

ԳՐԱԿԱՆ

TWO SONGS OF LOVE BY HOVHANNĒS T'LKURANC'I
(Armenian and English)

Introductory Remarks

The lyric poems of Hovhannēs T'lkuranc'i, an Armenian poet of the fourteenth century, are extraordinarily rich in language and feeling. He is celebrated for his wealth of imagery drawn from the natural world employed for his appreciation of beauty, which he expresses with a bounty of comparisons. Here we present two of his love poems that sing the praises of beautiful women, and both expressing the poet's ambiguity about human beauty. The poet knows, together with his admiration of the subjects of his paens, that such love is not unambiguous and together with its praise he expresses reserve about it. In the last stanza of Poem No. 2, addressing himself he says: "Cast worldly love from your heart, Bless the increate, existent Word". In the final stanza of the poem, he recalls that all beauty is transient and that "the beautiful countenance turns to dust." This apostrophe in the last stanza is a trade mark of his lyrics and it always commences with the words, "Crazy Hovhannēs T'lkuranc'i." Are these last stanzas almost a formality, or do they express some reservations that the poet has about his love of beauty, particularly, perhaps female beauty?

The freshness and imagery of his poetry are entrancing. Both poems translated here are marked by sustained metaphors and similes that are evoked throughout. Both are written in quatrains. The second and fourth lines rhyme, and sometimes one or both of the other two lines also rhyme with the second and fourth lines: so in Poem 1, stanza 2 the first, second and fourth lines end in -ան "-an", and so forth. Indeed, the whole poem, bar the first stanza, has "-an" as its only rhyme. Basically the lines are of four feet with a caesura after the second. He apparently also set the poems to music and used to sing them.¹

The poet Hovhannēs of T'lkuran, author of these "songs of love" is to be distinguished from the Cilician Catholicos of the same name who was of a later vintage.² Archbishop Bogharian dubs the poet, who lived approximately between 1320 and 1400, **ԽԵ ՅՈՒԿՏԱՆՆԷՍ** "Crazy Hovhannēs," following his own self-designation in the final stanzas of his poems. Nothing is known of his life and background, except that his work is deeply anchored in the Armenian poetic tradition.

The Armenian text printed below is drawn from E. Pivazyán (ed.) (1960), **ՅՈՒԿՏԱՆՆԷՍ ԹՎԿՈՐԱՆՑԻ. ՏԱՂԵՐ** [Hovhannēs T'lkuranc'i. Poems], (Erevan: Academy). Pivazyán's text has been compared with that edited by Archbishop Norayr Bogharian.³ The chief differences, apart from one reading, are that Pivazyán follows the rule that when a normally "unwritten" ը is counted in the scansion of a line, it is actually written.

The poems were previously translated by James R. Russell, who added explanatory and

¹ Srбуhi Hayrapetyan (1988), *Հայոց Հին և Միջնադարեան Գրականութեան Պատմութիւն* *History of Ancient and Mediaeval Literature* (Beirut: Catholicisate of Cilicia), 537.

² This problem is discussed by Archbishop Norayr Bogharian (Polarean) (1971), *Հայ Գրողներ* *Armenian Writers*. (Jerusalem: Sts. James Press), 385-387.

³ N. Bogharian (Polarean) (1958), *Hovhannēs T'lkuranc'i. ՏԱՂԵՐ* Poems. (Jerusalem: Sts. James Press), 12-13.

comparative notes to his translation, often setting an idea or an expression in its context in Medieval Armenian poetic tradition.⁴ Deliberately, we translated the poems without consulting Russell's work and have subsequently compared his translation with ours, noting where they differ in sense. Our translation incorporates suggestions of the Jerusalem Armenian Reading Group in 2020-2021, together with whom we read these two poems.

Our hope is that this translation, with the en face original text, will enable readers both of Armenian and English to enjoy the beauty of this gifted medieval Armenian's poetry.

Poem of Love No. 1.⁵

1. Ար'ե՛կ, ար'ե՛կ, իմ խոււյ սուրաթ,
Փառք ու պատիւ քո ստեղծողին,
Եդեմական դրախտէն կու գաս,
Օրհնեալ անուն քո՞ նախշողին:

2. Ար'ե՛կ⁷, արև գարնանային,
Ար'ե՛կ աշնան պայծառ լուսին,
Նիստ որ հայիմ յերեսդ ի վեր,
Տեսրդ հերիք է ինձ բաժին:

3. Տեսրդ բժիշկ է հիւանդին,
Առողջութիւն ջերմընոտին.
Աչերըդ ծով է ծարուածին,
Բերանըդ քաղցր է քաղցածին:

4. Ծոցդ է դրախտ անմահութեան,
Ի յետ դարձնէ զելած հոգին,
Ոչ մեռանի, ոչ ծերանայ,
Ոչ երեսին դառնայ դեղին:

5. Վաղուրնէն ում որ⁸ հանդիպիս՝
Ի ծառ ելնէ զօրն ի բարին,
Ով որ սուրաթըդ համբուրէ՝
Խնդմով անցնէ զբոլոր տարին:

6. Զով դու սիրով ի ներս ձէնես՝
Ծաղկի քան զծառըն խընկենին,
Ով կուռ միջացրդ գիրկ ածէ՝
Կանաչ մընայ քան զնշդարին:

1. Come, O come, my fair of face.
Glory and honour (be) to your Creator.
You come from the Edenic Garden,
Blessed be the name of your Adorner.

2. Come, you springtime sun.
Come, you shining autumn moon,
Sit so I may gaze up on your face,
The sight of you is portion enough for me.

