NARRATIVE APOSTROPHE IN THE KONTAKIA OF
ROMANOS THE MELODIST WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO HIS HYMN “ON JUDAS”

by J.H. Barkhuizen
(University of Pretoria)

1 Introduction

1.1 The internal nature of the kontakion, especially as this literary subgenre
flourished at the hands of Romanos in the sixth century A.D., can be defined as a
liturgical text comprising as basic components doxology, prayer, exhortation,
catechesis and sacred myth, the components exhortation and catechesis being my
addition to the other three listed by Topping.¹ From these components I
construct two intentional subworlds², viz. the Liturgical World, comprising [the
components] doxology, prayer, catechesis and exhortation, and the Sacred Myth
World, comprising the narrative of Biblical events. The basic function or role of
the speaker in the subworld of sacred myth is obviously that of narrator. Not
being part of the narrative world he is relating, he is known as a non-dramatized
 informant.³

In transmitting his message to the reader in the text, whether by means of the
liturgical components or the narrative component, the speaker is always present
in the text, but he may become openly or directly manifested in three ways:⁴
— by presenting himself in the first person (e.g. ‘In my opinion’ etc.);
— by addressing the receiver (= listener) in the text in the second person or
including himself and the receiver in the first person plural;
— by intruding into his narrative and addressing his characters, a technique that is
called narrative apostrophe,⁵ and which can be characterized as an authorial
monologue, because there is no dialogue going on between himself and his
characters: the latter are not aware of his addressing them, and therefore cannot
react to his words.

1.2 It is with the technique of narrative apostrophe that our main concern lies.
Consequently, the aim of this paper will be:
— firstly, to list and classify all instances of narrative apostrophe in the genuine
kontakia of Romanos;
— secondly; to analize one kontakion in particular, viz. Kontakion 17 (‘On
Judas’), because this hymn offers the most sustained example of such an
apostrophe in the kontakia of Romanos.

2. Listing and classification of narrative apostrophe in the 59 genuine kontakia of
Romanos
2.1 Narrative apostrophe is used in 16 of the 59 genuine kontakia. The instances can be classified under three subgroups:

**Group 1:** The first forms the largest group and represents the normal pattern by means of which the narrator interrupts his narrative by addressing his characters in positive or negative terms.

**Group 2:** In several kontakia the speaker relates the sacred events by addressing a particular character. This could be defined as a specific kind of narrative mode.

**Group 3:** In one instance the character addressed seems to respond to the narrator's address. We will, however, indicate below that this is merely an illusionary presentation of a dialogue between narrator and character.

2.2 List

**Group 1:**
- i. Kontakion 3: The Christ-child
- ii. Kontakion 17: Judas
- iii. Kontakion 18: Peter
- iv. Kontakion 24: The Jews
  - The Sanhedrin
  - Pilate
- v. Kontakion 28: Judea
- vi. Kontakion 35: Mary
  - Anna
- vii. Kontakion 43: Potiphar
- viii. Kontakion 50: The Lord
- ix. Kontakion 51: Eve

**Group 2**
- i. Kontakia 16/17/20/28: Christ
- ii. Kontakion 17: Judas
- iii. Kontakion 57: The Martyrs

**Group 3**
- i. Kontakion 7: Mary

2.3 Before we analyze Kontakion 17 in more detail, the seemingly irregular example encountered in Kontakion 7, in which Mary responds to the narrator's words, demands an explanation.

Kontakion 7 contains as narrative the marriage at Cana. The narrator relates in strophe 5 that the supply of wine ran out, with the result that the joy of the guests turned into distress. Mary, however, on recognising this, at once came to Jesus and begged Him to produce wine by means of a miracle. Thereupon the narrator addresses her as follows in strophe 6:
In strophe 7 Mary then responds as follows:

«Ακούσατε, φησίν, ὁ φίλοι, συνετίθητε πάντες καὶ γνῶτε μυστήρια. Εἴδον τὸν ὕδων μου ἡ δ θαυματουργοῦντα [καὶ] πρὸ τοῦτο τοῦ θαυματος; 5 οὐδέπω ἡν αὐτοῦ μαθητής Ἰωάννης οὐδέπω γὰρ οὐκ ἦν τῷ Χριστῷ μαθητεύσας, ὅτε τάτα ἐποίει τὰ θαύματα. πρῶτην αὐτοῦ θαυμάτων ἀμαρχήν ταύτην τεθέαται ἐν Κανὰ γενναμένην, ὁσπ[ερ] οἴδεν ὁ ὕδως μου. 10 ὁ τὰ πάντα ἐν σοφίᾳ ποιήσας.»

The narrative is continued only after 4 strophes of apostrophe! But seeing that neither the narrator nor the receiver (addressed by Mary as ‘friends’) forms part of the sacred story, there can be no question of any dialogue between them and Mary. What we have here in fact is a typical example where a character becomes a dramatized informant, i.e. the speaker delegates his role of dramatized informant to one of his characters, in this instance to Mary. The speaker explicitly informs the receivers in the text of this when he states at the beginning of strophe 7:

'Ῥήματα μάθομεν ἃ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἢ μὴτηρ λέγει τοῦ πάντων] Θεοῦ:'

By means of this technique the narrator has certainly created a dramatic effect of liveliness: the illusion that he as well as the receivers are present at the wedding! But this also provides him with a subtle way of touching upon the greatest of all miracles, the immaculate birth of Christ. It was this miracle that enabled Mary to approach her son with the request to perform another miracle.

3. Kontakion 17
As set out above, kontakion 17 contains the most sustained example of narrative apostrophe, all but one directed at Judas, and in which the narrator here performs the role of accuser. To get a clear picture of the use of narrative apostrophe in this hymn, I shall first give an outline of its structure, and then engage in a more detailed analysis.
3.1. Outline

The kontakion reveals the typical structure of Prologue, Narrative, and Epilogue.

3.1.1. Prologue

The prologue manifests both its thematic and liturgical function: by means of the thematic function the speaker touches on the theme of the hymn by referring to Judas who, while his feet were being washed by the hands of Christ, was secretly planning to betray Jesus. By means of the liturgical function the speaker in his role of intercessor prays on behalf of his fellow Christians that they may be safeguarded from such an action. The prologue is closed with the hymn's refrain in the form of a prayer for mercy.

3.1.2. Narrative

The narrative with the betrayal of Jesus as subject can be divided, according to Aristotle's concept, into three sections: introduction, various episodes, and a conclusion.

a. Introduction (strophe 1): In this section the narrator refers by means of rhetorical questions to the horror experienced by man and nature at the sight of this outrage committed by Judas.

b. Exposition (strophes 2–21)

   Episode 1: The first episode (strophes 2–13) has as theme the washing of the disciples' feet and is presented in five scenes:
   i. The first between Christ and Judas (2–5).
   ii. The second (6) and fourth (9–11) between Christ and Peter.
   iii. The third an inserted scene located in heaven with Gabriel and the angels as characters (7–8).
   iv. The fifth is a commentary on the person of Judas (12–13).

   Episode 2: The second episode (strophes 14–20) refers to the departure of Judas to the Sanhedrin, and consists of six subsections:
   i. A narrative introduction (14a).
   ii. An apostrophe directed at cosmic elements (14b).
   iii. An apostrophe directed at Judas (15–17).
   iv. A reference to Elijah (18).
   v. Another apostrophe directed at Judas (19).
   vi. A commentary on the fall of Judas (20).

   Episode 3: In the third episode (strophe 21) we have the betrayal in the garden, and it contains a short apostrophe directed at Judas.

c. Conclusion: In this section (strophe 22) the narrator anticipates, in the form of an apostrophe, the tragic end of Judas.

