CONFLUENCES

DRAMATIC STRUCTURES IN RELIGIOUS ORATORY CASE STUDY –ANTIM IVIREANU'S*DIDAHII*

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Abstract:
Antim's *Didahii* have always been a great topic of debate but very often the discussion has remained at a general level. Our approach aims to reveal a virtual aspect of the "*Didahii*". The originality of Antim's homilies, affirmed as well as contested, consists of both implicit dramatic structures and specific forms of expression. These are themes and reasons of a behaviour dictated by a conjuncture understood as a play convention.

Keywords:
Play, protagonist, *performance*, conflict, role, stage.

The metropolitan bishop Antim, Wallachian by adoption, belongs to the family of the great spirits who think ahead of their time. It was at the Court of Brâncoveanu where he played the mediating role between the cultural influences of the West and the former Byzantium. However, towards the professors of the Princely Academy or towards the representatives of the Italian school (Anton Maria del Chiaro) or the Greek school (Hrisant Nottara), which also played a mediating role, Antim seems to have been pursuing a higher goal, i. e. creating the premises of a novelty oriented climate.

His tragic destiny is marked by the ideas he advocated. In this spirit, his work, *Didahii* (which could be translated as "Homilies" or "Sermons"), must be understood as an attempt to enliven the Romanian historical context, which at the time was set in strictly imposed patterns.

Antim's *Didahii*have always been a great topic of debatebutvery often the discussion has remained at a general level. Our approach aims to reveal a virtual aspect of the *Didahii*. The originality of Antim's homilies, affirmedas well as contested, consists ofboth implicit dramatic structures and specificforms of expression. The first argument for our assertion is offered by G. Călinescu; in his well-known work, he remarks "the

spontaneity of exordia, the natural crossing from a material plan to an allegoric one, the familiar returns to the topic, the indignation, the desolation, the complaints, the rhetorical questions refrained from becoming bombastic... "[1], which thus emerge as themes and reasons of a behaviour dictated by a conjuncture understood as a *play convention*.

The main issue is that of the relation between Antim's sermon and his models (if they ever existed!), as we understand the model in terms of heuristics, as an expression of the orderingand constructive tendency of the Logos. As we know, the content of the sermonis invariable, being reduced, in essence, to the vulgarisation of the Scriptures' dogmata (it is not necessary to distinguish here among "*omilie*", "*cazanie*" and "*didahie*"). Thereby, the models offered in time by the great Christians lead to strict formalisation.

In his sermons, Antim succeeded in detaching himself from these models not only by freshening up the officialised language, but also by forcing the canonical patterns, provoking his auditorium to participate in a cultural act (he quotes or mentions ancient writers and philosophers, expounds theories); therefore, he digresses from the dogmatic or moral topic, in the sense of actualising the discourse.

Antim varies the spectacle he offers to the audience according to the circumstances, using not the norms of the canon, but those of commonsense. There is no doubt that such a discourse is more than efficient.

We perceive Antim as an intelligent, skilful, open-minded protagonist with a surprising on-stage mobility. The text of the dramais recomposed in a complex discourse, which makes use of both oratorical and dramatic procedures. Thetheatricalforms and the spectacular valences generate dramatic structures.

Thus, we distinguish between two categories of relations, which have the protagonistAntim as an element which establishes the order: Antimin relation to the others and Antim in relation to himself.

In a general context, this relational level is subordinated to functionality but, when referring to actualisation, one must take into account the current signification of*performance*.

The final aim of the text supposes its actualisation in the spectacle. The text compresses *the theatrical competence*. The signs of theatricality are to be perceived without effort, although the text cannot be ascribed to any of the species of the dramatic genre. According to the *Hjelmslevian*model, theatricality functions in the surface structure, in the "form of expression", but Antim's discourse does not seem to be subject to the division in discontinuous acts and scenes; besides, given the fact that every text sample is only a fragment *from agreat spectacleof the world,* changing the play

[1] George Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present*], 1982, p. 386.

registers, as well as sk etching some debates, reducedto a sole censor, does it not substitutethe former ones? Functionally, we can detect *aglobal discourse,* which includes another discourse, the relation between the sender as orator and the receiver as hearer being switched in sender-character and receiver-character. Certainly, in this case the circumstances of the discourse are decisive, though the usual procedures for motivating the passage from one dramatic situation to another, e. g. the monologue, are still used. The ensuing relations require the introduction of the concept of opponent, in order to clarify what we have already called *the conflict.*

