Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui

Gregory of Nazianzus' *Hymn to Parthenie* (II.1.2.1 – 214)

Christianizing Greek Theogonies

1 Gregory as a poet

Gregory of Nazianzus is the towering figure of Late Antique Christian literature, and for many he is the greatest Greek Christian poet of all times. Yet precisely the popularity, variety, and extension of his poetic work has been an unsurmountable obstacle for a reliable complete edition. The scarce critical editions of some specific poems are still a minor part of the more than 18.000 verses that are collected in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, which reproduces the unfinished and disorderly 18th century edition of his works by Maurine monks.¹ This is doubtless one main factor that contributes to the paradox that his poetry is less taken into account than it would doubtless merit in the studies that deal with theological Greek literature in Late Antiquity. Of course his discourses have more doctrinal consistence, as is to be expected from the systematic argumentations and terminological precision that are inherent to prose; but the poetic format allows often bolder formulations that can illuminate his theological conceptions without the doctrinal constrictions imposed by systematic discourse. Therefore, the project undertaken by this volume must necessarily take Gregory's poetry into account as a significant by-product of Christian poetic theology.

The variety of Gregory's poetic production makes it impossible to approach it from a single point of view. In his own account about the reasons for composing poetry, he offers four different motives: to exercise spiritual measure through the practice of linguistic measure imposed by poetic metre; to teach doctrines through persuasive language; to show that Christians are able to compose poetry of such literary quality as that composed by Greek pagans; and to get personal consolation in hard times.² Leaving aside the first and last reasons, which deal with personal motives, the second and third ones are most relevant for the comprehension of the theological and Biblical contents in his verses. Poetry is both a didactic tool for teaching Christian doctrine and a key instrument in the cultural contest that pagans and Christians were maintaining around the right to claim possession of Greek *paideia*. As shown by his discourses against Julian's attempt in 362 to exclude Christians

¹ The Maurine edition was lost during the French Revolution and was recovered by D. A. B. Caillau, whose edition (1840) is reproduced by Migne. The poems follow the numbering resulting from this edition. Translations from the poems are mine except otherwise indicated.

² "On his own verses" (II.1.39.33–55). On this poem, cf. Milanovic-Barham (1997).

from the teaching of the Greek classics, Gregory was fully conscious of the importance of that cultural struggle, and even years after the death of the Apostate Emperor, he was concerned with contributing to Christian Greek *paideia* through his poetic work.³

The importance of his cultural achievement has been slowly recognized in the last decades, in which editions, translations, and commentaries of particular poems have been slowly emerging. Likewise, studies dealing with his classical sources have analysed Gregory's frequent use of Greek poets, specially Homer, and parallels with Archilochus, Sappho, or Callimachus in specific verses have been duly noted as a clear sign of his outstanding learning. The study of the literary genres that he takes as models to imitate, and at the same time, to innovate, is indeed a fruitful approach to his literary projects: his use of heroic epic, *threnoi*, oaths, lyric poetry, and even tragedy has been fruitfully researched by scholars.⁴ It is evident that the adoption of a specific stylistic or generic model has key influence in his way of presenting his poetry of Biblical content, which is our object of interest here. In this chapter, I will contribute to this flow of studies with the commentary of a poem dealing with creation, that is paradigmatic of his knowledge of classical Greek poetry and his firm will to renew it in order to adapt Greek forms and genres to Christian themes, needs, and tastes. In spite of their importance, the literary models he follows in this piece, from literary theory about hymns to Hesiod's *Theogony*, have not to my knowledge been explored before.

2 Menander Rhetor on hymns

Let us start by focusing the attention in the most important work of late antique literary theory that has been preserved, the treatise on hymns attributed to Menander Rhetor. Of course it is not my intention to prove that Gregory knew this work, which cannot be proved or even considered a likely probability. However, Menander's judgements are representative of the kind of teaching learnt in rhetorical schools like those frequented by Gregory when he was young (and also by some conspicuous pagan contemporaries of the so-called Third Sophistic). Therefore, as a student of

³ Julian, *Epistle* 36.423 A-C: "But I give them (scil. Christians) this choice; either not to teach what they do not think admirable, or, if they wish to teach, let them first really persuade their pupils that neither Homer nor Hesiod nor any of these writers whom they expound and have declared to be guilty of impiety, folly and error in regard to the gods, is such as they declare" (translation Wright). Gregory's *Discourses* 4 and 5 are entitled "Against Julian". On the controversy, cf. Elm (2012).

