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# A NEW EDITION OF VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS: THE ART OF CRITICISM*

This edition forms part of the *Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries Series*. As such it represents an important and scholarly contribution to a growing body of work on the poetry of late antiquity in general and Venantius Fortunatus in particular. In addition to its technical treatment of metrics and textual tradition the introduction offers a helpful discussion of the generic background and of Fortunatus' relationship to his sources and predecessors. Kay makes a clear statement of his editorial credo: "My aim ... has been to arrive at what VF intended to write ... and not what he should have written" (p. 37), together with the standard by which it is to be judged: " ... the reader can at least expect that what is set before him or her makes reasonable sense" (ibid.) This statement can equally be applied to his translation, of which Kay claims: "The translation is intended to complement the commentary, though for clarity it sometimes has to be less opaque than the original" (p. 38). In this he succeeds admirably, producing a translation which is both accurate and very readable.

The relative weight attributed here to translation and commentary is amply born out by a wealth of detailed information in the latter which encompasses a wide range of literary parallels and linguistic analysis supported by grammatical dissection. This minute scrutiny amply justifies the otherwise frustrating decision to restrict the scope of the present edition to the first two books. There is also compensation in the form of the welcome inclusion in appendices of the text of Fortunatus' acknowledged prose source, Sulpicius Severus, together with the earlier verse paraphrase by Paulinus of Périgueux, thus producing an overview as well as facilitating direct comparison. More surprising is the relegation to an appendix of Fortunatus' (prose) *Epistola ad Gregorium*, usually viewed as a paratext and associated with the (verse) prologue addressed to Agnes and Radegunde. Kay lays out his reasons for this decision in the introduction (pp. 3-4).

In his preface Kay proclaims his adherence to the "traditionally classicist direction" (p. vii). This predominantly classical perspective can be seen as a potential advantage, in terms of the admirably scholarly and traditional approach discussed above. However, it may also represent a potential problem. Fortunatus can be seen not only as the end of the classical Latin tradition but also as a forerunner of the medieval. As such, there seems to be a danger of his particular

* N.M. Kay, *Venantius Fortunatus: Vita Sancti Martini. Prologue and Books I–II,* (ed. and com.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, viii+580pp., £ 120.00, ISBN 978-1-108-42584-1.

brand of poetic creativity being undervalued here. Comments such as "VF revels in syntactical complexity and rhetorical and poetic ornament of various kinds *to the point of obscurantism*" (p. 14) (the italics are mine) suggest a certain unease which is not really dispelled by the rider which follows: "[This] is no doubt intentional, in that it necessitates effort and concentration on the part of the reader to appreciate and decipher the text and its message" (ibid.) Other critical judgements are more overtly negative: of his linguistic ploys, "But others ... seem designed only to parade the author's cleverness ..." (p. 15); "But do readers really need ...?" (ibid.). The verbatim citations from Brower and Schuster at the end of this section stand in direct contrast to the slightly dismissive reference to the "more sympathetic and positive" approach of Roberts and de Nie (p. 17).

While it is not necessarily the job of a translator and editor to engage in literary criticism the somewhat negative flavour left by these comments extends beyond the introduction and finds echoes in the commentary. What follows here will focus on literary analysis. It will start with a discussion of the prologue, then look at two passages taken from start (the *apologia* in Book 1) and finish (the *envoi* to the book in Book 4). Although Book 4 reaches beyond the scope of the present edition it will be seen that these two passages benefit from being viewed in parallel.[1] The aim is to establish the nature of Fortunatus' poetic self-presentation and to assess its contribution to the *Vita* as a whole.

