

The Last Epic of Antiquity: Generic Continuity and Innovation in the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Venantius Fortunatus*

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The poet Venantius Fortunatus has been described as the last poet of antiquity and the first of the Middle Ages (Bernt 118). He was educated in the schools of Ravenna, where he received the literary education traditional in late antiquity. In 566, however, he moved from his native land to the proto-medieval kingdoms of Merovingian Gaul, where he employed his poetic skills in the service of kings, nobles, and bishops of sixth-century Francia. Many of his poems are short, epigram-like compositions in the service of his new patrons. The chief exception is the *Vita Sancti Martini* (*VSM*), a narrative poem in four books of dactylic hexameters, 2243 lines in all, recounting the adventures of a Christian hero, the apostle of Gaul.¹

*This paper was originally given as a talk at Yale University, November 4, 1999. My thanks go to the organizers of the session for the invitation and to the audience for their interest and their lively discussion of a somewhat unfamiliar text.

¹For the epigrammatic quality of much of Fortunatus' poetry see Bernt 118—32 and Fontaine 1981: 270. Fortunatus' corpus does contain a number of lengthy poems in addition to the *VSM*: the longest is 8.3, *de Virginitate* (400 lines). But late Latin poets sometimes refer to even quite lengthy poems as *epigrammata*. Avitus, in his dedicatory letter to *Carm.* 6, *de Virginitate* (274.7 Peiper), refers to that 666-line poem as an *epigramma*; cf. Sidonius, *Ep.* 9.13.5 and 9.16, v. 56, with the discussion of Anderson lxvi n. 2. It is, I think, useful to understand much of Fortunatus' poetry as in level of intent comparable to epigrams, as understood in the extended late-antique sense. (I would except the epithalamium for Sigibert and Brunhild, 6.1, from this judgement.) Fortunatus' language reflects this epigrammatic quality. As has often been observed (Kopp, Blomgren 1941 and 1973), throughout his poetry Fortunatus shows important points of comparison with the language of verse epigraphy, and his habit of reusing with minor variations convenient turns of phrase from poem to poem creates a formulaary comparable to the idiom of inscriptional epigrams.

In meter, scope, and mode of representation the *VSM* conforms to the expectations of epic. Written in the mid-570s (completed between September 573 and April 576), the poem relies on prose narratives of Sulpicius Severus, the *Life of Martin* and the *Dialogues* (2 and 3), for its content. It represents for Fortunatus a rare foray into hexameters (only four other poems in his large corpus are in that meter).² Accompanying the poem are a dedicatory letter to Bishop Gregory of Tours and a metrically distinct preface, in the manner of late antique epic, attributing its composition to the commands (*imperia*, 30) of Radegund and Agnes, respectively founder and abbess of the convent of the Holy Cross at Poitiers, with which Fortunatus had close connections.³ The work, with its praise of Hilary of Poitiers (1.123–45), as well as of Martin, was well suited to both its audiences but, unlike much of Fortunatus' poetry, its subject does not depend on any particular occasion and is not specific to a particular addressee. In its level of intent the poem is clearly distinct from the majority of Fortunatus' poetry.

An epic, then, to all appearances, but not one that reads at all like the more familiar texts from the Augustan, Neronian, or Flavian periods. In this paper I will try to outline the development of the hagiographical epic the subgenre in which Fortunatus is writing and will link it to developments in Latin hexameter narrative poetry, both sacred and secular, in late antiquity; I will identify other features of the poem that, I believe, reflect Fortunatus' generic aspirations; and finally I will isolate qualities of the poem that set it apart from its predecessors and represent Fortunatus' particular contribution to the hagiographical epic.

In speaking of genre in the context of late antiquity I find Jauss' approach, developed for medieval literature, most helpful. Instead of positing stable generic laws, Jauss emphasizes the diachronic evolution of genres. For him the history of literary genres [is] a temporal process of the continual founding and altering of horizons [of expectations] (Jauss 94). A new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules of the game familiar to him from earlier texts, which as such can then be varied, extended, corrected, but also transformed, crossed out, or simply reproduced (Jauss 88). Genres are constituted by a combination of formal and thematic elements. As codified discursive norms, genres perpetuate distinctive takes on the world according to

²2.4, 2.5, and 5.6 (all figure poems) and 6.1.25–143 (an epithalamium).

³For the circumstances of composition see Quesnel xiv–xvi and Labarre 35–38. The poem dates to the first year or two of Gregory's bishopric. It may be that Radegund and Agnes proposed the subject to Fortunatus to promote close ties between the convent and the new bishop of Tours (so Quesnel).

their established systems of representation. They may originally arise to fulfill specific cultic, religious, and/or social functions or needs, but are liable to a process of gradual literarization.⁴ In the case of epic in late antiquity it is worth noting that a diachronic development of new epic forms the panegyric epic, the biblical epic, and the hagiographical epic coexists with continued composition in more traditional forms, such as the mythical epic. (Claudian's *de Raptu Proserpinae* is more traditional in subject matter than his other long poems that combine epic narrative with panegyric or invective.)

Returning to Fortunatus: he begins his *Life of Martin* with an account of his literary forbears.⁵ They are exclusively Christian (*VSM* 1.10—25):

Quae conversatus dederat (*sc.* Christus) miracula terris
 multa, evangelici reserante volumine libri,
 Hebraicus cecinit stilus, Atticus atque Latinus,
 prosaico digesta situ, commune rotatu.
 Primus enim, docili distinguens ordine carmen,
 maiestatis opus metri canit arte Iuvenicus.
 Hinc quoque conspicui radiavit lingua Seduli
 paucaeque perstrinxit florente Orientius ore
 martyribusque piis sacra haec donaria mittens,
 prudens prudenter Prudentius immolat actus.
 Stemma, corde, fide pollens Paulinus et arte
 versibus explicuit Martini dogma magistri.
 Sortis apostolicae quae gesta vocantur et actus,
 facundo eloquio sulcavit vates Arator.
 Quod sacra explicuit serie genealogus olim,
 Alcimus egregio digessit acumine praesul.

Of the miracles he performed in his time on earth
 many, revealed in the pages of the Gospel books,
 the Hebrew pen proclaimed, the Greek and the Roman,
 set forth in prose style, of easy access to all.

⁴Jauss 76—109; cf. Mora-Lebrun 26—34. Conte 115 speaks of genres as codified discursive forms. For him (112) every genre is a model of reality, which mediates the empirical world.

⁵For the *VSM* I follow for the most part the edition of Quesnel, with occasional changes of punctuation. In line 1.10, however, I adopt Leo's *dederat* for the MSS *dedit ad*. (Quesnel understands *ad miracula* as the equivalent of *miraculo*, predicative dative. This strikes me as difficult. In any case, given Fortunatus' avoidance of enjambement, *multa* must go with what follows and not with the relative clause of line 10, as Quesnel seems to take it.)

But first, composing a poem in learned measure,
 Juvenecus sang with metrical art the work of salvation.
 Then too the tongue of brilliant Sedulius won distinction
 and Orientius touched on the subject briefly with eloquent accents.
 Making his holy gift to the sacred martyrs
 prudent Prudentius prudently offered an account of their acts.
 Paulinus, powerful in family, spirit, faith, and talent,
 set forth in verse the instruction of Martin the master.
 The deeds and acts, as they are called, of the apostolic company
 the poet Arator traced with his share of eloquence
 and the sacred narrative the chronicler of Genesis once recorded
 Bishop Alcinus set forth with his eminent learning.

It is striking that Fortunatus provides an exclusively Christian pedigree for his epic of Saint Martin. With the exception of the anomalous Orientius (see below) and of Prudentius, all of the poets mentioned wrote multi-book hexameter narratives on biblical or hagiographical subjects. Prudentius' martyr poems, collected in the *Peristephanon*, are written in a variety of meters, but they typically contain a large narrative element and complete Fortunatus' picture of the development of Christian poetry, which includes works on the martyrs, saints (Saint Martin), apostles, and patriarchs of the Old Testament. (The word *genealogus*, 24, is already used of Moses as the author of Genesis at Prudentius *Apotheosis* 315. It emphasizes human descent the line of the patriarchs and is appropriate here because Fortunatus has in mind the miraculous deeds of Christian heroes, biblical and post-biblical.)

