

# ‘THE TANGO AFTER THE CLOCK STRUCK THIRTEEN’

A BOOK REVIEW WITH AUTHOR ALLEN DAVID SIMON  
BY JORDAN CUNNINGHAM



## INTRODUCTION

This review examines Allen David Simon's collection, 'the tango after clock struck thirteen', a compilation of predominantly Haiku poetry. The collection's central focus, as I interpret it, is the ongoing tension between nature and humanity. Before delving into specific examples from the collection, it is helpful to briefly revisit the Haiku form, which I discussed in a previous review. The Haiku is a poetic form that employs plain language and vivid imagery, rooted in the natural world and the changing seasons. The form is defined by its brevity, which heightens suggestion and increases the impact of the imagery. Haiku poetry invites readers to look beyond themselves, fostering a deeper awareness of the world around them. Yet, as I have argued before, the authenticity of this aim is complicated by the inherent artificiality of the Haiku, as it is a human invention. Poets frequently explore this tension, reflecting on the relevance of Haiku within modern contexts that contrast sharply with the form's original setting.

## A N A L Y S I S

With a collection like this, each poem can be read independently. Like the cyclical rhythms of nature's seasons, readers are invited to enter the collection at any point and discover their own path through the work. Reflecting this approach, I begin my analysis with poems 5 and 9 of the collection:

lept into pouch  
joey warm in mother's care  
hops a childhood

And poem 9:

on the

Valentine Road,

I saw

three        guests in the court

two         hands clasped but

one         bleeding heart left alone

Poems 5 and especially 9 are immediately visually striking, and the structural framework is inventive and employed throughout the collection in novel ways. Thematically, what is particularly interesting, and which sets up the overall motif of the collection, is the contrast between nature and the fostering of genuine love, and how anything related to humanity is a source of pain. The image of animal life in the Joey is nurturing, and the hollowness and pain of the humans are evident. Two of the guests' hands are clasped, and one's heart bleeds. Immediately, this denotes hands in prayer; yet, in the act, they are trapped, and there are three guests, yet one remains alone. Similar to poem 5, poem 12 emphasises the role of nature, in this case, pigeons, as symbols of the natural world. However, there is a notable difference where nature is depicted not merely as a passive conduit of love, but as an active one. The pigeons are messengers bridging the gap between human emotions and the natural environment. This portrayal adds complexity to the relationship between humanity and the natural world, showing how nature can both reflect and facilitate human experiences of love:

gutar gu gutar gu

the pigeon carries messages

between lovers

Nature is what can unite humanity, allowing love to exist and mend bleeding hearts and unclasp trapped hands. Nature, in this sense, acts as a universal force transcending boundaries between individuals. The healing power of nature, both physical and deeply emotional, provides comfort. However, as the collection progresses, some barriers to this are introduced. For instance, poem 26 presents the image of a cuckoo:

cuckoo breaks nest  
eggs pay for another's sin -  
my sin to love

The cuckoo is a source of perverted nature, preying on others, like images we find in poems 19 and 40, where humanity wields objects to harm others. In this case, hands are free to cause more bleeding hearts, which corrupts nature itself. This depiction of the cuckoo as an intruder mirrors the darker aspects of human behaviour. In poems 19 and 40, the imagery of hands holding tools or weapons becomes a metaphor for the ways people manipulate the world, often at the expense of others, leaving wounds both literal and metaphorical. Poem 42 further develops this point:

vultures feast  
thanking humans for wars  
casualties without a last day

Poem 42 compliments the cuckoo, but using the vulture as another form of perverted nature, which is a debased form of nature that seeks and welcomes death to survive. The vulture, unlike the cuckoo, does not disguise its intentions; it openly feeds on death and decay. This brutality is contrasted with the cuckoo's cunning, yet both birds symbolise aspects of nature corrupted, reflecting humanity's tendencies. Through these figures, the poems suggest that humans become estranged from natural innocence and embrace roles as predators. The boundary between natural instinct and moral corruption grows blurred, raising questions about whether such perversions are inherent in nature itself or intensified by humanity. This is interesting imagery, which for me culminates earlier in the collection in the image of poem 23:

love bleeds more  
than war, but if never bled –  
ever was it love?

I appreciate the evocative perspective this poem offers, though I have some reservations about its thematic stance. Poetically, the work is compelling, and the image of love bleeding more than war is powerful. However, I question this assertion. War, being the absence of love, arguably bleeds far more than love ever could. This contrast sparks a fascinating aesthetic debate about the nature of suffering. The collection seems to probe humanity's innocence, suggesting that we are truly innocent only at birth and at death. This notion is both intriguing and unsettling; however, I find it somewhat reductive. Humanity comprises a multitude of differences. Each individual's loss of innocence is shaped by circumstance and random chance. Are we born into sin, or are we shaped by it? Is innocence itself a fallacy and something foreign to our animal nature? The irony becomes apparent when considering the collection's use of animals as symbols of purity, even as these animals are shown to embody distorted representations that lack the capacity for love. Perhaps this suggests that innocence and corruption coexist in all living things. Is death merely the absence of loved ones, both for oneself and for those left behind? Or is it a form of absolution, a return to a state of innocence? In a sense, we are born into death, as death is the one certainty that frames our existence.

