



CHAPTER 2

PATRONAGE AND EROTIC RHETORIC IN THE SIXTH CENTURY: THE CASE OF VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS

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Many of the papers in this volume are concerned with religious, philosophical, linguistic, and epistemological aspects of medieval erotic rhetoric; this paper is concerned with a more practical aspect — the use of “sweet talk” for material gain. Panegyric, often considered the lowest of literary activities,¹ is the obvious place to look for instances of such activities, and Venantius Fortunatus’s (c. 531–c.609) efforts in the genre have been surprisingly successful, since his *Carmina* have moved several of his most attentive modern readers to admire the sincere, authentic, passionate nature of the self-proclaimed *novus Orpheus*’s² expressions of *amicitia*. An Italian, born in Treviso, trained at Ravenna, who came to France, ostensibly to pay homage to Saint Martin, but not incidentally to escape the political strife in his native land, Fortunatus is best known for composing two major hymns, “Vexilla Regis Prodeunt” and the “Pange Lingua,”³ but he also composed panegyrics for Bishop Gregory of Tours, as well as for other ecclesiastical figures and powerful aristocrats, both men and women. These poems have received less

¹ “Panegyricum est licentiosum, et laciniosum genus dicendi in laudibus regum, in cuius compositione homines multis mendaciis adulantur. Quod malum a Graecis exortum est, quorum levitas instructa dicendi facultate et copia incredibili multas mendaciorum nebulas suscitavit” (Isidore of Seville, 6.VIII.7: Panegyric is a contemptible way of speaking in praise of kings, in the course of whose composition men are glorified mendaciously. The Greeks developed the wretched thing, raising many clouds of lies with remarkable, well-trained skill).

² *Venance Fortunat, Poèmes*, texte établi et traduit par Marc Reydellet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994), 4.

³ *Venance Fortunat*, 5–52, 57–58.

attention, and the judgments made about them in the last hundred and fifty years have been both positive and negative.

For example, Judith George admires the sincerity⁴ of *Carmina* 8.19, in which Fortunatus thanks Gregory for lending him a villa:

. . . poem 8.19 is more than a mere tribute from a poet to his patron. In its literary echoes of the ascetics' use of erotic terminology to express loving friendship, it is a tribute of great feeling to Gregory. There is respect for him as pastor and patron, but there is also personal love.⁵

George's assertions imply that Fortunatus's poems show signs of sincerity, authenticity, and accuracy (three words often invoked in the search for truth), qualities that can be dangerous, unless well disguised, for writers dependent upon patronage.

In addition, *Carmina* 8.19, in which Fortunatus uses *amor* once, and addresses Gregory merely as *care*, "my dear one," it certainly seems to be the work of a cold fish when compared to the extravagant expression of passion provided in mere prose by Paulinus in the opening of his *Epistle* xxiii, 8.19: Si potest mare superfluere obices suos, et quaecumque naturalem plenitudinem servant, incrementum temporale sentire, potest et caritas in te nostra cumulari . . . sollicitas potius gulam caritatis tantoque minus explere gratia litterarum, quanto majorem sedulitate ipsa et humanitate sermonis tui causam suggeris, te ipsum . . . Nam quantus quantus es, qua mente, qua lingua es, totus desiderium es: et mihi dulcedinem Christi sapis ut hortus mihi, *ut odor agri pleni*, quem in odorem unguentorum illius currendo legisti. (*PL* CXI, 256–257)

[If the sea can overflow its barriers, if all that is naturally full can experience a short-lived increase, then my love for you can be enhanced . . . you awake the gluttony of my love. Your failure to satisfy me with the pleasure of your letters is all the greater because by the very diligence and kindness of your words you awake in me a greater desire for seeing you in the flesh . . . All

⁴ The classic work on sincerity is Henri Peyre, *Literature and Sincerity*. Yale Romanic Studies, 2nd Series, 9 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), is also intermittently useful. Harry Frankfurt's recent brief treatment of the topic is playfully provocative: Facts about ourselves are not peculiarly solid and resistant to skeptical dissolution. Our natures are, indeed, elusively insubstantial — notoriously less stable and less inherent than the natures of other things. And insofar as this is the case, sincerity itself is bullshit. (Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], 66–67). See also Judith George, "Venantius Fortunatus: Panegyric in Merovingian Gaul," *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 225–46.

⁵ Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 130.

of you, mind and tongue, I long for. Your savour is for me the sweetness of Christ, like a garden or the smell of a plentiful field⁶]

Though he chooses not to match Paulinus's hyperbole in 8.19, Fortunatus provides a more heated rhetoric elsewhere; for example, two poems to Dynamius reflect what George calls "the tradition of the passionate expression of an ascetic friendship."⁷ Poem 6.9, to Dynamius, written in 567, while Fortunatus was still at Metz, but after Dynamius had returned to Marseilles, contains the startling assertion, *Vulsus ab aspectu, pectore junctus ades*: "torn from my sight, you are joined to my breast," the image of Siamese twins certainly outdoes its classical source or analogue, Horace's less graphic tribute to Vergil: *Et serves animae dimidium meae*, "you keep one half of my soul."

However, Fortunatus uses Horace's line in 7.20, a poem to Sigmund, an officer perhaps in the service of Sigebert, for whom he declares himself steady in love, and panting for news about his *care*; the poem ends with Fortunatus declaring that Sigmund is *pars animae dimidiata meae*:⁸

Quid geris, oro, refer; tamen, ut queo longius opto,
 Uiuas *pars animae dimidiata meae*
 [But please tell me what you are doing; I wish that you, one half of my soul,
 may live as long as possible.]

