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Self-construction: ‘Auto-Ethopoeia’ in Romanos’ Kontakia

Romanos the Melodist was a deacon in the church of the Theotokos in Constantinople during the sixth century AD.¹ We know very little about his life, but he was probably a native Syriac speaker who was educated in Greek rhetoric in Berytus (modern Beirut) where he became a deacon.² At some point during the reign of the emperor Anastasius he moved to Constantinople and began writing the hymns for which he is famous. Although the Synaxaria suggest he wrote one thousand, only fifty-nine genuine hymns remain.³ These hymns, later called kontakia, are actually long poetical sermons. They were sung in church in place of a spoken prose sermon, although in which liturgical rite is still a matter of debate.⁴ Each kontakion is made up

¹ For biographical details, and therefore for this opening paragraph, we rely largely on the Synaxaria, which are quoted in José Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mêlode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1977), 162.
² On education in Berytus, see Linda Jones Hall, Roman Berytus: Beirut in Late Antiquity (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).
of a series of strophes of the same length. Each strophe concludes with a refrain which the congregation probably sang. The first letters of each strophe make up an acrostic. Usually it is something like THE HYMN OF THE HUMBLE ROMANOS (ΤΟΥ ΤΑΠΕΙΝΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ Ο ΥΜΝΟΣ).\(^5\)

This should be enough to demonstrate that these hymns are very far from being classical poetry. The form is something unknown to classical genres, and in the fifth century was entirely new to the Greek language.\(^5\) The language is not atticing Greek, nor are the poems written in classical metres.\(^7\) Romanos is not an imitator of early models in the great tradition of classical mimesis which was still alive and well in other literary circles during the sixth century. Procopius of Caesarea, for example, wrote a history of the Emperor Justinian’s wars heavily indebted in style and historiography to classical models such as Thucydides, Herodotus and Polybius. By contrast, Romanos’ poetry is very different from classical models and possibly owes as much to Syriac and other Semitic styles of poetry as it does to classical Greek styles.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) For example, On the Nativity I (Oxford 1). References to the kontakia will follow the numbering system of the Oxford edition. All translations of Romanos’ kontakia are my own.

\(^6\) Grosdidier de Matons has rightly argued that the earlier kontakia are not really verse sermons in the same way that Romanos’ are. Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mélodie et les origines, 3.


\(^8\) There is much debate in scholarship on this point, although many scholars now agree that we should think of Romanos as being part of a combined tradition. See, for example, André de Halleux, ‘Hellenisme et syrianité de Romanos le Mélodie’, Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique 73 (1978): 632-41; Averil Cameron, ‘Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byz-
However, this does not mean that his rhetorical training in Berytus went to waste. Far from it. Despite moving away from classical styles of poetry, Romanos makes extensive and clever use of classical rhetorical devices. One which pervades the hymns is *ethopoeia*, or ‘characterisation through speeches’. Most of Romanos’ *kontakia* focus on a particular biblical story. So, for instance, there is a hymn on the baptism of Christ, a number of hymns on the crucifixion and resurrection, a hymn on Abraham and Isaac, and so on. The majority of examples involve a dialogue between different characters. Although the stories are taken from the bible, the dialogues do not follow the biblical accounts. They can be based on a biblical dialogue but extended. In the hymn on the baptism of Christ, Romanos creates a long discussion between Jesus and John about Jesus’ need to be baptised and his choice of John as his baptiser (5.6’, 1 γ’y’). This long dialogue stems from a couple of verses in Matthew’s Gospel (3:13-17). In other *kontakia*, the dialogues are non-biblical and sometimes involve newly invented characters. In *On the Sinful Woman* Romanos invents a dialogue between the woman and the man who sells her perfume, which is certainly not in the Gospel account.10

Through these different dialogues Romanos is able to characterise biblical figures.11 This is the technique of *ethopoeia*. According to rhetorical handbooks in circulation during the sixth century, *ethopoeia* is ‘an imitation of

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10 The Gospel story of the Sinful Woman is in Luke 7:36-50. There is nothing about a perfume seller in this account. However, Ephrem the Syrian wrote a *memra* (Syriac verse homily) on this story and he includes both a perfume seller and Satan, two characters which do not occur in the Gospel story. It is probable that Romanos was influenced by Ephrem’s *memra On the Sinful Woman* in the composition of his own *kontakion* of the same name.