This conflict involves a powerful scenic tension, highlighted through the most spectacular dialogued monologue inside the text. On the other hand, Antim's discourse comes to life by virtue of the generous offer of the historical and political realityof his time, but mostly because he was aware of the *role* he had to play. Being the focusing centre implies restrictions at a certain moment, subordinating them to a moral responsibility as an ordering factor in the chaos represented by the consciousness of thepeople he was addressing. The dynamic of Antim's discourse emerges not only from the figures of speech, but also from the existing conflictbetween the sender and the receiver. This happens especially when the receiver is forced to renounce the passivity of the ordinary hearer and provoked to respond and react. It is in fact a particular scheme of the communicative *feed-back* and a requirement of the theatrical act. The metropolitan bishop adopts different roles, mostly by miming possible reactions: "Și pentru ce să numim Sfânta Sfintelor?" ["*And why it was called the Holy of Holies?*"], "dară ce treabă are vlădica cu noi?" ["*What is the great bishop's concern with us?*"][2].

The fragments of text related to self-humiliation and piety– as a playing attitude– are also extremely relevant.

At this point we can conclude that in *Didahii* the theatricality would be the form of the discourseand the dramatic quality would be its substance. For a better understanding, we find necessary a brief comparison between thesermons, as known in the "*Cazanii*", and those from Antim's *Didahii*. In the first case what prevails is the impersonality, the canonical scheme ("*erminie*"). Antim introduces the monologue character, which does no longer belongs to the servant of the church, but to the personin the hypostasisof a "double", often translated by short references within parentheses, interrupting the discourse and denoting inparallel the existence of a veritable interior monologue, which leads to the re-signification of the state and reactions of the opponent.

The subjectivity of the oratoropposes the objectivity required by the form of an ordinary sermon. The credible stage reality revealed to us seems to be a genuine dramatic convention. Because Antim is a character and his

[2]Antim Ivireanu, *Opere* [*Works*], 1972, p. 59.

text highlights the predilection for the ludic in the theatrical sense. Antimcorrelates his pursuit of a personal manner of expression with the imperative of persuading and educating. His activity as a preacher develops within the framework of a ritual spectacle. Antim operates on thisframe without infringing the norm, nevertheless instilling the discourse with a percussive rhythm. Antim does not alter the liturgical drama, what he does is to integrate it in another spectacle. We may ask ourselves: Where is the applause or at least the rumour in the church? There is no doubt that the attraction existed. We appreciateAntim's playfield as being delimitatedby certain scenography elements or by the presence on stage of two or three participants in the liturgical drama. Antim imprints dynamism to this playfield, transforming it into a spectacle stage.

We encounter typologies that Antim creates by performing them; he plays behind different masksthe aspectsof "the human comedy". The beginning of the fasting period represents a very good opportunity for introducing types of characters, therefore, in his well-knownsermon "*Cuvânt de învăţătură la duminicalăsatuluisec de brânză*" ["*Teachings on the Sunday of the Second Week of Fasting*"], Antim presents such characters (the glutton, the miser), which correspond to certain models in reality. Thus, a type of dialogic structure inevitably comes to life, because the communication is directly delivered in accordance with the interlocutor's state of mind, as it follows: "Nu te face tristcacopiiice-i duc la şcoală..." ["*Do not be upset like children going to school...* "]; or "Iară de vazicecineva, încugetul său, darădeacănespoveduimluiDumnezeu, preotulcemaitrebuieştecă el iasteompăcătoscaşi mine? Adevărat, păcătosiaste..." ["*When someone tells himself: if we confess to God, why do we need a priest, who is a sinful man as myself? Indeed, he is sinful…*"][3], and, by way of exemplification, Antim introducesfrom the Bible the dialogue scenebetween God and Adam. Antim does not admit passivity for he provokesand sometimes even offencesin order to control the reactions and catch his audience in a "verbal fishing-rod".

Therefore, everything develops within a congruent space, similar to the stage. We may even speak about the presence of a mute character. On the one hand, there is a main opposition: character-audience; on the other hand (if we integrate the discourse in the liturgical spectacularas a form of play within a play), we perceive the existence of two or three characters of the liturgical theatrical act, as mentioned above. By extension, there emerges the motifof the church as a stage for the spectacle of the world (*TheatrumMundi* – baroque themepar excellence), and by reduction, the altar (respectively the pulpit) as the stage.

[3]*Ibidem*, p. 99.