Fortunatus' poem begins with nine lines summarizing Christ's resurrection, triumph over death, and ascension, pivotal events not only for salvation history, but also for the literary history of Christian Latin poetry. His canon begins with the Gospel poets Juvenecus and Sedulius. (Orientius, too, seems to be included in this group, although he is now known only for a work of moral instruction in elegiacs, the *Commonitorium*, and a few brief hymns.) They share their subject matter with the Gospels. In Fortunatus' account these poets concentrate on the miracles Christ performed on earth (10 *quae conversatus dederat miracula terris*); i.e., they give only a partial account of the actual content of the Gospels, by assimilating the biblical texts to the predominant content of hagiography.

Fortunatus' version of the development of Christian Latin poetry (at least its narrative forms) runs something like this. Christian poetics, like Christian belief, derives from the triumph of Christ at the Resurrection. Just as the miraculous events of Christ's life are recorded in the Gospels, so the first Christian Latin poetry is dedicated to the events of the Gospels. Subsequent poets devote their talents to recording the deeds of other Christian heroes: martyrs, saints, the

apostles, the figures of the Old Testament. Fortunatus emphasizes the miraculous and the deeds and acts (22 *gesta ... et actus*) of individual Christian actors rather than doctrine (the one exception is *Martini dogma magistri*, 21). In doing so he conforms to the expectations of non-Christian epic: the *virum* of Virgil's *arma virumque cano*.

Fortunatus' account of literary history is, of course, selective. Because he is writing an extended narrative poem, he concentrates on comparable works. It is worth noting, though, that even with that qualification there are some surprises.

The primacy of Gospel poetry is at least questionable in the case of Alcimus Avitus and the Old Testament poets: Fortunatus makes no mention of, and may well not have known, the works of Avitus' two more obscure predecessors, the anonymous author of a poem on the *Heptateuch*, and Claudius Marius Victorius, whose *Alethia* covers events from Genesis up to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Old Testament tradition shows different characteristics from Gospel poetry and lacks its concentration on the deeds of individual Christian heroes. Avitus was writing in this tradition the *Alethia* is particularly influential although because of his selective treatment of the biblical text and his concentration on individual actors (Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses) he fits Fortunatus' scheme better than his predecessors do.⁶

Similarly, Fortunatus' account has benefited from a confusion between two Paulinuses: Paulinus of Nola, the Gallo-Roman aristocrat (cf. *stemmate*, 20), whose conversion to asceticism and dedication of his wealth to religious uses were much admired at the time and subsequently he features more than once in the *Life of Martin* and Paulinus of Périgueux, who wrote his own verse account of the *Life of Martin* about a century before Fortunatus.⁷ (Gregory of Tours shows the same confusion [*Liber in gloria confessorum* 108, *de Virtutibus Sancti Martini* 1.2].) Paulinus of Nola's own hagiographical poems, his *Natalicia*, written for the annual festival of St. Felix at Nola, have little or no influence on Fortunatus and do not feature in his survey of Christian Latin poetry. Their occasional form only two are devoted to a narrative of Felix's life perhaps fell short of what Fortunatus considered appropriate to a great

⁶See Roberts 1985: 102—4 and 218. By including Old Testament poetry in his account, Fortunatus covers in his literary history poems celebrating all the inhabitants of the heavenly court, as described at the end of book 2 of the *VSM* (459—61): patriarchs, apostles, prophets, and martyrs.

⁷Labarre 19—21 dates the poem to the 460s. Her book is a systematic comparison of the two verse treatments of the life of Martin. She does not address directly the question of genre.

saint. As for Paulinus of P rigneux, his poem was known to and imitated by the sixth-century poet. This raises an obvious question: why would Fortunatus repeat his predecessor s undertaking and versify the *Life of Martin* once again? Perhaps the answer is visible in the way he describes Paulinus poem: he unfolded in verse the teaching of the master Martin (21 *versibus explicuit Martini dogma magistri*). In Fortunatus account, Paulinus emphasizes the teachings of Martin (*dogma*) rather than actions (*actus*), deeds (*gesta*), or miracles (*miracula*). It is certainly true that Paulinus version of the *Life of Martin* is much fuller than Fortunatus and that he consistently introduces moral commentary into the Severan narrative, giving his work at times something of the quality of a verse sermon.⁸ For Fortunatus, implicitly, this detracts from the *raison d tre* of such Christian narrative poetry, which celebrates in the lives and miracles of its subjects the saving power of the saints, a saving power that both derives from and reenacts Christ s redemptive victory at the Resurrection.

In deriving hagiographical epic from biblical and specifically Gospel epic, Fortunatus account accords perfectly with the facts of literary history. Juvencus was the founder of the genre of biblical epic, writing under Constantine (about 329—30). But Sedulius *Carmen Paschale*, written a century or so later, became the prototype of the hagiographical epic. No other Christian poem or poet comes close to the influence of Sedulius and the *Carmen Paschale* on Paulinus of P rigneux and Fortunatus.⁹ To understand the development of biblical, and hence hagiographical, epic, though, we need to go back beyond Sedulius to the circumstances of composition for Juvencus *Evangeliorum Libri IV*.

In the 320s the conditions were ripe for the creation of Christian epic according to the formal norms of classical poetry.¹⁰ The new situation of Christianity in the empire had expanded the educated readership for the Christian mes-

⁸For a detailed analysis of the methods of the two poets see now Labarre. Of Paulinus of P rigneux s treatment of the episode of the divided cloak she says (159): The paraphrase of Paulinus of P rigneux aims to explain and amplify the original text. It is an exegesis in the manner of ancient grammarians and commentators on the scriptures. She goes on to speak of his overriding concern for edification and his emphasis on moral and spiritual instruction. The *dogma* Fortunatus refers to in this passage is rather the lessons to be derived from Martin s example than his own direct teaching; Martin was not a great exegete.

⁹Paulinus poem incorporates more reminiscences of Juvencus than of Sedulius (Labarre 163), but Sedulius remains the most important influence on his poetics.

¹⁰See Roberts 1985: 61—86 for a fuller account of the circumstances of composition of the first New Testament epics; also Kirsch 56—72.

sage. But the unpolished style of the Old Latin versions of the Bible was aesthetically rebarbative to such readers. By comparison, no style was more prestigious than Virgilian epic. In recasting a harmonized version of the Gospels in Virgilian hexameters and Virgilian language is frequent in his poem Juvencus aspired to enlist the prestige of epic idiom in the service of the Christian message. The sublimity of the subject matter (*maiestatis opus* in Fortunatus) called for the most elevated of all literary forms. Already Lactantius had advocated the employment of the techniques of secular eloquence to inculcate Christian truth (*Inst.* 1.1.10); Juvencus poem puts Lactantius recommendations into practice. Aesthetic considerations play a large part in Juvencus Gospel paraphrase; he speaks of the glory of the divine law (4.804 *divinae gloria legis*) receiving the earthly adornments of language (4.805 *ornamenta ... terrestria linguae*). Although overt exegesis is rare in the poem, recent studies have shown that Juvencus deformation of the biblical text owes much to the emphases of Christian exegesis, which fulfilled a further precondition for his poetic undertaking.¹¹ Educated readers of late antiquity were used to the idea that Virgil's text was informed by almost encyclopedic learning. The biblical epic derived similar interpretative richness from traditions of Christian exegesis.

In his *Preface* Juvencus sets his poem firmly in the epic tradition (*Praef.* 6—10):

Sed tamen innumeros homines sublimia facta
et virtutis honos in tempora longa frequentant,
adculmant quorum famam laudesque poetae.
Hos celsi cantus, Smyrnae de fonte fluentes,
illos Minciadae celebrat dulcedo Maronis.