the character of a person supposed to be speaking; for example, what words Andromache might say to Hector.\(^\text{12}\) The rhetoricians go on to give extended examples of ethopoeic writing, drawing attention to the importance of carefully chosen words to imitate the speaker, particularly if the speaker is a well-known literary figure or statesman. The purpose of \textit{ethopoeia} is made clearer in a commentary to these handbooks. The writer says that this device ‘makes the language alive and moves the hearer to share the emotion of the speaker by presenting his character’.\(^\text{13}\) An author is able to make the audience hate a character or sympathise with them by the words he puts in their mouth. Romanos makes his listeners feel the fear combined with the hope of the haemorrhaging woman as she approaches Jesus to be healed (12. δ’.- α’.), and the pain and distress of Mary as she watches her son die on the cross. In On Mary at the Cross Mary is characterised as a loving and fearful mother, unable to comprehend what her beloved son is doing. Jesus hangs on the cross in front of her and has been trying to explain why he must die. Mary says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\lambda\varepsilon\iota\ \sigma\iota\ \bar{o}\ \dot{\epsilon}\chi\omega,\ \ \ \iota\nu\ \mu\acute{a}\theta\acute{w} \ \pi\acute{a}\nu\acute{a} \ \pi\acute{a}\nu\acute{a} \ \bar{o} \ \theta\acute{e}l\acute{w}.
\hfill \text{I will tell you what is on my mind, so that I might learn from you what I truly wish.}
\end{align*}
\]

If you suffer, if you die, will you return to me?
If you treat Adam and Eve, will I see you again?
For this is what I am afraid of, lest from the tomb you rush straight up, my child, and I, seeking to see you,


\(^{13}\) Commentary attributed to John of Sardis, section 11. The translation is from Kennedy, \textit{Progymnasmata}, 213.

\(^{14}\) Romanos 19. α’., 4-10.
will weep and cry out, 'Where are you, my son and my God?'

Romanos animates Mary through her speeches. Her concerns and fears are brought to life through a series of heartfelt questions and also through her lack of comprehension despite knowing her son's power. It is her role as mother which is most prominent in this hymn. Romanos' characterisation of Mary emphasises both her humanity and her faith and thus makes her a model of correct Christian behaviour for the congregation to imitate. The dialogue between Mary and Jesus, which stems from Mary's persistent questioning of her son, enables Romanos to explore the reasons for Jesus' death on the cross and thereby teach his congregation why the crucifixion happened. He does this through the most reliable mouth-piece. By putting his explanation of the crucifixion into Jesus' mouth, Romanos lends authority to his theology.

Dialogue is an important part of both Greek and Syriac homiletics in general. Preachers create dialogues to vivify the Gospel narratives in order to make them believable and memorable. In the dialogues, biblical and non-biblical characters explain their motivations and feelings, and flesh out the reasons behind an event. In these ways the preachers teach their congregations, correct wrong opinions, and condemn heresies. Judit Kecskeméti has argued that fourth-century 'exegetical dramas' or dialogue homilies were used to counter Christological heresies. One example she focuses on is a dialogue, probably written by Severian, between Jesus and the Devil, which is used to explicate whether Christ is man or God. The anonymous fifth-century Syriac dialogue (sogitha), The Cherub and the Thief,

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17 And, she argues, to link all heresies with Judaism. I am unsure about the latter, but the former is certainly true. See Judit Kecskeméti, ' Doctrine et drame dans la prédication grecque', Euphrosyne 21 (1993): 29-31; Cf. also Judit Kecskeméti, 'Exégèse chrysostomienne et exégèse engagée', Studia Patristica 22 (1989): 138.

18 Kecskeméti, ' Doctrine et drame', 34-38.
uses extra-biblical dialogue to explain the significance of the crucifixion for human salvation. The Cherub who guards the gate to Eden refuses to let the Good Thief into paradise until the Thief convinces him that the crucifixion means paradise is once again open to humanity. Thus Romanos’ use of dialogue in his kontakia places him within the broader traditions of homiletics.

But Romanos does not only create speeches for characters within the stories he relates. In a number of his hymns he gives himself speeches, speaking in the first person to God, to himself, to a character in the hymn, or to the congregation. Through these speeches he creates a persona for himself. It is part of the self-construction of the Melode in his own kontakia. I have called this technique auto-ethopoeia (self-characterisation). I do not mean by this that the hymns are autobiographical, or that much, if anything, can be gleaned about the poet himself from these authorial intrusions into the text. I have used the word ‘construction’ intentionally. Romanos is constructing a self through speech. Two questions immediately arise from this: what sort of ‘self’ is he constructing, and why?

