

# The Semantisation of Space in Sulpicius Severus' 'Vita Sancti Martini'

**Abstract** The article follows a relatively recent trend in applying modern narratological analysis tools to late antique hagiographic texts, a genre that has hardly been touched on by such approaches. It provides a spatial narratological close-reading of three exemplary episodes from Sulpicius Severus' 'Vita Sancti Martini'. First, it focuses on Sulpicius' account of how Martin converts a robber in the dangerous Alps (Mart. 5, 4–6), then on the protagonist's encounter with a pagan funeral procession (Mart. 12). Finally, it analyses an episode in which Martin is tempted by the Devil in his bare monk's cell (Mart. 24, 4–8).

The study is based on the spatial narratological model proposed by Birgit HAUPT and also draws on Jurij M. LOTMAN's semantic model of space. It works out that the narrative space of Sulpicius' hagiographic description of the life of St Martin is more than just a mere background foil against which the events are narrated. Rather, it has its own semantics that highlight, illustrate and enlarge the holiness and power of its ascetic and hermit hero.

**Zusammenfassung** Der Beitrag folgt einem noch relativ jungen Trend, moderne narratologische Analysekategorien auf spätantike hagiographische Texte anzuwenden, eine Textgattung, die in dieser Hinsicht bislang kaum untersucht wurde. Hierzu werden drei exemplarische Episoden aus der 'Vita Sancti Martini' des Sulpicius Severus einem raumnarratologischen *close-reading* unterzogen. Zunächst liegt der Fokus auf Sulpicius' Bericht, wie Martin in den lebensfeindlichen Alpen einen Räuber zum Christentum bekehrt (Mart. 5, 4–6). Im Anschluss richtet sich der Blick auf eine Episode, in der der Protagonist mit einer heidnischen

## Contact

**Dr. Andreas Abele,**  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen,  
Philologisches Seminar, Wilhelm-  
straße 36, 72074 Tübingen,  
andreas.abele@uni-tuebingen.de  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1859-7912>

Begräbnisprozession konfrontiert wird (Mart. 12). Zuletzt folgt eine Analyse von Sulpicius' Erzählung von einer Begegnung zwischen Martin und dem Teufel, der ihn in seiner kargen Mönchszelle in Versuchung führt (Mart. 24, 4–8).

Die Untersuchung basiert auf dem raumnarratologischen Model von Birgit HAUPT und wird teilweise erweitert durch das raumsemantische Konzept von Jurij M. LOTMAN. Hierbei zeigt sich, dass der narrative Raum in Sulpicius' hagiographischer Darstellung des Lebens des Heiligen Martin mehr ist als eine reine Hintergrundfolie, vor der die erzählten Ereignisse stattfinden. Vielmehr besitzt er seine eigene Semantik, die die Heiligkeit und Macht des asketischen und anachoretischen Helden hervorhebt, illustriert und letztlich sogar noch umfassender erscheinen lässt.

Narratological analyses have become more and more numerous in classical philology,<sup>1</sup> at the latest since Irene DE JONG's groundbreaking studies on the Homeric epics.<sup>2</sup> Such approaches are now also taken for granted in the research on the Old and New Testament as well as on apocryphal books.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, narratology has started to be used for late antique hagiography as well.<sup>4</sup> An extremely promising category of narratological analysis for the study of