Their lofty deeds and reputation for virtue win fame over many
ages for countless men, whose glory and praise the poets cele-
brate. Some the lofty strains from the spring of Smyrna hymn,
others the sweetness of Virgil the Mantuan.

Poetry here has primarily a panegyric function (*laudes*): to celebrate the outstanding deeds and virtue of men of the past. Both the lofty strains (*celsi cantus*) of Homer and the sweetness (*dulcedo*) of Virgil serve this function: to perpetuate the fame of the epic hero. In this reading, then, epic is poetry in praise of individuals of outstanding virtue.¹²

¹¹See most recently Flieger and Fichtner.

¹²This definition of epic is well established in late antiquity (see below, n. 16 and context). The view that epic served to praise great men is of long standing: see

Juvencus' poem fits well this pattern. His subject will be the life-giving actions, or just life, of Christ (pr. 19 *Christi vitalia gesta*). *Facta, gesta*, and, in Fortunatus, *actus* are the characteristic subject matter of epic. *Vitalia gesta* at one level means the life of Christ (the actions of his life); the biographical element, then, is prominent from the first in biblical epic. But it also means the life-giving actions of Christ's life in the Christian sense that is, those actions that conduce to human salvation or healing and which are particularly worthy of the praise that in Juvencus' account is the function of epic. Although Juvencus aspires to give a faithful version of the Gospels and does not follow a thematic principle of selectivity, his description of the subject matter of his poem paves the way for an emphasis on Christ's miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection, as the preeminent *vitalia gesta* of the biblical narrative.

Juvencus' pioneering efforts did not find immediate imitation. The reconciliation of Christian and classical was still in the process of negotiation and for all the more liberal voices, echoing the sentiments of Lactantius, there yet lingered a suspicion in ascetic circles of any compromise with worldly literature. Such suspicions can be heard in Jerome's reference to Juvencus' poem: He was not afraid to submit the majesty of the Gospel to the laws of meter (*Ep.* 70.5 *nec pertimuit evangelii maiestatem sub metri leges mittere*). But by the end of the fourth century, with the pro-Christian legislation of Theodosius and the coming to maturity of Christian Latin poetry in the works of Prudentius and Paulinus of Nola, the debate lost its polemical edge and the writing of classicizing poetry on Christian subjects became largely unproblematic.

Sedulius, the next Gospel poet, writing in the second quarter of the fifth century, put into practice the thematic selectivity foreshadowed by Juvencus: his subject will be the brilliant miracles of Christ the salvation-bringer (1.26 *clara salutiferi ... miracula Christi*). He will sing of the path of salvation (1.35 *via ... salutis*), echoing the language of the Sibyl in her prophecy to Aeneas in *Aeneid* 6 (96 *via prima salutis*). In Sedulius' case the path of salvation leads with firm steps to the paschal offerings (1.36 *haec firmos ad dona gradus paschalia ducit*). After books devoted primarily to Old Testament miracles and the early life of Christ, books 3 and 4 of the *Carmen Paschale* concentrate on Christ's miracles, leading up to the Crucifixion in book 5. Sedulius' poem was much read and imitated. According to a subscription in a number of manuscripts, Turcius Rufius Asterius, the consul of 494, prepared a recension of

Isocrates *Evag.* 6–7 and Cicero *Arch.* 22 (on Ennius' praise of Scipio). Juvencus' *Preface* is probably the most discussed passage in the Christian Latin poetry of late antiquity. For bibliography see Herzog 1989: 335–36, to which should be added Kirsch 85–92, Corrua and Deproost 1998: 109–12.

the text. Asterius' name is also known from a subscription to the Medicean manuscript of Virgil. The fact that Asterius produced recensions of Virgil and Sedulius is suggestive. The two works were, one suspects, complementary in Asterius' mind: for him Sedulius was the Christian Virgil (Roberts 1985: 77—79).

Although Sedulius does not explicitly invoke classical epic as a foil for the *Carmen Paschale*, programmatic allusions to Juvenecus (especially 1.37 *haec mihi carmen erit*, cf. Juvenecus *pr.* 19 *nam mihi carmen erit*) establish the tradition in which he is writing, while the history of Sedulian reception supports the description of his work as an epic.

From the point of view of classical epic, the most striking feature of the *Carmen Paschale* is the extreme fragmentation of the narrative: miracle stories in particular are treated as discrete episodes, with little attempt on the poet's part to create a chronologically and topographically unified narrative. Various considerations help explain or contextualize this development: (1) a similar tendency toward the episodic and the downplaying of continuity at the expense of the elaboration of the individual compositional unit is evident in contemporary secular epic (Claudian's *de Raptu Proserpinae* notoriously shares these features); (2) in liturgical practice the Gospel text was typically broken up into short passages for Church reading; (3) Christian allegory encouraged thinking of individual episodes, especially miracle stories, as at a certain level semantically equivalent dramas of salvation. From that perspective poetic composition involved the cumulative inculcation of a repeated message rather than an organically evolving continuous narrative sequence. Sedulius' text breaks up into a series of individual *narrationes*, treated as discrete units, with the narrative proper heavily abbreviated, though key details may be subject to amplification: in miracles of healing, for instance, the account of the symptoms of sickness and of their reversal. Sedulius frequently intervenes in the narrative with reactions to the events described, often in the form of exclamations or rhetorical questions, somewhat in the manner of Lucan. Antithesis and paradox figure largely as a means of teasing out the spiritual content of each passage. According to Reinhart Herzog (1984), in these *narrationes* Sedulius creates a new poetic form, the rhetorical meditation, a form which he traces through the 17th century English metaphysical poets. But Sedulius' most immediate influence is on the Martin poets, Paulinus of Périgueux and Fortunatus, both of whom, in their different ways, adopt the Sedulian model of discontinuous narrative structure with rhetorically elaborated commentary on individual episodes.¹³

¹³For Sedulius' poetics see Roberts 1985: 165—71.

Following Fortunatus' own account of his literary antecedents, I have turned to the Gospel epics of Juvencus and Sedulius to help explain some of the unfamiliar qualities of his poem, at least for a reader coming to the *Life of Martin* from classical epic. But Fortunatus himself knew at least Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius. What evidence does he show of assimilating his poem to the stylistic and thematic norms of classical epic? Apart from the length of his poem and its meter, how does he indicate its generic affiliations?

To address these questions we need first to consider how the poets and readers of late antiquity understood the genre of epic, as practiced preeminently by Virgil. Here Juvencus' *Preface* provides some answers. Epic, he implies, is poetry of praise, celebrating the lofty deeds of great men. In the *Aeneid* Virgil praises Aeneas through his actions. This understanding of epic is widespread in late antiquity. Tiberius Claudius Donatus (late fourth or early fifth century) assigns the subject matter of that poem to the *genus laudativum*. Virgil must show that Aeneas is free from all fault and worthy to be extolled with great acclaim (1: 2.24–25 *vacuum omni culpa et magno praeconiopraeferendum*). In his poem, as Donatus twice repeats, Virgil surveys the deeds of Aeneas (1: 2.11–12 *gesta Aeneae percurreret*, cf. 6.10).¹⁴ Although he differs from Donatus in his extensive use of allegory, Fulgentius (late fifth century) shares his predecessor's view of the *Aeneid* as a work of praise. For him too the narrative consists of a series of *gesta* that track the hero's achievement of maturity and contribute to his glory and virtuous reputation.

In their emphasis on deeds (*gesta*) Donatus and Fulgentius assimilate epic to the categories of prose panegyric.¹⁵ Rhetoricians recommend that a speech of praise be organized thematically, according to a sequence of topics. But the most important of these is that of *gesta*, which are especially well suited to showing an individual's moral character and virtues.¹⁶ In the panegyric epic of late antiquity, of which Claudian, Merobaudes, and Sidonius are the prime exponents in the west, the emphasis on the narration of *gesta* tends to blur the thematic structure of panegyric and assimilate the poems to epic.¹⁷ Conversely the view of epic as a poem of praise deemphasizes its narrative continuity and

¹⁴I quote Donatus from the edition of Georgii; reference is to volume, page, and line. For Donatus' commentary see Hardison 33 and Starr.

