

Who is listening? Apostrophe and ‘double relevance’ in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist

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This article analyses selected hymns of Romanos the Melodist (c. 485–562) with a special focus on who speaks and who listens. Romanos uses apostrophes to address biblical characters, the triune God, the Mother of God, and saints. Did they listen? In rare cases, characters respond – for instance, the eternal villain Hades, whom Romanos interrogates about Christ’s descent to the Underworld. At other times, the biblical characters seem to address the congregation from the storyworld. Examples such as these are analysed through the lens of modern narratology.

Keywords: Romanos the Melodist; hymnography; narratology; apostrophe; metalepsis

Ὁ τοῦ χρόνου δεσπότης τε καὶ κτίστης κατὰ χρόνου κατήλθεν ἐν κόσμῳ·
ὁ ποιητὴς ἐγένετο ἐν τοῖς ἰδίῳις θελήσας σῶσαι ἡμᾶς·
τὸν Ἀδὰμ ὁ πλαστουργήσας Ἀδὰμ ἐγένετο ἀρρήτως.

The Master and Creator of time came into the world of time.

The Maker was among his own, for he wished to save us.

The One who fashioned Adam became Adam ineffably.¹

With these words, the Byzantine poet Romanos the Melodist (c. 485–560 AD) celebrated the paradox of Christianity: God, who is beyond time, came into the world of

1 Romanos Melodos, *Hymnes*, ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons, 5 vols (Paris 1965–81), II, 20.2.1–3; tr. E. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist, Kontakia: on the life of Christ* (San Francisco 1995) 51.

time, the creator entered his own creation. This paradox bears close similarities to the modern narratological concept *metalepsis*, which describes the narratorial act of an author (creator) entering his/her own narrative (creation), for instance by addressing a character in an apostrophe, or conversely when a character speaks with the author or becomes aware of being part of a narrative. The hymns of Romanos are full of such *metalepses*; in this article, I analyse how Romanos uses *metalepsis* when retelling biblical narratives in his hymns (*kontakia*), sung at night vigils in the Byzantine church in order to connect the world of the listener (the congregation) with the storyworld of the Bible.²

In several of Romanos' hymns, we are sometimes left with the puzzle of who is actually speaking and who is listening. At times, Romanos speaks to or with his characters in apostrophes; at others, the characters seem to address topics and concerns that would have been foreign to the biblical world yet recognizable to a Byzantine audience. These topics and concerns thus have a 'double relevance': one for the characters in the storyworld and another for the audience hearing the story. Moreover, the merging of the time of the biblical events with the time of their retelling is sometimes explicitly stated by Romanos, while in other instances, it is merely alluded to. The playfulness of using these techniques when retelling a quasi-mythic past does not only serve an entertaining purpose, but also enables an encounter with the invisible, divine realm. It is intuitive to assume that a god addressed in a hymn is considered to be listening to the words of the singer, just like a prayer, but what of (biblical) characters, saints, or even personified entities such as Hades? The present article examines this question through a close reading of the hymns of Romanos. By placing Romanos' hymns in dialogue with recent scholarship on the use of apostrophe in ancient Greek epic and song, I argue that the use of *metalepsis* in religious narrative works in strikingly similar ways across both Christian and non-Christian contexts and across different time periods.

One of the first scholars to explore the appearance of apostrophes to biblical characters in sermons in Late Antiquity was the Syriac scholar Karl-Heinz Uthemann in the early 1990s. He traces a development from the use of *prokatalēpsis* by the preacher anticipating an objection, to the use of fictional interlocutors with whom the preacher feigns a dialogue, and finally to the incorporation of full-fledged dramatic dialogues between biblical characters, as seen in the hymns of Romanos. Uthemann poses the intriguing question of 'what consciousness of God and biblical figures a speech delivered at that time in a liturgical context presupposed', a question he leaves

2 I define the concept of 'storyworld' similarly to D. Herman as 'mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why and in what fashion in the world in which recipients relocate [...] as they work to comprehend a narrative'; however, I allow, contra Herman, the concept to be used as synonymous with *diegesis* (fabula or story). See D. Herman, 'Storyworld', in D. Herman, M. Jahn and M.-L. Ryan (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London 2008) 569–70 (s.v. 'Storyworld').

open.³ Uthemann addresses the question from the perspective of a historian of Syriac Christianity rather than from a narratological one. He emphasizes the context of the liturgical celebration, in that 'the liturgy makes present or actualizes God's past salvific deeds. The homily thus becomes incorporated into an event in which God himself is encountered'.⁴ If biblical characters and God were understood as existing and listening, then apostrophes of God and biblical characters may not have been perceived as a fictional play feigning a dialogue by the preacher, but rather as a kind of revelation or epiphany where biblical characters spoke through the preacher's words.⁵ A study of Romanos' hymns, which belong to this broader development in early Christian communication, can therefore shed light not only on the literary dynamics of his hymnography but also on its spiritual and liturgical implications.

Uthemann's question touches on a topic that lies beyond the scope of this article: what is fictionality in the late antique context?⁶ The use of a fictional interlocutor in sermons in Late Antiquity is easy to distinguish in the form of 'now one might ask', but what about biblical characters appearing in, for instance, sermons and hymns, where they give more elaborate speeches than in the Gospels: were they fictionalized and seen as inventions of the poet, or were their speeches ultimately a kind of revelation from their eternal heavenly abode, channelled through the pen of the poet? Although this intriguing question cannot be fully explored here, I will return to it in the conclusion.

Metalepsis in Greco-Roman narratives

The use of metalepsis in Byzantine literature in general and Byzantine hymns in particular has not yet been studied thoroughly from a narratological perspective. However, metalepsis has received more attention from classicists, who have explored the usefulness of the concept in ancient literature. The narratological concept of metalepsis was, as Gérard Genette notes in his short book on the topic, annexed 'from the field of rhetoric to narratology'.⁷ He first introduced the term and concept at the end of the

3 K.-H. Uthemann, 'Forms of communication in the homilies of Severian of Gabala: a contribution to the reception of the diatribe as a method of exposition', in M. B. Cunningham and P. Allen (eds), *Preacher and Audience: studies in early Christian and Byzantine homiletics*, vol. 1 (Leiden 1998) 139–77 (172).