In 6.10.48, he addresses Dynamius with a variation of the formula, *animae pars mediata meae*, either unaware or heedless of the dogmatic, categorical rejection of the possibility of *amicitia* between men of unequal social rank that Jerome makes, using Horace's very words as an example of deceit:

Amicitia pares aut accipit, aut facit: ubi inaequalitas est, et alterius eminentia, alterius subjectio, ibi non tam amicitia, quam adulatio est. Unde et alibi legimus: Sit amicus eadem anima. Et Lyricus pro amico precans: *Serves*, inquit, *animae dimidium meae* (*Horat.*). Nolite ergo credere in amicis, id est, his hominibus, qui de amicitii sectantur lucra.⁹

[Friendship assumes or makes men equal; where there is inequality, and one man is above and the other below, there is no friendship, but adulation. That is why we read elsewhere, "a friend may be the same soul." And the poet asks

⁶ Trans. by P. G. Walsh, *Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola*, vol. II (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1968), 1, 2.

⁷ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 1992, 143.

⁸ Horace, *The Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. C. E. Bennett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1.3.8 and 2.17.5.

⁹ Jerome on *Micah* II, *PL* 25, c.1219C

his friend, "keep one half of my soul." Therefore do not have faith in friends, that is, men who try to make money from friends.]

In another epistle to Dynamius (VI.10), paraphrased by Judith George as, "The two men are set in the literary world of lovers cruelly separated by malign and cosmic forces . . .",¹⁰ Fortunatus credits his addressee's verse with the powers of intestinal penetration:

Interiora mei penetrans possessor agelli,
Felix perpetue, dulcis amice, uale.

[penetrating the depths of my little field, remain forever happy, sweet friend.]

Fortunatus relentlessly relies on corporeal imagery to give the impression or illusion of intense love, a strategy that is more vivid in his poems addressed to male patrons than to his passionate expressions of *amicitia* to Agnes and Radegund. The use of erotic terminology often disturbs and confuses readers; in addition, Fortunatus's use of an ascetic strategy does not guarantee the genuineness of his feeling for Gregory, since no evidence of his asceticism has survived, while considerable evidence of his sensuality recurs throughout his verse and prose. One of the better known examples occurs in VI.vii, when the poet rhapsodizes about eating apples:

Quod petit instigans auido gula nostra baratro,
excipiunt oculos aurea poma meos.
Undique concurrunt uariato mala colore,
Credas ut pictas me meruisse dapes.
Uix digitis tetigi, fauce hausu, dente rotaui,
Migrauitque alio praeda citata loco.
Nam sapor ante placet, quam traxit naris odorem
Sic uincente gula, naris honore caret.

[Since our appetites, stirring us on, hunt in the great depths, the golden apples capture my eyes. Apples of all colours come piling in from all sides, so you would think I had earned a painted feast. Scarcely had I touched them with my fingers, put them in my mouth, rolled them between my teeth, and the booty, set in motion from that spot, sped down into my belly. For the flavour delighted before it attracted the nose's scent; so the gullet won, whilst the nose lost its glory.]¹¹

¹⁰ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 1992, 144.

¹¹ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 1992, 52.

In a poem to the nun Agnes, whom he apostrophizes as “O uenerandus amor,” he expresses the pleasure he feels upon discovering the imprint of her fingers on the cheese she has sent to him:

Aspexi digitos per lactea munera pressos,
 Et stat picta manus hic ubi crema rapis.
 Dic, rogo, quis teneros sic sculpere compulit utres,
 Daedalus an vobis doctor in arte fuit?
 O uenerandus amor, cujus, faciente rapina,
 Subtracta specie, venit imago mihi.
 Spes fuit haec quoniam tenui se tegmine rupit,
 Nam neque sic habuit pars mihi parva dari.
 Haec facias, longos Domino tribuente per annos,
 In hac luce simul matre manente diu. (XI.xiv)

[I observed the fingerprints over the milky gifts, and your hand remained imprinted here where you pick up the butter pat. Tell me, please, who encouraged your gentle fingers to fashion in that way? Was Daedalus your teacher in this art? O revered love, whose image comes to me, though the mould has been stolen away. But my hope was in vain, for this image broke up in its flimsy covering. Thus not even a small part could be given to me. May you make these over the long years the Lord gives you, with our mother abiding long with you in this life.]¹²

Lines like these moved Richard Koebner to admire Fortunatus’s delicate understanding of the sensuality of feminine celibacy:

Fortunatus stand sinnlichem Fühlen nicht fern, das beweisen seine Gedichte in ihrer Zährlichkeit, in ihrem Verständnis für das erotische Moment der Nonnenandacht und überhaupt für das Fühlen der Frau.¹³

More than a century ago Paul Nisard ended his book on Fortunatus with an impassioned fifteen-page defense of the sincerity and purity of Fortunatus’s *amicitia* not with Gregory, or with Dynamius, but with the nuns Agnes and Rade Gund; about poems XI.9,10, Nisard categorically asserts:

¹² *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, trans. Judith George. Translated Texts for Historians, 23 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 106.

¹³ “Fortunatus was no stranger to sensual feelings, as his poems demonstrate, in their tenderness, in their understanding of the erotic component of a nun’s devotion, and in their general understanding of a woman’s feelings.” Richard Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus: seine Persönlichkeit und seine Stellung in der geistigen Kultur des Merowingerreiches* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1915), 46.