⁴ Prudhomme (2006) in her thesis has thoroughly researched important literary aspects of Gregory's poetic work underlining his reception of classical authors; Demoen (1996) collected his mythical exempla mostly taken from Homer and Hesiod; Moreschini and Sykes (1997) note the frequent parallels with epic poetry; cf. Kambylis (1982), Simelidis (2009), Hawkins (2014) 142–183, and Basso 2015 for his poetic relation to Archilochus and Callimachus; Cataudella (1927) and Koster (1964) for his use of Sappho; on his use of Euripides, cf. my own paper in Herrero de Jáuregui (2020).

rhetorical schools, Gregory would have used, if not Menander, similar treatises on types of hymns and rules to compose them—which, as we shall see, he used creatively in his poetic works.

Now, Menander dedicates his first book on hymns to the gods, and he distinguishes, among other kinds that are not relevant for the present purpose (e.g. apopemptic, deprecatory), the following types of hymns:⁵

- 1) Cletic hymns (κλητικοί): “they are such as most of those to be found in Sappho, Anacreon, and the other lyric poets, containing invocations of many gods” (333.8–10); “the poet has a greater licence than the prose writer. The style appropriate to cletic hymns is that which moves with elegance and splendour. This is why the poets insert their additional passages. The appropriate figures are those of invocation” (335. 19–222).
- 2) Scientific hymns (φυσικοί): “they are such as were composed by Parmenides and Empedocles, expounding the nature of Apollo or Zeus. Most of the hymns of Orpheus are of this kind” (333.12–15); “some scientific hymns are fully explanatory, others are abbreviated; it makes a great difference whether one is concisely reminding a reader who is assumed to know, or giving instruction to one who is completely ignorant... some are written enigmatically, others in an overt manner... the enigmatic variety demands brevity, and those which do not convey instruction are in any case more summary; the others admit ample developments... In these hymns there is no need of a prayer at all. Such hymns should be carefully preserved and not published to the multitude or the people, because they look too unconvincing and ridiculous to the masses. As to the style, it is quite acceptable for it to approach the heights of the dythiramb, for there is no more solemn theme than these on which a human tongue may give utterance” (337.6–29).
- 3) Mythical hymns (μυθικοί): “they are those which contain myths and proceed by bare allegory: e.g. Apollo built the Wall, Apollo was a serf under Admetus, and the like” (333.15–18); “they must have no element of overt science... they are appropriate in a higher degree to the poet... style must be allowed less licence, retaining epideictic ornament but far removed from the manner of the dithyramb” (338.25–339.10).
- 4) Genealogical hymns (γενεαλογικοί): “they are those which follow the theogonies of the poets: e.g. when we say that Apollo is the child of Leto, and the Muses of Memory” (333.18–21). “If it is combined with other forms, this type welcomes length; if it is by itself, it is of use to poets, never to prose-writers... stylistic excellence in such composition resides in purity and freedom from wearisome excess; this may be achieved in poetry by moderation in the use of periphrases, and in prose by variety of cola” (340.8–20).

5 References to Menander's text and English translations are taken from Russell – Wilson (1981).

- 5) Fictitious hymns (πεπλασμένοι): “they are when we ourselves personify a god or the births of gods or daemons, as when Simonides speaks of the daemon Tomorrow, and others of Hesitation, and so on” (333.21–24); “they cannot be constructed around the more celebrated of the gods, whose births and powers are well known, but rather, as a rule, around the obscurer gods and daemons... we should take care to invent hymns that are continuous and not unconnected... fictions should be elegant and pretty, not unpleasing...in all our fictions we must derive corroboration from true facts...fictitious hymns must be internally consistent and not introduce contradictory or conflicting statements... length and elaboration must also be carefully watched... this kind of hymn is very powerful and a sign of inventiveness” (341.1–20).

After having described the different kinds of hymns, Menander praises the highest possible composition that combines the different types: “I have said that some hymns are composed of a combination of all of these forms or most of them in like proportions. These are also the most complete laudations” (343.27–29).