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- 1 For a detailed diachronic summary of the development of narratology in Classics in general and in the 'epic' genre in particular see: Robert KIRSTEIN, Andreas ABELE and Hans-Peter NILL, *Narratology and Classical Epic*, in: Christiane REITZ and Simone FINKMANN (eds.), *Structures of Epic Poetry*, vol. 1: Foundations, Berlin, Boston 2019, pp. 99–113; Irene J.F. DE JONG, *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide*, Oxford 2014, pp. 3–15.
  - 2 See Irene J.F. DE JONG, *Narrators and Focalizers. The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad*, Amsterdam 1989; Irene J.F. DE JONG, *Narratology and Oral Poetry. The Case of Homer*, in: *Poetics Today* 12 (1991), pp. 405–423; Irene J.F. DE JONG, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, Cambridge 2001.
  - 3 For a concise overview see Sönke FINNERN, *Narration in Religious Discourse. The Example of Christianity*, in: Peter HÜHN et al. (eds.), *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Hamburg, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narration-religious-discourse-example-christianity> (9 November 2021). A list of narratological studies on the Old Testament is provided by Uta SCHMIDT, *Narratologie und Altes Testament*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 143 (2018), pp. 423–438. Concerning the New Testament and apocryphal books see e.g. Sönke FINNERN and Jan RÜGGEMEIER, *Methoden der neutestamentlichen Exegese. Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch*, Tübingen 2016, pp. 173–194; Philipp AUGUSTIN, *Die Juden im Petrus-evangelium. Narratologische Analyse und theologiegeschichtliche Kontextualisierung*, Berlin et al. 2015; Sönke FINNERN, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese. Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28*, Tübingen 2010; Ute E. EISEN, *Die Poetik der Apostelgeschichte. Eine narratologische Studie*, Fribourg 2006. Many narratological publications on the Gospel of Mark are listed in Martin EBNER and Bernhard HEININGER, *Exegese des Neuen Testaments. Ein Arbeitsbuch für Lehre und Praxis*, Paderborn 2018, pp. 131–132, providing an exemplary analysis of Mark 2, 1–3, 6 on pp. 113–118.
  - 4 Esp. Leyla TELLI, *Narrative Analysis of Bethu Brigitte*, in: Stephan CONERMANN and Jim RHEINGANS (eds.), *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing. Comparative*

hagiographic texts is the narrative representation of space.<sup>5</sup> One needs only to think of the stereotypical and semantically highly charged settings in Christian martyr narratives (e.g. prisons, arenas), of the places hostile to life in which emaciated desert fathers lived their ascetic lives, or of those pillars on which hermits dwelt as a sign of their strict asceticism, to name only three illustrative examples. In general, narrative space has attracted increasing attention in recent years,<sup>6</sup> not least in Classics.<sup>7</sup> In

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Perspectives from Asia to Europe (Narratio Aliena? Studien des Bonner Zentrums für Transkulturelle Narratologie 7), Berlin 2014, pp. 43–58; Christa GRAY, 'Holy and Pleasing to God'. A Narratological Approach to Hagiography in Jerome's Lives of Paul and Malchus, in: Ancient Narrative 14 (2017), pp. 103–128; Andreas ABELE, Ut fidem dictis adhibeant. ‚Distanz‘ und ‚Fokalisation‘ in der ‚Mantelteilung‘ des Heiligen Martin (zu Sulp. Sev. Mart. 2–3), in: Mnemosyne 73 (2020), pp. 633–658; Nienke Vos, The Ambiguity of the Devil. A Discourse-Linguistic Reading of Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini 21 and 24, in: Eva ELM and Nicole HARTMANN (eds.), Demons in Late Antiquity. Their Perception and Transformation in Different Literary Genres (Transformationen der Antike 54), Berlin, Boston 2020, pp. 135–150; Christoph BRUNHORN, Peter GEMEINHARDT and Maria MUNKHOLT CHRISTENSEN (eds.), Narratologie und Intertextualität. Zugänge zu spätantiken Text-Welten (Seraphim 7), Tübingen 2020.