C'est une protestation pleine de dignité et de mesure; c'est l'accent de la vérité dans sa candeur intrépide et modeste, c'est l'expression de la tendresse même qui trouve l'éloquence pour se relever . . .¹⁴

On the other hand, by calling for "douce tolérance" toward Fortunatus's "galanterie,"¹⁵ he concedes the possibility that the poet was less than entirely sincere, and Nisard goes even further when he complains about the poet's compulsive desire to please, "il voulait plaire et toujours plaire, mettant presque cette qualité au-dessus de celle de poète et s'y laissant aller jusqu'à la bassesse."¹⁶ Nisard, however, like George, neglects to consider the complexity as well as the ambiguity generated by a priest establishing *amicitia* with patronesses who were nuns, one of whom was also, not incidentally, a former queen.¹⁷ Fortunatus himself acknowledges part of the problem, and perhaps protests too much, when he insists that the intense nature of his feelings for Agnes, although it involves *amor*,¹⁸ is like that which one feels conventionally for a mother and a sister, i.e., spiritual, not physical. Again, to represent the intensity of his feeling, he invokes breasts and the womb:

Mater honore mihi, soror autem dulcis amore,
 quam pietate fide pectore corde colo,
 caelesti affectu, non crimine corporis ullo:
 non caro, sed hoc quod spiritus corporis amo. (XI.vi 1–4)
 testis adest Christus, Petro Pauloque ministris,
 cumque piis sociis sancta Maria uidet,
 te mihi non aliis oculis animoque fuisse,
 quam soror ex utero tu Titania fores,
 si uno partu mater Radegundis utrosque,
 uisceribus castis progenuisset, eram,
 et tamquam pariter nos ubera cara beatae
 pauissent uno lacte fluente duos.
 heu mihi damna gemo, tenui ne forte susurro
 impediant sensum noxia uerba meum;

¹⁴ "It is a protestation full of dignity and measure, it has the accent of truth in its bold and modest directness, it is an expression of tenderness which even finds the eloquence to enoble itself." Charles Nisard, *Le poète Fortunat* (Paris: H. Champion, 1890), 189.

¹⁵ Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat, Poèmes*, lvi–lvii, also admires Fortunatus's expressions of friendship, asserting that they are warmer than what is found in Sidonius or Ennodius.

¹⁶ Nisard, *Le poète Fortunat*, 139–40.

¹⁷ See Jacques Fontaine, "Hagiographie et politique," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 62 (1976): 113–40; here 115: "Radegonde ait été à la fois hors du monde et dans le monde."

¹⁸ Chaucerians will recall the profound ambiguity of *amor* inscribed on the Prioress' brooch, ll. 160–62 of the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*.

sed tamen est animus simili me uiuere uoto,
si uos me dulci uultis amore coli.¹⁹

[Mother to me in honour, sister sweetly loved, whom I esteem with devotion, faith, heart and soul, with heavenly affection, and not with any bodily sin; I love, not in the flesh, but what the spirit yearns for . . . Christ is my witness, with Peter and Paul by His side, and holy Mary looking on with her godly host, that you were nothing other to me in sight and spirit than if you had been my sister by birth, Titania, and as if our mother Radegund had given birth to both of us in a single delivery from her chaste womb, as though the dear breasts of the blessed mother had nurtured the two of us with a single stream of milk. Alas, I bewail my danger, the fear lest by a slight whisper malicious words thwart my feelings ; but yet it is my intent to live with the same hopes, if you wish me to be cherished with sweet love.]²⁰

To infer, then, that Fortunatus exploited erotic terminology to produce the effect it clearly had more than 1300 years later on nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars such as Nisard, Koebner and George, and may or may not have had on its original recipient, does not require strenuous effort. In any event, a friendship between a man as powerful as Bishop Gregory and a man far more economically and socially vulnerable than his significant predecessors in panegyric (Paulinus [353–431 A.D.], Ausonius [310–394?], Sidonius [430–479?], were from wealthy, aristocratic families) was as complex in the sixth century A.D. as it was between Maecenas and Horace in the first century B.C.²¹

Recent work on patronage and poetry later in the Middle Ages tries to establish a less sentimental perspective on the problem. In the process of examining eleventh- and twelfth-century courtly behavior, C. Stephen Jaeger argues that “The language of favor relationships at court was the language of love.”²² As described by Lynn Staley, Ricardian speech-acts in fourteenth-century England also resemble Merovingian behavior eight centuries earlier:

. . . the *language* of love is social and should be understood as practiced within a set of conditions that, in the case of the medieval court, cannot be

¹⁹ *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortunati Opera Poetica*, ed. F. Leo. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 4, 1 (Munich: Monumenta Germanicae Historica, 1881), 260–61.

²⁰ *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal Poems*, trans. George, 1995, 52.

²¹ For a discussion of the necessity of understanding the complex nature of *amicitia* in Horace, see I. M. Le M. Du Quesnay, “Horace, *Odes* 4. 5,” *Homage to Horace: a Bimillenary Celebration*, ed. S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 128–87.

²² C. Stephen Jaeger, *Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 104.

understood without reference to power and to the terms of social harmony that power produces.²³

Expressions of affection, then, between two unequals, as Jerome insisted, stand virtually no chance of being reliable testimony to authentic feeling.

Some recent work on Horace's relationship to Maecenas has attempted to free him from the demands of sincerity. According to D. P. Fowler, "any concern for 'sincerity' or even 'authenticity' is a blind alley."²⁴ According to Gregson Davis, the only authenticity that can be claimed for Horace is as "an authentic composer of lyric song."²⁵ In his vigorous search for patronage, Fortunatus, whom George calls "a poet of Horatian pedigree,"²⁶ demonstrates a blatant, compulsive desire to please ("il voulait plaire et toujours plaire, mettant presque cette qualité au-dessus de celle de poète et s'y laissant aller jusqu'à la bassesse"),²⁷ making himself a far more vivid example than Horace of what Vasily Rudich, in his study of Lucan, calls, "the rhetoricized mentality":²⁸

... by definition, the rhetoricized mentality is indifferent to truth and falsity and resists any attempt at consistency. . . . The forms it takes differ in different contexts, but it always helps to privilege manner over matter, ideas over facts, and fiction over truth.²⁹

The most dramatic, if not notorious example of Fortunatus's indifference to truth occurs in *Carmina* 6.5, a lament for the death of Galswinth, who, according to Gregory of Tours, had been murdered by her husband Chilperic, enraged at her refusal to accept Fredegund's rival presence (576 A.D.). As Kurt Steinman has pointed out:

²³ Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 57.

