

HAGIOGRAPHY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY IN THE WORK OF GREGORY OF TOURS

John H. Corbett

The rich literature associated with the Desert Fathers provides convincing evidence of the important role played by charismatic figures in the transformation of Late Antiquity.¹ In the West the *Life of St Martin* by Sulpicius Severus and, even more explicitly, his *Dialogues (Concerning St Martin)*² demonstrate how quickly and completely this charismatic style infected the Latin-speaking western Empire, hardly a century after it had come to attract widespread attention in the East. Several studies by Peter Brown have done much to clarify the social processes attested to in this literature, the rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, and his function as a "village patron."³ These great "friends of God" served as the centres around which the new Christian social order accreted,⁴ leading in the East to a revival of the urban life of pagan antiquity but in the West to a new social order -- essentially the social order of mediaeval Christendom -- organized around the cult of the saints, now carefully regulated by an episcopal elite largely drawn from the old Gallo-Roman aristocracy.⁵

For our knowledge of these processes in later Roman Gaul, we owe a special debt to the literature associated with St Martin, to the writing of Sulpicius Severus which gives us insight into the crucial formative period of this cult (ca. A.D. 400), and to the work of Gregory of Tours which presents to us a broad canvas depicting most aspects of life in the sixth-century *Regnum Francorum* -- not least the cult of St Martin.⁶ It should be emphasized here that this picture of Martin, in my opinion, accurately represents the

social reality of his cult -- however much Martin owes to his two inspired propagandists. In fact, attention to the detail which Gregory reports in his four books about St Martin suggests that Brown's central thesis concerning the social function of the saint as patron can be substantiated much more completely. Both the language of the participants in the cult of Martin (technical vocabulary of Roman *patrocinium*) and, even more significantly, their behaviour, as described by Gregory, belong to a ritual of appeal to the saint, modelled on appeals to secular patrons, in which the circumstances and manner of the appeal, as well as its outcome, are prescribed by custom. More important than the miraculous element in the stories of healing, exorcism, and helping which Gregory reports are what we might call the social, or even political, elements: striking features of Gregory's account are the weakness of the appellants, their need for a strong patron, and the role of the saint in satisfying that need, often through the bishop who was his formal representative in this world.⁷

It is to Gregory's hagiographic work that we owe this insight into the functioning of Martin's cult in the later sixth century. In this respect the four books in which Gregory collected *The Miraculous Deeds of St Martin* simply exemplify the experience of the Holy reflected in many of Gregory's hagiographic works.⁸ But the *VSM* of Gregory of Tours is very far from conforming to the usual standards of "literary" hagiography (as evidenced even in Gregory's own writings).⁹ In fact, the *VSM* is a running collection in four books, totalling 207 chapters, in the manner of a modern social worker's case notes, concerning appeals made to St Martin and his deeds in response to such appeals, as witnessed by Gregory or carefully collected from eyewitnesses, for the most part over the twenty years of Gregory's episcopacy (A.D. 573-594).¹⁰ This being so, it is the more remarkable that the appeals which Gregory reports fall into a number of clear categories and that this classification remains remarkably consistent over the twenty-plus years in which the appeals were recorded. By the mid sixth century at least, if we can believe Gregory's account, there was already a wide social consensus as to the nature and effect of the *praesentium signorum munera*, as Gregory calls them (*VSM* I, 1). The cult of the saint was not something subject to being "developed" in one way or another by the bishop responsible for its supervision; rather, the bishop himself participated in the established relationship, as Gregory's frequent reports of his own appeals amply attest. This does not prevent us from recognizing Gregory as an able propagandist, but nothing entitles us to suppose that the cult of St Martin was a literary artifact.¹¹

Yet an examination of Gregory's hagiographic work as a whole makes it clear that he was working within a clearly defined literary context, drawing on older hagiographic works and influencing his successors in turn. Beyond this obvious observation nothing must be assumed. Rather, we must examine the context in which Gregory worked: what were the various influences which shaped his writing, especially his hagiographic works? Here we must include not only literary influences but also oral traditions, liturgy, and cult. It is also necessary to review critically Gregory's own work: are his hagiographic works uniform, all of one piece? Or can we distinguish "sub-genres" within them? One important source of insight must not be neglected: we must ask what was Gregory's own understanding of his work? As it happens, he gives us some important clues in a number of digressions and passing remarks.