¹⁵On Fulgentius' *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae secundum philosophos moralis* see Hardison 33–34 and 77–80. The works of Fulgentius are edited by Helm.

¹⁶E.g., Priscian *Praeexercitamina* 7 (on the *laus*): *in omnibus autem exquisitissimum de gestis dicere*; see also the passages collected by Burgess 120–24.

¹⁷On the panegyric epic of late antiquity see especially Hofmann.

promotes a fragmenting view of its composition as a sequence of incidents that separately redound to the glory of the epic hero. Finally, with the concentration on praiseworthy actions of the individual epic becomes a form of encomiastic biography. It is not difficult to see why Christian poets would view the life of a saint as highly appropriate material for epic treatment, as that genre was understood in late antiquity.

In fact, both Paulinus of P rigneux and Venantius Fortunatus use language that suggests they view their poems in this way. Paulinus appeals to Martin for inspiration to speak of the saint's claims to so great praise (1.312 *tantae laudis titulos*) and fears that Martin's lofty deeds (*sublimia gesta*) will surpass his powers of eloquence (1.313—14). Martin's actions frequently win him praise (*laus/laudes*) or acclaim (*praeconium*), though Paulinus is careful to attribute the ultimate glory to God.¹⁸ Fortunatus represents his poem as a debt of praise owed to the saint for whom he came to Gaul (1.43—44 *huius pontificis solvi praeconia verbis / cuius causa fuit hac me regione venire*) and speaks of himself celebrating the saint's reverence-inspiring deeds (4.426 *pangere gesta libet veneranda relatu*).¹⁹

Fortunatus' poem, then, in subject matter and panegyric tone conforms to expectations of epic that were widespread in late antiquity. It is more difficult to identify specific thematic or stylistic elements that conform to the generic norms of epic. Many of the techniques once characteristic of epic have become generalized poetic diction, irrespective of genre, and even extended to the style of artistic prose. Compound epithets, once a marker of epic, and poetic periphrases for sunrise and sunset occur even in a historian like Ammianus Marcellinus.²⁰ Yet such features are an indicator of stylistic aspiration.

By a rough count Fortunatus uses compound adjectives about 50 times in the *VSM*. The vast majority serve a panegyric or invective purpose all do in book 1. Thus, in that book they describe God (1 *altithronus*; 5 *omnipotens*), Martin (*belliger* 112 and 458) and his healing touch (362 *medellifero ... tactu*), Hilary (136 *belligerans*) and his jewelled eloquence (138 *gemmifer eloquiis*), the military reinforcements sent Martin from heaven (310 *belliger Olympus*), salvation-bringing baptism (443 *salutiferi baptismatis*), and the sacrilegious tongue (108 *sacrilego ... ore*) of the heretic Arius. (By comparison, six of the

¹⁸*Laus/laudes*: 1.32, 185, 354, 365, 2.252, 508, 3.10, 262, 420, 4.262, 491, 496, 5.1, 189, 483, 793; *praeconium*: 2.161, 574; glory belongs to God: 2.682. For *gesta* see 2.12—14, 617, 5.481—82.

¹⁹See also *laus/laudes*: 1.363, 3.367, 4.583; *gesta*: 3.18, 23.

²⁰Hagendahl 59—61, 102—3.

fifteen compound adjectives in book 2 describe the devil or his agents.) But large portions of the narrative lack such epithets. Fortunatus is sparing in his use of adjectives generally. With rare exceptions such adjectives in the *VSM* describe the qualities of persons (the few exceptions typically involve the natural world).²¹ They serve to communicate praise or blame. Their use in the *VSM* conforms to the epideictic turn in late Latin epic.

As for epic formulas for the time of day, Fortunatus uses them sparingly (only three examples). It is significant that all three occur within episodes rather than at the beginning of an episode. The discontinuity of Fortunatus' narrative does not admit of such chronological connection between episodes. Thus, in the story of the false prophet Anatolius, who claimed to have received a brilliant garment from God, Sulpicius Severus records that at about midnight (*Vita* 23.6 *ad mediam fere noctem*) the monks were woken up by a loud din and bright lights, but the garment that Anatolius received disappeared in the morning (23.9 *ubi influxit dies*), when he was to be presented to Martin. Both indications of time are subject to epic coloring in Fortunatus' version.²² Again, in destroying a tower dedicated to pagan cult, Martin prays during the night and in the morning (*Dial.* 3.8.7 *mane*) a storm brings it to the ground. In Fortunatus the single word *mane* becomes when a new morning was spreading dawn over the earth and Phoebus was extending his saffron garment (*croceum ... amictum*) among the clouds (4.221—223).²³ The indication of time here serves to throw

²¹There is a cluster of three compound adjectives in the introductory lines to book 4 (1—4), a *locus amoenus*; see too a description of sunrise (2.265 *lucifluas*, quoted below). In two cases Fortunatus seems to be aiming at an epic-sounding periphrasis: 3.289 *pinnigero volatu*, and 3.301 *cornigeri pecudis* (perhaps also 4.430 *tabifluus morbus*).

²²2.244—45 *Interea medias quasi nox transcurrerat horas / et rota flexa aequo gyrbat cardine metam* and 2.264—65 *Iam spumabatequis Aurorae auriga rubores, / sol quoque lucifluas curru flectebat habenas*. On the first of these passages and its relation to Virgil *Aen.* 5.835—36 see Labarre 185 and 197. In the second passage Fortunatus probably has in mind Paulinus' language in the same context: 3.339—40 *cum praevia solem / nuntiat acceptum spargens aurora ruborem*. Fortunatus *spumabat equis Aurorae auriga rubores* is a refined variation on the last three words of Paulinus, incorporating the paronomasia *Aurorae auriga*. The metaphor of driving horses picks up on the language used of midnight earlier in the episode.

²³4.221—22 *sed cum mane recens auroram spargeret orbi / tenderet et croceum per nubila Phoebus amictum*. Ovid *Ars* 3.179 has *croceo amictu*, Paulinus of P. rigieux 3.341 *croceo fuco*. The use of *croceus* for dawn has Virgilian authority

into greater relief the dramatic onset of the storm (*ecce repens oritur variante fragore procella*) and creates an epic, or epicizing, micro-narrative.

Prefatory topoi also indicate the level of intent of Fortunatus' poem. In his elegiac preface to Agnes and Radegund Fortunatus imagines himself as an unskilled sailor (*nauta rudis*) setting out on a dangerous and stormy sea. He seeks their prayers to Martin to direct his sail safely to port (*pr.* 35–38). Such language suggests Fortunatus is launching on an unusually difficult and ambitious literary undertaking. In the Augustan period the metaphor is used especially of epic, as Curtius notes (128–30), but by the time of late antiquity nautical language had been incorporated into the standard arsenal of prefatory topoi, whether of prose or verse.²⁴ Fortunatus stands apart, though, by his unusually systematic and sustained use of the metaphor. The poem as a whole is a sea-journey of four stages, broken by a period of rest on shore before embarking on the next stage of the journey (i.e., a new book). Each new book begins with Fortunatus setting out once more on the high seas: summoned by a light breeze he prepares sails for the wind (2.5); after a night of sleep on a green and shaded shore a bright day dawns and he looses the ropes and spreads the sails (3.3–7); awoken from a grassy bed by the song of the swallow and the all-too-early break of dawn (*celerata crepuscula*) he sets out again on his fourth book/sea voyage (4.5–9). Fortunatus' most influential Christian predecessor had made some use of such nautical language. Sedulius speaks of the composition of the *Carmen Paschale* as passing through the dangers of a mighty sea (*Epistula ad Macedonium* 1; 12.2–3 Huemer *postanti gurgitis emensa discrimina*) and Paulinus of Poirieu, at the beginning of book 2, launches out onto the mighty ocean of Martin's episcopal actions and teachings after the safe coastal waters of his monastic career (2.1–11). But neither makes any systematic use of the metaphor. In Fortunatus' case the language of a voyage is sustained, creating an allegorical mini-narrative of the ship of his poetry, bearing on board the precious cargo of the saint, coming ashore each night in idealized landscapes, and brought safely toward its final harbor by the helmsmanship of the saint and the favoring winds of Christ. Fortunatus' sustained representation of his poem as a sea-voyage implies a high level of intent; epic or, at least, epicizing. (His language has parallels in Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius, though it is a literal sea voyage that is being described in these passages of the classical poets.)²⁵

(G. 1.447, *Aen.* 4.585 and 9.460) and is widespread in late antiquity (*TLL* 4:1212.54–64).