²⁴ D. P. Fowler, "Horace and the Aesthetics of Politics," *Homage to Horace*, 248–66; here 249. But the most complex discussion of patronage and poetry in Horace occurs in Phebe Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), particularly in the chapter "From Patron to Friend," 161–210.

²⁵ Gregson Davis, *Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 247.

²⁶ George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 1992, 181.

²⁷ Nisard, *Le poète Fortunat*, 139–40.

²⁸ Vasily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization* (London: Routledge, 1997), 156–69, et alibi. Stephen Hinds's description (*Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Lyrics* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 86) of Lucan, "... a poet whose voice is so immoderate that his modern critics can variously accuse him of excessive obsequiousness to Nero, excessive hostility to Caesarism, and both in the same poem . . .," suggests that the first-century poet and Fortunatus may have found themselves in similar predicaments.

²⁹ Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature*, 156.

dass ein anonymes Schicksal, nicht der Wille Chilperichs für die Tat verantwortlich gemacht wird, entbehrt das Gedicht im entscheidenden Punkt durch das Verschweigen des Täters der historischen Wahrheit.³⁰

Steinman goes on to point out that Fortunatus blames only *improba sors* for her death, borrowing the phrase from Lucan IV.503, perhaps because those who live under tyrants find it safer to blame impersonal forces than individual human beings.

In his paper on the strategies of lament and consolation in 6.5, Gregson Davis adds the complexities of genre to the problem of determining Fortunatus's concern with the truth, focusing upon the elaborate obfuscation of the style of the poem:³¹

The very elaborateness and profusion of the lament in contrast to the curtailed consolation are a clear index that something gross and unnatural has occurred" (Davis 120). "The framework of lament which Fortunatus adopts with minor modifications is that of Classical amatory style as exemplified by the erotic *epyllion* of Latin epic and elegiac poets (Davis 125).³²

The result is a strange mingling of epithalamium and funeral oration, compounded out of erotic topoi, ornamented with alliteration and *annominatio*, and concluding with an intensely carnal embrace of mother and daughter that falls just short of the child crawling back into her mother's womb:

Cum primum algentes iungi peteretur ad arctos,
regia regali Gelesuinta toro,
Fixa Cupidineis caperet ut frigora flammis,
Uiueret et gelida sub regione calens,
Hoc ubi uirgo metu, audituque exterrita sensit,
Currit ad amplexus, Goisuinta, tuos;
Tunc matris collecta sinu, male sana reclinans,
Ne diuellatur, se tenet, ungue, manu.

³⁰ "... that an anonymous fate, not the will of Chilperic, is blamed for the deed deprives the poem, at a decisive point, by remaining silent about the perpetrator, of historical truth." Kurt Steinmann, *Die Gelesuintha-Elegie des Venantius Fortunatus (Carmen VI 5): Text, Übersetzung, Interpretation* (Zürich: Juris Druck + Verlag, 1975), 182–83. Heinz Hoffman has pointed out that panegyric tends to suppress historical reality in the panegyric epic of Fortunatus's contemporary, Corippus, as well as what Hoffman calls Fortunatus's "hagiographisches Martinepos," "Überlegungen zu einer Theorie der nichtchristlichen Epik der lateinischen Spätantike," *Philologus* 132 (1988): 101–59; here 105.

³¹ Gregson Davis, "Ad sidera notus: Strategies of Lament and Consolation in Fortunatus's *De Gelesuintha*," *Agon* I (1967): 118–34.

³² Davis, *Polyhymnia*, 120, 125; see also Sven Blomgren, "Der P. Papinii Statii apud Venantium Fortunatum vestigiis," *Eranos* 48 (1950): 57–65.

Brachia constringens nectit sine fune catenam,
 Et matrem amplexu per sua membra ligat.
 Illis uisceribus retineri filia poscens,
 Ex quibus ante sibi lucis origo fuit.
 Committens secura ejus se fasce leuari,
 Cujus clausa uteri pignore tuta fuit. (ll. 23–36)

[When first royal Galswinth was sought in marriage for a regal bed in the chill north (when, transfixed by the fires of Cupid, she here desired the cold and lived well warmed in an icy realm), when the maiden, beside herself with fear and with what she heard, realised this, she fled to your embrace, Goiswinth; then, with mind disturbed, lying enfolded in her mother's embrace, she clung with nail, with hand, so that she would not be dragged away. Bringing her arms together she wove a chain without a rope and bound her mother in her embrace with her own limbs, demanding as a daughter to be kept still by that flesh from which earlier the beginnings of her life had been; entrusting herself in confidence to be cared for by her royal power, in whose womb she had been safe and secure.]³³

This grotesque sequence is a vivid illustration of Fortunatus's frequent reliance on "body language" to intensify whatever emotional impact he wants to generate. Even (or unavoidably) when he composes a poem on virginity, "the flavour is decidedly erotic."³⁴

In addition to his steady reliance on images of "the lower bodily stratum,"³⁵ Fortunatus relies on euphony, and specifically alliteration, to create the illusion of intensity. The first four lines of XI.6 show some of the things that he can do with the letter "c",