Now Gregory’s extense poetic production has a large number of compositions that clearly take into account the precepts of rhetoric such as those of Menander, while dwelling on purely Christian themes. Let us test this proposition with the analysis of a hymnic poem in which many of these types appear in isolation or in complex combinations.

3 A Hymn to Virginity (I.2.1.1–214)

The Dialogue of Virginity and Marriage is a lengthy poem in which each of the two personifications explain their own reasons from line 215 for several hundred lines. The dialogue from line 215 onwards has been commented in detail by Klaus Sundermann, who dates the poem around 370–372. Since he discards the possibility that the first part springs from a different poem, this dating is of course also valid for the proem.⁶ Paradoxically, this proem (lines 1–214) has been neglected and it is seldom even mentioned. However, this section is central not only to introduce the allegorical characters of the dialogue, but also to understand Gregory’s poetic agenda in this composition.

In effect, the poem is defined as a hymn, in a proem that follows the generic conventions of literary hexametric hymns. These are the first lines of the poem (1–14):

Παρθενίην στεφάνοις ἀναδήσομεν ἡμετέροισιν,
ἐκ καθαρῆς κραδίης καθαροῖς μέλποντες ἐν ὕμνοις.
Τοῦτο γάρ ἡμετέροιο βίου ξεινήϊον ἐσθλόν,
χρυσοῦ τ’ ἡλέκτρου τε φαάντερον, ἢ δ’ ἐλέφαντος,

⁶ Sundermann (1991) 19–20.

οἷς ζωὴν χθονίην χαμάδις βάλε παρθένος οἷστρος, 5
 πρὸς Θεὸν ὑψιμέδοντα νόου πτερὸν ἔνθεν αἰέρων.
 Ἀρχομένου δ' ὕμνοιο συνιαίνουσθε μὲν ἀγνοί·
 ξυνὸν γὰρ πάντεσσιν ὕμνος γέρας εὐαγέεσσιν.
 Οἱ φθονεροὶ δὲ θύρῃσιν ἐπιφράσσοισθε ἀκουάς·
 εἰ δέ τις ἀμπετάσειεν, ἀγνίζοιτο φρένα μύθῳ. 10
 Παρθενίη, μέγα χαῖρε, θεόσδοτε, δῶτερ ἑάων,
 μήτερ ἀπημοσύνης, Χριστοῦ λάχος, οὐρανίοισι
 κάλλεσιν ἄζυγέεσσιν ὁμόζυγε· ἄζυγές γάρ,
 πρῶτα Θεὸς, μετέπειτα Θεοῦ χορὸς αἰὲν ἑόντος.

“We will bind Virginity with our crowns,
 singing in pure hymns from a pure heart:
 for this is the best gift of hospitality of our life,
 shinier than gold and amber or ivory,
 for those whom chaste impulse compelled to throw earthly life to the ground,
 lifting from here the wing of the mind to God who rules from above.
 Beginning the hymn, cheer up, you the pure:
 for the hymn is a common privilege for all the pious;
 and you, the invidious, close your ears with doors:
 but if someone opens them, let him purify his mind with this account.
 Virginity, I salute you, gift from God, deliverer of goods,
 mother of goodness, possession of Christ, companion
 of the heavenly beauties without spouse: for without spouse
 is firstly God, and then the choir of eternal God”.

As in Homeric and Callimachean hymns, the first lines express the intention of starting a poem. They also refer explicitly to the tradition of initiatory poetry which is only adequate for the knowledgeable and pure, while the profane and impure may not listen and understand it. Purity is of course a fundamental requisite of cult that religious poets incorporated as a requisite of singing and listening to their poetry, like in Empedocles' invocation of the Muse.⁷ The profane are rejected from the audience of the poem, like in the imprecation canonized by Callimachus (ἐκάς, ἐκάς ὅστις ἀλιτρός / καὶ δὴ που τὰ θύρετρα καλῶ ποδὶ Φοῖβος ἀράσσει)⁸. Specifically, Gregory recuperates in this proem the Orphic image of closing the doors of the ears, a line functioning like a *sphragis* of Orphic poems (*Orph. Fragm.* 1 Bernabé: φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοις) whose imitation is frequent in Greek literature⁹. Precisely Menander said (337.7) that “scientific hymns” should be presented as *ainigmata* so that only the chosen few may read them: Gregory's rhetoric of literary initiation is fully in accord with such prescription.