From these considerations arises our central question: what can we conclude regarding the relationship or interaction of text, belief, and social experience in the hagiographic work of Gregory of Tours? To ask the question in such a form is already to anticipate a conclusion: the interrelationship of text, belief, and experience is probably much more dynamic than a traditional approach to the study of the hagiographic literature would allow. On the other hand, it may prove by no means so easy as is often assumed to distinguish between "literature" and "life," between literary stereotypes and patterns of behaviour. Fortunately, recent advances in literary-critical theory have largely dissolved these conventional categories and replaced them with a much more functional approach. It may well prove that modern views of the literary process are actually surprisingly close to those of Gregory himself: *In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum . . .* (John 1:1 quoted *IGM Praef.*). If "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," perhaps hagiography continues the work of the Incarnation, that is, realizing the Word in life, bringing the Word into life. In this case it will not be presumptuous to suggest that the work of the Redemption is continued in the hermeneutic process, as Gregory seems often to suggest.

Let us now examine briefly the influences which helped shape Gregory's hagiographic works. Here, as often, his own words are our best guide. If we compare what Gregory says to our own first-hand experience of extant hagiographic texts written in Gregory's lifetime or earlier, we can easily gain some idea of the general milieu within which Gregory worked. The *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* are some of the most important and influential of early Christian "hagiographic" writings. Although the genre continued

to be popular for centuries, the most significant Apocryphal Acts were apparently written in the period ca. A.D. 150-300 and very widely diffused in many different versions in half a dozen languages.¹² Some of the most colourful of these were well known to Gregory; the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Andrew* are explicitly cited in *IGM* 31/2 and 30 respectively. Gregory's work known under the title *Liber de Miraculis B. Andreae Apostoli* itself, as he tells in its Preface, is an epitome of a work which he had found, *De Virtutibus S. Andreae Apostoli*. He had eliminated certain passages which gave offense (presumably because of their heterodox theological content), but his words clearly indicate that he understood this text to belong to the series of Apostolic Acts. In fact, Gregory's epitome has proven indispensable to the reconstruction of the original full form of the text, now no longer completely extant.¹³ As for the *Acts of Thomas*, it has long been held that the standard Latin version is to be attributed to Gregory.¹⁴ Gregory no doubt knew other Apocryphal Acts; he certainly recognized their evangelical function and their theological interests which were often heterodox, as modern scholars have noted. Even a cursory reading of the *Miracles of B. Andrew the Apostle* will reveal how much this work has in common with the tradition on which it depends. It is the most consciously "literary," the most "novelistic" of Gregory's hagiographic works.

Very different were the *Vitae* and the *Passiones* which Gregory drew on much more commonly. The *IGM* provides a good example of his method. In this survey of martyrs it is natural that Gregory should make use of *historiae passionum*, the official accounts of the sufferings of the martyrs, the reading of which was the central act of the annual liturgical re-enactment of their martyrdom. He often explicitly cites the relevant *passio* (e.g. *IGM* 34 Bartholemew, 35 Clement Martyr, 37 Crisantus and Daria, 56 Amaranthus, 57 Eugenius). Often, too, he explicitly notes that *non passio* had been handed down (*IGM* 39 Martyrs at Rome); he remained hopeful, however, that some might turn up (*IGM* 43: *nondum ad nos historia passionis advenit*, cf. 55). What of the numerous other cases in *IGM* in which no sources are explicitly cited? Here the editors have often been able to identify a written source of one sort or another: Theodosius' work on the Holy Land is apparently used for stories set in that context (*IGM* 6, 8, 16, 17, 26); Rufinus' Latin version of Eusebius is another such source (*IGM* 16, 20, 27, 31, 34). Other similar instances could be adduced. But it is clear that Gregory here often draws on oral tradition, his own experiences, or accounts of witnesses. On one occasion, for instance, he describes some dramatic manifestations of

Martin's *virtus* which took place at a ceremony over which he was presiding (IGM 14): even in that case he introduces further information with his customary formula: *Ferunt . . .*. Such reports clearly often come from the general stock of oral tradition (IGM 37, 62, 75, 95). Sometimes a specific informant is mentioned by name (IGM 18, 87).

