giant named Jolly. He lives in a cottage with a small wooden door. The door bears a sign which reads, "Come on in!" Jolly is a gentle giant. He likes to eat and drink and talk with his guests. He loves people. He loves to love!

Many years ago, he built his cottage just so he could have a place to meet with his dearest friends. Before Jolly came, all was destitute in that valley, with no trees or greenery to speak of; naught but thistle and sagebrush grew there. The whole country was bereft of beauty. But in that raw, unruly, and wild lowland, Jolly made the infertile land habitable by his own sweat and blood.

You want to visit this fabled Jolly. You've heard stories but you've never seen him. The cottage stands before you. "What should I say? I've not been much of a friend to him before now." The cobblestone path stretches from your feet right up to the front stoop. From outside the door you can hear the laughter. You knock on the door. Nothing. Frustrated, you peer through the keyhole. There they are. All Jolly's friends, some of them you recognize. They drink from simple cups. They eat off wooden plates. "What's so special about this place?" you ask. You still want inside. You must know what goes on. You must meet this Jolly fellow. You knock again. Nothing.

“Confound it!” You peer in through the foggy window. On the wall moves a great shadow with arms all waving and chuckling with great delight. “That must be him! O, for a look at his face! I must get to know this Jolly!” You knock once more. You don’t expect anything, you just knock. Nothing. You turn to leave and the door swings open wide! All the warmth and light of that happy place pours out. There, almost too bright to make out, stands Jolly.

“Come in, my boy!”

Your jaw has fallen agape. You stammer. There are no words. He’s larger, grander, more magnificent and more real than anything you know.

“Forgotten how to read? My door swings on welcome hinges!”

Your hands meet and you’re hugging. You’re brought inside. Your place is already set.

“You’ve been expected!”

You’re in awe and wonder. These people are family. These odd and simple people are your closest kith and kin. They care for you because they are guests of the gentle host. You care for them the same.

“What a place,” you say. “What a host! He brings the shadows to light!”

### 3. Men of Glass

While I walked along the way, I came into the land beyond the horizon. Just over the country’s beveled edge lay a fair and wild land, both green and golden. And there, standing among the brambles and hedges were a peculiar people. They appeared as men made of glass or, more perfectly, men clad in mirror-skin.

As I approached, I was nearly blinded, for the Sun, in all its radiant brilliance, glinted off their skin and attacked me. They were horribly beautiful creatures, fleet of foot, noble and kind. I was brought to my knees by the Sun’s refracting rays. They approached me out of compassion, and as they did so my agony increased. “Have mercy, please!” Their perfect reflection undid me.

In a mad dash I escaped that place. That is the sort of land a natural man can’t abide. With flushed face, sunburned flesh, and sweaty brow, I continued as best I could, never once forgetting those awesome men of glass. It’s hard to see and stand around creatures with mirror-skin.

### 4. The Littlest Lamb

In a low Alpine vale, a flock of downy sheep pastured. The terrain they grazed was gentle with rich soil and thickly blanketed under a swath of tender grass. On the valley’s outermost edge, in every direction, the topography climbed upwards, building heavenward. This gave the valley a bowl-like quality. This point should be noted, for the water which ran down the enveloping slopes gathered into a cool crystal pool cupped in the valley’s center. Here the flock could water and pasture at their leisure. Here there was plenty sustenance to meet their meager needs. All the flock was fat and fleecy, save one.

On the backside of the herd, there straggled a lean and stubborn ewe. She was the littlest sheep and the most curious. It was not uncommon to see her doddering alone on the skirts of the flock, flouncing about the steepening foothills. The marchlands and far reaches of the vale piqued her spirit, calling her upward.

One cool evening, she wandered up into the steeps, further than she’d ever gone. It was a misty world, wreathed in dew. Over the edge of the vale, off the rim of the mountain-lip, the earth dropped off, down and away into indefinite haze. In the darkening void below she could hear the faint bleating of goats. The darkness yawned before her and seemed to draw her down, into the obsidian deep.

Grabbing her attention, looming over the bleak shadow and lit by a pale luminescence, stood a solitary boulder-capped mount. To the little lamb’s amazement, the crown of the soaring mountain appeared, through the drifting vapor, to resemble the likeness of a hyperborean hero: rugged, honorable and altogether awesome. The tinkling of expectancy welled within her. Her spirit leaped; her heart clamored like carillon bells.

Whether her movement was a result of desire to reach this goodly mountain, to know the goats she heard below, or escape that vale she was most familiar with, who is to say? What is known is that while rapt in the pitch of the moment, her hoof was raised for the descent into the expanse and touched down in the chilly shade with the crumble of falling rock.