⁷ Emp. fr. 3 DK. Cf. Herrero de Jáuregui (2015) on these poetic images mimicking the proclamations of sanctuaries.

⁸ Call. *Hymn. Apoll.* 2.10. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* VI.258: *procul, o procul este profani*.

⁹ On the great fortune of *Orph. Fragm.* 1 in Greek literature, cf. Bernabé (1996). That Gregory was familiar with Orphic poetry can be ascertained: Herrero de Jáuregui (2007), (2010, 173–177, 213).

The proem is followed by the invocation to the addressee, Parthenie (Virginity), just like in Homeric and Callimachean hymns. The invocation of lines 11–12 (Παρθενίη, μέγα χαῖρε, θεόσδοτε, δῶτερ ἑάων / Μητὲρ ἀπημοσύνης) resembles the end of Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus* too closely to be mere formulaic coincidence (91–92: χαῖρε μέγα, Κρονίδη πανυπέρτατε, δῶτορ ἑάων, / δῶτορ ἀπημονίης). The canon of the cletic hymn could hardly be followed more strictly.

The following thirty lines, 20–55, dedicated to praise the Trinity and the angels, offer clear echoes of the “scientific hymns”, to use Menandrian labels. It is a dense description, full of allusions, that appeals to those that are already familiar with the Trinitarian doctrine, which is adapted to the topic of chastity, in order to show that in the filiation of the Son there is no marital relation involved. Some prominent features of this section can be said to be typical of scientific hymns, whose formulations are only understood by the expert and initiated into the secret, in this case, the Trinitarian doctrines: nominal syntax (22: αὐτὸς γὰρ πάντεσσιν ὁδὸς καὶ ρίζα καὶ ἀρχή); paradoxes and oxymora (24: ἐκ σέλαος σέλας ἔρχεται; 27: μούνοιο μονώτατος; 29: εἷς Θεὸς ἐν τρισσοῖσιν ἀνοιγόμενος φαέεσσι); abstract nouns rather than proper names, as is appropriate to science and philosophy (30: τοίη μὲν Τριάδος καθαρὴ φύσις; 38–39: ἦ φύσις, ἔν τε νόημα, / εἷς πόθος ἀμφὶ ἄνακτα Θεὸν μέγαν); negative theology rather than mythical accounts (34–45); and neologisms that express doctrinal discoveries or intuitions, like the *hapax legomenon* οἰόβιοι (46).

Parallels for these features are numerous in earlier Greek poetry, from Xenophanes and Parmenides among ancient poets to the theological lethanies of the Orphic Hymns, and last but not least, the Nicean Credo, which proclaimed εἷς Θεὸς just like so many henotheistic hymns from Hellenistic and Imperial times¹⁰. In fact, line 24, cited above, makes explicit echo to the formulation of the Nicean Credo, “light from light”, changing the regular *phos* for the epic term *selas*.

The most interesting part for our purposes is the following section in which Gregory imitates and rivals Hesiod's *Theogony*. Gregory announces the revelation of “God's mysteries” as the necessary background for presenting Virginity's origin—for telling genealogy and birth is a most traditional way of hymning a divine being. This revelation, however, does not follow slavishly a given pattern: the two lines that announce revelation in lines 56–57 (Εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν ἐρέω μυστήρια κεδνὰ Θεοῖο, Παρθενίη τε χρόνοισιν ὅπως πυμάτοισιν ἔλαμψεν) have two revelatory expressions (ἐρέω μυστήρια, χρόνοισιν πυμάτοισιν) for which curiously no match can be found in earlier philosophical or religious poetry. Imitation is not slavish or mechanistic, but creative. And then his cosmogonic account starts (58–59):

Ἦν ποτ' ἔην, ὅτε πάντα κελαινὴ νύξ ἐκάλυπτεν.
οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔην ἡοῦς ἐρατὸν φάος· οὐδὲ κέλευθον
ἡέλιος πυρόεσσα ἐπέσσυτο ἀντολήθην.
οὐ μήνη κερόεσσα φαείνετο, νυκτὸς ἄγαλμα.

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¹⁰ The classic monography on these expressions is Petersen (1926).