3.1.3. Epilogue

The epilogue covers strophe 23 and contains the liturgical components of
3.2. Description

**Episode 1**

a. In the first scene (2–5) of episode 1 the narrator refers to the love of Christ, even towards Judas, manifested in the washing of his feet by the Lord. But in spite of this love Judas turns his back on Christ. This scene is concluded by the first apostrophe directed at Judas (strophe 5):

> Ἄδικε, ἁστοργε, ἁσπονδε, πειρατα, προδότα, πολυμήχανε, τι γέγονεν, ὅτι ἡθέτησας; 
> Τί ἰδὼν οὗτος ἡφρόνησας; Τί παθὼν οὗτος ἐμίσησας; 
> Οὔκ αὐτῷ φίλον σε ἀνόιμαν;

5 Οὐκ αὐτὸς ἀδελφὸν σε κέκληκεν, καίτοι εἰδὼς ὅτι δεδόλωσαι; 
> Τὸ τῶν χρημάτων λήμμα τὸ ἐν τῷ γλασσοκόμῳ δέδωκε τῇ σῇ πίστῃ, καὶ ἀσυνείδητος ἐν τούτωι πάσιν ἐφάνης ὑφνῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν.

> Ἦλεος, Ἦλεος, Ἦλεος γενοῦ ἡμῖν, 
> ὁ πάντων ἀνεχόμενος καὶ πάντας ἐκδεχόμενος.

b. The second scene (6) as well as the fourth (9–11), both referring to Jesus’ washing the feet of Peter, and the embedded scene (7–8) in which Gabriel and the other angels are amazed at the fact that Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, serve as contrast to the first scene.

c. This is confirmed when, in the fifth scene (12–13), the narrator returns to the heartlessness of Judas by way of a commentary on his conduct.

**Episode 2**

a. In the second episode (14–20), in which Judas departs for the Sanhedrin, we encounter two apostrophes directed at Judas, the first covering no less than three strophes (15–17):

> Νῦν σου ἐφάνη τὸ ἀπληστον, νῦν ἐφανερώθη τὸ ἀκόρεστον, ἄχριταστε, ἄσωτε, ἄσπονδε, ἀνυιδέστε καὶ λαΐμαργε, ἀσυνείδητε, πιλάργυρε.
> «Τὶ ἐμοὶ θέλετε δωρήσασθαι;»

5 λέγεις τοῖς θέλουσιν ἀνήσασθα τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ξώντος καὶ μένοντος· τὶ γὰρ καλὸν οὐκ εἰχες; τίνος δὲ οὐ μετείχες; τίνος ποτέ ἀπείχες; 
> Μετὰ τῶν κάτω καὶ τὰ ἀνω εἰσί· καὶ τὸν Θεόν σου προδιέδοις.

> Ἦλεος, Ἦλεος, Ἦλεος γενοῦ ἡμῖν, 
> ὁ πάντων ἀνεχόμενος καὶ πάντας ἐκδεχόμενος.

> Ὄλον τὸν πλοῦτον ἐβάσταζες, 
> θησαυρός ὑπῆρξες ἀδιπάνητος; 
> πάντοθεν ἦς πάντοτε πλούσιος, 
> ἐν χερσίν ἔχον τὰ χρήματα καὶ φρεσι φέρων τὸν πλάσαντα.

Τί οὖν σοι γέγονεν, ὦ ἀθλιε,
In strophe 18 the narrator refers to Elijah who destroyed the priests with fire, and now Judas does not even consider the Maker of prophets as a prophet! This again moves the narrator to direct an apostrophe (in strophe 19) at Judas:

b. In strophe 18 the narrator refers to Elijah who destroyed the priests with fire, and now Judas does not even consider the Maker of prophets as a prophet! This again moves the narrator to direct an apostrophe (in strophe 19) at Judas:

In the final strophe (20) of this episode the narrator yet again comments on the fall of Judas likening it to that of Satan.

c. In the final strophe (20) of this episode the narrator yet again comments on the fall of Judas likening it to that of Satan.

The conclusion consists of an anticipation of Judas’ death, but again in the form of an apostrophe (strophe 22):
3.3. Evaluation

In our evaluation of narrative apostrophe in kontakion 17, two aspects will be accentuated: (1) the context in which it is used, and (2) its purpose.