4 Uthemann, 'Forms of communication', 172–3.

5 On the epiphanies of gods in ancient literature, see L. Fulkerson, 'Close encounters: divine epiphanies on the fringes of Latin love elegy', in S. Matzner and G. Trimble (eds), *Metalepsis: ancient texts, new perspectives* (Oxford 2020) 147–65.

6 The question of how and to what degree a modern concept of fictionality as primarily a post-Enlightenment phenomenon is applicable in the context of pre-modern narrative has recently received much attention; see E. von Contzen and S. Tilg, 'Fictionality before fictionality? Historicizing a modern concept', in M. Fludernik and H. Nielsen (eds), *Travelling Concepts: new fictionality studies* (Berlin 2020) 91–112. See also J. Van Pelt and K. De Temmerman (eds), *Narrative, Imagination and Concepts of Fiction in Late Antique Hagiography* (Leiden 2024).

7 G. Genette, *Métalepse: de la figure à la fiction* (Paris 2004) 7: 'Je crains d'être, par quelques pages déjà anciennes, un peu responsable de l'annexion au champ de la narratologie d'une notion qui appartient

third volume of his highly influential *Figures*, which was later translated into English as *Narrative Discourse*. There, Genette defined metalepsis as

any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [which] produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical (...) or fantastic.⁸

For readers less familiar with Genette's concepts, such as 'extradiegetic' and 'metadiegetic', we could rephrase it as a moment when a character in a story suddenly addresses the reader, when authors speak directly to their characters, or when authors or their characters deliberately reveal that the story is fictional. Whereas a substantial body of scholarly literature has explored the concept in modern and postmodern fiction, far fewer studies have examined its use in ancient literature, and almost none have considered its relevance for Byzantine literature.⁹

The Dutch classicist and narratologist Irene de Jong has been a pioneer in adapting narratology to ancient literature; she was among the first to engage with the concept of metalepsis in Homer, notably in her 2009 work on the poet's apostrophes to the characters.¹⁰ A few years later, several scholars, in a collective volume, examined the use of metalepsis in images, sculptures, and literature from the earliest Mesopotamian writings, dated to around 1700 BCE, to the philosopher Boethius around the sixth century CE, across several languages and cultures.¹¹ More recently, in 2020, classicists revisited

originellement à celui de la rhétorique'. See also the critical reassessment of this annexation in S. Matzner, 'By way of introduction: back to the future. Problems and potential of metalepsis *avant* Genette', in Matzner and Trimble, *Metalepsis*, 1–24.

8 G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca 1980) 234–5 [*Figures* III, 244]. The concept of metalepsis has been further developed by Monika Fludernik, who distinguishes between rhetorical and ontological metalepses, and John Pier, Werner Wolf, and others, who have elaborated on different levels of intrusion; see J. Pier, 'Metalepsis', in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, <http://lhn.sub.uni-hamburg.de/index.php/Metalepsis.html>, accessed 19 September 2024. Julian Hanebeck has refined the terminology and subtleties of the concept; see J. Hanebeck, *Understanding Metalepsis: the hermeneutics of narrative transgression* (Berlin 2017). For a survey of the history of the concept, see R. Nauta, 'The concept of "metalepsis": from rhetoric to the theory of allusion and to narratology', in U. E. Eisen and P. von Möllendorff (eds), *Über die Grenze: Metalepse in Text- und Bildmedien des Altertums* (Berlin 2013) 469–82.

9 See my unpublished dissertation *Drama in the Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist: a narratological analysis of four kontakia* (Aarhus 2013) 103–4, 139, 141, 238, and 241; my article 'Imaginære rejser ind i de hellige fortællinger: med Romanos Melodos som rejsefører', *Patristica Nordica Annuaia* 33 (2018) 61–82; and, outside the realm of hymnography, M. D. Lauxtermann, 'How Tzetzes lost his horse at Troy: metalepsis in the *Carmina Iliaca*', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 63 (2023) 350–61.

10 I. J. F. de Jong, 'Metalepsis in Ancient Greek literature', in J. Grethlein and A. Rengakos (eds), *Narratology and Interpretation* (Berlin 2009) 87–115.

11 Eisen and von Möllendorff, *Über die Grenze*. Not all chapters are equally convincing: see my review in *Patristica Nordica Annuaia* 32 (2017) 143–7.

metalepsis in the ancient world and began to question the application of (post)modern concepts to the past without taking into account the often very different rhetorical setting in which ancient literature was produced – thus calling for a diachronic narratology.¹² Concerning the use of apostrophe, Jacqueline Klooster has shown how it not only functioned as a rhetorical device but also created a metaleptic effect in epic and hymns.¹³ Irene de Jong, in turn, has coined the term ‘double relevance’ to describe utterances voiced by ancient heroes and gods in the epinician odes of Pindar. It is precisely these two notions – apostrophe and ‘double relevance’ – that I will employ to analyse similar cases in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist.¹⁴

For De Jong, the term ‘double relevance’ pertains to utterances that belong to and are announced from within the storyworld of the mythic past but can also be heard as addressed directly to the champion who is celebrated by Pindar’s ode in the present moment of the performance. In other words, an apostrophe by the author addressing a character is a metaleptic move *into the storyworld*, whereas De Jong’s concept of ‘double relevance’ is a subtler movement *out of the storyworld*.¹⁵ Recently, Gail Trimble and Sebastian Matzner have questioned whether there is any movement of, for instance, the author *into* the narrative or a character breaking *out of* the narrative in metalepsis. Rather than attempting to determine the direction of these movements, they suggest a ‘shared presence’ that ‘creates a moment of communion in a location of its own’.¹⁶ In other words, when metalepsis occurs, author, reader/listener, and characters seem to meet somewhere in the present of the narration. For this reason, Matzner and Trimble suggest moving away from the spatial metaphors related to breaking into or out of a narrative.

A recurring and poignant question in studies of apostrophe as narrative metalepsis is whether the characters addressed by the author were understood, in some sense, to be

12 See Matzner, ‘By way of introduction’, 20–1, and S. Matzner and G. Trimble, ‘Epilogue: metaleptically ever after’, in Matzner and Trimble, *Metalepsis*, 247–72 (261–7).