πάντα δ' ἄμ' ἀλλήλοισι φορούμενα, μᾶψ ἀλάλητο
 πρωτογόνου χάος ζοφεροῖς δεδμημένα δεσμοῖς.
 ἀλλὰ σὺ, Χριστὲ μάκαρ, Πατρὸς μεγάλου φραδίῃσι
 πειθόμενος τὰ ἕκαστα διέκρινας εὖ κατὰ κόσμον.
 ἦτοι μὲν πρώτιστα φάος γένεθ', ὥς κεν ἅπαντα
 ἔργα πέλοι χαρίεντα φάους πλέα. Αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
 οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα κυκλώσας, θαῦμα μέγιστον,
 ἠελίῳ μῆνι τε διαυγέα.

65

“There was a point in time when dark night covered everything:
 For the amiable light of dawn was not, neither the sun
 pushed from the Orient his fiery path.
 The moon, delight of the night, did not appear with its horns,
 and all things were carried together with each other, wandering vainly,
 submitted to the dark links of first-born Chaos.
 But you, blessed Christ, obeying the desings of the great Father,
 discerned each thing well in order.
 In effect, first of all light came to be, so that all works
 were made beautiful, full of light. But then,
 you formed into a circle the starry heaven, the greatest marvel,
 and shiny with the sun and the moon”.

The first lines that describe the initial chaos do not allude Hesiod explicitly. There are some parallels with other poets, like Homer, Theognis, Pindar, Bion, or the *Orphic Hymns*, but none of them is particularly significant¹¹. What these parallel expressions attest is a lively *theogonic koiné*, which would be particularly useful in the “mythical hymns” dealing with origins. It is in lines 62–78 that tell the creation of cosmos according to the account of the Book of Genesis when the reference to Hesiod becomes explicit.

Line 66 is clearly fashioned from line 116 of the *Theogony*, in which the Muses start telling the origins of cosmos: ἦτοι μὲν πρώτιστα Χάος γένετ'· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα / Γαῖ' εὐρύστερνος, πάντων ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ. Gregory has just substituted Χάος for φάος in the first hemistych—the context of line 66 makes a scribal error unthinkable. The huge differences between both poems and both cosmogonic accounts are stressed precisely by the explicit citation of *Theog.* 116. Furthermore, the fact that the second hemistych of the Hesiodic line, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα, has been kept for the next line (67), in order to introduce a phrase about the creating role of light is significant. For Hesiod, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα introduced the immediate birth of Earth from primeval Chaos. Heaven will be born from Earth at a later stage. Instead, in the Bible Heaven is originated just after light. Finally, the verb κυκλώσας, in hymnic second person, recalls that God's creating role excludes completely the theogonic metaphor of divine reproduction.

¹¹ Line 58: κελαινὴ νύξ ἐκάλυψε (Hom. *Il.* 5.310). Line 59: ἐρατὸν φάος (Theogn. 1.569; Pind. *O.*10.75): Line 62: νυκτὸς ἄγαλμα (Bion fr. 11.2 / *Orph. Hymn.* 9.9 / *PMG* 4.2786).

This section, after more than a dozen lines paraphrasing the Genesis, closes up with an image of the entire cosmos as formed by the addition of sea, earth, and heaven: "Ὡς δὲ τὰ πάντα / κόσμος ἔην, γαίῃ τε, καὶ οὐρανὸς, ἡδὲ θάλασσα. This expression of cosmological completeness is markedly Hesiodic (*Theog.* 427, 487, in exactly the same order). Likewise, the final line of the section (78) contributes with a still more Hesiodic expression, γαῖα πελώρη (*Theog.* 173, in the same *sedes metrica*). In his poetic account of creation, Gregory proposes an alternative to Hesiod grounded on the Biblical model but using the Hesiodic model as point of reference.

The acceptance of the Hesiodic pattern, however, poses a serious theological problem. Gregory speaks (line 63) of a primordial obscurity, which he calls night and chaos, and this darkness becomes ordered and shaped through God's creative power. This chaos opposed to the current cosmos seems to spring from a Stoic reading of Hesiod rather than from the original meaning of the *Theogony*, but this is not too strange in the 4th century¹². However, this obscure and disorderly chaos is in any case, however it may be conceptualized, previous to φάος, the primordial light through which creation begins. Is Gregory admitting, therefore, the pre-existence of matter? As it is well known, the pre-existent matter is a classical problem of ancient cosmology, both pagan and Christian, and Gregory himself defends in one of his dogmatic poems, *On the Universe*, the creation ex nihilo, i.e. that matter was also created by God¹³. This fundamental difference of Christian cosmology from Hesiod and his Stoicisist interpreters is marked in two ways.