Mater honore mihi, soror autem dulcis amore,
 quam pietate fide pectore corde colo,
 caelesti affectu, non crimine corporis ullo:
 non caro, sed hoc quod spiritus corporis amo. (XI.vi 1–4),

³³ *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, trans. George, 41. See now M. Rouche, "Autocensure et diplomatie chez Fortunat, à propos de l'élégie sur Galeswinthe," *Venantio Fortunato tra Italia e Francia: atti del convegno internazionale di studi: Valdobbiadene 17 maggio 1990 - Treviso 18–19 maggio 1990*, ed. Tiziana Ragusa and Bruno Termite (Treviso: Provincia di Treviso, 1993), 149–59; also Sven Blomgren, "Bemerkungen zur Gelesuintha-Elegie des Venantius Fortunatus," *Eranos* 81 (1983): 131–38. More than a thousand years later Spenser and Milton will emphasize the grotesque implications of the image in their representations of Error and Sin (*Fairy Queen* l.i.xv; *Paradise Lost* II, 649 ff.).

³⁴ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*. Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 84. Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus, *Poésies mêlées* ed. and trans. Charles Nisard and Eugène Rittier (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887), Dissertation Préliminaire, 28.

³⁵ A phrase popularized by Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1968), passim.

although they of course fall far short of the encomium of Charles the Bald composed more than 300 years later by the musical Hucbald; the entire poem, every word of which begins with “c,” exceeds 130 lines.³⁶

Even in prose Fortunatus cannot restrain his penchant for alliteration: “dum captivi solvere lora cupio, me catena constringo.”³⁷ But his works in verse far outnumber those in prose; in the very first poem in the latest edition, Fortunatus limits himself to the pleasures of assonance in the first line, provides alliterating g’s in the second line, and then bursts out with four v’s in the third line:

Antistes domini, meritis in saecula uiuens,
Gaudia qui Christi de grege pastor habes,
Cum te Uitaleu uoluit uocitare uetustas . . . (I.i)

[Bishop of the Lord, living through the ages because of your worthy deeds, who possesses joys as a shepherd of the flock of Christ, since your parents wanted to name you Vital . . .]

In *Carmina* IV.xxii, an epitaph for two brothers buried alongside their mother, he does not match the bathos of Ennius’ *O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti*, but

Non flenda infantia fratrum
Simili sunt sorte sepulti
[baby brothers not to be wept for, buried by the same fate]

shows great aptitude in the art of sinking.³⁸

But his greatest self-indulgence occurs in *Carmina* X.ix, a poem on Childebert, in which Fortunatus compounds alliteration with polyptoton and assonance through the first ten lines of a fourteen-line poem, using his prosodic ornaments the way desperate amateur fiddlers use vibrato:

Rex, regionis apex, et supra regna regimen,
Qui caput es capitum, vir capitale bonum.
Ornamentorum ornatus, ornatus ornans,
Qui decus, atque decens, cuncta decenter agis.
Primus, et a primis, prior et primoribus ipsis,
Qui potes ipse potens, quem iuvat Omnipotens.

³⁶ *PL* CXXXII, c. 1041–45.

³⁷ In a letter to Syagrius, *PL* 88, c.194a; Cf. Max Manitius’s judgment, “. . . aber zu einer stehenden Form ist bei ihm die Alliteration geworden, die er manchmal in störender Weise verwendet . . .” *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Munich: Beck, 1911), vol. I, 177.

³⁸ See L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 25–28, for a sketch of the kinds of difficulties that arise when one tries to assess aesthetically the use of alliteration.

Dulcia delectans, dulcis, dilecta potestas,
Spes bona, vel bonitas, de bonitate bonus.

Digne, nec indignans, dignus, dignatio dignans,
Florum flos florens, florea flore fluens.
Childeberte cluens haec Fortunatus amore,
Paupere de censu pauper et ipse fero.
Audulfum comitem commendo supplice uoto,
Me quoque; sic nobis hic domineris apex.

[King, leader of the area, and reign above kingdoms, you are the head of heads, a man who is true chief good, the ornament of ornaments, which ornaments more ornately, you who are the glory, and glorious, lead all things gloriously, first, (etc., *ad nauseam*)].

The link early in this passage between power and ornament clearly is second nature for a poet dependent on patronage.

The indulgence in sonic ornament that characterizes the *Carmina* also runs rampant in the *Life of Saint Martin*, where the poet indulges his fondness for alliteration to the greatest extent, producing lines in which every word alliterates, and polyptoton and assonance abound:

Foedere fida fides formosat foeda fidelis (I.506)³⁹

[faithful faith, strengthened by divine pact, made ugliness lovely]

Having restrained himself for the first seventeen lines of the poem, Fortunatus unleashes:

prudens prudenter Prudentius immolat actus.⁴⁰ (Leo 296)

[wise Prudentius wisely heaped up an offering of their deeds]

Although the *Carmina* contain, as his most recent editor and translator asserts,⁴¹ the most personal work of Fortunatus, the *Life of Saint Martin*, becomes urgently personal when Fortunatus introduces himself into the poem, experiencing the

³⁹ As quoted by Guido Maria Dreves, *Hymnologische Studien zu Venantius Fortunatus und Rabanus Maurus*. Veröffentlichungen aus dem Kirchenhistorischen Seminar München, Reihe III, 3 (Munich: J. J. Lentner, 1908), 23. Earlier Christian poets had shown greater restraint: for what was common practice for Paulinus of Nola, Ausonius, and Juvencus; see R. P. H. Green, *The Poetry of Paulinus of Nola: A Study of His Latinity*. Collection Latomus, 120 (Brussels: Latomus, 1971), 104–05.