13 J. Klooster, ‘Apostrophe in Homer, Apollonius and Callimachus’, in Eisen and von Möllendorff, *Über die Grenze*, 151–73.

14 I. J. F. de Jong, ‘Metalepsis and embedded speech in Pindaric and Bacchylidean myth’, in Eisen and von Möllendorff, *Über die Grenze*, 97–118.

15 De Jong already noticed this move out of the storyworld in her 2009 article, where she gives as an example the sixth song of the *Iliad*. In the passage where Hector visits the house of Paris, Helen implores Hector to fight hard, because ‘even hereafter / we shall be subjects of song for men of future generations’ (ὥς καὶ ὀπίσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ’ αἰοίδιμοι ἔσσομένοισι, *Iliad* 6.357–8). Tr. De Jong, ‘Metalepsis in Ancient Greek literature’, 98; Greek text from D. B. Munro and T. W. Allen (eds), *Homeri opera*, I, third edition (Oxford 1920). De Jong acknowledges that many scholars have interpreted Helen’s utterance as a consolation to herself and Hector in the storyworld of the *Iliad*. However, for the audience of the *Iliad*, the utterance could also be heard as referring to the *Iliad* itself and to any person reading or listening to the story. For a brief moment, Helen also seems to speak to the audience of the *Iliad*. For a similar case with the term ‘τὸ εὐαγγέλιον’ in the Gospel of Mark, see J. E. Spittler, ‘Metalepsis in the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew*’, in Eisen and von Möllendorff, *Über die Grenze*, 387–402 (388).

16 Matzner and Trimble, ‘Epilogue’, 264.

listening – a question that closely echoes Uthemann’s cited above. Klooster analyses the use of apostrophes to the gods in Homer, Apollonius, and Callimachus. Drawing on the classical rhetorical definition of apostrophe, where it simply denotes a turning away – in Latin *aversio* – from the present audience to address someone absent, she argues that addressing gods in poetry might achieve a different effect. She wonders whether a god or a heroic character addressed in the Homeric hymns or works by Apollonius and Callimachus was not absent but present in some way, as gods are eternal entities ‘who straddle the intradiegetical world and that of narrator and narratees’. Likewise, apostrophe to heroes is related to the apostrophe to gods ‘in that the Greeks imagined Homeric heroes to have been historic entities, theoretically still present somewhere’.¹⁷ According to Klooster, the effect of this kind of breaking into a storyworld would be less startling for an ancient audience, for whom the gods and heroes were thought to exist,¹⁸ than apostrophes to clearly signalled fictional characters in modern and postmodern narrative.

Matzner and Trimble, along with Felix Budelmann and De Jong, concur with Klooster that mythical characters and ancient heroes differ from postmodern fictional characters in that they exist both inside and outside texts, however fictionalized they might be in an author’s version of a well-known myth or historical past.¹⁹ Budelmann, however, moves the discussion in a slightly different direction. For him, the question of the possible existence of dead heroes or gods is less relevant than the readerly investment and the affective relationship readers build with characters: As he puts it, ‘[l]iterature, and especially literary characters, have a reality irrespective of their fictionality. They affect us, and mean something to us, sometimes in lasting ways’.²⁰ Apostrophes, in this sense, become an invitation by the author to form a close relationship with past, distant, and mythic characters, making them available, what he in short calls ‘apostrophic reading’.

When the address goes in the opposite direction in what De Jong calls ‘double relevance’, the listener in the present may also form a relationship with a character in the past. De Jong shows how the double relevance operates in the epinician odes of Pindar, composed to celebrate a victor of the Panhellenic games in Greece. These odes would often include a mythic narrative in which a god or a hero gives a speech in the mythic past. Such a speech given by a god in the past might resonate not only with the character’s audience in the mythic storyworld, but also with the victor in the present – or, as De Jong stresses, ‘to put it slightly exaggeratedly, a victor may feel that he is

17 Klooster, ‘Apostrophe in Homer’, 171.

18 Contra T. Whitmarsh, ‘Radical cognition: metalepsis in classical drama’, *Greece & Rome* 60.1 (2013) 4–16 (5).

19 Matzner and Trimble, ‘Epilogue’, 253.

20 F. Budelmann, ‘Metalepsis and readerly investment in fictional characters: reflections on apostrophic reading’, in Matzner and Trimble, *Metalepsis*, 59–78 (76).

addressed by a mythical character’.²¹ For this reason, she concludes that the epinician ode – as well as the ancient hymn – is ‘the metaleptic genre par excellence’.²² As I argue in what follows, the hymns of Romanos are replete with metalepses comparable to those found in Homer, Callimachus, Apollonius, and Pindar. Indeed, one might go so far as to call the kontakia of Romanos the Byzantine metaleptic genre par excellence.

Apostrophe in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist

The use of apostrophe in the hymns of Romanos has been extensively studied by Sarah Gador-Whyte. She demonstrates how apostrophes to biblical characters already appear in early Christian homilies of, for instance, John Chrysostom, Basil of Seleucia, and Leontios of Constantinople.²³ Gador-Whyte analyses and interprets apostrophes in Romanos’ hymns within the framework of late antique rhetoric rather than through the lens of modern narratological theory. Her approach has the benefit of avoiding any kind of presentism in the reading of the hymns.²⁴ The present article, by contrast, adopts a narratological approach, which allows for comparisons across a broader literary-historical spectrum, transcending languages, geographies, time periods, and genres. In this sense, a continuity emerges between the epics of Homer, the epinician odes of Pindar, and the hymns of Romanos, as they all employ metaleptic techniques such as apostrophe and ‘double relevance’; these techniques are not unique to the Christian tradition of storytelling but inherent in all communication. Still, the specific historical configurations of such a universal property of communication may vary widely.²⁵

Turning to apostrophes in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist, these most often occur in the midst of a biblical story that Romanos is retelling. At certain places in his stories, Romanos will suddenly address a biblical character, for instance Judas,

21 De Jong, ‘Metalepsis and embedded speech’, 103.

22 De Jong, ‘Metalepsis and embedded speech’, 118. See also I. J. F. de Jong, ‘Metalepsis and the apostrophe of heroes in Pindar’, in Matzner and Trimble, *Metalepsis*, 79–96.

