

Tyler Nunley  
 Theo-742  
 Mark Baker  
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Atonement Metaphor  
 The World Is a Poem and God Is Speaking It

At the beginning the Great Poet began to recite the World Poem. Immediately his Voice went out and vocalized all that is—the rhythm of the planets and the lights, the rushing of the wind, the great flowing waters, and the grassy fields.

However, the Great Poet was not yet satisfied with his World-Poem. Despite its great beauty the Great Poet had something still greater to speak. Out of joy the Great Poet desired to share his love for poetry by allowing part of the World-Poem to compose itself, and he called this part of the World-Poem Humankind. The Great Poet desired that each human would hear his Voice speaking the World-Poem and compose its own verse after him. Whatever each human composed would become stanzas in the World-Poem. Out of his great joy the Great Poet gave Humankind this freedom.

In those days the humans were near the Great Poet. Each day they would sit at his feet as he would teach them and share his love for poetry. Each day, inspired by the World-Poem inside them and the World-Poem all around them, they composed and recited their poems together. All their voices were in accord with each other and the Great Poet's Voice, and in those days none took advantage of another.

At the end of every day each human would share its work with the Great Poet, and the Great Poet was always overjoyed to hear each new and unique work. Eventually, the day would come when a human voice would become faint. The Great Poet would come sit beside the faint voice as it passed, hearing its poem one last time, from start to finish. Our hearts grew heavy when a human voice ceased to speak its poem, but we never once feared because we knew her poem was safe in the heart of the Great Poet. We trusted the Great Poet to keep our finished poems near his heart forever.

These were the first days, and there have never since been any like them—when humans were near the Great Poet and heard his Voice clearly, when they spoke beautiful poems and learned from the Great Poet face to face.

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Two of the greatest human poets were the brothers Calliphon and Haimon. Calliphon had the most mellifluous and supple verse, and his brother Haimon, magnificent in his own right, always lived in his brothers shadow.

One day Haimon brought his work to the Great Poet. He said he had a new and great innovation for the World-Poem—there was no art like it. So, Haimon began to recite to the Great Poet. As he spoke, his bright and beautiful verse began to turn dark and narrow, fractured and enjambed. That day Haimon spoke a unique verse, unlike any other the World-Poem had yet known.

In his heart he had come to hate that there was a voice greater than his. And in hatred of Calliphon's greatness, he had come to hate a still greater voice—that Voice of the Great Poet! His heart had grown dark and greedy; he desired to be the voice above every other voice.

That day Haimon, with his verse, spoke of running blood— and silenced forever the voice of his brother—no voice would be greater than his! He would have even silenced the Great Poet's Voice, were he able.

Many other humans were taken in by the novelty of Haimon's work. They began to write for themselves. They disregarded the poems of the other humans, and they began to take advantage of others and write them into their poetry in hideous ways. "It is for the sake of art!" they would exclaim. They believed their poems had more integrity, were more beautiful, were more truthful than the poems of those who still heard the Great Poet's Voice.

Closed to the Great Poet's Voice, these humans only heard their own twisted work. They spoke power and fame to themselves. They raised themselves above others and claimed that all other voices were to be subjected to their own distorted voice. They wrote death, pain, and tragedy into their poems at the cost of others—all in the name of good art. Each one wanted his voice to fill the space of the Great Poet's Voice that he no longer heard.

These were the days when no one any longer understood the Voice that sustained the World-Poem, and so each one spoke as he saw fit. The distorted and shrill human voices had drowned out the Great Poet's Voice. They no longer knew where to find the Great Poet when their voices went faint, and everyone passed away in great fear and tumult.

A few humans still claimed to hear the Great Poet's Voice. They claimed strange and mysterious things. They were often hated and killed by the others. However, they said a day would come when we would hear and understand the Voice of the Great Poet once again, and that he would send one who would undo the evil of Haimon.

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Deaf to the Voice of the Great Poet, unable to hear its meter and cadence, its original purpose for the World-Poem, Humankind's poetry grew to a shrill and hideous cacophony. The World-Poem was becoming a very tragic poem indeed. It told a story in which the strong trampled the weak, in which the rich came out on top, and in which the guilty were not punished.

But the Great Poet would not let his World-Poem end in tragedy. If Humankind could no longer speak their poetry in accord with his Voice, he would have to speak it for them at whatever the cost. So, the Great Poet recited his own Voice into the World-Poem—the same Voice at the beginning with him and through which he vocalized all that is. He gave his Voice to humanity, giving it a human body.