Firstly, the formula with which the whole section begins, ἦν ποτ' ἔην, ὅτε, is an extremely rare analeptic expression, found only twice in Greek literature¹⁴. Gregory uses it only once more, in a poem *On the soul*, precisely before a section taken, as we shall see, from this poem. Sykes' commentary on this line says that this expression marks the recognition of a punctual moment of creation, the origin of time itself¹⁵. This may well be the case also here, since it would imply that the dark chaos was itself created by God before he started ordering it, and therefore it also had a beginning. This interpretation could seem slightly imposed by the need of

¹² Gregory's notion of a dark chaos seems rather a huge disorder than a first separation, as it is in Hesiod. This conception, influenced by Stoic cosmogony, is already apparent in the beginning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.4: *rudis indigestaque moles*) and has been predominant up to our times: chaos would oppose cosmos as the order that is the telos of cosmogonic evolution.

¹³ Cf. Moreschini – Sykes (1997) 16 – 21; 143 – 173.

¹⁴ Apart from Gregory, the only example comes from 2nd cent. Rhetorician Alexander Numenius, who offers the following sentence, possibly Demosthenic, as example of analepsis (*De figuris* 20.9): καθάπερ ἔχει τὸ τοιοῦτον: ἦν ποτε, ἦν, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἐν τῇ τῶν πολλῶν ψυχῇ. The only further example comes from the Byzantine monk John Geometre in the 10th century (*Or.* I.3.23).

¹⁵ *Poemata arcana* 755 (451 A), cited below. Cf. Sykes 1997, 237: "the first four words recapitulate the point of *Arc.* 4 (scil. The poem "On the universe"): the world was not always in existence, but was created at a precise point in time. The words recall what Arius said about the Son (*Symb. Nic.* 325, *anath.* 1; Opitz 3.52.2; M 20.1540c), surely intentionally. It is right to talk in this way about the origin of the physical universe, just as it is wrong to use this language of the Son".

ideological consistence rather than linguistics, since neither the imperfect tense nor the adverb ποτε impose the understanding of a punctual moment, but it can be reinforced by the purposeful similarity with the famous expression by Arius to express the creation of the Son: ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, “there was a time in which he was not”. Gregory’s expression “there was, moment, when ...” emphasizes the positive meaning of the verb “to be” implying existence, but the inevitable resonance to Arius’ formulation in the ears of the 4th century audience must have association to the beginning of such existence, and therefore, the lack of absolute eternity of that which has beginning—only God never began¹⁶.

Secondly, the creation of primordial darkness is also implied by the epithet πρωτογόνος that Gregory uses to qualify chaos in line 63. This might seem contradictory with the expression πρώτιστα φάος γένεθ’ two lines later, but precisely this superlative may be understood as an act of superior creation for light, while chaos would be a mere fabrication: πρώτιστα would imply qualitative priority, rather than chronological. In fact, Protogonos is, in the aforementioned Greek theogonic *koiné*, the name of the first-born god, Phanes in the Orphic theogonies, for instance (cf. *Orphic Hymn* 5 to Protogonos). By calling chaos πρωτογόνος, Gregory is definitely denying the eternity of matter.

Lines 79–138 continue the cosmogonic narrative using a different poetic register. This section seems to aim at what Menander calls “genealogical hymns”, in which mythical narratives are combined with other hymnic forms. In fact, the tale of the creation of angels (lines 81–99) is exactly identical to that of the poem “On the soul”¹⁷. Since the internal chronology of Gregory’s poems is very difficult to establish, can we ascertain which of the two poems is earlier? The two lines that introduce this section in the poem we are commenting describe God’s pleasure in his creation (79–80: Ἀθρήσας τότε ἔπειτα καὶ ἄρμενα πάντα νοήσας, / τέρπετο Παιδὸς ἀνακτος ὁμοφρονέουσιν ἐπ’ ἔργοις). Instead, the poem “On the soul” introduces this section with these lines (53–60, *PG* 451a-452a):