23 S. Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry in Early Byzantium: the kontakia of Romanos the Melodist* (Cambridge 2017) 188–9. We also find such apostrophes in Latin and Syriac homilies and hymns. For Latin hymns, see M. Roberts, ‘Poetry and hymnography (1): Christian Latin poetry’, in S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford 2008) 628–40 (634); concerning Syriac poetry, see S. P. Brock, ‘Dramatic dialogue poems’, in H. J. W. Drijvers (ed.), *IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984: literary genres in Syriac literature (Groningen–Oosterhesselen, 10–12 September 1984)* (Rome 1987) 135–47 (137).

24 On the danger of presentism when reading premodern narratives through the lens of narratology, see E. von Contzen, ‘Unnatural narratology and premodern narratives: historicizing a form’, *Journal of Literary Semantics* 46.1 (2017) 1–23 (5–6).

25 The variety of ways in which metalepses appear in the course of literary history is also an important *nota bene* in Matzner and Trimble, ‘Epilogue’, 261–3, where they emphasize the need to historicize the concept of metalepsis by asking what expectations readers in ancient societies had concerning literary conventions and examining the ontology and metaphysical epistemology that lie behind a certain text.

whom he castigates for betraying Christ in the kontakion *On Judas*.²⁶ In the hymn, Romanos addresses both Christ and Judas. While Christ is depicted as compassionate beyond measure – even the angels are amazed by his mercy, as we learn in stanzas 7–8 – Judas, by contrast, is subjected to a barrage of the harshest epithets Romanos can muster:

Ἄδικε, ἄστοργε, ἄσπονδε, πειρατά, προδότα, πολυμήχανε,
τί γέγονεν, ὅτι ἠθέτησας;
Τί ἰδὼν οὕτως ἠφρόνησας;

Unjust, unloving, unrelenting one, thief, traitor, trickster,
What made you reject him?
What had you seen to make you mindless like this?²⁷

The alliteration in this reproach must have had a pleasing effect on Romanos' audience. Romanos is generally very fond of alliterations, assonances, and wordplays, not least in his reproaches, as this example demonstrates.²⁸ Judas is not only attacked with words, but the very sound of those words exerts a strong emotive force and is thus also a pleasurable rhetorical display. Besides this alliterating apostrophe, Romanos refers to Judas in the third person as stubborn (σκληρός, st. 12.3), terrible (τὸν δεινὸν Ἰούδαν, st. 13.1), and altogether a devil (ἔστιν ὅλως διάβολος, st. 13.3). The entire hymn is charged with words deployed like arrows against the arch villain both in the second and third person.

In the middle part of the hymn, we find an interesting passage just at the moment in the narrative when Judas meets the chief priests and asks them what they are willing to pay in exchange for the betrayal (st. 14–15, cf. Matt 26:14–15). At this juncture in the retelling of the gospel narrative, Romanos pauses his story to address the earth and sea:

Ἄκουσον, γῆ, καὶ φρίξον· θάλασσα, φεύγειν σπεῦσον· φόνος γὰρ συμφωνεῖται.

Listen, earth, and shudder. Sea, flee in haste, for a murder is being agreed.²⁹

26 On the apostrophes in the kontakion on Judas, see Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry*, 192–3.

27 Romanos, *Hymnes*, IV, 33.5.1–3; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*, slightly altered to emphasize the alliterations in the Greek.

28 Two of the editors of Romanos' hymns, Karl Krumbacher and José Grosdidier de Matons, point out Romanos' fondness for puns with a negative evaluation – the puns are bad taste! See, e.g., Grosdidier de Matons' comments in Romanos, *Hymnes*, I, p. 215 n. 1 and V, pp. 206–7 n. 1, and Krumbacher's critical assessment as well as further examples of Romanos' wordplays in K. Mitsakis, *The Language of Romanos the Melodist* (Munich 1967) 167–8.

29 Romanos, *Hymnes*, III, 27.14.6; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*.

In this line, we encounter an apostrophe that is difficult to determine: is Romanos addressing the earth and the sea at the time of the betrayal – that is, the time of the event narrated in the gospel – or the earth and the sea at the time when the hymn is performed? The address becomes, in effect, omnitemporal. Also, by pausing the narrative and turning to the present, ‘a murder is being agreed’, Romanos engages in what Monika Fludernik has called a ‘rhetorical’ or ‘discourse’ metalepsis.³⁰ Genette had already identified a famous example of this kind of metalepsis in his *Narrative Discourse*, describing it as a feigned contemporaneity of the time of the telling and the time of the told – as if the events unfold in the instant of their narration. The example is from Honoré de Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*, where Balzac writes: ‘While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain...’³¹ In other words, the transgression between narrative levels is very subtle and does not disrupt the narrative world.³² As I will show further below, we encounter such a subtle metalepsis again in another hymn, but this time voiced from inside the narrative.

After this address to the earth and the sea, the final scolding of Judas demonstrates Romanos’ fondness for rhetorical fireworks of reproach in yet another chain of apostrophes:

Νῦν σου ἐφάνη τὸ ἄπληστον, νῦν ἐφανερώθη τὸ ἀκόρεστον,
ἀχόρταστε, ἄσπινδε, ἄσπονδε,
ἀναιδέστατε καὶ λαίμαργε, ἀσυνείδητε, φιλάργυρε.

Now your greed has appeared, now your insatiability has been revealed,
you unappeasable, unthrift, unrelenting,
you most unashamed and gluttonous, consciousless lover of money!³³

After assailing Judas with these words, Romanos continues in four stanzas (16–19) to attack and scold him. However, we never hear Judas respond to these harsh words. This silence invites reflection: are these apostrophes only rhetorical, emotional outbursts that seek to both horrify and please the audience and create an outlet for pathos in distress, or might Judas, dead but still alive somewhere, be listening to these words? If thought of as alive, a tormented soul in the netherworld, these words would not only have an effect on the audience but also on the archvillain himself. Indeed, a stanza from the kontakion *On the Man Possessed with Demons* seems to confirm that the performance directly

30 See M. Fludernik, ‘Scene shift, metalepsis, and the metaleptic mode’, *Style* 37 (2003) 382–400 (389).

31 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 235. John Pier (‘Metalepsis’) calls this a ‘minimal metalepsis’ in his entry on the concept in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* and characterizes it as only ‘incipiently transgressive’. The story time is put on hold by the author, who ‘intervenes with a metanarrative comment, demonstrating the latent metaleptic quality of narrative embedding in general’. It is also this kind of metalepsis that Lauxtermann has found in the works of Michael Psellos and John Tzetzes; see Lauxtermann, ‘How Tzetzes lost his horse at Troy’.