- 5 On the controversy whether hagiographies are to be considered as narrative texts see: ABELE (note 4), pp. 636–637; Matías MARTÍNEZ and Michael SCHEFFEL, Einführung in die Erzähltheorie, München 2016, pp. 125–128; Wolf SCHMID, Narratology. An Introduction, Berlin, New York 2010, pp. 8–12; Peter GEMEINHARDT, Christian Hagiography and Narratology. A Fresh Approach to Late Antique Lives of Saint, in: Stephan CONERMANN and Jim RHEINGANS (eds.), Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing. Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe (Narratio Aliena? Studien des Bonner Zentrums für Transkulturelle Narratologie 7), Berlin 2014, pp. 21–41.
- 6 See e.g. MARTÍNEZ and SCHEFFEL (note 5), pp. 153–163; Marie-Laure RYAN, Space, in: Peter HÜHN et al. (eds.), The Living Handbook of Narratology, Hamburg, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/space> (9 November 2021); Katrin DENNERLEIN, Narratologie des Raumes, Berlin, New York 2009; Mieke BAL, Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, Toronto, Buffalo, London 1999, pp. 132–142. – For first steps towards a digital narratology of space see Robert KIRSTEIN et al., Cadmus and the Cow. A Digital Narratology of Space in Ovid's Metamorphoses, in: Paolo FOGLIARONI, Andrea BALLATORE and Eliseo CLEMENTINI (eds.), Proceedings of Workshops and Posters at the 13th International Conference on Spatial Information Theory (COSIT 2017), Cham 2017, pp. 293–304.
- 7 See esp. DE JONG (note 1), pp. 105–131. Special interest was brought to narrative space in classical epic, see e.g. Robert KIRSTEIN, Hero's Space. Raum und Fokalisation in Vergils Aeneis, in: Oliver SCHELSKE and Christian WENDT (eds.), Mare nostrum – mare meum. Wasserräume und Herrschaftsrepräsentation (Spudasmata 181), Hildesheim 2019, pp. 31–54; Marios SKEMPIS and Ioannis ZIOGAS (eds.), Geography, Topography, Landscape. Configurations of Space in Greek and Roman Epic, Berlin, Boston 2014; Irene J.F. DE JONG (ed.), Space in Ancient Greek Literature. Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, Leiden 2012. See also Andrew M. RIGGSBY, Space, in: Andrew FELDHERR (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians, New York 2009, pp. 152–165. – On spatiality in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages see: Peter VAN NUFFELEN (ed.), Historiography and Space in Late Antiquity, Cambridge, New York 2019; David NATAL, Putting the Roman Periphery on the Map. The Geography of Romanness, Orthodoxy, and Legitimacy in Victricius of Rouen's De Laude Sanctorum, in: Early Medieval Europe 26 (2018), pp. 304–326; Keith D. LILLEY (ed.), Mapping Medieval Geographies. Geographical Encounters in the Latin West and Beyond, 300–1600, Cambridge 2013; Veronica DELLA DORA, Imagining Mount Athos. Visions of a Holy Place from Homer to World War II, Charlottesville 2011; Conrad LEYSER, 'This Sainted Isle'. Panegyric, Nostalgia, and the Invention of Lerinian Monasticism, in: William E. KLINGSHIRN and Mark VESSEY (eds.), The Limits of

the context of the ‘spatial turn’, space was rehabilitated and now forms an equally important pillar of narratological analysis as the previously predominant category of time.<sup>8</sup> It is no longer perceived as an unchangeable and static background element but rather as a fluid, subjectively perceivable and processed constituent. In contrast to the diachronic orientation of time, spatial approaches emphasise synchronicity and spatial juxtapositions of objects, figures and actions. Decisive for literary studies is the realisation that “literary space is no static factor which is detached from the plot and figures, but a dynamically integrated one which does not only provide a framework for the narrative but which is also a functional component of the narrated world which itself develops ‘protagonist qualities’”.<sup>9</sup> However, in the field of hagiographical studies, narrative space has almost completely been ignored so far.

The objective of this article is to be a small step towards filling this research gap by analysing the narrative space in Sulpicius Severus’ ‘Life of St Martin’ based on the spatial narratological model proposed by Birgit HAUPT. In addition to Seymour B. CHATMAN’s notion of ‘discourse space’<sup>10</sup> and Ruth RONEN’s model of ‘spatial frames’,<sup>11</sup> which are occasionally more established in the English-speaking world, HAUPT’s alternative model is a useful tool to analyse concrete text passages from

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Ancient Christianity. Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus, Ann Arbor 1999, pp. 188–206; Robert A. MARKUS, How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), pp. 257–271.