²⁴See also Janson 146–47.

²⁵*VSM* 2.5 *aura vocat*: Stat. *Ach.* 2.7; *paro lintea ventis*: Ovid *Met.* 7.40 *det lintea ventis*; *VSM* 2.6 *imple mea vela secundus*: Virg. *Aen.* 7.23 *ventis implevit vela secundus*.

He does, however, introduce a new Christian dimension into his journey narrative. Christian poets regularly seek to win salvation through their poems the topos goes back to Juvenus: This work, he says, will perhaps save me from the fire when Christ the brilliant judge, glory of the high-throned father, descends in a cloud of flame (*pr.* 22—24).⁶ Fortunatus does not describe in the metaphorical language of seafaring the successful completion of his four-book poem. Instead, his poem ends with a prayer to Martin to intercede for him when the judge of the world comes and to save him from the flames of perdition. In both the journey of composition and the journey of his life Fortunatus, through the protection of Martin, comes to, or hopes to come to, safe haven/heaven. Implicitly, large-scale epic composition on Christian themes takes on a soteriological dimension, as a journey of salvation for the poet.

A further element of epic encoding in the *VSM* is Fortunatus' use of the language of warfare. Like Virgil, the sixth-century poet sings of arms and a man, though in Fortunatus' case the warfare is spiritual, not literal. One feature of this is the choice of epithets for Martin and his activities. He is a warrior, *belliger armis* (1.112, 458, 2.172; cf. 4.239), whose activities are frequently described as a form of *militia*. As a former soldier whose anti-pagan missionary activities had something of the nature of a military campaign, Martin lends himself readily to such a characterization, but Fortunatus' practice goes well beyond what he finds in his prose source to become, especially in book one, an element of epic stylization. Martin's warfare is waged against the enemy *par excellence*, the devil, in all his forms. His weapons consist of words and gestures. They are not literal. When the devil confronted Martin on the road near Milan the saint transfixed him with the spear-point of his mighty word (1.102 *validi transfixus cuspide verbi*); to perform miracles of healing, Martin twice has recourse to his own accustomed weapons (*solita / sua arma*), that is, to prayer (1.183, 421 the latter metaphor is already present in Sulpicius Severus, *Vita* 16.7); twice (1.264, 2.171; cf. 2.466) the saint deploys the weapon of the cross (*arma crucis*), whether to perform a miracle or to protect himself as with a shield against demons in the form of pagan gods. Martin, though, is a paradoxical warrior, who subdues and triumphs with the weapons of peace (2.357 *pacificis armis doctus domitare rebelles*; 4.567—68 *pietatis ab agmine miles ... pacis in arma triumphans*). So, at the end of book one, he heals a leper with a

dis; *VSM* 3.7 *levo carbasa ventis*: Luc. 5.560 *dat carbasa ventis*, Stat. *Ach.* 1.446 *consumunt carbasa ventis*; *VSM* 4.16 *bibulis harenis*: Ovid *Her.* 19.201 (cf. *Met.* 13.901, Stat. *Theb.* 11.44 and Claud. *Rapt.* 1.258).

²⁶*Hoc etenim forsan me subtrahet igni / tunc cum flammivoma descendet nube coruscans / iudex, altithroni genitoris gloria, Christus.*

kiss: From a gesture of peace disease's warfare was stilled; ... kisses waged a novel battle (1.502 and 504 *pacis ab officio perierunt proelia morbi / novam gesserunt oscula pugnam*). The sustained use of military language gestures toward the warlike hero of epic but, at least in Fortunatus' version, Martin is a warrior who subverts traditional martial values by deploying the weapons of peace.

One passage from the *VSM* deserves special attention in this context. Martin has traveled to the village of Levroux (not named in Fortunatus) to destroy a pagan temple. Unsuccessful at his first attempt, he clothes himself in sackcloth and ashes and prays for assistance, in Fortunatus' version for two days. Finally, two armed angels appear to him to give him aid (*VSM* 1.304—17):

Militiae angelicae coram duo protinus adsunt
 siderei proceres, hastas et scuta tenentes.
 Comminus his sanctum compellant vocibus ultro:
 Praesidiis, Martine, tuis delabimur astris.
 Squalidus ipse sedes, sed fit tua cura Tonantis
 suffragiisque tuis caeli fremit arduus axis
 belliger et totis conspirat Olympus in armis.
 Ut coepta efficias, per nos tibi militat aether.
 Mittimur a domino gemini tua castra regentes,
 hac pro parte duces melior qua causa laborat.
 Nunc age, rumpe moras, neu rustica turba rebellet,
 arma ministra vides: nostrum est superare superbos.
 Inrue, ne trepides, ope nostra ad templa ruenda
 nec titubare decet, favor est ubi numinis almi.

Straightaway two of the angelic host stood before him,
 lords of heaven, bearing spears and shields.
 They came up to the saint and addressed him as follows:
 Martin, we have journeyed from the stars to bring you aid.
 Though you sit in the dirt the God who thunders cares for you,
 the high arch of heaven clamors to do your bidding
 and warlike Olympus mobilizes in alliance all its forces.
 Through us the skies rally to your side to gain your purpose.
 We are sent by the Lord, twin captains of your camp,
 commanders on the side where fights the better cause.
 Come then, no further delay, to put down the country mob's revolt
 you see the arms we bring: ours is to overcome the overproud.
 Never fear, but march out with our help to topple their temple;
 there is no cause to falter when God's on your side.

Fortunatus goes on to describe succinctly the destruction of the temple and the conversion of the country folk.

In this passage the epic coloring is unusually insistent. The two angels appear to Martin in the manner of divine messengers of classical epic. The verb *delabimur* is almost a technical term for such appearances.²⁷ They adopt the role of commanding officers (312—13 *tua castra regentes, / hac pro parteduces*) and deliver a speech of exhortation before battle according to the norms of the epic battle narrative. Such an attempt, in the appearance of angelic emissaries, to achieve a Christian equivalent of the divine machinery of pagan epic, is very unusual. The closest parallel I know is the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Noah before the Flood in Avitus' Old Testament epic *de Spiritalis Historiae Gestis* (4.190—285), which also shows epic stylization.²⁸ Fontaine (1976: 126—27) is surely right, too, to see in the angel's phrase *nostrum est superare superbos* an echo of Anchises' description of Rome's imperial mission, *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos* (*Aen.* 6.853). (It would be typical of Fortunatus to prefer the alliteration *superare superbos*.) Fortunatus spiritualizes and Christianizes Virgil's language. Pride here means persistent paganism; the angels' mission, and that of their agents, is to spread Christianity rather than the secular law and order of the Roman empire.

If Virgilian language is present in the speech of the angels, their arrival is announced in terms that recall Christian poetic tradition. In his panegyric for the third consulate of the emperor Honorius, Claudian celebrated the divine assistance that the imperial army received from the elements in the battle of the River Frigidus against the forces of the usurper Eugenius (*III Cons. Hon.* 96—98):

O nimium dilecte deo, cui fundit ab antris
Aeolus armatas hiemes, cui militat aether
et coniurati veniunt ad classica venti.

