

AMAL DUNQUL
THE BOOK OF GENESIS

TRANSLATED BY ROBIN MOGER

CHAPTER 1

In the beginning I
was a man a woman a tree
I was a father and son and holy spirit I
was morning evening the round fixed eye

and my throne it was a stone upon the river's banks
sheep did graze and bees about the flowers
buzzed, ducks floated on a lake of silence and
life

pulsed
like the distant mill

when I saw all that I saw
would not save my heart
from tedium

(cockfights
the only diversion
by my solitary seat
amid the wrangling branches)

CHAPTER 2

I told myself should I go down to water,
bathe, I'd cleave in two (once cleft
be doubled! and I smiled)
and once I'd washed, the flowers knit
into a cloak of the lip's bitterness in which
I wrapped my quaking body

(my throne was floating
like the ark)

a small bird flitted to my head
alight to shake off droplets I
stared into the waters
I stared all that I saw
 my face crowned with thorn

CHAPTER 3

I said Let love be on Earth yet it was not, I said
Let the river run to the sea and the sea to clouds
and the clouds to barren ground and barren to green to grow
bread to bring ease to the heart of the hungry and grass for the cattle
of the earth and shade to those abroad in sorrow's wastes
and I saw a son of Adam setting his walls about God's estate
purchasing his neighbors as guards, selling his kin
bread and water, from lean cows drawing milk, I said
Let love be on Earth yet it was not, now
love was a possession for those who owned the price

And the Lord saw that it was not good

I said Let justice be on Earth, eye for eye and tooth for tooth
I said Does wolf eat wolf or sheep the sheep? Do not
set the sword at the necks of two, boy and old man
and I saw a son of Adam fell a son of Adam, fire
cities, push his blade into pregnant bellies, strew
his children's fingers as fodder for his mount, clip lips
for blooms that moan to decorate the victory banquet

Justice now death its scales a gun its sons
crucified in the squares or hung on corners
through the towns, I said
Let justice be on Earth yet it was not, now
justice was a possession for those who sat
on thrones of skulls their mantles shrouds

And the Lord saw that it was not good

I said Let reason be upon the earth Hearken
to its measured voice I said Do birds build nests

in the serpent's maw, does the worm make home in flames of fire
do the owls paint kohl along their lashes, when the season falls
does the one who hopes for wheat sow salt? I saw
a son of Adam, mad, uprooting the climbing trees
spitting in the well, upon the waters casting oil, dwelling
in a house to plant the fatal charge at his door's foot
sheltering scorpions by the warmth of his ribs, conferring on
his sons his religion his name the shirt of discord, reason now
a beggar outcast pelted by boys with stones, stopped
by soldiers at the border, stripped by governments of nationality
set down on lists of those who hate the homeland, I said
Let reason be on Earth yet it was not, reason dropped
into a whirl of banishment and prison till it was mad

And the Lord saw that it was not good

CHAPTER 4

I said Let the wind blow over the earth Let it sweep up
this rot I said Let there be wind and blood The wind
plucks out the whisper of the dogged withered
leaf blood dribbles right down to the roots
and makes them bloom and cleanses them then climbs
the stem the tangled leaves the hanging fruit
and pressers press it into wine which shrills
in every jar I said Let blood be

a river of honey
coursing through Eden this earth is good its crown
the poor for them it wears its sweet perfume
they give it love it gives them issue, pride, I said
The rich shall not dwell here the rich who forge
from sweat of labor adultery's coin the settings in the
crown earrings of ivory a rosary for dissemblers

I am the first of the poor who live cast out
who die surrendering to me their hope of solace
I said Let the earth be mine and theirs
and I one of them

when I strip off the robes of heaven I
am sanctified in hunger's cry
upon the rough cot

CHAPTER 5

I stared at the rock and at the spring

I saw my face in hunger's lines

I stared at my inverted brow

I saw me, cross and crucified

I cried

emerging from the womb of bliss

I cried

I plead innocence

my being

~ my noose

my umbilical cord

~ its severed rope