As I discussed in a previous piece, the Haiku is a great poetic form for writers who favour immediate visual poetry. Rather than a marathon, it is a 100-metre sprint where each word must be precise and every image vivid. This suits poets who seek to create immediate impact, crafting striking visuals that render the familiar newly strange and echo the Uncanny. In the Haiku, there is often a connection drawn between nature and human experience. The beauty of nature serves as a mirror to humanity and a standard of purity that we aspire to but rarely attain. In these poems, the Uncanny becomes a lens through which humanity's deepest contradictions are magnified. The poems suggest that within us lie repressed desires and fears that, when brought to light, reveal unsettling truths about our nature. The Uncanny in these works is not merely a literary device but a reflection of our existential state. It exposes an underlying current of pain, loss, and self-destruction that humanity cannot escape. We are confronted with the reality that there exist impulses, often self-destructive and harmful to others, that we struggle to acknowledge. The juxtaposition in Haiku poetry thus becomes a meditation on the human psyche, revealing that our quest for beauty and meaning is shadowed by darker drives that shape our experience of the world.

This is uncanny as it theorises that humanity harbours two competing drives: the fear of pain and the need to inflict pain. One view is that humanity seeks to kill love, perhaps out of self-preservation or as a defence against vulnerability. Alternatively, that we are preprogrammed, cursed even, against our wishes to have control over love. How then can humanity be to blame? This line of thought leads to an unsettling conclusion: perhaps there is no "true" answer, because there is no verifiable "truth." This is a central theme the Uncanny considers. Nature simply is; humanity is endowed with the capacity to reflect and is damned to know too much. Given these complexities, I feel the subject demands a larger poetic form to fully capture this nuance. Of course, this is strictly a matter of personal preference, and I may not be the ideal audience for such a work. Others may seek experiences or answers different from mine. Regardless, for what it is and what I perceive its aims to be, it accomplishes them admirably. The work is inventive and enjoyable. It presents complex topics in an accessible manner. Ultimately, this blend is what makes it stand out.

As Tatar states, 'uncanny events have the power to provoke a sense of dread...because they are at once strange and familiar' (M.M. TATAR, p.169). This phenomenon often manifests through the reappearance of suppressed childhood experiences in adulthood, particularly those associated with pain or trauma. When such emotions or memories resurface, they can evoke a profound sense of discomfort precisely because they straddle the boundary between the known and the unknown. The concept of the Abject, as theorised by Julia Kristeva, further illuminates this process: it involves the expulsion of what is perceived as undesirable from the self. This can be physical, such as vomiting or excreting, but also psychological in the rejection of painful emotions. From the victims' perspective, violence and pain act as internal agents of decay, corroding one's sense of self. In an attempt to safeguard themselves, individuals may purge these corrupting influences, even at the risk of causing pain to others. This repeated cycle of internalisation and expulsion perpetuates suffering and mirrors the logic of the doppelganger, creating a sort of anti-nature in which organic renewal is replaced by recurring processes of death and decay, thereby preventing the possibility of rebirth.

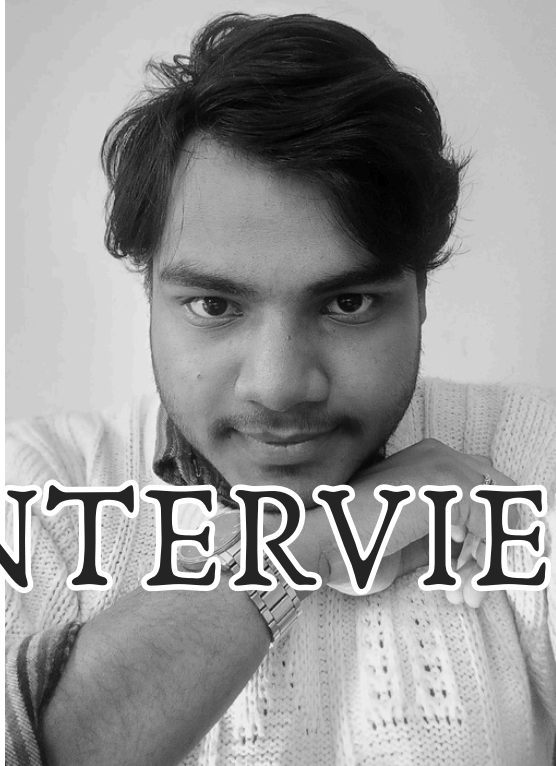
The images of innocence in childhood are emphasised in poem 5, where the Joey is protected from the world by a protective layer that maintains purity. This metaphor highlights vulnerability and conveys the hope of preserving purity amid corruption. The natural processes of childhood, such as vomiting or expelling waste, are accepted, yet as humans transition into adulthood, attitudes toward them shift. Adults are conditioned to suppress such natural actions, to delay and conceal them, reflecting a broader discomfort with the impure. The learned ability to hold onto waste is a literal and symbolic sign of the pressure to hide aspects of the self that are deemed unacceptable. In nature, there is no stigma associated with waste. For humans, waste becomes synonymous with shame, something to be eliminated. Entering adulthood, the impossibility of remaining untouched by impurity becomes apparent; thus, the longing for a return to innocence becomes deeply attractive. However, we should question if this longing is a form of escapism or a genuine path to renewal. The answer to this remains ambiguous, as it could signify either the appeal to innocence as a comforting illusion or, alternatively, a potentially transformative experience. Ultimately, the reader's response will depend on their own beliefs about the possibility of reversing decay and reclaiming lost purity. This tension between illusion and reality is left unresolved, inviting reflection on the limits of both.