32 See also Matzner, ‘By way of introduction’, 5.

33 Romanos, *Hymnes*, III, 27.15.1–3; my translation.

affects the enemies of Christ. With theatrical metaphors, Romanos tells his audience that by retelling the biblical stories and reproaching the demons and the devil, the fall of the demons is turned into a comedy.³⁴ Judas, clearly cast as the devil himself (ὁ ἄββολος), would be beaten to a pulp by Romanos' performance.

In a few instances in the hymns of Romanos, characters do actually listen and respond. A particularly amusing example of a dialogue occurs in a hymn on the descent to Hades. First, Romanos states that no one knows what really happened at the descent; he therefore proposes to ask someone who was there – none other than Hades himself. Romanos asks the underworld villain:

Εἰπὲ οὖν πρῶτος, Ἅϊδη, ὁ αἰὶ ἐχθρὸς τοῦ γένους μου,
πῶς εἶχες ἐν τῷ τάφῳ τὸν ποθήσαντα τὸ γένος μου;

Tell me therefore as the first one, Hades, the eternal enemy of my race,
how could you keep him who longed for my race in the grave?

Hades, personified, is bewildered and exhausted and replies to Romanos:

Ὑπ' ἐμοῦ θέλεις, ἄνερ, διδαχθῆναι πῶς ἐμοὶ κατεπέβη ὁ φονεὺς μου;
Διαλέλυμαι καὶ οὐκ ἰσχύω σοι ἐρεῦξασθαι· ἀκμὴν γὰρ τεθάμβημαι.

You, a man, want to learn from me how my murderer came down to me?
I am dissolved and too feeble to belch out to you – I am still astounded!³⁵

Hades is perplexed because Christ has descended into his belly and freed all the dead. In this interview with Hades, the descent and victory over Hades seem to have just taken place, as the subterranean, gluttonous monster is rendered powerless and astonished. Romanos seems to speak with Hades at the time and place of the Resurrection in the past from the time and place of the liturgical celebration in the present (or, indeed, anytime and anywhere this hymn is performed).

The transgression of time and place becomes even more tangible in the following stanzas. In an amusing and ironic turn, Hades seems to be aware of Easter, the liturgical celebration of the resurrection of Christ.³⁶ For Hades, the resurrection, the ἀνάστασις, entails the end of the infernal powers; he therefore laments:

ἀνάστασιν καλοῦσι τὴν ἡμέραν μου τῆς πτώσεως,

34 Romanos, *Hymnes*, III, 22.2.4–5: Τί δὲ τούτους τιτρώσκειν ἐγνώκαμεν, / ὅταν τὴν πῶσιν αὐτῶν κωμφοδοῦμεν γηθόμενοι. My translation.

35 Romanos, *Hymnes*, IV, 42.2.3 and 42.3.1–2; my translation.

36 See Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry*, 161–9 for more references to the liturgy uttered by characters inside a biblical storyworld. In 'Imaginære rejser', I have also pointed out several instances where Romanos makes present a biblical event by saying that, for instance, the birth of Christ happens 'today' (σήμερον) or invites his audience to enter the sacred storyworld – exactly as instances of metalepsis do.

πανήγυριν τελοῦσι τὸν καιρὸν τῆς ἀπωλείας μου· οἱμοι οἱμοι, τί ἔπαθον.³⁷

'Resurrection' they call the day of my fall!

They celebrate the time of my destruction! Alas, alas! What I had to suffer!

This strange encounter with the personification of a realm inaccessible to the living produces a metalepsis that is comical and fantastic, as Genette defines the term. We might even go so far as to suggest that Romanos is actually addressing a person or entity that is not a fiction but exists in some sense. While such a suggestion may appear bold, it becomes less so when we consider that Romanos often tells stories about Christ, his mother Mary, and God the Father. Before, during, and after his retelling of a biblical episode, where he will even signal explicitly that he is imagining what, for instance, Christ would say almost in the manner of an *ethopoia*, he also addresses these three persons directly in prayer. For the faithful, Christ, the Mother of God, and God the Father are not fictional characters but persons and entities who are believed to exist. In other words, metalepsis in the hymns of Romanos – and perhaps Christian prayers and hymns in general – does not have only a comical or fantastic effect, but also a mystical, non-fictional effect, which establishes a meeting with the divine realm, a revelation.

'Double relevance' in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist

When Hades speaks of the anastasis in the passage just cited, this could also be understood as an example of 'double relevance'. For Hades, the word 'anastasis' signifies the end of reign and power; for the audience of Romanos' hymn, it denotes a liturgical celebration. However, following Irene de Jong's definition, 'double relevance' occurs not when a character in a story addresses the extradiegetical audience or listener directly, but when the audience perceives an utterance addressed to a character in the storyworld as addressed to them. We find several examples of 'double relevance' in the hymns of Romanos. In fact, this kind of metalepsis, the 'double relevance', is at play so often in the kontakia that José Grosdidier de Matons described some kontakia as 'un sermon placé dans la bouche d'un des personnages'.³⁸

In the example of the kontakion 'On the Meeting of the Lord', Romanos retells the brief pericope in Luke 2.22–35, in which the infant Jesus meets the aged Symeon in the temple. While Romanos follows the biblical hypotext, he expands the narrative through extended speeches from the biblical characters. The first such expansion occurs when Mary, on her way to present her newborn child to the temple, becomes anxious and asks the infant how she should address him:

Ποίαν εὔρω, ὕἱέ μου, ἐπὶ σοὶ προσηγορίαν;

37 Romanos, *Hymnes*, IV, 42.12.3–4; my translation.

38 J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris 1977) 321; concerning Symeon specifically, see Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, pp. 163–4.

Ἐὰν γάρ, ὡς βλέπω, ἄνθρωπόν σε εἶπω, ὑπάρχεις ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον,
ὁ τὴν παρθενίαν μου φυλάξας ἀκήρατον,
ὁ μόνος φιλόανθρωπος.³⁹

What title can I find for you, my Son?
For should I call you, as I see you, man, you are more than man,
who kept my virginity unsullied,
only Lover of mankind?