⁴⁰ Solange Quesnel, ed. and trans., *Vie de Saint Martin* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1996).

⁴¹ Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat, Poèmes*, xviii, calls it “l’œuvre la plus longue et la plus personnelle de Fortunat, celle où révéle le mieux les qualités de l’homme et de l’écrivain.”

miraculous ophtalmological powers of the saint. First he describes the miraculous cure that occurred when Paulinus stood before the picture of Martin:

Paulinique oculum tetia caligine mersum
inpositis manibus radius penetrauit acutus
atque **serena** dies detersa nube refulsit,
lumen et emicuit facies non lusca gemellum
Martini digitis oleo manante lucernae,
cuncta salutifero superans collyria tactu. (II.38–43)

[The sharp ray penetrated Paulinus' eye, buried in a dark cloud (leucoma), when Martin placed his hands on it, and the serene day gleamed when the cloud had been removed, and the light shone on his face, no longer blind. From Martin's fingers flowed oil whose touch surpassed all unguents.]

Fortunatus's hexameters certainly outdo the rhetoric of his model, Sulpicius Severus's account in plain prose of how Martin healed Paulinus's eyes:

Paulinus vero, vir magni postmodum futurus exempli, cum oculum graviter dolere coepisset, et jam pupillam ejus crassior nubes superducta texisset, oculum ei Martinus peniculo contigit, pristinamque ei sanitatem sublato omni dolore restituit.⁴²

[Paulinus, a famous man, who in the future was destined to be an example, suffered grievously in one of his eyes, of which the pupil was already obscured by a thick film. Martin touched the eye with a sponge, delivered his friend entirely from all suffering, and restored to him his previous good health.]

After describing the church and the picture of Martin on the wall, Fortunatus goes on to insert a description of his own healing by St. Martin:⁴³

huc ego dum propero, ualido torquente dolore,
diffugiente gemens oculorum luce fenestris,
quo procul ut tetigi benedicto lumen oliuo,
igneus ille uapor marcenti fronte recessit
et praesens medicus blando fugat unguine morbos. (IV.694–98)

⁴² *Vita Martini* 19.3/4: www.thelatinlibrary.com/sulpiciusseverusmartin.html (last accessed on March 1, 2006); Sulpicius Severus is himself by no means a restrained hagiographer; see Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 183–202 *et alibi*.

⁴³ *Vita Martini* 4.689–701.

[I quickly came closer, in great pain, groaning because light was fleeing from the windows of my eyes. As soon as I touched my eyelids with the consecrated oil, the fiery cloud disappeared from my face, and the physician drove off the malady with his mild unguent.]

The relatively chaste rhetorical restraint of this passage, particularly the fastidiously reduced alliteration, suggests that one of Fortunatus's strategies for generating the illusion of truth was to strip away some of the most obvious ornaments, although he does add the presence of a mysterious light, which he might have borrowed from any number of Biblical passages representing divine intervention, to the description of his own cure.⁴⁴

Wallace-Hadrill⁴⁵ accepts the autobiographical insertion as factual, but Marc Reydellet categorically asserts that "... le visite au tombeau de saint Martin ne fut qu'un prétexte... chargé de ce qu'un pourrait nommer une offensive de charme."⁴⁶ In her edition of Fortunatus's *Life of Saint Martin*, Solange Quesnel also is struck by Fortunatus's attempt to "charm,"⁴⁷ but Brian Brennan provides the strongest contextual support for skeptical resistance:

In an age ever ready for miracle stories, what better way would a poet have of gaining the attention of bishops and clergy, as well as the interest of the Bishop of Tours, one of Gaul's most important metropolitans, than association with Martin, the most popular of Gallic saints and the patron of Tours.⁴⁸

In addition, as Giselle de Nie has pointed out, "Fortunatus's story is the first in the West, and as far as I know the only one in this period, explicitly to mention an expression of the healing 'presence' of a saint through his picture, rather than a relic or a tomb."⁴⁹

Writing himself into Martin's life, Fortunatus's self-impersonation⁵⁰ also provides material for answering yes to the rhetorical question Paul De Man asked twenty-six years ago :

⁴⁴ Cf. *Acts* 9.3–4, 22.6–16, 26.12–18; *John* 1.1–41; *Isaiah* 42.6–7.

⁴⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 82.

⁴⁶ Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat, Poèmes*, xv.

⁴⁷ Quesnel, *Vie de Saint Martin*, xi.

⁴⁸ Brian Brennan, "The Career of Venantius Fortunatus," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 49–78; here 55.

⁴⁹ Giselle de Nie, *Word, Image and Experience: Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul*. Variorum Collected Studies Series, 771 (Burlington: Ashgate/Variorum, 2003), chapter XII, 110.

⁵⁰ As Gerald A. Bond uses the term in *The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), passim.

We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences; can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of the medium?⁵¹

The Life of Saint Martin is, of course, like all hagiography, a panegyric, a genre in which accuracy, sincerity, and truth are not primary requisites.