## C O N C L U S I O N

Allen David Simon's collection, 'the tango after clock struck thirteen,' stands out as an excellent collection. Simon's poems explore the enduring tension between nature and humanity, a theme woven throughout the collection with insight. The poet's ability to juxtapose the organic world with human artifice is striking, inviting readers to reflect on the boundaries and intersections between these realms. The collection's title, 'the tango after clock struck thirteen,' suggests an uncanny atmosphere, blending time-honoured tradition with a sense of dislocation. This motif recurs throughout the collection, as Simon explores how Haiku can serve as a bridge between the natural and artificial. The use of plain language and concrete imagery grounds the poems, while subtle shifts in tone invite readers to question their own relationship to poetry and the world it seeks to represent. Simon's collection revitalises Haiku and interrogates its ongoing tensions in a contemporary world.

### Sources:

KTatar, M. M. (1981) 'The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny', *Comparative Literature*, 33(2), pp. 167–82. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1770438>. Accessed 6 Dec. 2025.



# INTERVIEW

WITH AUTHOR ALLEN DAVID SIMON

**Were there any specific themes or messages you aimed to explore in this work?**

I aimed to make the collection eclectic as a means to allow suppressed emotions to be explored in whatever manner they happened to occur. A way of looking at mundane things from unique perspectives.

**If so, how successful do you feel you were?**

In retrospect, I would have taken some more time, maybe, but ultimately, I feel I accomplished my goal.

**What do you hope readers will derive from your book?**

It is okay to think about things differently, whether good or bad.

**Which authors/writers have had a significant influence on your writing, either stylistically or thematically?**

William Wordsworth and travel poetry, which allows external surroundings to mirror internal emotions. Also, Mona Bedi, who was a good introduction to Indian micropoetry for me.

**What was the most rewarding experience you encountered during the writing process?**

When some people expressed admiration. Alongside this, readers took a variety of diverse interpretations from the collection.

**What would you offer as one piece of advice to aspiring writers?**

To be patient in the writing process and to network your work, to find the right places to send it, and to target avenues and organisations that cater towards the kinds of poetry you enjoy.

**Did your personal experience inspire the books creation, and how did that factor into the motivation for writing it and the creative process?**

I did not give much thought to whether personal experience necessarily influenced the compulsion to write. It was a quick, organic process. It was written for a person, however, as a means to show what the poet could do and how creative expression could serve as a mirror to who they are as a person.

# INTERVIEW

WITH AUTHOR ALLEN DAVID SIMON

**What projects are you currently working on, and can you provide any previews or hints about your upcoming work?**

Yes, I am currently working on more poems, but with a more thematic slant akin to Romanticism and utilising more colloquial everyday language. I am aiming to write about one thing every day.

**What motivated you to create and publish the book?**

Quite recently. It all happened over 6 to 7 months, as I consciously composed poems with the aim of publishing a collection. What pushed them to seriously consider publishing was a personal loss, and this gave me the impetus to do it.

# ABOUT

A Calcuttan, Allen describes his creative side as "A poet, on days he is read; on other days a scribe." A self-affirmed "romantic pessimist," whose passions vent out in poetry, he is his truest when left to rant his heart out. His recent works have been published in literary journals like the LitCult and Literary Cognizance; and anthologies including the Alien Buddha Zine Vol.80 & 83, Shadows and Sparks Vol.2, Some Feelings Don't Expire, Quietly Blooming, Alien Buddha Loves You Too, Stardust and Sentences, Beautiful Lies; and a regular to the Five Fleas Itchy Poetry. He was also featured in The Asahi Shimbun, a Japanese daily, and the Sakura Haiku Challenge Anthology 2025 by the Japanese Consulate-General in Toronto. His first chapbook, titled, the tango after clock struck thirteen, a collection of micro-poetry.

Allen is a postgraduate student at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata [University of Calcutta] and is currently engaged as a Postgraduate Researcher and Academic Projects Coordinator at the Department of Academics, International Association of Political Science Students; and as Editor, Forum of Global Studies.



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