Even this brief survey of the IGM makes it clear that Gregory's accounts of the martyrs are not literary hagiography in the same sense as his work on Andrew. And the same observation applies to his account of the *Miraculous Deeds of St Julian*; the *passio* provides the starting point; it is supplemented by other literary sources, by accounts of eyewitnesses, and by Gregory's own experience. But the *passio* itself is by no means a work of literary hagiography comparable to the *Apocryphal Acts* from which Gregory's account of St Andrew is drawn. The *passio* is primarily a liturgical text, essential to the establishment of a cult, as Brown has noted,¹⁵ and thus perhaps somewhat closer to the concerns of the average believer, somewhat less subject to literary development than were the *Apocryphal Acts*. The same could be said of saints who did not enjoy the privilege of having been martyred.

Together with *vitae* and *passiones* as important documents of a less consciously literary character associated with the cult of the saints are the *virtutes*, the collections of "Miraculous Deeds" which form such a large part of all Gregory's work. Even in the case of Andrew, as we have seen, Gregory has stripped away much literary material of a theological or evangelical import in order to concentrate on Andrew's miraculous deeds, and he has retitled the work accordingly. In his survey of famous martyrs (IGM), *virtutes* play a dominant part: Gregory is concerned to present the saints as a living force manifesting themselves through miraculous deeds at their tombs, or even more commonly, through relics which did not suffer from the same immobility. These martyrs, even the most remote of them, are no mere literary constructs; they are presented as persons functioning as patrons (and the same can be said of the confessors recorded in IGC). These martyrs and confessors continue to live through their cult. This being so, it is not surprising that the two figures who dominate in Gregory's hagiographic work are saints in whose cult Gregory had a close personal interest as Bishop of Tours, namely Julian and Martin -- but pre-eminently Martin.

What were the materials which Gregory had to hand when he came to assemble these two collections of *virtutes*? As I have already noted, the ancient *passio* provides Gregory with his starting point for the *Miraculous*

Deeds of St Julian; it is supplemented by other literary sources, by accounts of eyewitnesses, and by Gregory's own experience. A few details will suffice to characterize the context of his work. The first chapter of the *VSJ* reviews Julian's life and martyrdom. It is clear that Gregory is here drawing on the ancient *Passio S. Juliani* (see editor *ad loc.*). This *passio*, however familiar, is a literary document. As Gregory notes, it must be confirmed from experience: *Quod ne cuiquam fortassis videatur incredibilis esse narratio, quae audivi gesta fideliter prodam*. And indeed the bulk of *VSJ* is drawn from reports or personal experiences. But before he comes to these experiences, Gregory searches out whatever records he can find: the verses on the tomb of Julian and Ferreolus at Vienne (supplemented, of course, by the oral tradition preserved by the *aedituus* at the shrine). A letter of Sidonius is also quoted in support of the account which he has given (VII,1). After a brief description of the spring in which Julian's severed head was washed, and of its miraculous efficacy Gregory turns from "literature" to "life," that is, to accounts of eyewitnesses and personal experiences. He realizes, however, that his act of recording these experiences endows them with a literary quality; he fears that his own literary ineptitude makes him ill-equipped for the task to which, however, he is impelled by his love for his patron (*VSJ* 4). Later on, he warns his readers against undue scepticism (*VSJ* 7, cf. 28). From this it is clear that Gregory understood his own position as a hagiographer to lie somewhere on the continuum between literature and life, between the literary documents (*Acts, Vitae, Passiones*) by which he had been formed and the *virtutes* which he sought to transform into something not unworthy of their predecessors and models.