An example of Fortunatus's ruthless disregard of accuracy, perhaps more blatant than his elegy for Galswinth, occurs in 9.1, a panegyric of Chilperic composed in 580, in what some have seen as a betrayal of Gregory of Tours, who had called King Chilperic the "Nero nostri temporis et Herodes."⁵² Others, however, have argued that it was a clever way of smoothing things out between Gregory and Chilperic. Whatever his purposes, offering an accurate representation of historical reality was not one of them; Steinmann asserts categorically that one of them certainly was self-serving:

Im Panegyricus auf Chilperic Chilperich I.X.1, der im Zusammenhang mit der Biographie des Dichters schon kurz besprochen wurde, nimmt F. Zuflucht zu Lügen und Vertuschung der Wahrheit, um im Auftrag des Episkopats den brüskierten König versöhnlich zu stimmen.⁵³

Since he is not reliable about the details of his own life, nor sincere about the emotions he expresses, what remains is the proposal that he is meticulous about his craft. Significantly, Nisard says that Fortunatus *nearly* placed pleasing people above poetry; one apparent example of this virtue occurs during a panegyric of bishop Bertram of Bordeaux. After heaping twelve lines of hyperbolic praise on the bishop himself, Fortunatus is unable to restrain himself from injecting some literary criticism:

Sed tamen in uestro quaedam sermone notau
Carmine de ueteri furta nouella loqui;
Ex quibus in paucis superaddita syllaba fregit,
Et pede laesa suo musica cloda gemit. (III.xviii 13–15)

⁵¹ Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 919–30. Another useful contrast, between organic and morphological elements in medieval autobiography, is offered by Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* (Bern: A. Francke, 1949), vol. II: *Das Mittelalter*. Part I: *Die Frühzeit*, 21–22.

⁵² *Historia Francorum* VI.46 www.thelatinlibrary.com/gregorytours6.html (last accessed on March 1, 2006).

⁵³ "In the panegyric for Chilperic I X 1, about which we just spoke, F.(ortunatus) takes refuge in lies, covering up the truth, at the express order of the bishop, to conciliate the snubbed king," Steinmann, *Die Gelesuintha-Elegie des Venantius Fortunatus*, 200.

[But I see that some of the lines have been stolen from an old poem, and the music of the verse is hobbled by a miscounted foot.]

First to accuse him of plagiarism (*furta* in this context seems stronger than “borrowed”), then of composing verse whose music simultaneously limps and groans because of an inability to count syllables — surprisingly blunt charges for panegyric — suggest that Nisard’s *presque* was the right word; for the *novus Orpheus*, poetry might sometimes have been even more important than pleasing patrons. In his panegyric of King Charibert, Fortunatus praises the king’s eloquence, but not his verse (VI.2.97–100). But Chilperic receives extensive praise not only for his religious faith and administrative fairness, but also for his literary accomplishments, an area in which Gregory had disdainfully dismissed the king.⁵⁴

More complex, however, is the poem in which Fortunatus compliments Radigund for her verse, connecting *sinceros* with gustatory delight, declaring their breasts or hearts (George here translates *pectora* as singular, consciously or unconsciously intensifying the intimacy) linked:

In breuibus tabulis mihi carmina magna dedisti,
 Quae uacuuus ceris reddere mella potes;
 Multiplices epulas per gaudia festa ministras,
 Sed mihi plus audio sunt tua uerba cibus:
 Uersiculos mittis placido sermone refectos,
 In quorum dictis pectora nostra ligas.
 Omnia sufficient aliis quae dulcia tractas,
 At mihi **sinceros** det tua lingua fauos.
 Supplico me recolas inter pia uerba sororum,
 Uerius ut matrem te mea uota probent:
 Omnibus et reliquis, te commendante, reformer,
 Ut per uos merear quod mea causa rogat.⁵⁵

[You have given me great verse on small tablets, you can create honey in the empty wax; you bestow a feast of many courses in the joyful festivities, but your words are sustenance to me for which I am even more eager, you send little verses composed of charming speech, by whose words you bind our heart. All the delicacies you produce are sufficient for the others, but to me may your tongue grant pure honey. I pray that you remember me among the holy words of the sisters, that prayers for me make you my mother all the more truly; through your commendation, may I be restored to all the others, that I am worthy to attain through you what my plea requests.⁵⁶]

⁵⁴ *Historia Francorum*, 4.51, 5.39, quoted from www.thelatinlibrary.com/gregorytours6.html (last accessed on March 1, 2006).

⁵⁵ Appendix xxxi, Nisard, *Poésies mêlées*, 1887, 281.

⁵⁶ *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, trans. George, 120–21.

Translating *sinceros* as “empty”—it is a pun: *sin - cere*: “without wax [cerum]”—loses the physical quality of honey, that is, it is clear, or pure, and sensually pleasing, qualities Fortunatus often associates with women in general (and typically medieval, in accord with the theories propounded on the third function by Dumézil and Duby),⁵⁷ and with Agnes and Radegund specifically; he also arranges for *uerius* to appear two lines later, reinforcing the connection between sincerity and truth; finally, he balances the potentially hyperbolic *carmina magna* of the first line of the poem with the reductive *versiculos*, a word that might imply that her lines are not *aere perennius*, and that he has not categorically sacrificed his artistic standards to please the queen who became a nun.

Fortunatus’s use of *sinceros* in this poem and elsewhere in his verse, where he often links “sincerity” with “serenity,” may signify more than his relentless appetite for alliteration, since “sincerity” and “serenity” provide two of the three elements juxtaposed with the third element, “truth,” by Augustine in an explication of the book of *Genesis*, where he speaks of the clarity and serenity of the sky as analogues for the truth, and specifically as qualities to be found in virtuous creatures:

Quapropter non absurde existimari potest firmamentum coeli in divinis Scripturis usque ad haec spatia vocari, ut et ille aer tranquilli simus et sincerissimus ad firmamentum pertinere credatur. Hoc enim nomine firmamenti, ipsa tranquillitas et magna pars rerum significari potest. Unde etiam illud dici pluribus in Psalmis existimo: *Et veritas tua usque ad nubes* (Psal. XXXV, 6; et LVI, 11). Nihil est enim firmitus et *serenius veritate*. Nubes autem sub ista *sincerissimi* aeris regione concresecunt. Quod quanquam figurate dictum accipiatur, ex his tamen rebus scriptum est, quae habent ad haec quamdam similitudinem; ut corporea creatura constantior et purior, quae a summitate coeli usque ad nubes est, *veritatis* figuram recte habere videatur, id est usque ad aerem caliginosum et procellosum et humidum.⁵⁸