The flow of the dislodged pebbles echoed and ricocheted in the deep. The little sheep stilled, not out of fear, but by what followed. The hulking hyperborean face, whom the sheep had deemed a beautiful illusion or a static artifact, came alive. In fact, he had only been in a state of meditation and was now fully animated and seething.

The torrent swept up at once with a mighty north wind. The little sheep dared not speak. The firmament thundered with tumultuous rumblings. The little sheep dared not move. The earth undulated in a semi-solid fluctuation that knew no anchor. If she had seen, had her eyes not been closed in reverence, she would have known the great creature's face. She could have seen the lightning bottled in his eyes. She could have witnessed the menagerie of creatures large and small resting in his gnarled and leafy mane. She could have taken in the roaring fire of his eminence. But such sights have been known to lay men prone, not to mention sheep. For her sake, it is best she didn't see.

She returned to the flock, which had just begun to miss her, though she had long missed it. She took up grazing by the crystal pool and bedded down in dusk's dewy eve. The littlest lamb would ever pasture with the flock in the palm of the vale, safe in the eye of the mountain's watch, never to wander that dark way again.

## 5. The Book with No Cover

In a rubble-stone alley, tucked behind a memory, there sat a squat barn-like building. A deep green sign hung upon its door which read, in calligraphic script, "Booksellers." Many years ago, an unsuspecting boy traveled that way while chasing after a ball and found himself beneath the shade of its gable. Having never seen the building before, his interest was piqued. He entered with the tingling of a tiny bell.

A charming mustiness sat upon the shop. Nothing stirred except tiny dancing particles of dust swirling through pin-beams of sunlight. Suddenly, there came a whisper on a breath of air which turned the boy's head. All he saw was a matte crimson-bound tome on a lonely shelf. He moved toward it. His hands took up the book by its leather binding. There was no title, not even a frontispiece. The author, who remained anonymous, would have his identity discovered through the text alone. Within a twinkling of an eye, he was gone and out of the shop, book in hand.

Thunder crashed as he nestled into a familiar corner of his room. Lightning lit up his eyes and the world. Opening the book, a scene was hoisted into place before his eyes. It was in the shape of a proscenium theatre staring at him end-on. It was one of those intricately garish halls of the Victorian era, the very image of Irving's

Lyceum. What a blow. The boy placed the book down. "Bother," he thought, "neither novel nor adventurous. How childish, a pop-up storybook. Useless!"

As he turned to go, there came a tiny yelp. Reeling around, the young lad locked eyes with what appeared to be a peewee-man. On the curtain of the stage, leaning out over the lip of the open book, there stood a man, three inches tall. He was clothed in the garb of the Shakespearean actor, pantaloons and all. The boy approached at eye level, lying on his stomach. The tiny thespian waved his arm in great emphatic circles. The boy could not make out a word of what he said, for his voice was far too high in pitch, but he understood that he was being called forward. He extended his index finger in acquiescence to the little fellow. This was his grave mistake, for no sooner had he acknowledged the player, was he swept into a torrent of delirium.

All around was the din of rustling pages. Monstrous characters and marks of punctuation flew overhead. There was a flash of light followed by ringing silence. Then came the fall. Down, down, and still further down he fell, arms waving. He fell for such a long time that it felt as if he were motionless, and the literary cyclone gushed up around him like an erupting geyser.

The stop came abruptly. He felt the coarse grain of timbers beneath his hands. He smelled the spray of the sea. The platform keeled and pitched beneath him. There was a mingle of taut creaking ropes and crying gulls. He was on board a ship, more correctly a brigantine in full sail. "Get up laddy!" growled a grim West-Cork baritone. The grizzly seaman prodded the boy with the end of his cutlass. The youngster stood to find himself held on point, on the flat of a wooden plank. Pirates! He dared not glance at the choppy deep below. "You're off the edge 'o th' map mate!" came the blaggard's rough jeer, followed by a jolt. The sea-rat stamped the plank with his peg of wood, affixed below the knee. The plank gave and the boy tumbled off into the breakers below.

Fully expecting the sharp ice of the ocean's bite, the lad was completely bewildered to find that he had hit marble. He was in a great hall of precious stone with ominous candelabra and chandelier looming above. He heard the clash of steel. Down the corridor came the clash and clang of swords! A man dressed from head to toe in Lincoln green appeared to be on the run from a swath of angry ebony guards. "Hold, scoundrel!" roared the soldiers. The swashbuckler evaded their grasp in a nimble dance of swordplay and acrobatics.