This Voice in human flesh was given the name Theophon. His poetry was different from all the rest. He proclaimed that the Great Poet had never given up on his World-Poem: it was not going to be a story where the strong trampled the weak, where the rich came out on top, and where the guilty were not punished. But no one had the strength or skill to rhapsodize the World-Poem in this new direction. No one—that is—besides Theophon. As the Voice of the Great Poet in human flesh, he was the only one able to speak the World-Poem in a new direction. And so, with his beautiful words, he began to bend the World-Poem back towards the beautiful and glorious work that the Great Poet had originally loved.

Eventually, the poetry of the wicked silenced Theophon's voice. They hated his new direction for the World-Poem (which was not really new at all, but what the Great Poet spoke into it at the very beginning.) Therefore, they composed every evil thing against him. Theophon, with his most powerful voice, refused to compose like them. He refused to turn their hideous verse against them, even to defend himself. In the end it cost him his life; they took his voice from him. This was the most wicked composition of humanity: they killed the very Voice that spoke and sustained them. Were this the end—it really would be the End. Without any Voice to recite and sustain the World-Poem, it would collapse in on itself and cease to exist.

But the Great Poet had a trick up his sleeve all along. He, poet above all poets, was planning a Part II. He was going to make known, at the End of Part I, what he really thought about all the humans' ugly and hideous poetry. He would do this with a grand exposition of poetic justice. Further, he was going to praise and honor those who had continued to write beautifully. All the poetry composed in Part I that was in accord with the Great Poet's Voice would continue to Part II. Even those whose voices had gone silent—if they had composed in accord with the Great Poet's Voice (which was the very essence of beauty and love), he kept their stories near his heart for a reprise in Part II.

Even in Theophon's death, the Great Poet had a plan to help humanity. Theophon, the Great Poet's Voice in fleshly form, had composed and recited perfect poetry, better than any human ever had. As a gift to humanity, the Great Poet let Humanity see the great honor he was planning for Theophon in Part II. In so doing the Great Poet was proclaiming, "This is the sort of poetry that I will honor and

praise in the the Next Part! Compose yourselves into Theophon’s poem and you will also be honored like him in Part II!”

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Long ago we had lost the ability to hear the Great Poet’s Voice. But now, after Theophon had spoken, we knew we had heard in him the Voice of the Great Poet once again. We had sat at his feet, and he had taught us how to make beautiful poetry again. The distorted and cacophonous poetry of the world was no longer the only work we knew. Theophon himself bent the World-Poem back towards the Great Poet’s heart, but with every person that learned from him and spoke after his way, the World-Poem drew nearer and nearer to it.

Many still compose after the style of Haimon, believing that Theophon was a shoddy poet. However, we have come to know that in his life and death Theophon was the Voice of the Great Poet himself. As we live in the way of Theophon the Voice of the Great Poet continues to speak through us and to speak life and love into the World-Poem. Dear Reader, hear the lyrics of Theophon, the Voice of the Great Poet himself—how he respected every person and took none for granted; how he heard the orphan, the widow, and the poor and always sought to uplift their voices, to teach them beautiful style. He even composed beautifully for those who sought to silence him! Hear in Theophon’s voice the Voice of the Great Poet who loves the weak and poor, and turn away from a style that tramples the weak and favors the rich. Theophon’s one powerful verse in his life and death becomes many as we hear and follow in his way. Finally, after it all, the Great Poet will keep your work close to his heart for a reprise in Part II.

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Questions for Consideration:

- 1) Commonly, we see Scripture as God’s rules—limitations on our freedom and happiness in life. Poetry limits and constrains expression in order to bring beauty, meaning, and emotional depth to the world. How might seeing our lives as poetry in God’s great poem change how we view the “rules” in Scripture?
- 2) How does viewing Jesus as God’s Voice speaking to us and for us affect our understanding of humanity and divinity in the person of Jesus?
- 3) Quality poetry penetrates into and shapes the meaning of the world—for better or for worse. When we consume it, quality poetry grows inside of us and molds us. What does thinking of Jesus as a poet that perfectly expresses the nature and character of God mean for how we understand his work in life and death?
- 4) What does hearing the Word of God’s poetry in Jesus mean for the poetry of your own life today?