The communication is sustained through different figures of speech, such as false interrogation, invectives, relevant phrases, for instance "va spune oarecine..." [*"someone may say…"*]. There is a permanent alternation foreground-backgroundbetween Antim and the public. The foreground is subtly created by references to himself, using monologue or dialogue insertions: "precumzic... "[*"as I say…"*], "sămăertaţ... "[*"foregive me…"*], "stau de mă mir ce voi face"[*"I sit and wonder what will I do…"*], or using the necessary attitude of self-humiliation. The accusatory or critical tone goes up and down, in wide oratorical sequences, which imply rich gestures, leading therefore to theatricality. Antim as an actor is "representative of his time", in this hypostasis he is "the negation of himself, but at the same time a negation of the negation, because he is alive"[4].

A very interesting question is raised bythe *entertaining insertions*, an aspect of *Didahii* that implicitly subordinates the oratoricalart, in general, to theatre: "The extension of the concept of oratory, so that it includes, besides the aim of persuasion, the one of entertainment, gathers together the orators of the tribunes or meetings and the producers of emotions: playwrights, novelists, actors etc. "[5]Furthermore, according to Croce, "But the oratorical art is entirely practical, not aesthetic"[6], the conclusion being that theaesthetic is imposed in discourses by elementsof another form of art, in this case the dramatic art.

Thus, Antim's discourse must be considered as having at least two levels of interpretation: as expression of the canonical rigour and as expression of a person involved in a complexact. Antim does not completely follow the oratorical principle postulatedby the Antiquity, in which Cicero saw the image of an "*Orator optimus*", what he doesis to create the play *convention.* The hypnosis of the spectacle is the resultof an interesting mechanics ofthe effect.

Having the intuition that common sense behaveslike a receptacle, Antim does not follow a regular discourse, he performs freely. In this sense, one must understand the diversity of forms of Antim's discourse: Horace's ruleof the pathetic ("*Si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*") [7], the captivating argumentation, correlated with the attraction induced by the orator-performer, who brings prestige. Improvisation is often presented through the frequent procedure of transforming the biblical fable into short dramatic scenes. The sensitivity that emerges from the text proves the sheer participation in the role. Moreover, we may use in our argumentation Pirandello's assertion: "because the style, the intimate personality of a dramatic

[4]Cesare Brandi, *Teoria generală a criticii* [*A General Theory of Criticism*], 1985, p. 246.
[5]Benedetto Croce, *Poezia* [*Poetry*], 1972, p. 42.
[6]*Ibidem*, p. 67.
[7]Horaţiu, *Arta poetică* [*The Art of Poetry*], 1943, p. 102.

writer, should absolutely not appear in the dialogue, in the speech of the drama characters, but in the spirit and the architecture of the narrative"[8].

We have to admit that, if we remain with the traditional idea of the Dramatics' nature, reducing it to dialogue and character, the present thesis becomes arguable.

In addition to the long tirades, the gestures and the mimics, the spontaneity of exordia, the rhetorical interrogations and "the passion that equilibrates the entire precise machinery of the homily"[9], there are elementsof profound lyricism with a ritual tinge, for instance the ad-hoc litanyfrom "Cazanie la AdormireapreasfinteiNăscătoarei de Dumnezeu" ["*The Homily to the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*"], which mixes standard phrases and poeticinnovations with theatricaleffect; there is an obvious recitative attitude: "Aleasăiaste cu adevăratcasoarele... / Aleasăiastecarevărsatul zorilor... "["*She is truly precious like the sun… / She is in truth precious like the dawn…*"], but, by changing the register, the monologueacquires the tinge of a prayer: "Pentruaceeaeu, nevrednicul şi multpăcătosulrobultău... "["*For that I, Your unworthy and sinful servant...* "], and at the endthe audience present is strategicallyintegrated.

There is no necessaryself-humiliation in such cases, but a real innertension, theatrically projected.

The ending of the sermons keeps the hearers-cum-audience in suspense.

After Ivireanul'ssermons, the hearers are supposed to have left the stage of the church just like people who leave the theatre debating arduously or having doubts. Ivireanul's hearers felt exhausted and richer, even without knowing it, because they had been made to be active, to adopt attitudes, to be present. They had been *characters*. As a representative of his time, with a rich dramaticmaterial, Antim does not forget that the world is a stage on which people are the actors. A demonstration and a plea for the Romanian baroque may find an argumenteven here.

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[8]Luigi Pirandello, *Teatru* [*Theatre*], 1967, p. 587.

[9] George Călinescu, *op.cit.*, p. 381.