Written in elegiac couplets, Fortunatus' preferred or at least more usual metre, the prologue turns on the threat of potential shipwreck. Predictably, Kay again undermines faint praise of Fortunatus' poetic skill with damning criticism: "As a literary metaphor it [the difficulty of the literary enterprise he is about to embark upon] is *commonplace* ..." (p. 120); "Although the overall effect is *muddled* ..." (ibid.); "... though he *rather detracts from the effect* by introducing a second theme involving the waters of poetic inspiration ..." (ibid.) (the italics are mine).[2] The last comment seems to disregard the fact that the second theme is inextricably linked to the complexity of the shipwreck motif as developed here. It relates both to the audacity of the poetic enterprise, the writing of an epic paraphrase in hexameters to celebrate and immortalise the life of St. Martin, and to the concept that the undertaking is bound up with Fortunatus' spiritual salvation, put at risk by his lack of poetic talent.[3]

[1] The text will be taken from the edition of Quesnel: S. Quesnel, *Venance Fortunat.* Œuvres*, Tome 4: La Vie de Saint Martin*, Paris 2002.

[2] Contrast, for example, the positive evaluation of Braidotti: "I 13 distici, nei quali si sviluppa la lunga e articolata descrizione poetica della impetuosa burrasca che rischia di travolgere il navigante, formano un brano di grande impegno retorico, ricco di tutta la gamma delle figure e degli artifici tipici di una poesia fortemente ricercata ..." (C. Braidotti, "Prefazioni in distici elegiaci", in G. Catanzaro and F. Santucci, eds., *La poesia cristiana latina in distici elegiaci: atti del Convegno internazionale, Assisi, 20-22 marzo* 1992, Assisi 1993, 57-85, 74.

[3] So Roberts: "Christian poets regularly seek to win salvation through their poems – the topos goes back to Juvencus ... Implicitly, large-scale epic composition on Christian themes takes on a soteriological dimension, as a journey of salvation for the poet" (M. Roberts, "The last epic of antiquity: generic continuity and innovation in the "Vita Sancti Martini" of Venantius Fortunatus, *TAPA* 131, 2001, 257-85, 270. ) For the sea voyage as metaphor in the writings of

Moreover, the two themes are closely linked by repetition and word-play. The language by which the theme of (lack of) inspiration is introduced, *fluctuat ingenium cui non natat unda Camenae,/ sensus harenosus non rigat ore lacus* (Prol. 31-32) looks back to the sea-imagery in general but also to one earlier couplet in particular, *pars subit una ratis, pars altera vergit harenis,/ nutat et in dubio lubrica libra freto* (Prol. 15-16).[4] *Fluctuat ingenium* (of the wavering intellect; talent) echoes *nutat ... lubrica libra* of the faltering of the unstable balance, that is, the ship, while *sensus harenosus* (the sandy; arid sense; spirit) picks up the sands towards which the ship is being driven.[5] The oscillation between literal and figurative, matter and spirit, fuelled by paradoxical word-play (*natat*; *nutat*) lends the imagery a multivalency which highlights Fortunatus' uncertain position, poised between Heaven and Hell.[6]

One further detail may serve to highlight the extent of Fortunatus' poetic skill. In the course of the prologue he dubs himself *temerarius arbiter* (Prol. 21), rendered by Kay as "rash captain". Kay notes a possible borrowing from Statius but comments "rather inappropriately, if so, because Statius alludes to Paris" (p. 126). The clue may lie in the preceding line of the original. There the notion of theft is coupled with that of spoils, that is, the abduction of Helen of Troy.[7] The motif recalls *spoliatio Aegyptiorum*, the "despoiling of the Egyptians", taken from Exodus and used to justify borrowings from pagan culture by the Christian writers of late antiquity. Jerome, however, following Origen, seemingly rejects this allegory in favour of another drawn from Deuteronomy, that of the "beautiful woman" taken in captivity.[8] The echo may function as a humorous (and learned) acknowledgment of Fortunatus' own classical appropriations in the creation of his saint's life. At the end of the prologue pagan thefts will be transmuted into spiritual treasure through the parable of the talents, effecting a simultaneous shift from Old to New Testament.[9]

St. Augustine see e.g. E. TeSelle, "Looking for home: travel as metaphor in Augustine", *Annali d'Italianistica* 14, *L'Odeporica/ Hodoeporics: on travel literature*, 1996, 103-20, 114.

[4] Kay notes the general association (p. 130), yet still comments that "this concluding section of the prologue is somewhat muddled" (p. 129).