The most prominent ‘self’ which arises out of Romanos’ auto-ethopoeia is a penitential self. Romanos presents himself as a lowly sinner who begs for forgiveness. He is aware of his faults and calls on God to save him from eternal damnation. He often makes this characterisation by comparison with a biblical figure. So, in On the Epiphany, he likens himself to the haemorrhaging woman in the Gospels who touches Jesus’ cloak and is healed (6. ΕΠΙΦΑΝΕΙΑΣ, 4): προσπίπτω σοι, σωτήρ, καθάπερ ἡ αἰμόρρωσις (‘I fall down before you, Saviour, like the woman with the haemorrhage’). In the Gospel story (Matt. 9.20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48) the woman falls down before Jesus when he discovers that she has touched him. He tells her that her faith has been her cure. Romanos presents himself as needing the healing which this woman received.

21 ibid., 257.
22 Krueger, ‘Romanos the Melodist’, notes this in relation to On the Second Coming. See ibid., 259. We will look at another self, the ‘reporter self’, later.
Similarly, Romanos likens himself to the disciple Peter who floundered when Jesus told him to walk on water:

Χρήζω τής σής βοσθείας.

ωσπερ ο Πέτρος ἐν ταλάσσῃ χειμαζόμενος,

τοῦ βίου τὸ πέλαγος βαδίζων ποντίζομαι

καὶ προσπίπτω σοι:

ἐγγισάτω μοι ἢ χείρ σου

καὶ σωσάτω με, κύριε.23

I need your help, like Peter on the stormy sea.

Walking on the sea of life I am sinking, and I fall down before you.

May your hand be near me and save me, Lord.

In the Gospel story (Matt. 14:25-33), Jesus pulls Peter out of the water when he begins to sink (Matt. 14:30-31). Romanos combines the comparison between himself and Peter together with a sea metaphor to represent the troubles of life. In both these examples Romanos uses the phrase προσπίπτω σοι (‘I fall down before you’). He presents himself in a humble and penitential manner. He recognises his faults and needs, and calls out for help. The image of prostration before the deity is conjured up by this phrase. It is most often used of suppliants before a God or a god-like King.24

There is one hymn which is entirely spoken in the first person, that is, by the persona which Romanos is creating. This kontakion has rightly been called a prayer rather than a verse sermon.25 It is an extended prayer for forgiveness, deliverance from sin and damnation, conversion and redemption. It is full of personal cries for help and expressions of fear and torment, as well as a string of imperatives. He calls for conversion, for purification and for freedom from the bond of sin:

23 Romanos (56. ζ’. 1-3).
24 Romanos uses it a number of other times in his kontakia. See, for example, 53. κβ’. 6. It also appears in the Ephrem Graecus collection and in the letters of Barsanuphius and John. For example, Ephrem’s De passionibus animi 357.8, and Sermo paraeneticus 407.10; and epistle 826, line 7, of the letters of Barsanuphius and John. There are classical examples too: Xenophon uses it in the Cyropaedia when Gobryas offer himself as a suppliant to Cyrus (4.6.2).
25 The acrostic of this hymn is ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΗ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ (‘a prayer of Romanos’).
'Περιπτώται ἢ ψυχή μου  
ἐνδεδυμένη τῶν χιτώνα τῶν πασχάδων μου·  
αὐτὸς δὲ παράσχομαι ἀπό τῶν ὄρματων μου  
βεύσαι ὀδατά,  
ἐνα ταύτην καθαρίσω διὰ τῆς κατανύξεως.  

My soul is dirty, having been clothed in the cloak of my misdeeds.  
Grant that from my eyes tears [lit. water] might flow,  
so that I might cleanse [my soul] through repentance;  

'Υπνοῦνται μὲ ῥαθυμία ὁ ποιητὸς ἐπαγρυπνῶν ἐσυλαγώγησε·  
tῶν νοῦν μου ἐπλάνησε, τὴν φρένα ἐσέλησε καὶ διήρπασε  
tῶν τῆς χάριτος σου πλούτων ὁ λυπηθής ὁ ἀρχέκακος·  
ἀλλ' ἐγείρον πεσόντα με καὶ ἀνακάλεσαι, σωτήρ,  
ὁ θέλων πάντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σωθῆναι.  