This same picture emerges even more clearly from a survey of the *Miraculous Deeds of St Martin*. The Preface of the first book explicitly attests to Gregory's understanding of his own role. And throughout the work it will be noted that Gregory adduces contemporary experience of Martin's *virtutes* as evidence authenticating records from the past. Many had already recorded the miraculous deeds of St Martin: Sulpicius Severus is given the place of honour. Here, too, is evidence for Gregory's literary sophistication: in a few well-chosen words he alludes to Sulpicius' account of the Desert Fathers and their deeds, reported by Sulpicius only to increase Martin's glory -- Martin was the equal of them all together (*VSM* I, 1).¹⁶ There follows a long chapter with excerpts from Paulinus' poetic account of St Martin. A passing reference to the similar work of Gregory's contemporary Fortunatus anticipates the long excerpts which follow, recounting Martin's

virtutes in Italy (*VSM* I, 2 end; I, 13-16). The visions which Saints Severinus and Ambrose enjoyed at Martin's passing seem also to have come to Gregory in literary form (*VSM* I, 4 & 5). And it is unlikely that the account of the translation of Martin's remains during the episcopacy of St Perpetuus came down to Gregory in oral form alone, however much the tale of angelic intervention was subject to oral expansion (*VSM* I, 6).

The rest of this long work is devoted to recounting miraculous deeds of St Martin which Gregory either experienced himself, witnessed, or gathered from witnesses and participants; in any case, as I have explained elsewhere, these *virtutes* almost without exception occurred shortly before Gregory became Bishop of Tours (*VSM* I, 7-40) or during the years of Gregory's episcopacy (A.D. 573-594), being recorded as they happened and gathered into books of approximately equal length (*VSM* II, 1-60; III, 1-60; IV, 1-47, cut short by Gregory's death?).¹⁷ Here again, as with his account of Julian, the context of Gregory's own work clearly appears as a continuum linking the daily experience of ordinary believers with the already "classic" texts in which Martin's life and deeds had first been recorded. Gregory's own comments eloquently attest to his understanding of what was expected in a hagiographer -- also to his own anxiety that he might prove unworthy of those expectations. Such expressions of unworthiness are themselves a literary commonplace, in Gregory's case sometimes moving, often amusing. But our reaction should not obscure their content. If we hope to appreciate the transforming action of the hagiographer's work, there is no better guide than Gregory himself.

In two places Gregory gives a brief account of his work. At the end of his *History*, completed probably early in A.D. 592 (*History* X, 24, cf. 26, 30, all recounting events to be dated to 591), Gregory assembled brief biographies of the Bishops of Tours, concluding with an account of his own episcopacy (*History* X, 31). This allows him to survey his work: the "ten books of *History*," which he has just completed, take pride of place; after this he alludes to "seven books of *Miracles* and one on the *Lives of the Fathers*," concluding with a reference to his *Psalms Commentary* and his books on the *Offices of the Church*. While Gregory seems to distinguish here between his historical and hagiographic works, we should note (before turning to the latter, which most concerns us) that even Gregory's *History* has a spiritual purpose, being an account of the working out of the providential dispensation in his own time; it is certainly far removed from "secular" history! Neither here nor elsewhere does Gregory list two of his most "literary" hagiographic works, the accounts of *St Andrew* and of the *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus* (but

cf. *IGM* 94 for an allusion to the latter), to say nothing of his putative Latin version of the *Acts of Thomas* to which I have already alluded. These omissions are the more strange inasmuch as Gregory takes care to review his hagiographic writings in some detail.