[5] Kay offers an effective formulation of the ship as "an aerial pair of scales" (p. 125), but does not push the sense of *lubrica*, frequently linked with moral instability and human weakness.

[6] It is tempting to see a playful reference to the "instability" of the elegiac couplet in the rise and fall of the sea-tossed vessel. That is, striving to write the life-giving hexameter of epic paraphrase Fortunatus finds himself relapsing into elegiacs instead. For similar play in classical Latin poetry see e.g. T. Thorsen, "The Latin elegiac couplet", in T. Thorsen, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Love Elegy*, Cambridge 2013, 367-78.

[7] *en aliud furto scelus et spolia hospita portans/ navigat iniustae temerarius arbiter Idae* (Statius, *Achilleid* 1. 66-7).

[8] See G. Folliet, "La *spoliatio Aegyptiorum* (Exode 3.21-23; 11.2-3; 12.35-36.) Les interprétations de cette image chez les Pères et autres écrivains ecclésiastiques", *Traditio* 57, 2002, 1-48, 10-11.

[9] *vos date quod vobis cum fenore reddat alumnus,/ addam ut thesauris parva talenta suis* (Prol. 41-42). As noted by Kay (p. 133), this draws on Matthew 25.14-30.

The proem of Book 1 begins with the picture of Christ's harrowing of hell and triumphant accession to heaven. A brief linking of earthly miracles with their (initial) celebration in prose paves the way for a catalogue of Fortunatus' (poetic) predecessors. *Ast ego* (1.26) signals an abrupt turn with the intrusion of Fortunatus into the narrative. The *apologia* begins with a block of 10 lines (1.26-35) which comprise a veritable character assassination directed against himself, paving the way for a 4 line rhetorical question aimed at further casting doubt on his ability to be part of such an illustrious company (1.36-9). Kay's comment is predictably dismissive: "after giving his literary credo VF embarks on another convoluted sentence to *indulge in an orgy* of mock-modesty ..." (pp. 148-9) (the italics are mine). In fact, as will be seen, it might better be characterised as a virtuoso rhetorical display of self-directed and satirical invective which simultaneously serves to undercut its own claims of ignorance and lack of talent.

Fortunatus starts by piling up (essentially synonymous) phrases designed to illustrate his lack of reason: *sensus inops* (1.26), *ratione pigrescens* (1.27), *mente hebes* (1.28); lack of eloquence: *arte carens* (1.28), *ore nec expers* (ibid.); and lack of piety: *faece gravis* (1.27), *sermone levis* (ibid.).[10] These failings can – and should - be set against the positive qualities he has chosen to highlight in the preceding catalogue: of Juvencus, *docili ordine* (1.14); of Sedulius, *radiavit lingua* (1.16); of Orientius, *florente ore* (1.17); of Prudentius, *prudens prudenter* (1.19); of Paulinus, *fide pollens et arte* (1.20); of Arator, *facundo eloquio* (1.23); of Alcimus, *egregio acumine* (1.25).[11] In what follows key metaphors relating to poetic composition are transmuted into their opposites. As Fortunatus laments his paucity of formal learning, drinking deep from the fountain of inspiration is reduced to "licking/lapping" (*lambens*) a "few little run-offs" (*parvula refluamina*) of grammar (1.29), "sipping" (*praelibans*) "a little draught" (*exiguum haustum*) of rhetoric (1.30).[12] A little later the floweriness and sweetness expected of high poetry are said to be in the (barren) hands of one *nullo flore virens* (1.38), mixing the "stream of honey", *mellis ... inrigui*, with "bitter wormword", *haec austera absinthia* (1.39).[13]

[10] Braidotti draws attention to the similarity of these first three lines with the prologue: *attonitus, trepidus*, *hebetans*, *vagus*, *anxius*, *anceps/ confuso ingenio mox ope nauta caret* (Prol. 23-4) (Braidotti, "Prefazioni", 74). Fortunatus employs the same technique in his diatribe against the "king's cook": *corde niger, fumo pastus, fuligine tinctus* (VF, *Carmina* 6.8.38).