Mary acknowledges that the infant is more than man and addresses him with the refrain ‘only Lover of mankind’, first introduced by Romanos in the proem to the hymn. The double relevance is already at play in the refrain, which in most of Romanos’ hymns is voiced not only by the poet but also by the biblical characters.⁴⁰ Outside the storyworld the refrain is a doxological affirmation, within the storyworld it is Mary’s attempt at finding the right title.

She continues trying to find the right words and then engages in doctrinal language that is foreign to the biblical hypotext:

Τέλειον ἄνθρωπον εἶπω σε; Ἄλλ’ ἐπίσταμαι
θεϊκὴν σου τὴν σύλληψιν· οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων γὰρ πώποτε
δίχα συνουσίας καὶ σπορᾶς συλλαμβάνεται
ὥσπερ σύ, ἀναμάρτητε·
κἂν Θεόν σε καλέσω, θαυμάζω ὁρῶσά σε κατὰ πάντα μοι ὅμοιον,
οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔχεις παρηλλαγμένον οὐδὲν τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις,
εἰ καὶ δίχα ἁμαρτίας συνελήφθης καὶ ἐτέχθης.
Γαλακτοτροφῆσω ἢ δοξολογήσω; Θεὸν γὰρ σε τὰ πράγματα
κηρύττουσιν ἄχρονον, κἂν γέγονας ἄνθρωπος,
ὁ μόνος φιλόανθρωπος.⁴¹

Should I call you perfect man? But you know my conception was divine.
None of humankind is ever
conceived without union and without seed, as you were, sinless One.
And if I call you God, I marvel as I see you like me in all things,
for you have nothing which differentiates you among humans,
even though without sin you were conceived and born.

39 Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, 14.3.6–10; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*.

40 The general assumption is that a choir or perhaps even the congregation sang the refrain during the performance of the kontakia. This kind of performance would enact another layer of metalepsis, extratextual metalepsis, where the audience would sometimes take on the role of, for instance, Mary or Christ – or even Hades and Judas. On the refrain in performance, see T. Arentzen, ‘Voices interwoven: refrains and vocal participation in the kontakia’, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 66 (2017) 1–10. On the participation of the congregation in general, see Gador-Whyte, *Theology and Poetry*, 154–94.

41 Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, 14.4; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*.

Shall I suckle you, or give you glory? For the facts proclaim you
God without time, even though you have become man,
only Lover of mankind.

It is worth quoting this stanza in full as it echoes central doctrines on the two natures of Christ and the role of the Mother of God. As several scholars have pointed out, the theology voiced through Mary (and, as we shall see below, Symeon) aligns with the imperial orthodoxy promoted under Emperor Justinian in the sixth century.⁴² However, we find these doctrines scattered throughout the hymns of Romanos, so the historical doctrinal discussions need not occupy us here, nor what the sources of these doctrines are. What is interesting is that something contemporaneous for the audience of the hymn is voiced not by the poet in his own persona, but through the biblical characters. Romanos grants authority to these doctrines by placing them in the mouth of the Mother of God herself. It is a clear case of 'double relevance': within the storyworld, these utterances appear as Mary's ruminations; outside the storyworld, they function as firm Christological doctrines for the audience. Romanos uses sources such as the Bible and doctrinal formulations, but he does so with a particular purpose: to authorize the doctrines by transmitting them indirectly via Mary as his mouthpiece.⁴³

Whereas Mary's concern is used to promulgate doctrines of the two natures and the sinlessness of Christ, the elderly Symeon ponders the trinity of the Godhead. As he meets the little child, he is afraid but also full of joy. Symeon cries out:

ὁ ὑπάρχων πρὸ αἰώνων καὶ τὰ σύμπαντα ποιήσας·
φῶς γὰρ τηλαυγὲς εἶ, φῶς τὸ τοῦ πατρός σου, ἀσύγχυτον, ἀορίστον
καὶ ἀπερινόητον, κἄν γέγονας ἄνθρωπος,
ὁ μόνος φιλόανθρωπος.⁴⁴

You exist before the ages and you made the universe,
for you are the far-shining light, the light of your Father, unconfused,
unbounded
and beyond understanding, though you have become man,
only Lover of mankind

and he continues in the following stanza:

... μείζονα ἄλλον οὐκ ἔχεις ἐπίσταμαι, ἀσυλλόγιστε Κύριε·

42 See, e.g., Grosdidier de Matons in Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, p. 164; Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*, 26, 29 n. 6, 30 n. 10.

43 On this aspect of borrowing divine authority in ancient literature, see Fulkerson, 'Close encounters', 160.

44 Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, 14.6.7–10; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*.

ὁ γὰρ πατήρ σου τὸ κατ' οὐσίαν οὐδέν σου ὑπερέχει·
ὁμοούσιος γὰρ τούτου καὶ συνάναρχος ὑπάρχεις.⁴⁵

...there is none greater, I know, than you, Lord beyond reason;
since your Father, as to essence, does not surpass you at all,
for you are consubstantial with him and, like him, without beginning.

In this speech, doctrines from the Council of Nicaea and the Cappadocian fathers are placed in the mouth of the old man.⁴⁶ If we apply a historical, realistic frame of understanding to this narrative, Symeon utters doctrines that do not belong to his own lifetime but to debates unfolding several centuries later. Romanos thus allows Symeon to deliver a sermon in which doctrine is explained. Inside the narrative, the speech is best understood as a doxology directed towards Christ and the triune God – Symeon is not giving a sermon to God – whereas the speech can be heard outside the narrative as a sermon affirming later doctrine by a biblical character, and not just any biblical character, but a particularly venerable one, as Grosdidier de Matons calls Symeon.⁴⁷

In the following stanzas, Symeon can even foretell the crucifixion of Christ to Mary as well as the rise of heresies that are, strictly historically speaking, unknown to the time of the biblical event:

τὸν σταυρούμενον ἄλλοι Θεὸν μὲν κηρύξουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ πάλιν ἄνθρωπον,
καὶ ἀσεβείας καὶ εὐσεβείας τὰ δόγματα κινουῦνται·
καὶ οὐράνιον τινες μὲν ὑποπτεύουσιν τὸ σῶμα,
ἄλλοι φαντασίαν· ἕτεροι δὲ πάλιν ἐκ σοῦ τὴν σάρκα ἄψυχον
καὶ ἕτεροι ἔμψυχον φασὶν ὡς ἀνέλαβεν
ὁ μόνος φιλόανθρωπος.⁴⁸

Some will proclaim the Crucified as God, while others yet again as man,
propounding the doctrines of false religion and of true.
Some suppose his body to be of heaven,
others a phantom; while others yet again say that, from you,
he assumed inanimate – but others animate – flesh,
the only Lover of mankind.

