

A Profitable and Excellent Poem by Catholicos Grigor Tl,-ay

Translated by Michael E. Stone

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Grigor Pahlavuni, dubbed "Tl,-ay", (1133-1193) was a poet and Catholicos (1173-1193). He was the nephew of Catholicos Grigor III (1113-1166) and of St. Nerse, s S, norhali (1166-1173). His father was Prince Vasil Pahlavuni. Grigor has not been highly estimated as a poet and the poetic eminence of his uncle, the renowned St. Nerse, s S, norhali, overshadowed him. Recently, however, Th.M. van Lint wrote a study of his best-known poem, *Lament over the Capture of Jerusalem*, and has gone a considerable way to cast fresh light on his poetic production. Van Lint gives a good deal of information of both biographical and literary character about this poet-Catholicos.¹

The poem translated here is an expression of personal religious sentiment. Grigor knows and recognizes the potential for spiritual perfection within himself but finds that that potential has weakened, darkened, is asleep. The first nine of the poem's twelve stanzas express his sense of spiritual impotence in a series of images, growing in intensity. Each line is formed of two hemistichs, one expressing a positive sentiment and the second a corresponding negative one. In the first four stanzas, the negative counterpart is formulated impersonally, but from stanza five on, the first person is introduced, "He commanded me for good, But I did not perceive it". In stanza 8 he speaks of his sinfulness and in the next he expresses powerful fear of Divine judgement. A climactic effect is thus achieved, with the turning point in stanza 10 "But He gave hope for sins...". From this 10, the poet faces towards hope for God's mercy and Christ's forgiveness of sin.

Stanzas 1-4 deal with the poet's own qualities and characteristics, and how he is disappointed in them, and then with things outside himself to which he cannot respond, though they summon him. In stanzas 5-6 God's demand and call through both punishment and the offer of the good are set forth. Because he cannot respond to them on his own, these constitute yet another aspect of his soul's sterility. He attributes this to Satan's deception and his consequent sin and punishment (stanzas 7-9). The first part of the poem strongly presents the poet's own sense of spiritual aridity and his incapability to respond to God's summons. As he is, by implication, so are all humans. The resolution of the great tension thus created is Christ's forgiveness and this is the message of the last three stanzas. On his own, the poet cannot respond to God and His summons, only Christ's forgiveness can bring him to the light. The triple repetition of the stem թողութ in the last stanza drives this point home: "Jesus will forgive (թողցէ) many things."²

Grigor uses a number of techniques to reinforce the overall movement of his composition. Thus we find a pattern of repetitive words at the end of the stichs. This

¹ See Th. M. van Lint, "The Poem of Lamentation over the Capture of Jerusalem written in 1189 by Grigor Tl,-ay, Catholicos of All Armenians," *The Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land* eds. M. E. Stone, R. R. Ervine and N. Stone (Leuven, Peeters: 2002), 121-142.

² I am indebted to my friend Theo van Lint for much of the analysis in this paragraph.

is sustained in stanzas 1-5 as *e*, "is"; in stanzas 5-6, 10-11 line 1 as *zayn* "that"; in stanza 7 as the indefinite pronoun (*ok* ' in line 1 and *inc*, ' in line 2); and as *na* "he" in stanza 11, line 2 and stanza 12. Stanzas 7 and 8 break the pattern.

These repetitions, even if not completely consistently used, give the poem a cohesiveness and perhaps the disruption of the pattern in stanzas 7 and 8 strengthens this effect by deliberate contrast. That cohesiveness is enhanced by the pattern of stress. The caesura between the hemistychs is strict throughout, preceding the fifth syllable from the end of the line. Thus the second hemistych always has 5 syllables and is also marked out by the repetitive final word. The first hemistych of each line is also usually of 5 syllables, but in some cases is 6 or even 7 syllables long. This combines with the repetitive words to produce a first hemistych contrasting in content, sound and length with the stressed second hemistych which gains strength from its stressed regularity. Though the imagery is varied, the import is identical. The reader's interest is sustained by the technical means which captivate the ear and strengthen the interesting contrasts of imagery.