[11] Kay comments in relation to *florente Orientius ore*: "VF lets rip with a jingle of the type he finds irresistible, whether or not it makes any great point or sense in the context" (p. 144). In fact it will later be set against Fortunatus *nullo flore virens* (1.38), just as *radiavit lingua* will be set against *meis tenebris* (1.48) and *prudens* has been trailed by the *temerarius nauta* of the prologue.

[12] For a a useful summary of further reading on this trope see Kay, p.130.

[13] Kay offers a helpful comparison of sources here although the reference to "... the honey permeating the wormwood" seems to invert the significance (p. 156). Rather than sweetening the (health-bringing) medicine with honey Fortunatus will be contaminating the (divine) sweetness with the wormwood of sin.

Other tropes familiar from classical poetry are incorporated with a twist to illustrate Fortunatus' lack of capacity. *Desuetudo*, deterioration through "disuse", as found in the exiled Ovid's lament for his loss of Latin,[14] is first trailed through Fortunatus' self-portrayal as a "mere fraction of the Italian tongue", *Italae quota portio linguae* (1.26),[15] then made explicit through the claim to be "unlearning", *dediscens*, what he formerly learned (1.32). Onto this is grafted the image of the whetstone taken from Horace,[16] its critical function here impaired by an accumulation of "rust".[17] The motif of the impoverished poet, associated particularly with satire and epigram, is introduced by a complaint relating to the lack of (fine) clothing, *non praetexta mihi rutilat toga, paenula nulla* (1.34), which recalls similar complaints in Martial.[18] The implied link between (physical) poverty and lack of (poetic) talent is spelled out though a conjunction of the literal and the metaphorical which simultaneously undercuts its own claims. All that is left (*superest*), "hunger bare of fame", *famae nuda fames*, may draw on epic,[19] while the "poor tongue", (*de*) *paupere lingua,* can be

[14] *en pudet et fateor, iam desuetudine longa/ vix subeunt ipsi verba Latina mihi* (Ovid, *Tristia* 5.57-8). Labarre notes the parallel and comments: "Il [Fortunatus] use du motif de la *desuetudo* avec habileté" (S. Labarre, *Le Manteau Partagé: deux métamorphoses poétiques de la Vie de saint Martin chez Paulin de Périgueux (V^e S.) et Venance Fortunat (VI^e S.),* Collection des Études Augustiniennes 158, Paris 1998, 30).

[15] It seems likely that this adapts a phrase from Juvenal: *quamvis quota portio faecis Achaei?* (Juvenal, *Satires* 3.61). Kay notes the possibility but dismisses it as "improbable" (p. 149). In the original it denotes the influx of foreigners – not even proper Greeks! – to Rome. Here it would be doubly satirical: like Ovid, Fortunatus depicts himself in the preface to the *Carmina* as an Orpheus among the barbarians.

[16] *... ergo fungar vice cotis, acutum/ reddere quae ferrum valet, exsors ipsa secandi* (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 304-5). Like Fortunatus, Horace is here self-ironising: incapable of writing himself he can yet criticise other people. For the allusion see Quesnel, *La Vie*, 111.

[17] *cote ex iuridica cui vix rubigo recessit* (1.31). Both Quesnel and Kay link this with the "rusty tongue" resistant to the whetstone as found in Fortunatus' *Carmina*, 2.9.7-10 (Kay, p.152; Quesnel, 111) but interpret the phrase differently: "le ciseau de la critique a bien mal frotté ma rouille" (Quesnel); "whose rust has barely receded from his juridical whetstone" (Kay). Whether the rust attaches to tongue or whetstone, the metaphor of disuse remains the same.

[18] Martial recounts an encounter when he is asked "*cur ergo ... habes malas lacernas?*" His reply, "*quia sum malus poeta*" preludes a request to his friend to send him "*bonas lacernas*" in order to avoid future embarassment (Martial, *Epigrams* 6.82.9-12). Woolf comments: "Poverty ... is a (tatty) cloak put on for some purposes and not others" (G. Woolf, "Writing poverty in Rome", in M. Atkins and R. Osborne, eds., *Poverty in the Roman World*, Cambridge 2009, 93-9, 98).