3.3.1. It has been observed that apostrophes arise ‘from some intenser feeling in the context’ 9 and have their greatest effect ‘at emotional junctures’. 8 This is also true of apostrophe in the hymns of Romanos, especially in those instances where the narrator reacts violently and vehemently towards a given character. The whole theme of kontakion 17, the treacherous act of Judas, breathes the atmosphere of indignation and outrage: the very deed, the conduct, the action of Judas provoke the narrator as spokesman for God to vehement reaction. In this connection, as indicated above, the instances where the narrator refers to the moving scenes between Jesus and Peter and the amazement of the angels and the creation at this act of Judas, serve to emphasize this emotional context in which the apostrophes are inserted into the narrative. And the reference itself to the love of Christ towards Judas serves the same purpose.

3.3.2. The purpose of narrative apostrophe is ‘to emphasize the response of the speaker and thereby shape the response of the listener’. 11 Narrative apostrophe therefore ‘almost always expresses and demands a strong response’. 12 In this connection Prince 13 observes: ‘The intrusiveness of a given narrator . . . does not only characterize him but also affects our interpretation of and response to the narrative’. The narrator articulates his response of anger, fear, sympathy or antipathy, in order that the receivers may be confronted in that particular instance with the same emotions and feelings as the narrator. ‘Apostrophe . . . thus asks the audience to respond, ideally, as the narrator responds to the situations or evaluations that he introduces’. 14 We have here in fact the concept of mimesis which, according to Havelock 15 ‘focusses initially not on the artist’s creative act but on his power to make his audience identify almost pathologically and certainly sympathetically with the content of what he is saying’.

This function and purpose of apostrophe is especially effective in the context of the kontakion as liturgical text, a text in which the narrative primarily has a didactic function. In this connection the relation between narrator and receivers is of the utmost importance, a relation which is tied up with the very essence of the kontakion as a literary text. For though the kontakion was composed as a written text, it was performed orally. In such instances the relationship between
narrator and receivers differs from that in the case of written texts, or texts that were received primarily in a written form. Block observes in this connection: 'The relationship between singer and audience is, in the oral tradition, one in which the narrator’s response is shared rather than challenged, with the result that the audience of an oral narrative is primarily a feeling, not a judging, participant. . . .' The performance situation of the kontakion as described above, viz. a written text performed orally makes the observation of Block concerning the relationship between singer and audience also applicable to that of the speaker (or the poet-priest in the Real World) and receivers (or the congregation in the Real World).

4. Conclusion
With these observations in mind we may conclude that the narrator, by means of narrative apostrophe, creates a definite dramatic effect: by the use of this technique both he and the receivers are involved more directly with the sacred events related. In the case of kontakion 17 the narrator is thus able to direct the feelings of the receivers towards his own: he wishes to incite their feelings to the same level of intensity as his. He wishes to share his anger, contempt and accusation, which he directs in his role as accuser at the traitor of the Lord, with the receivers, and thereby to make himself and the receivers living witnesses of this atrocious act of Judas, who despite the love of Christ turned his back treacherously on Him.

And although some scholars have expressed negative commentary on the excessive use of narrative apostrophe or invective in this particular poem, with this accumulation of invective in kontakion 17 the speaker as narrator of this horrible act of treachery must surely have succeeded in his purpose to unite the feelings of the receivers with his own into a combined resentment directed against the traitor of Christ, their God. This is especially effective in a context where the kontakion as liturgical text became a powerful didactic and homiletic instrument to show God’s love for man, and how man should or should not repay this love.

NOTES
6. Reference to individual kontakia is according to their numbering in the Oxford text edited by P. Maas — C.A. Trypanis, Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina, Oxford 1963. However, the Greek text used in this paper is that of J. Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes I–IV, Paris 1964–1967.
7. This is my designation. The various functions attributed by various scholars to the prologue can

17. See e.g. M. Carpenter, Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist I: On the Person of Christ, Columbia 1970, 168, and J. Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes IV, Sources Chrétiennes no. 128, 55ff.
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