[For this reason it is plausible to consider the firmament of the sky in holy scripture as the space up to this region, so that this most peaceful and clearest air may be believed to belong to the firmament. Therefore, by the name

⁵⁷ For a discussion of these terms, see Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (1978; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). Duby develops the scheme, originally devised by Georges Dumézil. The latter points out that one function is more difficult to define, the one associated with the categories of labor and fecundity (*L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*. Collection Latomus, 31 [Brussels: Latomus, 1958], 19. See also Jean Flori, *L'Essor de la chevalerie: Xie–XIIe siècles*. Travaux d'histoire éthico-politique, 46 (Geneva: Droz, 1986), for an attempt to apply tri-functionality to a study of feudal ritual; Joel H. Grisward's *Archéologie de l'épopée médiévale: structures trifonctionnelles et mythes indo-européens dans le cycle des Narbonnais*. Bibliothèque historique (Paris: Payot, 1981), offers an application of trifunctionality to a specific medieval genre. See also Robert Levine, “Baptizing Pirates: *Argumenta* and *Fabula* in Norman *historia*,” *Mediaevistik* 4 (1991): 157–78.

⁵⁸ *PL* 34, c. 239.

“firmament” this peacefulness and the great part of things may be signified. It is for this reason I believe that it is said in several psalms: “your truth reaches to the clouds” (Ps. 35:6; 56:11). Nothing is stronger and clearer than the truth. Although it is meant figuratively, it is written about things which bear some resemblance to these words; then bodily creation, more constant and purer, which stretches from the top of the sky down to the clouds, seems to be an appropriate figure for the truth, that is, up to the dark, stormy, wet air.]

In another work, arguing that Julian has not understood the difference between love and lust; Augustine also chains “serenity”, “sincerity”, and “truth”:

Audi ergo apertam sententiam meam, et intellige vel sine intelligere alios, non offundendo caligines nebulosae disputationis *serenitati sincerissimae veritatis*.

[Hear my open declaration, and understand it, or permit others to understand, raising no more mists of obscurity about the serenity of the most sincere truth].⁵⁹

In Augustine’s Epistle 242, the three words occur in two consecutive sentences, with “truth” occurring twice in the second sentence:

Ita excedentes animalis hominis caliginosas imagines, ad *serenitatem* illam *sinceritatem*que veniemus, qua videre possumus quod dici non posse videmus.

5. Nam libello quem dignatus es mittere, si mihi sit otium, facultasque tribuatur ad singula respondere, arbitrator te cogniturum tanto minus quemque vestiri lumine **veritatis**, quanto magis sibi videtur nudam depromere *veritatem*.⁶⁰

[Thus going beyond the nebulous images of the human animal, we may come to that serenity and sincerity by means of which we may see what cannot be said. For by this little book which you have deigned to send, if I have the time and ability to reply in detail, I think that you will understand that the less one is wrapped in the light of truth the more he seems to himself to partake of truth directly.]

Augustine, in turn, may have been following the third-century commentary on I *Corinthians* v.vii in which Cyprian links truth and sincerity:

⁵⁹ *Contra Julianum*, liber quintus, caput ix. 37; trans. from *Against Julian*. trans. Matthew A. Schumacher. Fathers of the Church, 16 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1957), vol. 16, 281.

⁶⁰ *PL* 33, c. 1053.

XVI. . . Itaque festa celebremus, *non in fermento vetere, neque in fermento malitiae et nequitiae, sed in azymis sinceritatis et veritatis* (I Cor. V, 7). Num inceritas perseverat et *veritas* quando quae *sincera* sunt polluantur colorum adulteriis et adulterinis medicaminum fucis in mendacium *vera* mutantur?⁶¹

[Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." But are sincerity and truth preserved, when what is sincere is polluted by adulterous colours, and what is true is changed into a lie by the deceitful dyes of medicaments?]⁶²

If we accept the nexus of serenity, sincerity, and truth as a patristic commonplace, developed and expanded from its appearance in the New Testament, then Fortunatus's use of the word *sinceritas* is clearly taken from the letter, not from the spirit.

An Italian understandably anxious in Merovingian Gaul, Fortunatus was a perpetually oscillating self-impersonator who made use of the rhetoric of passionate friendship, a subdivision of the rhetoric of sincerity, developed in antiquity and transmitted by Augustine and others, to win friends, and, eventually, a bishopric.⁶³ Sentimental in several senses of the word, a textbook illustration of the rhetoricized mentality, he manipulated a sensual vocabulary through several genres of poetry; the only passionate attachment that can be demonstrated from his secular poetry is to poetry itself; prosodic competence was (though discontinuously) more important than pleasing patrons; otherwise, the *novus Orpheus* was, to borrow Wallace Stevens' phrase, a "bawd of euphony."

⁶¹ *PL* IV, c. 455b.

⁶² Translation from www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0280/_PH.HTM (last accessed on March 1, 2006).

⁶³ Michael Roberts shows how well Fortunatus serves his masters, even when writing a poem about a river, in "The Description of Landscape in the Poetry of Fortunatus: The Moselle Poems," *Traditio* 49 (1994): 1–22; here 22: "the scenery of the Moselle valley serves to idealize and hypothesize the cultural systems that have Fortunatus's addressees at their head...The elements of this system are present in the *Mosella*, but diffused with ambiguous evaluation. In Fortunatus they are employed, for the most part unproblematically, to legitimate the new powers in Merovingian Gaul."