Ἡμέτερον δ’ αἰοῖς ψυχῆς πέρι μῦθον ἄριστον.
 Ἐνθεν ἐλὼν, τέρψιν δὲ μικρὴν ἀναμίζομεν οἴμῃ.
 Ἦν ποτ’ ἔην ὅτε κόσμον ἐπήξατο νοῦ Λόγος αἰπὺς,
 ἐσπόμενος μέγαλοιο νόφ’ Πατρὸς, οὐ πρὶν ἔόντα.
 Εἶπεν ὁδ’, ἐκτετέλεστο ὅσον θέλεν. Ὡς δὲ τὰ πάντα
 κόσμος ἔην, γαίη τε καὶ οὐρανὸς ἡδὲ θάλασσα,
 δίζετο καὶ σοφίης ἐπίστορα μητρὸς ἀπάντων,
 καὶ χθονίων βασιλῆα θεουδέα, καὶ τόδ’ ἔειπεν·

“Now I want you, picking up at this point, to hear my excellent account of the soul,
 and I shall mix a little enjoyment with my poem.
 There was a point in time when the lofty Word of Mind,

¹⁶ I thank Filip Doroszewski for this suggestion, which is concomitant with Sykes’ commentary on the poem “On the soul” (cf. previous line).

¹⁷ Sykes (1997) in his commentary to *Arc.* 759–77 also points to a close parallel in *Or.* 38.11.

following the intention of the mighty Father,
 framed the structure of the world which before did not exist.
 He spoke, and his whole will was accomplished. When everything,
 earth, heaven and sea, cohered to form the world,
 he sought a being to be acquainted with wisdom, mother of all that is,
 to be also a godlike ruler of earthly affairs, speaking these words" (translation Sykes).

Like the poem on Virginité, also the poem "On the soul" talks about pleasure (*terpsis*), but it is that of the readers, when they hear the Christian account on the soul—a clearly secondary sense in comparison to God's pleasure upon seeing his creation (Gn. 1,12) versified by Gregory in lines 79–80 of the poem on Parthenie quoted above. Also the aforementioned expression ἦν ποτ' ἔην, ὅτε is repeated, for the only time in Gregory's poetic corpus. So the account in the poem "On the soul" seems clearly a summarized version of this section of the poem on Virginité, which would be composed earlier.

From line 139 to line 171, the tale of Christ's incarnation and the deliverance from original sin combines the registers of the scientific and the mythical hymns, following Menandrian terminology typical features of both like the descriptive nominal syntax and the narrative speed coexist. For instance, lines 149–155 which describe the incarnation are characteristic of this mythical-doctrinal account:

ἦλθε Θεὸς θνητός τε, φύσεις δύο εἰς ἓν ἀγείρας,
 τὴν μὲν κευθομένην, τὴν δ' ἀμφαδίην μερόπεσσιν,
 ὦν Θεὸς ἡ μὲν ἔην, ἡ δ' ὕστατον ἄμμιν ἐτύχθη,
 τῆμος, ὅτ' ἐν σπλάγχνοισι μίγη Θεὸς ἀνδρομέοισιν·
 εἷς Θεὸς ἀμφοτέρωθεν· ἐπεὶ θεότητι κερασθεῖς,
 καὶ βροτὸς ἐκ θεότητος ἄναξ καὶ Χριστὸς ὑπέστη.
 αἰνὴ δ' ἔπλετο μίξις, ἐπεὶ προτέρην ἀθέριξα.

"He came as God and as mortal, uniting two natures in one,
 the former hidden, the latter apparent to men,
 the former was God, the latter was formed ultimately for us,
 in the time when God was mixed in human entrails:
 one God from both: for mixed with divinity,
 and mortal from divinity, came up as lord and Christ.
 There was a new mixture, for the first one was despised".

After a lengthy account on the incarnation, Gregory goes back to the initial cletic hymn, with a brief praise of God (171–182) that announces through the annular structure implied in the return to invocation the imminent closing of this introductory section. A relevant structural parallel is the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (177–181), which makes the transition between the Delphic and the Delian parts with a brief cletic hymn in which the invocation ὦ ἄνα (174) also appears—probably not by chance this expression is prominent in Gregory's invocation followed by a not less typical proclamation of the divine incommensurable glory: ὦ Ἄνα, τίς δέ κε σεῖο νόον καὶ βένθος ἀνέυροι (172: o Lord, who would know your mind and depth?).

