

GENESIS IN POETRY

by Jeffrey M Cohen

CREATION

(Genesis 1:1 – 2:6)

Why just now,
Indeed, why ever,
Infinity's thread
Did God choose to sever?

Whatever possessed him to empower
Those who would morally cower;
Betraying indifference
To their own existence;
Those who would lie
And deny,
Seek to dethrone
The One blissfully alone -
And rarely, if ever, truly atone?

The angels of the heavenly host -
Who long had revelled in the boast
That they alone had his attention -
Could not believe this intervention:
What prompted God to set his hand
To a covenant of being with creatures of land,
Whose main pursuit would be pleasure,
While rarely applying a spiritual measure?

'Allow me, Lord, to have my say' -
A cheery cherub from the Milky Way
Interrupted boldly in full flow
The One Above who best must know.

'What sort of plan
Is a son of man?' -
The cherub rather timidly began,
Quaking at his own lack of tact,
To question what was
Manifest fact.

But God frustrated his fulmination,
Expressing his own determination:

*'My will be done! Let there be light!
A measured time for day and night;
Let rain descend from skies above,
To quench the thirst of my man
And his love.*

*'Let oceans of water the earth embrace,
Let rivers and streams zigzag the space
That I'll create for the human race.*

*'Let sun and moon and earth rotate,
So human life may generate,
Where cool and cold and warmth and heat
Entice my nature to yield her treat.*

*'Let there be hills, and dales below,
And fields so green where man might sow
The seeds for fruit and roots to grow;
Where cows and geese and lambs and cats,
Nifty mice and lively rats,
Gaze with envy at the bats
And their flying friends who stop for chats
Out of reach of their land-based cronies,
Like the lofty giraffes and children's ponies.'*

'But, Lord,' a senior Seraph called,
Hitherto by God's word enthralled:
'May I, your humble servant, say
A word in your ear about the way
Your universe will no longer be
Subject to your royal decree.

'For rumour has it in the heavenly portals,
That you wish to share with mere mortals
The power, the knowledge and the glory,
For them to create their own story;
Imperiously strutting the stage of life,
Making a virtue of war and strife.

'For they will plunder and they will kill,
Their voice will thunder and not be still,
Demanding of others
To do their will.

'Chariots of war they'll design,
Missiles with targets they'll align,
Women and children
Who've committed no crime,
Will suffer the most
Every time.

'The earth will be filled with the blood of the just,
Remorseless victims of violence and lust,
Of power-crazed monsters with hearts of lead,
Who spare no thought for how many fall dead.
For the anguish of parents they'll not care,
Mourning sons who lie
They know not where.

'So,' said that Seraph,
'Is that what you'd bless:
A world of darkness,
Mankind in distress?
Will you in the future
Have no such regret?
Will you never view
Your man as a threat?'

*'Silence, Seraph! Speak not of regret;
Seek not to change my higher mind-set.
"Regret" is a term of man's invention,
Fearing the folly of his former intention.*

*'But I, by time, am not constrained,
The past by me can be reframed;
It is never gone from my sight,
It cannot darken what I coloured bright.
The future's not a thought unborn,
A sun awaiting a new day's dawn.
I am the present, I am the past;
I'm from the first until the last,
I will,
I act,
I embrace;
All that exists -
I am its place.*

*'Whatever your view of humankind,
I'll never change my mind.
I know his violence and his greed,
But within his heart I'll plant the seed
Of righteousness and of the need
To seek me out and make of earth
A paradise of infinite worth,
Where love and peace and truth abound,
And stilled forever will be strife's sound.'*

*

*

*

ADAM

(2:7 - 20)

So Adam appeared at the divine behest,
All innocence, and walking undressed;
Head held high,
In his step a spring,
Overwhelmed with wonder
At everything
That caught his eye as he stepped into life -
As yet alone,
Without a wife.

Pure goodness,
Bathed in primordial light;
Energy of a meteorite;
But one whose seed –
Through lust or greed,
A parent's over-expectation,
A sibling's dare, a friend's temptation,
A colleague's envied reputation,
A thoughtless word or prevarication -
Would be deaf to his Maker's exhortation.

*'I've called you Adam,
I like that name;
Conflicting concepts
It seeks to proclaim:
From adamah - the earth below,
Or from demut, divinity's glow.*

*'If you are anchored in physicality,
And have no truck with spirituality,
Then you're adamah in reality,
And your life will be a vague vacuity.*

*'But if your sights are set on high,
And you have faith when others deny;
If your deeds are good and true,
And acts of kindness you accrue,
Then my demut you'll share with pride -
And you'll always find me by your side.'*

'Oh, heaven-bound I'll surely be,'
Said Adam with alacrity.
'Of course you will,' was God's reply -
Without conviction, and with a sigh!

*'Of course you will; you'll pray and sing,
Read my Scriptures and make bells ring;
You'll initiate those newly born –
And massacre those who don't conform!*

*'Be not perplexed, my little man,
For that is not my ideal plan;
But I grant freedom to your kith and kin,
To opt for good or to sin.
For they're not puppets on a string,
Nor celestial angels on the wing;
They're men and women I've designed,
With a complex, independent mind.*

*'With justice they'll acquit or harm,
To wounds apply a soothing balm;
The harassed in spirit they will calm,
And the gullible they'll cheerfully charm!
But they will also cause alarm
When they threateningly raise a muscled arm,
And strike the weak without a qualm,
Pillaging the victor's palm.'*

*'So what's the point, Lord, of my life,
If wickedness is so rife;
If attaining good is such a struggle,
As ephemeral as a bubble?*

*'And where will you be when the weak
In fear cry out – or fear to speak;
When mothers cradle to their breast
The erstwhile glory of their nest:
Lifeless victims of a violent quest
By men to re-order, at their own behest,
A fractured world,
As they think best?'*

*'Enough of your questions, Adam, my friend,
Now let your ear to me attend:
Through adamah's prism you're viewing man's fate,
But I, at the end of time, await
A mankind exhausted from its dark deeds,
A coming together of disparate creeds,
A true empowerment of the weak,
A banishment of the evil streak.'*

*'But just how long, Lord, will all that take,
For a human-kind with so much at stake?'*

*'Although I've said enough of "why?"
I'll offer you this, my last reply:
There've been other worlds before this one,
Which I've dispatched to oblivion,
When man left me no other choice,
Having suppressed his moral voice;
When nations passed beyond redemption,
With kindness meriting no mention.
Those worlds then vanished without a trace -
And with them went their human race.*

*'But a time will come – I have no doubt -
When a world will be born to take up the shout:
"Praise the Lord from the heights!"
When a new Adam will raise his sights
Heavenward,
And, pure of heart,
Seek its guidance from the start;
And without so much as a trace of guile,
Be filled with love and a ready smile,
For fellow man in far off isle,
Whom he will greet with "Shalom, brother!"
And never think of as just "another;"
Moulding all his generations
Into a family of bonded nations,
Attentive to all of my orations.'*

*'Will mine be that world, Lord?
Will it seek to promote accord?
Will my offspring earn your grace,
And eternally behold your face?'*

*Adam stood waiting for a reply,
Till the sun went down in the sky;
Desperate to hear of his children's fate,
He scanned the heavens to locate
The One who, mysteriously,
Was making him wait.*

*'Why, Lord, this long delay?' -
He bellowed loudly till the break of day,
His face awash with his tears -
But with no response to allay his fears.*

*'I will not move from my place,
Till you tell me the future of my human race,'
Cried Adam weakly as he fell to the ground,
Closed his eyes, and, without a sound,
Slipped into an induced sleep -
And dreamt of deer, gazelles and sheep.*

* * *