O greatly beloved of God, for whom Aeolus sends from his cave
storms fully armed and for whom the heavens wage war and the
winds band together to come to your clarion call.

Both Augustine and Orosius cite Claudian when referring to the battle, but in an abbreviated version that omits the reference to Aeolus (*de Civ. Dei* 5.26):

²⁷*Delabor* is used of heavenly descent (not always of messengers) by Virgil (*Aen.* 7.620 and 11.595), Ovid (*Am.* 3.5.21, *Ars* 1.43, *Met.* 2.838, 3.101, 14.838), Claudian (*Ruf.* 1.55), Paulinus of Nola (*C.* 26.185—86), and the *Heptateuch* poet (*Jo.* 130—31).

²⁸On this passage see Deproost 1991: 92—93. For the descent of an angel bringing heavenly reinforcements see too *Hept. Jo.* 130—32 (cited below).

O nimium dilecte Deo, cui militat aether
et coniurati veniunt ad classica venti.²⁹

To the anonymous author of the *Heptateuchos*, early in the fifth century, falls the distinction of first applying Claudian's language to a biblical event, thereby suggesting a typological relationship between the biblical story in this case—the fiery column and pillar of cloud of Exodus and the battle of 394 (*E.* 474—76):

O nimium felix, celsis cui misit ab astris
munimenta deus, candens cui militat aether
et coniuratae veniunt ad proelia noctes.

O greatly happy, for whom God sends fortifications from the stars
on high, for whom the bright heavens wage war and night forms a
compact to battle on your side.

Later in the same poem there is a more distant echo of the Claudian passage when an angel appears to Joshua before the siege of Jericho (*Jo.* 130—32; cf. *Jo.* 5: 13—14):

Delapsus ab alto
aethere nunc veni, totis cui militat astris
insignis legio et quo sub principe degit.

I have come, winging down from high heaven; with all the forces
of the stars a glorious army wages war for me and fights under my
command.

Claudian's language, as adapted by Augustine and Orosius, is well suited to the quasi-military missionary activities of Martin, and both Paulinus and Fortunatus use it of the saint.

Paulinus frames his account of the destruction of a pagan temple and its high tower with references to this poetic model. In Sulpicius' prose original, after the local priest has been unable to marshal the forces to demolish the tower, Martin prays overnight and in the morning a storm totally destroys the building (*Dial.* 3.8.7). Paulinus expands to twenty-nine lines (5.553—81) the brief two-sentence notice of the prose text. Martin now prays for help to God, who rules heaven and earth and for whom the air wages war (5.557 *cui militat aer*). After an elaborate description of the saint's fasting and self-mortification practices designed to strengthen the force of his prayers and of the storm and destruction of the pagan tower, Paulinus concludes in his normal

²⁹Orosius 7.35.21 gives the first line in the form *O nimium dilecte Deo! tibi militat aether*.

fashion with commentary on the episode just narrated. He alludes a second time to the Claudian passage, addressing Martin as one greatly beloved of God (5.576 *O nimium dilecte Deo*), to whom God makes subservient the forces of nature. By splitting the Claudian allusion in this way and referring it first to God and then to Martin, the poet emphasizes the doctrinal point that Martin's powers come from God.

Fortunatus typically prefers shorter units of composition. (The tricolon in 1.308–10 is unusual.) In his account of the angelic assistance brought to Martin, the line-ending *militat aether* (1.311) and the verb *conspirat* (1.310; cf. *con-iurati* in Claudian), as well as the general similarity of context, are sufficient to bring to mind the Claudian passage. And indeed in a later epigram written for Gregory's cathedral at Tours, describing the destruction of a pillar topped by the statue of a pagan divinity by a column of fire sent from heaven, he again uses the same clausula: heaven battles to aid the saint (10.6.127 *auxilium ad iusti dignando militat aether*). The phrase *totis ... in armis* (1.310) recalls the *Heptateuch* poet's *totis ... astris* (*Jo.* 131) and probably derives ultimately from a passage in Lucan describing the unfavorable omens that met Pompey on his march to Thessaly: 7.154 *totus venientibus obstitit aether*; while all heaven conspires to aid the biblical patriarch or Christian saint, all heaven opposes the pagan Roman general. The example of Pompey by comparison serves to throw into greater relief the Christian scheme of things. For both Fortunatus and Paulinus, Martin enjoyed the same heavenly support in his campaigns against paganism as did the Christian forces under Theodosius in their battle against the usurper Eugenius. The Claudian allusion links Martin's missionary activities with one of the most resonant events in the history of the Christianization of the Roman empire.

Fortunatus' account of angelic reinforcements is unusual in its assimilation to the norms of pre-Christian epic, though, as we have seen, these norms act as a foil to contrast and give greater prominence to the Christian scheme of things. In general, Fortunatus' poem corresponds only distantly to the expectations of a reader of classical epic. Unlike, for instance, a Renaissance biblical epic like Vida's *Christiad*, the *VSM* makes no use of the plot device of scenes set in heaven or hell; there are no ecphrases of works of art (the poem ends with a reference to a portrait of Martin in Ravenna, but it is not part of the narrative proper and does not play the role of an ecphrasis in epic), and no epic similes.³⁰

³⁰For epic similes in biblical epic they are relatively rare see Juvenius 1.687–89; *Heptateuch* poet *N.* 687–91 (cf. 39–40); Claudius Marius Victorius *Alethia* 2.127–32, 265–69, 3.276–81, 310–16, and 439–43; Sedulius *Carm. Pasch.*

On the other hand, the *VSM* possesses other literary qualities that both relate it to, and to some degree set it apart from, the traditions of late Latin epic. I will look briefly at three particular qualities, the panegyric, the ecphrastic (understood in the ancient sense of passages of vivid description), and the epigrammatic.

The Panegyric³¹

Following the understanding of epic widespread in late antiquity, Fortunatus conceives of the *VSM* as serving, at least in part, to praise the hero of his poem, Saint Martin. In composing his poem to reflect glory on its saintly hero Fortunatus shows points of comparison with the prose panegyrics of late antiquity, in particular with the corpus of Gallic imperial panegyrics from the late-third and fourth centuries that go collectively under the title of *Panegyrici Latini*. Sabine MacCormack (1976: 41—54 and 1981: 1—33) has shown that in these speeches emperors frequently appear in visually detailed descriptive tableaux. Such scenes, set apart from the everyday, serve to embody an ideological truth about the emperor and his status that transcends the particular event. They often describe ceremonial, or alternatively describe events and situations as if they were ceremonial. In MacCormack's terms (1981: 26) these ceremonial or quasi-ceremonial passages of description lift [events] out of the realm of the ordinary and give them a significance other than the merely factual. They present an idealized vision of order, an order in which the individual being praised plays a central, and, in the case of emperors, informing role.

To take one typical example, Claudius Mamertinus, the panegyricist of Julian, describes that emperor's journey along the Danube to confront Constantius (3.7.2):

Quae navigationis illius fuit pompa, cum dexteriolem incliti fluminis ripam utriusque sexus, omnium ordinum, armatorum atque inermium perpetuus ordo praetexeret, despiceretur ad laevam in miserabiles preces genu nixa barbaria!

2.110—14 and 152—54 (cf. 5.215—16 and 220—24) *SHG* 4.37—53, 62—75, and 441—43 (cf. 5.71—72 and 405—7).

³¹I understand panegyric here in the general sense of serving the purpose of praise rather than with specific reference to the rhetorical pattern of the panegyric, as found in Menander Rhetor and the progymnastic tradition. In general I have some reservations about over-reliance on the schemes of rhetoricians when reading late Latin panegyric texts; see MacCormack 1976: 31—33 and 1981: 4—6 and Cameron 253—55. For Fortunatus' panegyrics, and a somewhat different emphasis, see George 1989, 1992: 35—61, and 1998.