Finally, Gregory gets into the true subject-matter of the poem in a last section (182–214) which subtly introduces Virginity, Parthenie, the true divinity honoured in this hymn. Through correlative structures *men... de..., hote... pote...*, Gregory connects the account of the redemption by Christ with the contrapositive world / soul, earth / heaven, and marriage / virginity. Thus in 182–185: πρόσθε μὲν ὠδίνεσκε βίος καὶ κόσμος ἔραζε... νῦν δ' αἰνῆς κακίης Χριστὸς ἀπὸ χειρὸς ἐρύσας... (“before life and earthly world were suffering with childbirth pains... but now Christ taking them by the hand, liberates men from terrible disgrace”). Then in 187–188: κείνο γάμος μερόπεσσι, τὸ δ' ἄζυγίη θεοειδής / κόσμος ὁ μὲν γαίης, ἡ δ' οὐρανίῳ χορείης (“marriage brings this to men, divine virginity that other thing; the former is ornate of the earth, the latter of the heavenly chorus”). Parthenie had been hidden during the reign of the Law, i.e. the Old Testament (194: μέσφ' ὅτε καὶ βασίλευε νόμος); but when Christ came, Parthenie manifested herself (203: δὴ τότε παρθενίη στράψεν μερόπεσσι φαεινῇ). And the following five lines end up with this description of her above-worldly place through perfectly symmetrical parallelisms (204–208):

Λυομένη κόσμοιο, λύουσά τε κόσμον ἀφαυρόν,
τοσσάτιον προφέρουσα γάμου βιότιοι τε δεσμῶν,
ὀσσάτιον ψυχὴ προφερεστέρα ἔπλετο σαρκός,
καὶ χθονὸς οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὅσον βιότιοιο ῥέοντος
ἐστηώς μακάρεσσιν, ὅσον Θεὸς ἀνδρὸς ἀρείων.

“Liberated from the world, liberating the weak world,
so much overcoming marriage and the links of life,
as the soul overcomes the flesh,
and wide heaven is above the earth, as the stability of the blessed
is above the passing life, as God is superior to man”.

After this presentation, the dialogue between Parthenie and Gamos that constitutes the body of the poem will flow naturally. As Menander said, the true difficulty of fictitious hymns (*peplasmēnoi*) is achieving consistence and continuity. Gregory's poetic effort to achieve them through this complex introduction is remarkable. Through the hymnic proem he has created the rhetorical plausibility of the subsequent dialogue. And just as the *Homeric Hymns* could function as proems to the larger epic poems, but they were independent compositions in themselves, this proem can also function as an independent hymn to Parthenie which shows Gregory's mastery in composing hexametric hymns.

Conclusions

If we go back to his self-confessed reasons to compose poetry, we may suppose that when composing this hymn, Gregory took personal delight, but he also achieved his other external goals: presenting Christian doctrine in a pleasurable way, and putting Christian literature at the height of pagan equivalents. The poem that has been com-

mented, this hymnic proem to Parthenie, adapts the Christian accounts on creation to the canons of Greek traditional poetry, particularly theogonies: Orphic theogonies and Hesiod are the closest models which Gregory imitated and sometimes explicitly alluded to show precisely his doctrinal divergences. This effort is particularly original, since only Theophilus in his *Autolycus* had endeavoured to use Greek theological language to convey Christian Trinitarian doctrines: Theophilus' attempt was, however, in prose, and had little continuity¹⁸. In this poem, Gregory attempted to Christianize a genre that was particularly resistant to adapt, since Homer and Hesiod's accounts on the origin of the gods were the obvious rival that pagans, the last of them Julian, had opposed to the Christian Bible, and their polytheistic contents were full of images of sexual generation of the cosmos. After Gregory, Christian hexametric versions of the Bible would flow. His success in such difficult achievement showed that Christian poetry was already wholly worthy of Greek *paideia*.

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¹⁸ Curry (1988), Herrero de Jáuregui (2013).

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