[19] Kay, who renders this as "famine without fame", points towards Silius Italicus (p. 154): *inhonoratam ... mortem et famae nudam* (Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 4.605-6). Quesnel's rendition, "la faim de renommée", misses the possible echo.

paralleled from panegyric (1.35).[20] The context makes it likely that Fortunatus is also referencing his spiritual impoverishment here.[21]

The proem concludes with a five-line justification for his temerity (1.40-4) which invokes compulsion and turns on notions of sin and debt,[22] then glides into a contrast between his lowliness and Martin's glory which nonetheless brings the two into close proximity and sets up the narrative of the saint's deeds to follow.[23] Within this section as a whole, Fortunatus has created a marginalised and disreputable *persona*, living on the edge from hand to mouth, perhaps in exile.[24] The image can – and probably should - be inverted: in Christian terms, poverty and humility function as proofs of spiritual virtue. At the same time, the specification here of the lack of cloak and "shining toga" serves both to tentatively identify him as following in the footsteps of Martin and to pave the way for the figurative representation of the Book at the end of the poem.

The corresponding passage in Book 4 follows on from a prayer to Martin for intercession which picks up the notion of Fortunatus' sinfulness[25] and seeks indulgence for his damaged "garland".[26] It brings together two familiar *topoi*, the farewell to the personified Book[27] with that of poetry as weaving,[28] thus presenting it under the double guise of animate subject and material object. Since it is beyond the scope of Kay's edition the relevant text, taken from Quesnel, is printed below:

[20] Sidonius Apollinaris in the preface to his panegyric on Anthemius draws a parallel with the accession of Jupiter. Self-referencing as an ungainly and unmusical Chiron, he claims: *ergo sacrum dives et pauper lingua litabat*, that is, all praise was equally welcome (Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* 1.21).

[21] In Prudentius *rubigo*, "rust", "blight", can connote sin (Prudentius, *Cathemerinon* 7.205; *Contra Symmachum* 2.2).

[22] *res illa coegit* (1.40); (*quominus*) *reus pro crimine* (*redderer*) (1.41); *ratio ... poposcit* (1.42); *solvi praeconia* (1.43). Kay interprets this primarily in personal terms, as Fortunatus' fear of defaulting on his "promise" to Martin (Kay, p.157). Quesnel cites Fortunatus' use of *reus* in *Carmina*, 3.15.5-9 as indicating also a more general obligation to avoid sin by praising God and his saints (Quesnel, 111-12).

[23] *dignus ero/ Martini gesta* (1.45); *non eget ille meis tenebris* (1.48). The representation of Martin as *Gallica celsa pharus*, its rays extending *ad Indos* (1.49), may foreshadow the journey of the Book.

[24] Kay comments: "VF ... asserts that he has no proper poetic persona or style to suit his subject" (p. 155). This seems rather to miss the point.

[25] *supplicis esto memor, famuli exauditor, opime,/ Fortunati inopis, trepidi sibi sorte reatus ...* (4.594-5). Fortunatus is "begging" for spiritual patronage rather than the material assistance sought by Martial in the passage cited earlier.

[26] *da veniam, dulcis, pie, blande, benigne patrone,/condere dum volui quia laesi carmine flores* (4.617-18). For this as an echo of the earlier *texere sertam* (1.38) see Kay, p.155.

[27] For a list of parallels see Quesnel, *La Vie*, LXI.

[28] See B. Brennan, "Weaving with words. Venantius Fortunatus' figurative acrostics on the holy cross", *Traditio* 74, 2019, 27-53. It includes a discussion of this passage and will be referenced later.

pone, libelle, modum, trepido verecunde relatu,
multiplices faciens dissuto stamine rugas
nec bene fila ligans nodo subit aspera tela,
hispida cameli rigido quasi vellere texta,
serica cum decuit Martini pallia duci
aut pretexta micans auro sub tortile necti
vel toga permixtis hyacinthina curreret albis
pingere seu variam rosa, lilia, gemma coronam.
marcida lingua iacet, veniam tibi posce, libelle.