While I was sleeping lazily the evil one, keeping watch, carried me off.  
He, the arch-evil robber, led my mind astray.  
He seized my spirit and despoiled the riches of your grace.  
Raise me up, who am falling, and call me back, Saviour,  
you who want all humans to be saved.  

Thus Romanos presents himself, not as an altogether positive model of faith and virtuous living, but rather as a penitent, aware of the depth of his sin and calling for forgiveness. He represents the ordinary sixth-century man and his correct response to sin. But what was his reason for presenting himself in this humble and contrite manner? I maintain that Romanos' preoccupation in his use of auto-ethopoeia is the end of the world, the eschaton. He is concerned with instilling in his congregation a mode of behaviour which will prepare them for the imminent Last Judgement.  

This concern of Romanos' places him in a broader tradition of homiletics. Preachers like John Chrysostom, for example, similarly exhorted their congregations to live a virtuous life in the light of the coming Judgement. As  

26 Romans 56. β', 1-3.  
27 Romans 56. σ', 1-5.  
28 See further Krueger 'Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium', which draws out various other examples of Romanos' penitential self not investigated here.
Daley points out, Chrysostom’s homilies are peppered with eschatological themes. In his thirteenth homily on the Gospel of Matthew, Chrysostom calls on the congregation to imitate Christ in rejecting the things, like wealth and earthly power, offered by the Devil, since the Devil has the power to deprive humans of entry into the Kingdom of God (In Matt. Hom 13.5-6). For Chrysostom, if one wants to avoid eternal damnation (13.6), virtuous deeds and not just virtuous thoughts are important. This concern for eschatology is ubiquitous in early Christian literature. It is partly driven by attention to Old and New Testament apocalyptic literature, and partly governed by the doctrine of creation, since, for the early church, the idea that the world had a beginning had as a necessary corollary the idea that the world would be brought to an end.

A number of Romanos’ hymns similarly betray a concern for the coming Judgement. In his kontakion entitled On the Second Coming, Romanos discusses the advent of the Anti-Christ, who was to come before the end of the world. There is a sense of urgency in his calls for repentance and cries for salvation:

άλλα σε καθικετέων, δὸς κατόν μοι μετανοίας
καὶ ταῖς ἰκεσίαις τῆς δειπραθένου καὶ θεοτοκοῦ φείσαι μου

And I beg you, grant me time for repentance,
and by the prayers of she who is ever a virgin and God-bearer,

[spare me ...]

As in earlier Christian literature influenced by eschatology, there is a sense that the second coming is very close at hand and therefore that repentance is rather urgent. The second hymn on the ten virgins is similarly apocalyptic. In the first strophe Romanos says:

33 Romanos 34. κδ’. 6-7.
Why are you idle, my humble soul?
... And why do you secure the present,
while [your spirit] holds onto eternity?
The Eschaton is near ...
Therefore come to your senses,
wake up from your sleep.
The Bridegroom comes.

Here Romanos speaks to himself, analysing himself and querying his own actions. He recognises a difference between his current actions and the actions of a good Christian preparing for the end of time. This kontakion also presents the five wise virgins as models of behaviour in the time of waiting before the eschaton. Unlike the foolish virgins who are taken by surprise, they are prepared for whenever Christ comes again.\(^{35}\)

When the final judgement would take place had long been a concern for Christians. There is an extensive body of literature which sought to determine the exact age of the creation, so as to pin down the date of the final apocalypse.\(^{36}\)

Many thinkers had speculated that the world would come to an end in the reign of Anastasius.\(^{37}\) Although eschatological speculation was driven by biblical and doctrinal concerns, such concerns could also be emphasised by reference to contemporary events that might be interpreted as signs of the coming end.\(^{38}\)

There were a number of factors which combined in the sixth century to make this a major issue. According to a rather literal interpretation of the bible it was believed that the earth should exist for six thousand years only.\(^{39}\) This

\(^{34}\) Romanos 48. α’, 1, 4-6, 14-16.


\(^{37}\) ibid., 28-29 and passim.

\(^{38}\) ibid.

\(^{39}\) For the following, see Cyril A. Mango, Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome
stems from interpretation of Genesis and Psalm 90. According to Genesis, God created the world and everything in it in six days (Gen. 1) and then rested on the seventh (Gen. 2:1-2). Psalm 90 suggests that a thousand years is like a day to God. Putting these two together Christian theorists said that the world would last for six thousand years, and that there would be the judgement and eternal rest, corresponding to the seventh day. Since humans were created and sinned on the sixth day, Christ needed to redeem Adam by his incarnation in the middle of the sixth day, that is about 5500 years after creation. That would leave only another 500 years before the end of the world, which would place the end of the world in the sixth century. While earlier thinkers had calculated the arrival of the apocalypse to the end of Anastasius’ reign, according to one calculation, the world should have ended in the year 532.