What a pageant that journey was! an unbroken army of both sexes,
all orders of society, people armed and unarmed fringed the right
bank of the famous river, while on the left barbarians, kneeling in
abject supplication, met his downward gaze.

This is no ordinary trip down the Danube; not just a journey by boat (*navigatio*) but a triumphal pageant (*pompa*), embodying on the right bank the civil consensus of all members of society, united under Julian's rule, and on the left his military prowess, as he receives the submission of the barbarians. The tableau communicates the emperor's power and status; he is central to a complex system of differences, represented by the opposition between Roman and barbarian and in the former group by the enumeration of the ranks of Roman society, whose order he guarantees and from which he derives his legitimacy.

Much of Fortunatus' poetry, the occasional as well as the *VSM*, has a panegyric coloring. He is especially adept at such tableaux of praise. To take two examples: a poem in praise of Bishop Germanus of Paris (2.9) centers on two complementary vignettes of hierarchy and community, the one describing the bishop in procession surrounded by his clergy (17–34), the other the celebration of matins by the whole congregation (49–62); a second poem (5.3) was written on the occasion of Gregory's election as bishop of Tours. That poem is framed by two ceremonies, the first the new bishop's arrival in Tours (1–8), the second an anticipation of his joyful reception in heaven as his reward for his faithful conduct of the episcopacy (35–44). Such scenes embody ideals about the role of the bishop that transcend particular events.

In the *Life of Martin* Fortunatus elaborates an imperial banquet into just such an exemplary vignette (2.58–121). The usurper Maximus has finally persuaded the saint to share his table. At the banquet he hands the wine cup to Martin first, hoping to receive it back from the saint's hands. Instead Martin passes it to a priest who is also present at the banquet, indicating that a priest is of higher standing than an emperor. In Fortunatus' version the imperial banquet is described at great length and with especially splendid language. It becomes not a particular banquet, but the imperial banquet *par excellence*. Against this background the gesture and actions of the saint take on an exemplary value that transcends the individual event and reflects his exalted status.³²

Just as the Latin panegyrics imagine the emperor seated in state, surrounded by his court or the senate (e.g., 10.3.2 and 13.4), so Fortunatus concludes books 2 and 3 with elaborate descriptions of heaven, where Martin sits among the gorgeously arrayed company of angels, patriarchs, apostles, prophets, and

³²On this passage see Roberts 1995.

martyrs, in close proximity to God, whose friend and confidant he is.³³ Heaven is imagined according to the model of a royal or imperial court, though of fantastic wealth and luxury. Martin, as senator, takes his seat next to the king among the nobles and highest powers of the city of Sion, with high-born patricians and consuls (3.520—22):

inter quos procures et culmina celsa potentum,
patriciis mixtus generosis consulibusque,
proximus et regi resides, Martine, senator.

The patriarchs, apostles, and martyrs of the earlier citizen-list of heaven (2.458—65) now take on the guise of powerful figures at a Roman imperial court. Expressions of Roman patriotism are largely absent from Fortunatus poetry. They would be anachronistic in Merovingian Gaul. But the ideal of Roman political organization lives on, translated into the language of imperial ceremonial to the court of heaven.³⁴

The Ecphrastic

In the panegyric vignette, description is put to the task of evoking a ceremonial or quasi-ceremonial context. But descriptive/ecphrastic material is widespread in Fortunatus and the literature of late antiquity generally, often without an evident panegyric purpose. It is notorious that even in a mythological epic like Claudian's *de Raptu Proserpinae* narrative is reduced to a minimum, in part replaced by description.

One of the most frequent subjects for description, especially popular with Fortunatus, is the storm at sea. Thinking of the famous storms of classical epic, one might be inclined to identify this as an epic motif, but such descriptions are so common in late Latin literature that it is hard to maintain the generic affiliation. For instance, the *Romance of Apollonius of Tyre* (11) includes a typical storm-ecphrasis (in verse), as the hero suffers the first of his many misfortunes at sea. (The work, incidentally, was a favorite of Fortunatus in one poem [6.8.6] he compares himself with Apollonius as a sad wanderer from his native land.) Nonetheless, such passages are a staple of the Latin biblical epic Juvenius (2.25—42), Sedulius (*Carm. Pasch.* 3.46—69), and Arator (*Hist.*

³³2.438—39 *Noscens clausa Dei quasi consiliator amici, / cum sua participat caro secreta clienti.*

³⁴On the relationship between these passages and Fortunatus' ideology of Merovingian kingship see Reydellet 342—43. The idea of a senate in the Christian heaven is of long-standing, going back to Paulinus of Nola (*Ep.* 13.15) and Prudentius (e.g., *Perist.* 2.553—60), and is especially associated with the cult of the saints.

Apostol. 2.1066—92), as well as the anonymous *de Iona* (28—52) all conform to this tradition.³⁵ In the case of Martin, Sulpicius Severus records the story of an Egyptian merchant who invoked the saint during a storm: immediately the waves are stilled (*Dial.* 3.14.1—2). Both Paulinus (5.743—83) and Fortunatus (4.404—13) incorporate a storm-ecphrasis in this episode. Elsewhere Fortunatus describes a river in flood, using some of the standard topoi (11.25.13—28), while in the *Life of Martin* storms twice figure metaphorically.

In the preface addressed to Agnes and Radegund the poet imagines the bark of his poem, battered by a storm and seeking protection from Martin by the intervention of the two holy women. In a second case Fortunatus' use of language of storm and shipwreck takes an unexpected turn in an account of Martin's healing of a woman suffering from an excessive flow of blood (4.252—58; cf. Sulpicius *Dial.* 3.9.3 *profluvio sanguinis laborantem*).

Pallida cum mulier, stillante rubore cruoris,
cuius se inriguo siccarant viscera fluxu,
naufraga membra trahens secum, vaga sanguinis unda,
tempestate suae pluviae defessa laborans,
ipsa sibi generans secreti turbinis imbres
fluctibus et propriis iam submersura ruebat
nec super ullus erat portus sibi, norma salutis.

The woman was pale, though her blood dripped red,
and her womb was drained by an incessant running flux.
She carried with her her own shipwrecked body, adrift on a surge of blood,
wearily borne down by the storm of her own rain,
causing for herself the downpour of an inner deluge
she was headed for destruction, soon to sink below her own waves,
no haven left, no source of salvation.

It is typical of Fortunatus, and the Sedulian style generally, to linger over the symptoms of a sickness before the miraculous healing. Such episodes regularly pivot on a few words or a gesture. Here immediately after the lines quoted the woman touches the hem of Martin's garment (259—60). There follows an extended account of the reversal of the symptoms (261—70), though the metaphor of shipwreck is no longer sustained. In the account of the woman's sickness Fortunatus' metaphorical development depends on a mannered play with the language for the flow of blood: from the red dripping of blood (252 *stillante*

³⁵On the storms in Juvencus and Sedulius see Ratkowitsch. Herzog 1975: 150—54 has some interesting remarks on the capacity of ecphrastic detail to serve an edifying function, with special reference to the storm in Juvencus.

rubore cruoris), it becomes a running flux (253 *inrigo fluxu*), a wave of blood (254 *sanguinis unda*), a storm of her own rain (255 *tempestate suae pluviae*), the downpour of an inner deluge (256 *secreti turbinis imbres*), and her own waves (257 *fluctibus propriis*). The language assimilates the act of healing to the literal rescue from shipwreck of the Egyptian merchant invocation of the saint and touching his garment are equivalent acts of faith and to Fortunatus own prayers that the saint provide a safe harbor from shipwreck in his perilous undertaking of writing the poem. Such unexpected metaphors are a feature of Fortunatus style in all his poetry, though they are quite varied in tone: indigestion, too, can be likened to a storm within (7.14.27—32). In the present passage the metaphorical ecphrasis intensifies the pathos of the woman's desperate situation and the emotional force with which the listener or reader reacts to the miracle of healing. When elaborated in this way such extended metaphors can play in Fortunatus narrative poetry something of the role that the simile plays in traditional epic.