*VM* 4.621-9

Extending over nine lines the passage is enclosed and marked out from what follows by the device of ring-composition (*pone, libelle ... posce, libelle*). The first part of this turns the satire from the earlier passage against the book itself, portrayed as badly-finished and coming apart at the seams (*dissuto stamine*; *non bene ... ligans*), while the second sets this apparent failure against the richly textured, highly finished item which could have, should have, been produced (*cum decuit*). In the course of this Fortunatus effects a seemingly abrupt transition from (roughly) woven textile to (elaborately decorated) item of clothing (*pallia*; *toga*) and even (painted? embroidered?) *corona* (crown; garland). It will be argued here that hyperbole and syntactical disruption combine in relation to both sections to produce an unsettling and challenging satirical effect.

In terms of classical models, the address can play out in two ways, either as distancing, with the book eager to go off and get published,[29] or identification as in the *Tristia*, where the wretched condition of the book can be seen as mimicking that of his exiled master.[30] Fortunatus here may seem to be mixing the two. There may also, however, be more to this than meets the eye. The injunction *pone ... modum* is rendered by Quesnel as "marque le pas", that is, "slow down", "mark time".[31] In fact a possible echo of Statius' *Thebaid* may suggest that the *topos* is here being inverted. There Eteocles is warned *pone modum laetis*, "set a limit" to the pleasures of kingship.[32] In other words it may be that the book, *verecunde*, "modest", "shamefaced" at the "disordered narrative" is to be imagined as dragging its feet and regretting the glories that might have been.[33]

The general thrust of the passage is clear but the precise details are more difficult to pin down. Quasi-technical vocabulary combines with uncertain syntax

[29] E.g. Horace, *Epistles* 1.20; Martial, 1.3.7-8; 11-12. For the trope as turning on authorial "reluctance" to publish, see E. Oliensis, "Life after publication: Horace Epistles 1.20", *Arethusa* 28, 1995, 209-24.

[30] Ovid, *Tristia* 1.1.3-14. See S. Hinds, "Booking the return trip: Ovid and *Tristia* 1", in P.E. Knox, ed., *Oxford Readings in Ovid*, Oxford 2006, 415-40.

[31] Quesnel, *La Vie*, 98.

[32] Statius continues: *satis ostro dives et auro/ conspicuus tenuem germani pauperis annum/ risisti* ... (Statius, *Thebaid* 2.406-8). The reference to purple and gold is relevant to what follows here.

[33] Quesnel draws attention to Paulinus of Périgueux's self-depiction as *trepidus ... relator* (Quesnel, *La Vie*, 98 = PP *vita* 5.483). Here the phrase is transferred from poet to product.

to create a degree of complexity. *Stamen* and *tela* are vitually synonymous. Both can indicate the warp (i.e. the vertical threads); at the same time, *stamen* also comes to designate the weft (i.e. the crosswise threads), while like *tela* (more usually identified with the web as a whole) it can also stand for a piece of cloth. The two participles, *faciens*, "making creases"; "wrinkles", and *ligans*, (badly) "binding together", seem to dangle ambiguously. Initially they appear to look back to the personified book: the introduction at the end of the line of *aspera tela*, conjoined with *subit*, "springs up", comes as something of a surprise.[34] The placing of the words may also seem to mimic the disjointed appearance of the cloth. *Multiplices* ("manifold"; "of many turns"), is held apart from *rugas* at either end of the verse; *nodo* ("by"; "with" a knot) is placed (ironically) between the ineffectual tying of the threads and the "harsh canvas". The comparison to *rigido vellere*, the "stiff pelt" of a camel, is similarly dislocated, with *hispida* ("bristling"; "bristly") at the start and *texta* ("woven") at the end kept apart by *quasi*, "as if".