- 8 Cf. Robert KIRSTEIN, *Raum – Antike*, in: Eva VON CONTZEN and Stefan TILG (eds.), *Handbuch Historische Narratologie*, Stuttgart 2019, pp. 206–217, here p. 206; Hartmut BÖHME, *Einleitung. Raum – Bewegung – Topographie*, in: Hartmut BÖHME (ed.), *Topographien der Literatur. Deutsche Literatur im transnationalen Kontext*, Stuttgart 2005, pp. ix–xxiii, here p. xii. Paradigmatic is Michel FOUCAULT, *Des espaces autres* [1967], in: *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984), pp. 46–49. – For outlines of the ‘spatial turn’ in literary studies see also: Robert KIRSTEIN, *An Introduction to the Concept of Space in Ancient Epic*, in: Christiane REITZ and Simone FINKMANN (eds.), *Structure of Epic Poetry*, vol. 2, 2: *Configuration*, Berlin, Boston 2019, pp. 245–259, here pp. 246–247 with a rich bibliography; Doris BACHMANN-MEDICK, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2014, pp. 284–328; Wolfgang HALLET and Birgit NEUMANN (eds.), *Die Literaturwissenschaften und der Spatial Turn. Ansätze bei Jurij Lotman und Michail Bachtin*, Bielefeld 2009; Jörg DÖRING and Tristan THIELMANN (eds.), *Spatial Turn. Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2008. See also the various volumes by Stephan GÜNZEL: *Raum. Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung*, Bielefeld 2017; *Raum. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, Stuttgart, Weimar 2010; *Raumwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a. M. 2009; *Topologie zur Raumbeschreibung in den Kultur- und Medienwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2007.
- 9 Cf. KIRSTEIN, *Raum – Antike* (note 8), p. 207 (author’s translation). See also: Hans-Peter NILL, *Gewalt und ‘Unmaking’ in Lucans ‘Bellum Civile’*. Textanalysen aus narratologischer, wirkungsästhetischer und gewaltsoziologischer Perspektive (*Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology* 27), Leiden, Boston 2018, pp. 59–60; Michel FOUCAULT, *Questions of Geography*, in: Colin GORDON (ed.), *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, New York 1980, pp. 63–77.
- 10 Seymour B. CHATMAN, *Story and Discourse Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca et al. 1978, pp. 96–107.
- 11 Ruth RONEN, *Space in Fiction*, in: *Poetics Today* 7 (1986), pp. 421–438.

a spatial narratological perspective.<sup>12</sup> After a short theoretical introduction into her concept, it will be applied to the 'Vita Martini', one of the best-known and most influential late antique hagiographic texts, composed by the Gallic aristocrat and convert Sulpicius Severus in 396 AD.<sup>13</sup> Its protagonist, the author's contemporary, Martin of Tours (316/7–397), has not only been the patron saint of France ever since the Merovingian period, and is widely present in Christian literature and art across ages.<sup>14</sup> To the present day, he still is one of the most famous and popular saints of the western church. The analysis of the narrative space of three exemplary episodes in the 'Vita Martini' will demonstrate a part of the semantisation of space within Sulpicius' text. It will be shown that its narrative space serves in an implicit way, by the narrative presentation itself, to reinforce the protagonist's power, which is broadly presented in terms of content. It is the interaction of *fabula* and *story*, to use Irene DE JONG's terminology,<sup>15</sup> that makes Sulpicius' account more credible within the framework of biographical or hagiographical authenticity.<sup>16</sup> This is exactly what he stated as his main goal in the proem of the 'Vita Martini': "This I ask my future readers: that they give credence to my words."<sup>17</sup>

12 See e.g. KIRSTEIN, Raum – Antike (note 8); Robert KIRSTEIN, Zeit, Raum, Geschlecht. Ovids Erzählung von Hermaphrodit und Salmacis (Metamorphosen 4.271–388), in: Wolfgang POLLEICHTNER (ed.), Literatur- und Kulturtheorie und altsprachlicher Unterricht (Didaskalika 1), Speyer 2018, pp. 99–145; Robert KIRSTEIN, Der sehende Drache. Raumnarratologische Überlegungen zu Ovids Metamorphosen, in: Christoph KUGELMEIER (ed.), Translatio humanitatis, St. Ingbert 2015; NILL (note 9), pp. 141–152 and 280–284.