These lines clearly echo heresies condemned at the ecumenical councils. In the story-world, Symeon foreshadows heresies that would arise in the future, which are well

45 Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, 14.7.5–7; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*.

46 See the references of Grosdidier de Matons in Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, p. 183 n. 1.

47 Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, p. 163. See also De Jong, 'Apostrophe of heroes in Pindar', 91–2, about apostrophes to ancient heroes in the *Odes* of Pindar as hinting at the ancient person's future status as a hero in the present of the author and the victor. The same goes for Symeon: he is at one and the same time a person from the past and a venerable saint in the present.

48 Romanos, *Hymnes*, II, 14.12.5–10; tr. Lash, *St. Romanos the Melodist*.

known at the time of the telling. The false doctrines can be heard inside the narrative as prophesies, outside the narrative as a contemporaneous rejection of heretical views endowed with the authority of this particular venerable biblical character.

The second example is a subtler case of double relevance. In the kontakion 'On Joseph', Romanos appears to present the figure of Joseph as a model for the Byzantine emperor.⁴⁹ Joseph's mantle is repeatedly described as purple (πορφυρίδα), whereas it is 'many-coloured' (ποικίλος) in the hypotext (Gen 37 LXX). Purple was the colour reserved for the Byzantine emperor. By emphasizing the colour purple instead of referring to the mantle as 'many-coloured', Romanos aligns Joseph's appearance with that of the emperor. The comparison, however, extends beyond clothing. Romanos draws a more direct parallel between Joseph and the Byzantine emperor in stanza six, where Joseph's brothers call him 'king' (βασιλεύς, which would mean 'emperor' for Romanos' audience). In the same passage, Joseph uses language that evokes the imperial court in sixth-century Constantinople:

‘Καλῶς’, φασίν, ἦλθεν ὁ βασιλεύς·
 βάψωμεν αἵματι αὐτοῦ τὴν πορφυρίδα·
 ἐγκαινίσει πρόκενσον ἐν πύλαις νεκρῶν.
 ‘Ρουβὶμ δὲ συναλγῶν πάντας πείσας ρίπτει αὐτὸν
 ἐν τῷ λάκκῳ βοῶντα· ‘Οἱμοὶ τῆς βασιλείας·
 τοῦτο νῦν ἐστὶ τὸ παλάτιον;’ Καὶ ἔκραξε·
 Μέγας μόνος Κύριος ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν.⁵⁰

‘Welcome to the king’, they said.
 ‘Let us dip his purple garment in blood.
 He will begin his palace procession to the gates of the dead!’
 However, Reuben felt pity and persuaded them to throw him
 in the cistern, he who cried: ‘Alas,
 is this now my royal palace?!’, and he cried out:
 ‘Only the Lord, our Saviour, is great!’

First, the brothers also call Joseph's mantle purple. Second, they use a term not attested before Byzantine times, προκέκνσον, which denotes a solemn procession from one royal palace to another. As Grosdidier de Matons notes in his edition, ‘it is a Byzantine who

49 I will explore this possible use of the Joseph story as a *Fürstenspiegel* for the Byzantine emperor in a forthcoming article. R. J. Schork has suggested that Romanos' other kontakion on Joseph, which focuses exclusively on the temptation of Joseph by the wife of Potiphar, may be read as a subtle critique of Emperor Justinian and Theodora: ‘The poet could also have meant his message of self-control and chastity to apply, discreetly, to the imperial pair, especially the empress’, a critique that is also voiced in Procopius of Caesarea's *Secret History*. Schork admits, though, that this ‘subsurface allusion’ that he believes is implied in Romanos' kontakion is ‘utterly speculative’. See R. J. Schork, *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist* (Gainesville 1995) 160–2.

50 Romanos, *Hymnes*, I, 5.6.4–10; my translation.

speaks this way, not a shepherd from biblical times'.⁵¹ Finally, Joseph compares – not without irony – the cistern into which he is cast with a royal palace (παλάτιον). For the biblical characters inside the storyworld the words do not have the same meaning as they do for the Byzantine audience in the sixth century. This last example also connects the phenomenon of 'double relevance' with tragic or prophetic irony, where the audience outside the storyworld know more than the characters in the storyworld, namely that Joseph will become king and ruler of his brothers. Throughout the kontakion 'On Joseph' – and in many other instances in Romanos' kontakia – this form of tragic or prophetic irony is exploited to the fullest, not only to entertain, but also to merge the time of what is told with the time of the telling.

Night of the living dead

Uthemann's question nevertheless remains pressing: 'what consciousness of God and biblical figures a speech delivered at that time in a liturgical context presupposed'. Were biblical characters understood and believed to still be alive somewhere and able to listen and speak? What about the biblical characters Romanos addresses, who seem not to respond or hear the address? Were they thought of as existing in some way? Judas does not reply, whereas Hades does, but the latter case is very rare.

Romanos' hymn 'On All Saints and Martyrs' may provide a clue to the ontological status of saints and martyrs. In the opening stanza of the hymn, Romanos invites his audience to envisage the martyrs as simultaneously present in the heavenly realm and gathered together with the congregation on earth in the here and now of the liturgy:

Οἱ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῇ μαρτυρήσαντες καὶ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς μετοικήσαντες,
οἱ τὰ πάθη Χριστοῦ μιμησάμενοι καὶ τὰ πάθη ἡμῶν ἀφαιρούμενοι
ἐνταῦθα σήμερον ἀθροίζονται πρωτοτόκων δεικνύοντες ἐκκλησίαν
ὡς τῆς ἄνω τὸν τύπον ἐπέχουσιν
καὶ Χριστῷ ἐκβοῶσαν· 'Θεός μου εἶ σύ,
πολυέλεε.'⁵²

Having borne witness⁵³ in the whole world and residing in heaven,
having imitated the sufferings of Christ and taking away our sufferings,
they gather together here today, showing that the church of the Firstborn
holds on to the heavenly archetype
and cries out: 'You are my God,
All Merciful!'