The second half replaces the coarseness of camel-hair with the fineness of silk (*serica ... pallia*) and the richness of purple and gold (*toga hyacinthina; auro sub tortile*) interwoven with gemstones (*permixtis albis*; cf. *variam ... gemma* of the *corona*). Both Labarre[35] and de Nie[36] (seemingly independently) have pushed the imagery further and read the poem symbolically as the weaving of a "new cloak" for Martin in exchange for the one(s) he gave away. In fact, the depiction of the (idealised and unrealised) garment, while superficially attractive, shows a degree of syntactical slippage and semantic ambiguity which suggests that it shares in the satirical impulse of its (unworthy) replacement.[37] The shift from plural (*pallia*) to singular (*pretexta*; *toga*) creates a sense of uncertainty

[34] Brennan and Quesnel render *stamen* and *fila* as subjects and *tela* as object: "The thread ... is making many rucks and the disjointed fibers ... make a rough cloth" (Brennan, "Weaving", 34); "La chaîne [warp] en est lâche et fait de nombreux plis, les fils ... laissent voir ... une toile rugueuse" (Quesnel, *La Vie*, 98). Labarre, on the other hand, stays closer and maintains a degree of syntactical ambiguity: "Parce que la chaîne a été dénouée, faisant des plis multiples, liant mal ses fils ... la toile rude se laisse apercevoir" (Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 67).

[35] "La métaphore de l'œuvre littéraire comme vêtement tissé est tout à fait justifiée dans un poème consacré à Martin. Quel don pourrait offrir le poète Fortunat, si ce n'est un manteau à celui qui s'est, par deux fois, dévêtu pour habiller un pauvre?" (Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 67).

[36] de Nie extends the image to encompass the *corona*: "(For) at the very end of the poem we find that image of the precious mantle – as well as that of a wreath or crown – as a model for what he had wanted his poem to be for the saint ... the poem as a whole, therefore, is intended to be not only a wreath of flowers and jewels, but especially a – supposedly unsuccessful – mantle of praise ..." (G. de Nie, "The poet as visionary: Venantius Fortunatus' «new mantle» for Saint Martin", in de Nie, *Word, image and experience. Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul*, Padstow 2003, 49-83, 80. This was originally published as an article in 1997).

[37] The section gives rise to a range of conflicting translations. Both Brennan and de Nie are noticeably loose in respect of syntax: e.g. "it was fitting for Martin to be given ..." (Brennan, "Weaving", 34); "Martin deserves to wear ..." (de Nie, "Visionary", 80). There are striking differences elsewhere: e.g. "with a border shining with an interweave of twisted gold thread" (Brennan, ibid.) as opposed to "qu'une prétexte étincelante soit attachée sous une torsade d'or"

about the precise identification of the garment: *pallia* could connote "clothing", "clothes" in general or be taken more specifically as a "cloak", perhaps even a "pall". The following alternatives (*aut*; *vel*; *seu*) serve only to complicate the issue, leaving it unclear whether the "gleaming" *praetexta* (purple-bordered toga?) and "hyacinthine toga" represent alternatives (either) or just different possibilities (whether),[38] while the sudden shift to *corona* seems to conflate the making of a flowery garland (*variam rosa, lilia*) with the fabrication of a jewelled artefact.[39] Particularly unexpected is the use of *curreret*. The shock of the grammatical shift from infinitives (*duci*; *necti*) to subjunctive is compounded by the semantic shift from verbs associated with "spinning" and "binding" to the seemingly unrelated "running".[40] The cumulative result seems to be an exaggerated agglomeration of overly elaborate detail with overly complicated structure.

There are further, more tangible indications of satire here in the form of potential intertextual allusion. Labarre suggests the lurking presence of two Virgilian echoes.[41] The first depicts a giant snake as forming a kind of golden chain entwined around the neck.[42] The second references a cloak embroidered in gold with a running purple border given as a victory prize.[43] Both contexts are highly inappropriate: the snake is thrown by Allecto to inflame Amata to madness; the cloak depicts Jupiter's rape of Ganymede. At the same time, two echoes from Paulinus of Périgueux may serve to further point up the irony of the passage as a whole. The first is an elaboration of the wearing of camel hair by Martin's followers as a form of hair-shirt to mortify the flesh.[44] The second, an interpolation following the account of a vision of Christ wearing the cloak given to the pauper, sets this "truly precious cloak" (*o vere pretiosa clamis*) against the purple and gold of worldly pomp.[45] Fortunatus, accordingly, is seen to be giving Martin the gift he would choose instead of the one he would reject.

(Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 67). De Nie renders the toga as "of interlaced blue and white wool", rather than the more usual "pearls" (de Nie, ibid.).

[38] Of the four versions consulted none translates *aut* while Quesnel omits them altogether (Quesnel, *La vie*, 97).

[39] At the start of book 4, Fortunatus has denigrated his poem through the image of a (precious) necklace (*monile*), unpolished and imperfectly wrought (*Vita* 4.18-25). See Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 69.

[40] Quesnel renders it as "faire courir des perles" but leaves the question open (Quesnel, *La Vie*, 168). Labarre justifies it as a double construction after *decuit* and explains it via Virgil as a "running border" (Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 67). See below.

[41] Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 67.

[42] *... fit tortile collo/ aurum ingens coluber* (Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.351-2).

[43] *victori chlamydem auratam, quam plurima circum/ purpura Maeandro duplici Meliboea cucurrit* (ibid. 5. 250-1).

[44] *multis vestis erat saetis contexta cameli,/ quae levibus stimulis vigiles contingeret artus,/ excludens tenuem conpuncta carne soporem ...* (Paulinus of Périgueux, *Vita* 2.141-3 = Kay, Appendix 3, 532). Compare the comment of Labarre: "Fortunat offre à Martin une œuvre indigne de lui, comme s'il lui présentait un vêtement de pénitence" (Labarre, *Le Manteau*, 69).

[45] *... quid tale vel ostro/ vel ducto in filum pensis rutilantibus auro/ insignes meruere habitus? quid serica tactu levia ...?* (Paulinus of Périgueux, *Vita* 1.107-10 = Kay, 520).

The image with which the passage closes, that of the poet's "withering", "exhausted" tongue (*marcida lingua*), in addition to picking up his earlier apology for the spoiled "flowers", may perhaps take on a further resonance here. The injunction to the Book to "seek pardon" for itself (*veniam tibi posce*) picks up the previous request to Martin to *da veniam* (4.617) but may also hark back to the notion of the discontented Book as raised earlier. That is, it (the Book) also stands in need of forgiveness for having forced the poet to engage in the tasteless and exhausting poetic flourishings of the preceding lines. There may be one final layering to the irony. De Nie draws attention to an earlier passage in Book 4 where Fortunatus develops an earlier story to depict a transfigured Martin, veiled in miraculous light, with shining jewels in place of woollen threads.[46] As de Nie notes, this "jewelled mantle" is attributed there not to the work of a human craftsman but to "divine grace".[47] Unlike the later effort this poetic effusion can be seen as both entirely appropriate and divinely sanctioned.

The erudite playfulness of these passages serves both to stamp Fortunatus' individuality on the *Vita* and to bridge the gap with the inventiveness of his lyric output as revealed in the *Carmina*.[48] Notwithstanding the caveats expressed earlier, Kay's edition is to be hailed as a major piece of scholarship and to be celebrated for the richness of its commentary and the accessibility of its translation alike. It is to be hoped that Books 3 and 4 will follow in the not too distant future.

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[46] *quam nova palla tibi cuius textura coruscans,/ trama topazos erat rutilans et stamen iaspis/ et tunicae insignes currunt pro vellere gemmae* (VF, *Vita* 4.322-4). De Nie comments "The poet has taken the «noble» jewels on Martin's hand which he found in his source, specified them, and imaginatively spun them into a whole «new mantle» and «tunic» for the saint" (de Nie, "Poet as visionary", 51). It may also help to explain the use of *curreret* in the later passage as an intratextual echo.

[47] *quis fuit hic opifex ...?*; *est, homo, quod stupeas ubi nectit gratia telas* (VF, *Vita* 4.326; 330) (see de Nie, "Poet as visionary", 80).

[48] Roberts comments that the poem's "wit" foreshadows medieval (and later) religious lyric (M. Roberts, "Venantius Fortunatus's Life of Saint Martin", *Traditio* 57, 2002, 129-87, 151), Quesnel that the poem unites "classicisme et esthétique baroque" (Quesnel, *La Vie*, LXIX).