In his work in honour of the Confessors of Gaul, Gregory begins with self-deprecation (*IGC* Preface); this introduces a review of his life's work probably written in his last years (he includes reference to the fourth book of *VSM* including incidents from the years A.D. 588-594). The Martyrs are mentioned in first place, followed by Julian and Martin; the seventh book incorporates biographies of some *feliciosi*, presumably the *Vitae Patrum*, while in the eighth place is listed the work to which this notice is prefixed, in honour of the Confessors. Gregory seems to have reworked or added to most of these *Books of Miracles* throughout the latter part of his life; perhaps only the book on Julian was essentially complete at an early date. We have apparently no way of fixing a date for the reworking of the book on St Andrew. The translation of the *Seven Sleepers of Ephesus* from the Syriac may have been early inasmuch as it is alluded to in a later work (*IGM* 94). It seems to me significant that Gregory has obscured his more "literary" hagiography. For if one sets aside the *Lives of the Fathers (LVP)*, which are somewhat historical in character, the seven remaining *Books of Miracles* are much of a piece and clearly opposed to the works on St Andrew and the Seven Sleepers. And, of these all, the clearest contrast is evident between Martin and Andrew, Martin's manifestation being primarily contemporary and "living" for Gregory, while for Andrew the literary influence is dominant. The books on the Martyrs and Confessors (and Julian) fall somewhere between the two poles. One should, however, resist the impulse to classify these different works into distinct sub-genres. Gregory's work is very much of a piece. And even if he has deliberately obscured his own more literary hagiography, a close examination of Gregory's methods and attitudes should arm us against his assumed naivety. Gregory is anything but a naive reporter of the miraculous deeds of Martin and Julian.

Ancient narratives of Julian's life and passion are confirmed for Gregory, as we have seen, by recent experiences, just as the verses on Julian's tomb are supplemented by the oral tradition preserved by the *aedituus*. Literary ineptitude may be distressing; love of his patron compels Gregory to give literary form to Julian's deeds. Literature and life thus interact to their mutual benefit; Fedania's description of her vision, as reported by those who heard her, conforms with the popular conception of

Julian's appearance: *unde multis non absurde videatur, ei beatum martyrum apparuisse* (VSJ 9). Every account of the martyr's intervention must be diligently expounded, *quo facilius fides dictis adhibeatur* (VSJ 13). Fortunately, reliable witnesses were to hand with the evidence of Julian's *virtutes*: Gregory's uncle could point to a scar on his foot (VSJ 23). Who would doubt the word of Bishop Gallus? Who would doubt the word of an abbot, one of whose monks had benefitted from Julian's intervention (VSJ 28)? Gregory himself remembered visiting Julian's shrine at Brioude during the summer festival (Aug. 28) with his whole family when he was still very young; his brother Peter had been cured of a fever (VSJ 24). Relics had spread the cult of Julian far beyond his basilica at Brioude (VSJ 32). And if Julian's relics could reach the Orient, why be surprised that faithful brothers brought home accounts of *virtutes* manifest even there (VSJ 33)? All of this had happened before Gregory's consecration in 573. As Bishop of Tours, he had a special interest in the church which some monks had built there at Tours in honour of St Julian (VSJ 34).

It seems likely that many of the remaining *virtutes* which Gregory reports were thus worked closer to home (VSJ 35, 36, 37-40). Other miraculous deeds were reported by friends (VSJ 41-45, Arridius from Limoges), or brought to the Bishop's attention by residents of Tours (VSJ 47-49). But the incident which closes the collection of Julian's *virtutes* is especially instructive (VSJ 50). There Gregory reports how the presence and cooperation of Julian and Nicetius of Lyons, invoked by the relics with which a rural church in the territory of Tours had been consecrated, were confirmed by a cure in which the two saints had cooperated (with reference to LVP 8, 8): here the joint consecration enacted publicly by Gregory is confirmed by a miraculous cure which validates both his action in so consecrating the church and the account which he has circulated of that action! He makes the purpose of this exercise clear in a concluding remark: "From all these miracles the attentive reader may conclude that he can win salvation only with the help of the martyrs and other friends of God" (VSJ 50 end). But Gregory himself does not stand apart from this transaction: in his final words he prays to obtain divine mercy by the *patrocinia* of the martyr Julian, so that with Julian as his advocate in court before the Lord, he may carry through his life to a worthy conclusion.