51 Romanos, *Hymnes*, I, 209 n. 4: 'C'est un Byzantin qui parle ainsi, non un berger des temps bibliques.'

52 Romanos Melodos, *Cantica Genua* 59.1, ed. P. Maas and C. Trypanis (Oxford 1963); my translation.

53 Another possible translation: 'having become martyrs'.

The martyrs do not only reside in heaven, they have also gathered 'here today' (ἐνταῦθα σήμερον) in the church, where they cry out the same refrain as Romanos and the audience: 'You are my God, All Merciful'.

That the martyrs are indeed present is clear when Romanos switches from speaking *about* the martyrs to speaking *to* them in stanza five:

Οἱ ἀγῶνες ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ στέφανοι, οἱ ἰδρῶτες ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ θαύματα
οὐδὲ λόγῳ ἐνὶ ὑπογράφονται, οὐδὲ τόπῳ ἐνὶ περιγράφονται.⁵⁴

Your [the martyrs'] fights and victory crowns, your sweat and wonders
cannot be written in one speech, nor be outlined in one place.

Romanos addresses the martyrs in the second person and praises their struggles and victories, which he says – ironically – cannot be written down (yet he writes them down); in the last stanza he shows how their stories become important for him and his congregation as the martyrs and saints through their sufferings have received a special position in heaven where they can intercede on behalf of believers on earth:

Ὑπομείναντες ὄντως ὑπέμειναν καὶ νομίμως ἀθλήσαντες ἦθλησαν·
τὸν ἀγῶνα καλῶς ἡγωνίσαντο καὶ τὸν δρόμον εἰς τέλος ἐτέλεσαν·
τὴν πίστιν ἄμωμον ἐτήρησαν, ἀντὶ πάντων δὲ τούτων τῶν ἀλγεινῶν
παρὰ σοῦ τοὺς στεφάνους ἐκδέχονται·
ταῖς εὐχαῖς αὐτῶν ἱλεως γενοῦ ἡμῖν,
πολυέλεε.⁵⁵

Enduring, they endured truly, and struggling, they struggled lawfully.
They fought the fight well and ran the race to the end.⁵⁶
They kept their faith unblemished, and because of all these sufferings
they receive victory crowns from You.
Through their prayers be merciful to us,
You the All Merciful.

The saints and martyrs are clearly heavenly beings who can be addressed and who engage silently with Romanos and his audience. As many of the biblical characters were saints in Romanos' lifetime, it is safe to assume that, however fictitious and playful apostrophes to biblical characters were when used by Romanos, there nevertheless

54 Romanos, *Cantica Genua*, 59.5.1–3; my translation.

55 Romanos, *Cantica Genua*, 59.13; my translation.

56 It is difficult to translate the polyptota (ὑπομείναντες...ὑπέμειναν, ἀθλήσαντες ἦθλησαν, ἀγῶνα...ἡγωνίσαντο, and τέλος ἐτέλεσαν) in a satisfying manner. I have kept them close to the Greek to show that Romanos uses this figure of speech here.

was a reality behind the play.⁵⁷ To rephrase Klooster, apostrophe to God, biblical characters, and saints is indeed an address to eternal entities, who straddle the storyworld and the world of the telling. By using apostrophe and double relevance, these characters are not only talked about, but they are also, in a certain way, invoked during the narration, and, as we have seen, on some occasions, do answer. Dead but nevertheless still living eternally, they are invisibly present and listening during the night vigil, in which the kontakion was performed.

Conclusion

In religious narratives like hymns, metalepsis and apostrophe do not function in the same way as they do in rhetoric and fictional narrative. In postmodern fiction, these devices create ‘an effect of strangeness’ and function as a deliberate game played by the author with the reader or viewer. Although metalepsis purports to break the illusion of fiction, it remains within the realm of fictionality and, in fact, intensifies it. In religious narratives, by contrast, metalepsis and apostrophe are not only fictional devices but also means of creating a revelatory encounter with the divine. The characters addressed are not inventions of the poet but heavenly beings invisibly present using the poet as their mouthpiece. They listen and sometimes respond.

In Christian hymns and homilies, narrative techniques such as metalepsis and apostrophe therefore do not signal pure fictionality as inventedness but direct attention towards a higher reality. One might even say that in Christian narratives, especially in hymns, fictional devices and imagined discourse become instruments of revelation in the hands of a poet-preacher – or simply put, baptized fictionality. This expression is a deliberate play on the title of Karla Pollmann’s book *The Baptized Muse*, which explores how late antique Latin Christian poets appropriated and transformed ancient poetry in the form of centos or biblical narratives in hexameter – effectively baptizing the pagan past. Her overall characterization of Christian poetry in Late Antiquity works for Byzantine hymns (and hymns in general) as well. As Pollmann states, Christian poetry in Late Antiquity is ‘a genre that partakes in both earthly conditions and divine truth’ and which ‘anticipates God’s final coming at the end of time and is simultaneously able to instil truth and freedom in its readers already in the present’.⁵⁸ By retelling biblical stories in a liturgical setting, Romanos merges the past of the biblical events with the present of the audience and the eschatological future, applying fictional

57 The possibility to interact with saints was not a settled matter in sixth-century Byzantium and was only systematized in the latter part of the Middle Byzantine period; see V. Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium: the fate of the soul in theology, liturgy, and art* (New York 2017) 1–49. For instance, Eustratios of Constantinople (d. after 602) claimed that souls of the saints were in heaven but could appear on earth (Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium*, 42), whereas Ps-Athanasios a century or two later would argue that the souls of the saints were confined to heaven and interactions with saints were really caused by angels looking like them (ibid. 22, 26).

58 K. Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse: early Christian poetry as cultural authority* (Oxford 2017) 15.

techniques in the service of revelation. Metalepsis, such as apostrophe to God and biblical characters as well as moments of 'double relevance', becomes a baptized means of Christian persuasion and praise.

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