It is this setting off of the second hemistych that expresses the point of each of the images used. The range of the images is rich and complements the pattern set by the formal aspects of this meditation. The overall effect is very pleasing.³

Տ Ե ԱՌՆ ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻՍԻ ՈՐԴՈՅ ՎԱՍԻԼ ԻՇԽԱՆԻ՝ ԵՂԲՕՐ
ԿԱԹՈՂԻԿՈՍԱՅՆ Տ Ե ԱՌՆ ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻՍԻ ԵՒ ՆԵՐՍԻՍԻ,
ԱՍՍՅԵԱԼ ԲԱՆ ՊԻՏ ԱՆԻ ԵՒ ԶԱՐՄԱՆԱԼԻ

Գ ո յ յ ի ս գ ի տ ու լ թ ի լ ն ,
Բ այ ց ի ս ս մ ր ա ց ե ալ է .
Գ ո յ ե ր կ ի լ ղ ք ա ր ե ա ց ,
Ա յ լ շ ի ջ ա ն ի մ ի շ ա :

Է՛ յ ի ս ե լ հ ո գ ի
Բ այ ց տ կ ա ր ա ց ե ալ է .
Ու ն ի մ ե լ լ ո յ ս պ այ ծ ա ո ,
Բ այ ց ի ս աւ ա ր ե ալ է :

³ The text is drawn from The text is drawn from Գրիգոր Տղայ. Բանաստեղծություններ եւ պոեմներին աշխատությունը Ա.Շ. Մնացականյան, Երեւան 1972, էջ 179-181.

Կայ եւ հուր սիրոյ ,
Բայ ց սառնուցեալ է .
Եւ հողմըն քաղցրասի գ`
Խորշակահար է :

Ջերմեմ առ Աստուած ,
Այլ ց ուրտըն մերձ է .
Կամիմ քու սուցանել ,
Բայ ց սոթըն չար է :

Խոստացաւ ինձ չար չարանք
Եւ չընկալայ զայն .
Ասաց եւ հեշտու թիւն ,
Այլ չկամեցայ զայն :

Ի հնգից զիս բաժանեաց ,
Եւ չիմացայ զայն .
Հրաւերետեւ քարեաց ,
Բայ ց չըզգացի զայն :

Ի սնոտիս այս խաբեցայ
Որպէս տըկարոք .
Ի յունայնս այս պատրեցայ
Իբրիկայուն ինչ :

Ձաչըսկափուցի
Եւ այնկամաւ իմ .
Իքունմտիմեղաց

Եւ հ ե շ տաց այ յ այ ն :

Վա՛ յ , երբ զարթնուցում

Եւ հատուցէ ինձ՝

Խաւար եւ տարտարոս ,

Դառն սարսափու մն :

Բայց յոյս ետմեղանաց ,

Եւ ես գտի զայն .

Ատե՛ լ , սուաց , զյանցանս ,

Եւ զնվեցի զայն :

Բարի եւ զողորմելն

Եւ կատարեաց զայն .

Սիրելն անճարբարի ,

Եւ զայն ուսոյցնա :

Ի թողուն լ պարտապանին՝

Եթող եւ մեզնա .

Թողցէ Յիսուս քաղմաց ,

Զոք պահանջեացնա :

A Profitable and Excellent Discourse by Lord Grigor, son of Prince Vasil, brother of the Catholicoses, Reverend Grigoris and Reverend Nerse, ^s.

There exists knowledge in me,
But it is has withered;
There exists awe of good things,
Yet 'tis ever extinguished.

There is a soul⁴ in me too,
But it is enfeebled;
I contain brilliant light,

⁴ Or: spirit.

But it is darkened.

There is love's fire too,
But it has grown cold;
And the sweet-wafting wind,
Is smitten by heat.

I am warm towards God,
Yet the cold is close by;
I wish to sprout forth,
But the heat is wicked.

He proffered me punishment,
And I did not accept it.
He said delight too,
Yet I did not want it.⁵

From the five he separated me,⁶
And I did not understand it.
He invited me to good,
But I did not perceive it.

I was deceived in this nonsense,
Like a weak man;
I was duped in this nothingness,⁷
As if in something real.⁸

I closed my eyes,
And that by my own will;
I entered sin's sleep,
And I enjoyed it.⁹

Alas, when I shall be wakened,
And he will recompense me;
Dark and Tartarus,
Bitter terror.

But he gave hope for sins,
And I found that;
Hate transgression, he said,
And I praised that.

⁵ Reward and punishment were revealed to the poet, but he did not accept them as a guide for action.

⁶ I.e., the five senses and the sensory world in contrast to the intelligible or the spiritual one. God gave the poet the ability to transcend the world of the senses and he did not realise what had been offered to him.

⁷ Nonsense and nothingness are this world. The language evokes the serpent's deception of Adam who is doubtless the "weak man". This world is vanity and nothingness, a sentiment drawn from Ecclesiastes chapter 1.

⁸ Literally: stable.

⁹The poet continues to blame his lack of perception. The image of sleep to designate the unenlightened state is ancient and widespread.

Good and merciful,
And he carried that out;
Loving ineffable good,
That too he taught.

In forgiving the culprit,¹⁰
He forgave us as well.
Jesus will forgive many things
Which He required.¹¹

¹⁰ The Armenian expression is drawn from the Lord's Prayer, եւ մեք թողնու մք մերոց
պարտաւանս ազ "we forgive those who trespass against us."

¹¹ For which he would otherwise have demanded punishment.