Gregory's methods and attitudes stand out still more clearly in his work on St Martin. The substantial Preface to Bk. I enunciates his position: the miracles which God has deigned to work through Martin serve to confirm the faith of believers. Present *virtutes* authenticate records of miraculous

deeds from the past. But authentication requires that contemporary *virtutes* continue to be recorded. This posed Gregory with something of a problem. Admonished in visions to record the deeds of St Martin, Gregory was seized with grief and terror -- grief at the thought of deeds remaining unrecorded, terror at his own *rusticitas*. He consoles himself with the thought that our Lord chose fishermen, not philosophers: Martin himself will endow his account with glory. Gregory returns to these prefatory themes at the beginning of each new book of the *VSM*. The Preface of Book II states it clearly; he has recounted the deeds of Martin *ut non traderetur oblivioni quod Dominus exercere dignatus est in laudem antestitis sui*. He will make up for his lack of skill with the sheer numbers of deeds recorded (more accessible now that he is dealing with events of his own episcopacy). Perhaps it is not fitting for him to begin Book III with an account of his own cure. But fear seizes him again: to conceal even his own cure would be to cheat the saint, something the more offensive given our obligation to offer reverent service to the "friends of God" (*VSM* IV Preface citing Psalms 138:17; 14:4 & 5). Everyone renders honour to his own patron, the more so when he has been cured by his patron's *virtus* (cf. *VSM* I, 32, II, 40). But the honouring of patrons who are friends of God requires appropriate talents: *utinam ignavia mentis nostrae permetteret eum sic venerari, ut decet amicum Dei* (*VSM* IV Preface). And when he has reviewed the work of his talented predecessors, Gregory returns to his theme: how difficult it is to praise Martin adequately; it must suffice to recount his story (*historia*) in straightforward fashion (*VSM* I,5). We are reminded of the difficulties of Gregory's position every time he professes, as he often does in almost formulaic fashion, "We are unable to pass over this in silence" (*VSM* I, 6, 29; II, 10, 14; IV, 32). This theme finds eloquent expression when Gregory comes to recount how Martin raised a child from the dead (*VSM* II, 43): *Quid silemus? Quid occultamus pauci, quod populi declamant multi?* The hagiographer must be content to reflect popular fervour.

Thus we see that the difficulty of praising Martin adequately will not serve Gregory as an excuse to avoid the task. But there were other problems facing the would-be hagiographer, some of them more intractable. First there were the great numbers of Martin's miraculous deeds. At the beginning of his work Gregory had been impressed with the number of Martin's *virtutes* reported from Italy by his friend Fortunatus: "They were so numerous that they could scarcely be gathered up in words once they had been dispersed, so unbounded that they could not be stored away on pages" (*VSM* I, 16). This may have been to some extent a commonplace; it is no surprise from an

enthusiastic believer. There can be no doubt that Gregory is sincere; a rescue from attack by robbers prompts him to remark that the troubles and griefs from which Martin had saved him were so many that it would be a task of great length even to recount, much less to record them (*VSM* I, 36). How much more is this so if every deed is to be recorded (II, 54 cf. I, 40), while Martin continues to manifest himself on a daily basis (II, 60, III, 44)!

There were still more serious problems: many deeds were never recorded through simple negligence (I, 6). More scandalous was the idea that some people came to be cured and were cured but returned home secretly, so that they were seen by no one and their names never recorded (III, 45)! Rumours would arise, none the less, that the saint had manifested his *virtus*; the custodians of the shrine would be summoned to be interrogated by Bishop Gregory; even so the names of individual appellants could not always be recovered (III, 45). Surely we must find such a situation as thought provoking as Gregory did! What does it signify that many could obtain Martin's help who would never freely acknowledge their petition? At the very least it reminds us that we are dealing with a complex social phenomenon, not the literary artifact of an ambitious bishop working in isolation. If all these secret *virtutes* were to become public, as Gregory notes, not only books but even the world would not suffice to contain them, as the evangelist has said of the Lord (I, 39 with reference to John 21:25). And yet Gregory prays to witness still more miracles so that he may gather them up in further books *ut ea quae ostenduntur non oculi sed magis debeant populari* (III, 60).