The Epigrammatic

While Fortunatus *Life of Martin* shares with much of the narrative poetry of late antiquity a predilection for the ecphrastic and a tendency to the panegyric, his most original achievements probably lie in the development of the Sedulian mini-narrative towards an epigrammatic concision.³⁶ Frequently the poet paraphrases his prose original quite closely, retaining the simple sentence structure and much of the vocabulary of his original, with no attempt at poetic ornament. For the most part, the significance of an episode depends on the reversal of the existing unsatisfactory state of affairs, achieved by words or gestures either of the saint or directed to him. When Fortunatus does elaborate the central narrative core, it is typically to describe more fully the preexisting circumstances and/or the situation after the saint's reversal of those circumstances. Episodes normally conclude with a reformulation of the central miracle that has taken place, often in the rhetorically refined language of antithesis, paradox, and paronomasia. Unlike Paulinus, the poet generally avoids employing a narrative as the occasion for a sermon. Instead, he develops the Sedulian techniques of meditative lyric and reworks hagiographical epic into a succession of refined meditative epigrams. With their emphasis on the visual and the scene, they could serve as a poetic commentary on a sequence of pictures of the kind Gregory of Tours was

³⁶Mazzega 45—49 has recently spoken of Sedulius use of the techniques of the epigram, emphasizing the brevity of individual episodes in the *Carmen Paschale* and their tendency to end with rhetorical point.

to put up later in his rebuilt cathedral, for which, in fact, Fortunatus did compose two sets of brief epigrams (10.6).

To take an example from the first book of the *VSM*, Sulpicius records that Martin converted his mother from paganism (*Vita* 6.3 *matrem a gentilitatis absolvit errore*).³⁷ Here is Fortunatus' version of the same event (1.104—7):

Interea matrem gentili errore resolvens;
illa istum mundo, hic illam generavit Olympo,
decrepitamque senem sancto facit amne renasci
et meliore sinu generant sua viscera matrem.

Then he freed his mother from pagan error;
she bore him to the world, he her to heaven
and caused her broken-down old age to be reborn in the holy stream:
her own flesh gave birth to its mother from a better womb.

Despite the brevity of this passage (and of the notice of Sulpicius on which it is based) it does show some typical features. The first line sets out in straightforward language, closely modeled on the prose original, the action of Martin that becomes the text for meditation in the rest of the passage.³⁸ That meditation takes a rhetorically pointed form: antithesis reinforced by homoeoteleuton (Leonine rhyme) in line 105 (*mundo Olympo*), the paradoxical rebirth of an old woman (106 *decrepitamque senem renasci*) and the reversal of the normal state of affairs in which a child, her own flesh and blood from her own womb (*sua viscera*), gives birth to his mother and a man gives birth to a woman. Fortunatus' language, and especially the last line, has the capacity to renew the reader's sense of the mystery of baptism. In his poetry the word *viscera*, when used of women, regularly means the womb (6.5.33 and 79, 8.3.325 and 338). So, in the case of Martin's mother, her son, the fruit of her womb, becomes a metaphorical womb himself to bring his mother to birth; the mystery of rejuvenation in the previous line, a broken-down old woman is reborn, depends on the paradoxical endowing of her son with the power to give birth.

³⁷On this passage see Labarre 140—41.

³⁸For the concept of meditation see St. Francis de Sales' definition in his *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616), quoted by Martz 15: Meditation is an attentive thought iterated, or voluntarily intertained in the mynd, to excitate the will to holy affections and resolutions. As Steadman 147 points out, this meditative tradition was not new [but] rather an adaptation and continuation of an older and well-established tradition. Ong traces examples of theological wit and word play in medieval Latin hymnody going back to the Holy Cross hymns of Fortunatus.

Perhaps the fullest example of such mannered meditation on a miracle of healing is the story of Martin's cure of a leper with a kiss (1.501—4).³⁹

Virtutum quam celsa fides ubi concite sancti
 pacis ab officio perierunt proelia morbi!
 Complexu res dira fugit, languoris iniqui
 peste cadente novam gesserunt oscula pugnam.

How sublime the faith of the saint's miracles, when swiftly
 from a gesture of peace the warfare of disease was stilled!
 Dread contagion fled his embrace, of cruel sickness
 the plague gave way, as kisses waged a novel battle.

Antithesis, paradox, and the sustained metaphor of the healing of disease as warfare give the passage its quality of rhetorically refined meditation. For Fortunatus, Martin's healing of the leper is his greatest miracle, exemplary of the lofty faith of his miracles (*virtutum celsa fides*), for, he goes on, in the renown of Martin's holiness faithful in its fealty faith faithfully makes fair the foul (506 *foedere fida fides formosat foeda fidelis*). The line is the most extreme example in the poem of Fortunatus' precious play with language. It serves, it is clear, a panegyric function, extolling Martin's *inclita religio* (505).

The formulation of line 506 privileges verbal play over referential content, with a disorienting effect on the reader, who has difficulty following the sequence of syntax because of the distractions of the self-advertising verbal surface that demands his or her attention. The impression is akin, in visual terms, to the brilliance of heaven, or in the secular realm of the imperial reception hall, that dazzles normal perception and signifies the otherworldly splendor of the divine. The viewer in such circumstances has difficulty making out individual details and their relation to each other.⁴⁰ Similarly, in Fortunatus' poem the reader cannot easily perceive the syntactic articulation of the sentence. Arguably such language serves the same purpose in Fortunatus' poem as the profusion of brilliant visual detail in a description of heaven or a brilliant architectural setting; that is, it communicates the special status of the saint, who can transcend normal worldly constraints, as the preciousness of Fortunatus' language foregrounds a gorgeous verbal surface that defies normal categories of grammatical and syntactical understanding. Even other passages, less extreme in their verbal

³⁹On this passage see Roberts 1994: 95—100.

⁴⁰Compare the disorienting effect of the brilliant decoration of the palace of Aurora in Sidonius (*C.* 2. 418—21) and the other passages cited by Roberts 1989: 73—75.

refinement, to the degree that they emphasize the play of language at the expense of the referential content of a statement, contribute to the reader's admiration of Martin's holiness and of his ability to suspend the normal laws of human experience.

The *VSM* is a work in the tradition of late Latin epic. In writing his only extended narrative poem Fortunatus reveals his awareness of the generic expectations of epic, at least as they were understood in late antiquity. The most important influence on him, as the first lines of the poem reveal, is the Christian Latin tradition of New Testament epic. In particular, he follows the practice of Sedulius of breaking the text into individual *narrationes*, compositional units on which the poet can separately comment. Both Paulinus of Périgueux, his predecessor on the Martin-epic, and Fortunatus develop this Sedulian tradition of poetic meditation.⁴¹ In the later poet's case he brings to the *VSM* the same qualities that he shows in his many elegiac poems, the bulk of which are best understood as epigrams. Frequently devoted to praise, the more ambitious show a taste for the ecphrastic and the panegyric vignette; in style they often adopt a fragmented, commatic structure, with extensive use of isocolon, rhyme, antithesis, and paronomasia. The *VSM* brings these thematic and stylistic qualities to the hagiographical epic: Fortunatus writes an epigrammatic, epideictic epic of rhetorically refined meditation.

⁴¹Herzog 1984 compares Sedulian practice with the techniques of English metaphysical poetry, deriving ultimately from Catholic manuals of meditation. Labarre 233 has recently similarly compared Paulinus of Périgueux methods with a fifteenth century spiritual guide. I would emphasize that both Paulinus and Fortunatus in their different ways develop the meditative *narrationes* of Sedulius and would suggest that in addition to considerations specific to Christian spirituality, rhetorical teaching on the handling of the *narratio* contributed to the development of such practices (see Roberts 1985: 179–80). Mazzega 31 interestingly compares Sedulian narrative techniques with Augustine's recommendations for the instruction of catechumens (see especially *Catech.* 3.5).

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