Soon, intrigue changed to horror as the fray of cold steel headed directly for the lad. He fumbled into an alcove fitted with a stained-glass window in the hopes of remaining undetected. To his astonishment and discomfort, he soon found that he was sharing his seat with the runaway rogue. “Why hullo there!” piped the mustachioed swordsman as he unfurled a coil of rope. The black guards were fast approaching. “Do hold tight to this!” said the swashbuckler. He placed the cord in the boy’s hand. There came a shatter of glass. What happened next was a confusion of angry roars, the scream of the wind and a vision of stabbing castle spires looming far below as the pair careened out the portal and into the air, tethered to safety by a single strand of chord. The rope became heavy in the lad’s hands. There was a fiery burn in his fingers and knuckles. His soft palms screamed. He lost his grip on the lifeline.

The sudden stop came with frigid teeth. It was snow, several feet deep. He was facedown and buried. Icicles had formed on his eyebrows and lashes. A blizzard flurried all around. The arctic air stung his cheeks and the wind whistled a shrill, monotonous lament. Nearing despair, the boy cried out, “Enough! I’m done with it all!” To his relief, there came the jingle of linked leather and chain. He could hear the moist, vaporous gasps of open-mouthed creatures.

“Mush! Mush!”

A dogsled!

“Oh salvation!” muttered the exasperated little fellow as a team of husky canines thundered past. Up he went, gripped by the scruff of the collar. He collapsed on the back of the sled. The driver was a tall and bright-eyed woman, dark in complexion, clad in fur and unrelenting in her focus toward the horizon. In the distance there was a halcyon light, flickering. The boy groaned within and reached with all his heart toward that glimmering speck.

Gasp! He was up! The rain poured outside. The thunder had moved off. It was evening. The attic was as much the same as it was when he had “left.” Had he left? The red book sat open. There was no sign of the tiny Shakespearean. He closed the book firmly, tucked it reverently underarm and descended from that place. “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” he noted, “and never misprize those books without.”

## 6. The Crustacean

On a long and bleak sandbar there probed a scholar, one of those well-bred men of old money; a New Englander. With a gnarled piece of drift, he prodded the shale and bated the waves, searching. His prey were seashells, sand dollars, and other natural depositions. The scholar was not in the habit of collecting, mind you. He was far too high above that. He was of the empirical sort, always inspecting, analyzing, and dissecting. Like examining a butterfly pinned to cork, so was his way with all life. The categorization, sanitation, and explanation of all things natural was his life’s pursuit.

Having lived by the shore his whole life and having emphatically walked this same shoal every morning for as long as he cared to remember, it came as a natural surprise that this dreary morn he should find two blinking beady eyes glaring at him in the surf. To his amazement (and what a remarkable occurrence that was), out from the water popped a rare russet crustacean. The scuttling creature advanced onto the sand, mandibles clacking, claws snapping and beady eyes peering black and bulbous. The scholar sneered in disgust but did not run. His mind was aflutter with a thousand flitting fantasies of fame.

“Have you ever seen such a creature?” he thought. “Not in all my years!” What would his colleagues think if he were to capture and domesticate the little leviathan? He concluded it would make him among the most popular of his Fellows, and he would most certainly find himself hosting a lecture on *The Brine: Submerged Frontier*. How would he catalogue this scuttling shell-dweller? What was its genus and species? *Barnicula Obscurum* had a nice ring to it!

The fascinated scholar scooped up the inquisitive decapod and kept him as a pet in his home. It was not long before the creature found his way into the halls of higher learning, sitting with great pomp upon the scholar’s desk. They were inseparable. With the passing of days to months, it seemed that the scholar’s scuttling companion had taken on the habits of a little man, stooping to ladies, opening doors and emphasizing the imperative with his forelimbs. It is also noteworthy that the scholar seemed to become more sea-creature, dwelling in the dark, rarely changing his outer shell and smelling all day of a salty air.

One grey morning, as the scholar woke in frenzied anticipation for that day’s lecture, he stopped short.

There was, all around him, a great and oppressive weight. All over stabbed a great sharp pain along his cheeks, forehead and eyelids. It was as if he were submerged in a bed of gravel. He could only see upward, for his head was sunk deep into his pillow. Tunnel vision was all he knew, like a horse in blinders. At the mouth of the tunnel, some inches away from and above his eyes, he saw the shellfish pass by with a paper clenched in his claw.

There lay the scholar, piled high with leeching barnacles. On first glance, one would never have noticed the scholar at all, only a bed piled high with rocks. There was a noise of a kind that was audible every now and again, almost a word, perhaps a cry, but who could hear over the nearby ocean breakers lapping on the shore? Smirking, the crustacean plopped off the end of the mattress, clacked across the floor and out the door with his lecture tucked firmly under arm. It remains to be seen what lessons may be learned from the teacher's pet.