For this addiction the motive is not far to seek: hagiography was a redemptive activity -- for the hagiographer inasmuch as the reading of the saint's deeds in his honour might assure the one who had recorded them *refrigerium pro delictis* (I, 40 cf. II, 60, III, 60). For the other faithful the collection and preservation of *virtutes* was no less beneficial: reciting the saint's deeds often provided the occasion for a cure, the literal re-enactment of Martin's *virtus* (II, 14: a paralyzed girl was cured while Gregory was reading the *contestationem de sancti domini virtutibus* -- here referring to St Martin). This was a common experience if we may judge from the number of *virtutes* recorded on the occasion of one of Martin's festivals (e.g. II, 3, 12, 14, 24, 29, 31, 34, 44, 46, 47, 49 with explicit reference to the reading of Martin's *Life*, 54-56; Books III & IV show a similar frequency). From this we begin to form some idea of the social importance of the hagiographer and his work -- through his art he helped to create social reality. But this noble view of art as social creation should not surprise

the student of literature, ancient or modern. It will be appropriate to conclude with some reflections on the creative power of the word, examined in the light of recent studies of the interaction of text, belief, and social experience.

The fame of Martin in the mediaeval West cannot easily be overstated. Whether one resorts to the evidence of church dedications, place names, or literary references, it seems evident that the cult of Martin spread very widely over western Europe in a remarkably short time after his death. Martin's charismatic gifts had an immediate impact on popular consciousness, no doubt; but much credit for the wider fame of Martin must go to Sulpicius Severus in the first place and after him to Gregory of Tours. Bede finds it unnecessary to say anything about Martin in the entry for Nov. 11 in his *martyrologium*: "His life, his wondrous deeds and signs have been described quite clearly by Sulpicius in eloquent language; and Gregory . . . has written at great length about him in his books of Miracles."¹⁸ It is tempting to argue, as I have tried to do in another place, that Martin may well have served as the model for some remarkable and charismatic early Anglo-Saxon Holy Men; the case can, at least, be argued for Oswald and Cuthbert.¹⁹ But the studies of this sort suggest a difficult and provoking question: what is the relationship between literary stereotypes of Holy Men and Saints, and their actual social roles? Two extreme views are possible: the obvious resemblance of one hagiographic work to another reflects simply the literary dependence of hagiographers on the work of their predecessors. Alternatively, the similarity of saints' lives, one to another, is to be explained by independent description of similar social phenomena. Both these extreme positions are dangerous, though the former is perhaps the more common, given the fact that we work with literary texts in the first place.

A middle view seems more sensible: belief, experience, and text all interact in some way, both in literature and in life. Belief and experience interact to produce the text, in the way we have witnessed in Gregory's work. But the text, in turn, also becomes part of the belief system, conditioning experience and the reflection of experience in further texts. And this interactive process, which we have witnessed in Gregory's work, is remarkably similar to the process which contemporary literary theorists have described as acting within the "fictive triangle" of myth, experience, and fiction, "fiction" here denoting the text which arises from, and contributes to, the interaction of belief systems (myths in the fundamental sense) and personal experience. All literary activity occurs within this triangle of interaction.²⁰

Hagiography is a creative activity: this should not be taken to imply that it is artificial or arbitrary. Hagiographic texts will carry conviction insofar as they contribute to the meaningful structuring of experience along mythic lines, ever constant, ever new. In this hagiography is no different from history -- or from "fiction" in the common sense of the word. Meaning arises from relationships; it is embedded in life and always dynamic. It is for this reason, surely, that Gregory in the Preface to his stories of the martyrs quotes from the *Gospel of John*, as I have indicated (John 1:1-3; 14): "In the beginning was the Word . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Only the knowledge of the Incarnate Word, so Gregory asserts, can validate our experience of the miraculous deeds of the saints and reveal the stories of the pagans for what they are: *tamquam super harenam locata et cite ruitura*. Gregory understood from the beginning what we are only now learning anew: the text, arising from myth and returning to it, is constitutive of experience, and only in the second place is experience the standard by which we measure the text. This being so, hagiography participates in the Incarnation and the study of hagiography, as Gregory believed, is surely redemptive.

Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

NOTES

¹ For the Desert Fathers and the literature associated with them see the classic study by D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford 1966). The early influence of this literature in the West is briefly surveyed by P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford 1978).

² For the texts see the edition by C. Halm in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* I (Vienna 1886).

³ P.R. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *JRS* 61 (1971) 80-101, reprinted in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 1982).

⁴ See now P.R. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978).

⁵ P.R. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago 1981). For a definitive study of the episcopal elite see M. Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien* (Munich 1976).

⁶ For the text of Gregory's *History* see the edition by B. Krusch and W. Levison in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* I, 1 *editio altera* (Hannover 1951). For the hagiographic works of Gregory of Tours see n. 8 below.

⁷ See "The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours," *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981) 1-13.

⁸ For the text of Gregory's hagiographic works see the edition by B. Krusch in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* I, 2 (Hannover 1885). These works will be cited by the following abbreviations (given in brackets): *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini (VSM)*, *De Virtutibus Sancti Juliani (VSJ)*, *In Gloria Martyrum (IGM)*, *In Gloria Confessorum (IGC)*, *Liber Vitae Patrum (LVP)*. Gregory's own view of these works and their place in his work as a whole are discussed below.

⁹ Compare, for instance, the *Liber de Miraculis B. Andreae Apostoli*, for which see n. 13 below and the text there. It should be noted that such terms as "literary" or "documentary" when used to describe hagiographic texts are more useful than strictly accurate.

¹⁰ See "Praesentium Signorum Munera: The Cult of the Saints in the World of Gregory of Tours," *Florilegium* 5 (1983) 44-61 for further details.

¹¹ By contrast Fontaine seems often to overemphasize the purely literary quality of Sulpicius' *Life of St Martin*, as though there were no larger context to limit the free invention of the hagiographer. See J. Fontaine, *Vie de Saint Martin I-III* (Paris 1967-9) in the series *Sources Chrétiennes*, #133-5.

¹² The dating of the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* is most uncertain, but they are commonly believed to be early. For a convenient English translation with comprehensive survey of modern scholarship see E. Hennecke,

New Testament Apocrypha, ed. W. Schneemelcher, English trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson, II (Philadelphia 1965).

¹³ For Gregory's *Liber de Miraculis B. Andreae Apostoli* and the reconstruction of the original Acts of Andrew, see *New Testament Apocrypha* II (at n. 12) 390-403, esp. 397.

¹⁴ So Lipsius and Bonnet cited in *M.G.H.* (at n. 8) 507.

¹⁵ See Brown (at n. 5) esp. 79-83 for the liturgical use of *passiones*.

¹⁶ The literary sophistication of Sulpicius himself must not be underestimated: almost two centuries before Gregory, he found himself in a very similar position, working with hagiographic texts which were, at once, his model and the standard which he set himself to surpass -- the common experience of any creative person working in a tradition. The recent work of C. Stancliffe (*St Martin and His Hagiographer*, Oxford 1983) shows us how much can still be learned from close study of Sulpicius Severus.

¹⁷ For further details see "*Praesentium Signorum Munera*" (at n. 10).

¹⁸ See Migne, PL.94 1100-1.

¹⁹ "Two Anglo-Saxon Holy Men: Oswald and Cuthbert" in *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. J.D. Woods and D.A.E. Pelteret (Waterloo, Ont. 1985) 63-75.

²⁰ I owe this concept of the "fictive triangle" to Wolfgang Iser (personal communication). His work on the inter-relationship of reader and text is suggestive and most helpful to the student of hagiography: see *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore 1978). For a further development of this line of thought see now W. Iser, "Feigning in Fiction" in *Identity of the Literary Text*, esp. M.J. Valdés and O. Miller, (Toronto 1985) 204-38.