Apocalyptic literature, like the Theosophia and the Oracle of Baalbek, perhaps spurred on by debates between Christians and neoplatonists over the eternity of the world, became more prominent in the East during the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Although figures like Aneas of Gaza, John Philoponus and even Cosmas Indicopleustes did not set a date for the end of the world, their arguments against the neoplatonic idea of an eternal world may well have contributed to the rise in interest in apocalyptic literature.

Understandably, such calculations and debates fired the imaginations of sixth-century writers. There were prophecies about the rule of the Anti-Christ which would take place just before the final judgement. In his

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Secret History, Procopius portrays the Emperor Justinian as the Anti-Christ. He goes without food and sleep and was once seen to walk around without his head. One monk calls him the King of Demons.\textsuperscript{45} One scholar has suggested that, intratextually, Romanos portrays Justinian in the same way.\textsuperscript{46} A comparison of his kontakia On the Second Coming and On Earthquakes and Fires, which both cover the same events, suggests that the Anti-Christ of the former should be identified with the Emperor of the latter. Agathias, a later contemporary, wrote about the effect of an earthquake on the capital: ‘[f]antastic stories and extraordinary predictions to the effect that the end of the world was at hand began to circulate amongst the people’.\textsuperscript{47} The eschaton seems to have been a real and present concern for sixth-century Christians.

Preachers and theologians likewise addressed the question of the eschaton, focusing often on the final judgement and the outcome for the righteous and the unrighteous.\textsuperscript{48} The sixth-century theologian referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius, for example, argued that those who had led a virtuous life would have no need to fear death, because they knew they would be resurrected to immortality.\textsuperscript{49} As a preacher, Romanos wanted to prepare his congregation for the imminent judgement. He used auto-ethopoeia to create a persona with which his congregation can identify, and whom they may be able to imitate. He taught them to admit their guilt, and how to repent and ask for forgiveness. He ties into the representation of himself as an exemplar with biblical characters who are models of faith and repentance.\textsuperscript{50} Thinking about the end of the world had been the catalyst for new considerations of the Christian self.\textsuperscript{51} In Romanos, the pressing urgency of the imminent end of the world, which is a traditional component of Christian doctrine but also has particular contemporary relevance, leads him to the claim that the best form of Christian identity is a penitential self.

Although the penitential persona is the most prominent Romanos construct,

\textsuperscript{45} Secret History 12.
\textsuperscript{47} Historiae 5.5.2. For the translation, see Agathias, The Histories, trans. Joseph D. Frendo (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975).
\textsuperscript{48} Daley, The Hope of the Early Church, chapter 11.
\textsuperscript{49} Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, 7.1.1
\textsuperscript{50} This is an example of the radical implications of eschatology for anthropology.
\textsuperscript{51} See further in Krueger, ‘Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium’.
it is not his only ‘self’ in the *kontakia*. The penitential character is created through speeches mainly to God, himself or the congregation, but a couple of other personae are created in single hymns by direct addresses to characters. In *On Judas* for example one might see a judgmental persona, in which Romanos personally berates Judas for his actions. In *On the Resurrection II* Romanos plays the role of reporter. The whole *kontakion* appears to be a report back to Jesus after Romanos has been ‘on location’ in Hades and at the tomb, although naturally the first audience is really the congregation. Narrative apostrophe of this sort may also be seen in homiletics, and Romanos seems particularly creative in the way in which he thus layers his addressees.52 The message he wants convey to his congregation is presented through a journalistic report to Jesus of his conversation with Death and the guards.

The resurrection has just taken place and Romanos decides to go and interview Death and the guards at the tomb:

\[
\text{αὐτὸν οὖν πρῶτον θέλω ἐρωτήσαι τὸ γέγονε}
\]
\[
\text{kai τότε μετὰ τούτων τοὺς φιλάξαντας τὸ μνήμα σου ...} \]

So first I want to ask [Hades] what happened and then, after that, the guards at your tomb ...