## 7. Aurora

Aurora rode forth in her chariot drawn by her prancing stallions, Firebright and Daybright, and all the earth was green. She went out into the fields and tended to the beasts: sheep and ox, rabbit and squirrel, wolf and fowl. She sat on a seat of flaxen wheat and spun thread at her wheel. Children came up from the hamlets and burghs to pile stones in her honor. In the evenings, they lit great bonfires, decked themselves in chains of daisies, and danced gaily until morning.

At dawn, just before the sun's rising, one of the stones on the altar began to move. The little boulder sprouted legs and then arms and finally a stout biscuit-shaped head. He slowly approached the sleeping goddess on her throne. "Lovely mistress of the morn," spoke the dwarfish one in a throaty voice, "I've come to beg your favor!"

Waking in radiance, Aurora smiled at the small and ugly one, "What is your name, son of the earth?"

The creature bowed his rumpled head. "Hobbog," he said ashamedly, "your servant."

"Dearest Hobbog," spoke Aurora, "what would you ask of me?"

With little hesitation, the sprite declared, "That what is stone would be made as soft as new-born flesh!"

"Go then, beyond the land of the Cimmerians and beyond the lesser seas! To the realm of ice and snow

you must go, cloud-wrapped and misty!" came the word of the goddess, "There you will seek Boreas, my kinsman and friend. Learn of him and return!" Off and to the Far North Hobbog strode in search of healing.

He came into the sunless land, where there was naught but snow and ice. There, on a wild wind he met Boreas the Wing-footed. "Ho there, son of earth!" belled the blustery god, "where art thou bound?" Hobbog bowed low. "I am here that what is stone might be made as soft as new-born flesh!" With a great gasp the god blew a furious breath and, in the flurry, Hobbog was smoothed of all his jagged edges.

To his dismay, he found that he was still made of hard stone. "What must I do to be made soft?" The god answered, "Go into the mountain caves. Seek out Fafnir the Worm of Fire. In his billows you'll be unmade!" So, the little troll of stone set out in search of the terrible dragon. Night's darkest watch, just before the dawn, was settled about the rugged country. He entered into the dragon's haunt and there he saw him, the great, coiled and winged snake. The beast sat atop a mountain of gilded trophies: cups, drinking bowls from around the mid-earth sea, tokens of varying coinage, and gems of every size imaginable.

Hobbog approached most carefully. "Hail Fafnir, most terrible and malevolent!" The dragon raised his swaggering armored head, "Who is so bold as to enter my domain unannounced? A thief?" The rock-ling was shaken by the fierce roar of the dragon's words. "Nay, oh mighty one! A humble and lowly servant!" The serpent peered down on the frightened creature with an omniscient and glassy yellow eye. "What have you to say?" he heaved, "Speak your piece!" Clearing his throat, the little creature piped, "If you would, oh fiery one, turn my stony hide from rock to silk!" With a belch of smoke and flame Hobbog was bathed in smoldering blue flame. There was a crack across his simple frame, and, like scales, his rough exterior fell away. He was now a stout and living nugget of raw gold.

Hobbog was exasperated. "What must I do to be shaped, formed and fashioned like the fleet-of-foot?" The dragon pondered this question for a long while, for he was not used to being asked his advice on such matters. "You must venture into the land of the dead. Hel, kinswoman of Aurora, will give you form after those who have passed her way, for she knows mortals best of all!"

Immediately, Hobbog went out from that place and down into the realm of the dead. At the gates of death, there lay the great growling hounds, Garmr and Cerberus, crouched on hind legs keeping watch over the doors of darkness. Hobbog descended into the pit and before him he saw the great river of life, in which mortal souls must swim upstream for eternity. Hel was there by the water's edge.

"You were expected, earth-son."

"Please," pleaded Hobbog, "Will you give me form in the likeness of these poor damned ones?"

With a pale finger, Hel motioned towards the placid stream. "Go and dip seven times," she commanded. He obeyed. Hobbog entered the gentle and ancient waters, watching the peaked faces float by. He began to bathe completely, sinking and rising. On the seventh time, he emerged, changed. His likeness was that of Cupid's own cherub. He was a golden boy child.

Hobbog returned to his country. There he met with the children of the valley, but they were afraid of his golden complexion. They all fled in fright. Hobbog sat weeping all alone. Aurora approached the tender little being. "What is the matter, dear son of the earth?"

"Please," whimpered the gilded cherub, "Make me so that I can speak and not be balked at!"

With that the gentle maiden began to tear and peel at his skin. All around fell the remnants of gilded leaves. When she was finished, the sun peeked his blazing tendrils over the eastern horizon, and Hobbog stood up a peachy and beautiful boy. Aurora placed a chain of daisies around his neck. He was reborn. He was new. In that gentle rolling land, stone-made-flesh found life boundless and free, there to abide for all eternity.