3. The sight of you is a physician for the ill,
Healing for the febrile.
Your eyes are a sea for the thirsty,
Your mouth is ambrosia for the hungry.

4. Your bosom is a garden of immortality,⁹
It makes the wandering soul turn back.
It does not die, it does not age,
Nor does the face¹⁰ turn pale.

5. Whoever you meet in the morning,
His day dawns wholly for good.
He who kisses your face,
Passes the whole year in joy.

6. He whom you invite in lovingly,
Flowers more than the incense tree.
He who embraces your waist constantly,¹¹
Remains greener than the hornbeam tree.

⁴ James R. Russell (1987), *Hovhannēs T'lkuranc'i and the Mediaeval Armenian Lyric Tradition*. (University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press), 26-38.

⁵ Pivazyán, No. 1, 119-121.

⁶ nf: Literally 'picture'

⁷ ? ւ՝ ա՛ր'ե՛կ Bogharian

⁸ Bogharian omits. In terms of

⁹ i.e. the Garden of Eden; See stanza 1.

¹⁰ Russell: Alluring to the risen soul.

¹¹ Russell: your ? waste

7. Խե Յովհաննէս Թուրկուրանցի
Փառաւորէ զՀայր և զՈրդի.
Աղուոր սուրաթն ի հող դառնայ,
Ի հուրն անշէջ իւր սիրելին:

7. Crazy Hovhannēs T‘Ikuranc‘i
Glorify the Father and the Son,
The beautiful countenance returns to dust,
My beloved, to eternal¹² fire.

Poem No. 2¹³ (Pivazyian p. 122)

1. Տեսայ պատկերք մի գեղեցիկ,
Զէտ զարեգակն որ լոյս կու տայ,
Տեսայ աչեր զէտ ըզծովեր,
Ուներ քան զամպ ու զտիրայ:
2. Ուրակ ճակատ ու ճոխ բերան,
Ծամն ու վարսերն էր հոգեհան,
Ծոցն է լըցած սպիտակ վարդով,
Մէջքն ու թիկունքն քան զուռ ճօճան:
3. Ելից ի յիս հանց հուր ու բոց,
Որ կու վառիմ զօրն ի լման.
Մոռցայ զուսումըն զոր ունի,
Մնացեր եմ լոկ աշխարհական:
4. Ասացի՝ Սիրէ զիս, ծով աչեր.
Նայ¹⁴ ասաց՝ պահեմ զաչս ի վերան.
Նիստ որ հայիմ երեսդ ի վեր,
Ար՛եկ¹⁵ կացիր ինձ յերևան:
5. Աստուած ողորմէր¹⁶ ինձ, եղբայրք,
Որ զայն երեստ ինձ պատասխան,
Թէ չէ մնայի խև կապելու,
Ի՛ շուրջ կու գի քան զգայլ գազան:
6. Թէ շատ թէ քիչ ի յետ ձգեմ՝
Միթէ անցնի հուրս ի խափան.

1. I saw a beautiful face,¹⁷
Like the sun which shines.
I saw eyes like¹⁸ seas,
Eyebrows like clouds and the deep.
2. White brow and splendid mouth,
Her breath-taking locks and hair,
Her bosom filled with white roses,
Back and shoulder,¹⁹ a swaying willow.
3. She filled me like fire and flame,
And I burn the whole day through.
I forgot the learning that I had,
I remained an empty laïc.
4. I said, “Love me, eyes like the sea.”
She said, “My eyes I keep on high.”
“Sit so I may gaze on²⁰ your face.
Come, be a vision for me.”
5. God had mercy on me, brothers,
that she gave me this answer,
If not, I would stay ensorcelled, crazy,
I²¹ would pace around²² like a wild wolf.
6. If I recoil a lot or a little,
Will this fire become quiet?

¹² Literally: unextinguishable. This is an allusion to Isa 66:24. There are Armenian texts, still unpublished, that bear the title, “Concerning the Undying Worm and the Unextinguishable Fire.” These are, presumably, descriptions of Hades.

¹³ Pivazian, No. 2, pp. 122-124.

¹⁴ Bogharian omits նայ on grounds of scantion this seems correct.

¹⁵ Bogharian reads յերակ “always”

¹⁶ Boghrarian: ողորմեաց

¹⁷ Literally: picture. Russell translates “image”.

¹⁸ Thus translating according to fաճ2 in R.S. Łazaryan and H. M. Avetisyan (1987), Միջին Հայերէնի Բառարան [Dictionary of Mediaeval Armenian]. 2 vols (Yerevan: Yerevan State University Press).

¹⁹ Literally: like.

²⁰ Russell: upwards at.

²¹ Littrally: And I.

²² Russell: a wandering about more than the.

Նա՛յ սէրն ի սիրտս ի ներս կ'երթայ
Ի՛ ես կու մընամ մեղաց դարան:

Behold,²³ love penetrates my heart,
And I stay snared by sin.

7. Բերեմ անցընեմ զահն ի մըտիս,
Ու զդժոխոց հուրն անվախճան՝
Մի թ'ազատիմ այս կըրակէս,
Որ յանկասկած ինձ վառեցան:

7. I bring, I pass the fear in my mind,
And the eternal fire of Hell,
Will I be freed from this fire,
In which they surely burned me?²⁴

8. Խե Յովհաննէս Թուկուրանցի,
Յրէ զխորհուրդդ զիւական,
Հան ի սըրտէդ սէր աշխարհիս,
Օրհնէ զանեղ բանն էականն:

8. Crazy Hovhannēs of T'ulkuran,
Disperse your devilish thoughts,
Cast worldly love from your heart,
Bless the increate, existent Word.

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²³ Russell: Such.

²⁴ Russell: With wich I was ignited unawares.