After declaring his intentions to Jesus, Romanos speaks to Hades, the personification of Death:

\[
\text{Εἴπε οὖν πρῶτος, Ἀιδή, ὅ άει ἔχθρος τοῦ γένους μου,}
\]
\[
\text{πῶς εἰμίς ἐν τῷ τάφῳ τὸν ποθήσαντα τὸ γένος μου;} \]

So tell me first, Hades, eternal enemy of my race, how did you hold in the tomb the one who loves my race?

Romanos’ questions elicit a long response from Hades, who complains that he has been robbed of all humanity and thereby confirms the truth of

52 Kecskeméti gives an example from Pseudo-Chrysostom in which the preacher addresses Christ and asks him to explain statements in the Gospels which apparently conflict with orthodox teachings: Kecskeméti, ‘Exégèse chrysostomienne’, 140-41.
53 Romanos 25. α’. 3-4.
54 ibid., 25. β’. 3-4.
the resurrection. The effect is the same when Romanos interviews the guards. They confirm, rather unwillingly, that Jesus has been resurrected.

Romanos is a character in this story. He is like a reporter, interviewing eyewitnesses of the miraculous event. His purpose in this use of *auto-ethopoeia* is closely related to the one we have just discussed. He presents himself as a penitent in order to give the congregation an example of repentance, and owing to the impending Judgement he focuses on the need for repentance. In *On the Resurrection II* he makes himself a player in the drama of the resurrection in order to make the congregation part of this story. The idea here is participation. Not only do Christians need to repent of their sins before the eschaton, they also need to participate in the life of Christ. Romanos believed that when God became human in Jesus Christ he greatly changed reality. The incarnation was an event that broke all human conventions and categorisations. It was the world- and time-changing event which had long been prophesied. All Old Testament prophecies had been looking forward to the incarnation. As a result, the time between the first and second coming is, for Romanos, a type of pre-Paradise Paradise. It is not the same broken world which Abraham and Moses had lived in, because the Messiah has come and changed the course of history, but it is not yet Paradise. It is a period in which prophecies are confirmed and humans are called to live according to Christ’s example while they await the second coming and final judgement.

As a preacher, Romanos is concerned to make his congregation follow this call. One way he does so is by vivifying the Gospel events, creating dialogues for characters and presenting them as believably real and believably sixth-century characters. He makes the Gospel present. Yet, as we have just seen, through *auto-ethopoeia* he also takes the congregation back to first-century events. By placing himself within the Gospel stories, Romanos makes the congregation part of these events. As we saw with the penitential persona, Romanos’ constructed self functions as a model of behaviour for ordinary man. The persona of *On the Resurrection II* suggests that Romanos’ self is also designed as a representative of the people. The congregation is encouraged to identify with Romanos’ personae on a number of levels, so that he need only place himself within the story to make the congregation feel that they too are participating in it.

Mary Cunningham has rightly argued that dialogue creates a sense of timelessness in homilies, which in turn highlights the idea that the message
of the homily is not time dependent but eternally relevant.\textsuperscript{55} Equally, the
timelessness which Romanos creates by making biblical events contemporary
and by taking the congregation back into these moments is a reflection of
his conception of post-incarnation time. As discussed above, Romanos
believed that at the incarnation the nature of time was dramatically altered.
All history had looked towards Christ’s incarnation, prophecies had foretold
it, events beforehand had prefigured it. Thus all previous history converged
when Christ descended to earth to fulfil the prophecies. For Romanos,
time is no longer linear. The only event which he regards as a ‘future’
event, which stands outside the eternal time of the post-incarnation world,
is the eschaton. The period between is one of preparation for the eschaton
through participation in the changed reality which Christ inaugurated.

Rhetoric is a vehicle for theology in the \textit{kontakia} of Romanos the Melode.
Romanos adapts the rhetorical device of \textit{ethopoeia}, using it to characterise
himself in different ways. It is his concern for the imminent eschaton which
drives his use of \textit{auto-ethopoeia}. The end of the world was a pressing concern
for sixth-century Christians, and Romanos is keen to provide an example of
penitence for his congregation to follow. In the period of waiting before the second
coming both repentance and pious living are called for. Christians are called
to participate in Christ and the new, post-incarnation reality. Romanos is able
to facilitate active participation in Christ’s life and humanity through a different
self-construction. By making himself a participant in the events of Christ’s
death and resurrection, he draws the congregation into participation in Christ.

\textsuperscript{55} Cunningham, ‘Dramatic Device or Didactic Tool?’, 106-7.