13 For a biographical outline see Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini, ed. by Philip BURTON, Oxford 2017, pp. 1–7; Sulpicius Severus, Vita Sancti Martini. Das Leben des heiligen Martin. Lateinisch/Deutsch. Übersetzungen, Anmerkungen und Nachwort von Gerlinde HUBER-REBENICH, Stuttgart 2010, pp. 101–103; Sulpicio Severo, Vita di Martino. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento di Fabio RUGGIERO, Bologna 2003, pp. 11–17; Walter BERSCHIN, Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter, Bd. 1: Von der Passio Perpetuae zu den Dialogi Gregors des Großen (Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 8), Stuttgart 1986, pp. 195–196; Clare STANCLIFFE, St. Martin and his Hagiographer. History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus, Oxford 1983, pp. 15–107; Sulpice Sévère, Vie de Saint Martin, tome 1: Introduction, Texte et Traduction (SChr 133), by Jacques FONTAINE, Paris 1967, pp. 54–58.

14 See Brigitte BEAUJARD, Le culte des saints en Gaule. Les premiers temps, d'Hilaire de Poitiers à la fin du VIe siècle, Paris 2000; Bernard CHEVALIER, D'un manteau partagé au culte d'un saint, in: XVIème Centenaire de la Mort de Saint Martin (Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Touraine 63), Tours 1997, pp. 303–310; Eugen EWIG, Der Martinskult im Frühmittelalter, in: Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte 14 (1962), pp. 11–30.

15 DE JONG (note 1), pp. 37–39.

16 On the notion of 'biographical truth' in contrast to 'biographical authenticity' see: Danny PRAET, The Divided Cloak as redemptio militiae. Biblical Stylization and Hagiographical Intertextuality in Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini, in: Koen de TEMMERMAN and Kristoffel DEMEON (eds.), Writing Biography in Greece and Rome. Narrative Technique and Fictionalisation, Cambridge 2016, pp. 134–138; Bernhard FETZ, Biographisches Erzählen zwischen Wahrheit und Lüge, Inszenierung und Authentizität, in: Christian KLEIN (ed.), Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien, Stuttgart, Weimar 2009, pp. 54–60.

17 *Obsecro autem eos qui lecturi sunt, ut fidem dictis adhibeant.* Mart. 1, 9. – All quotations from the 'Vita Martini' and their translations are taken from the edition by BURTON (note 13).

## Birgit Haupt's Spatial Narratological Model

The spatial narratological model developed by Birgit HAUPT is based on Elisabeth STRÖKER's philosophical concepts of space.<sup>18</sup> Like the spatial notions of STRÖKER and Gerhard HOFFMANN, who introduced it into literary studies,<sup>19</sup> HAUPT's model is a tripartite one distinguishing between "tuned space" (*TS*; "Gestimmter Raum"), "action space" (*AS*; "Handlungsraum") and "viewed space" (*VS*; "Anschauungsraum").<sup>20</sup> However, this does not imply a strict separation of 'spaces', but rather describes different modalities or possibilities of accentuation ("Akzentuierungsmöglichkeiten"). They are to be considered as different, overlapping and mutually non-exclusive layers which correspond to the three ways in which a subject can consciously perceive or experience space (by feeling, acting, seeing) and which can be accentuated in different ways (cf. Fig. 1).

In *Tuned Space* (*TS*), the focus lies on how the atmospheric setting of narrative space is perceived by a subject. The atmosphere or mood of space can be generated by different factors depending (1) on associations that a specific spatial setting triggers in a person perceiving it, or (2) on specific external circumstances in which a perceiving subject is placed. *TS* can be perceived quite differently by different text-internal figures as well as by different text-external recipients. Correspondingly, the concept of focalisation coined by Gérard GENETTE, i.e. the question through whose eyes, ears or other sensory organs a setting is perceived, is of great significance in this context.<sup>21</sup> For instance, a Christian text-internal figure or text-external reader, respectively, who personally experiences an archaic pagan animal sacrifice or reads of it, perceives this setting quite differently than a devoted pagan figure or reader. Concerning the perspective of consciousness, *TS* correlates with the feeling and experiencing subject.

*Action Space* (*AS*), on the other hand, is accentuated when actions stand in the foreground of a narrative as well as the interaction between an acting subject and space. Here, a figure can be characterised by the way it acts within narrative space, especially in contrast to other figures' actions or to the expectation of the recipient. A figure might also interact with space by creating specific spatial structures, for example through moving.

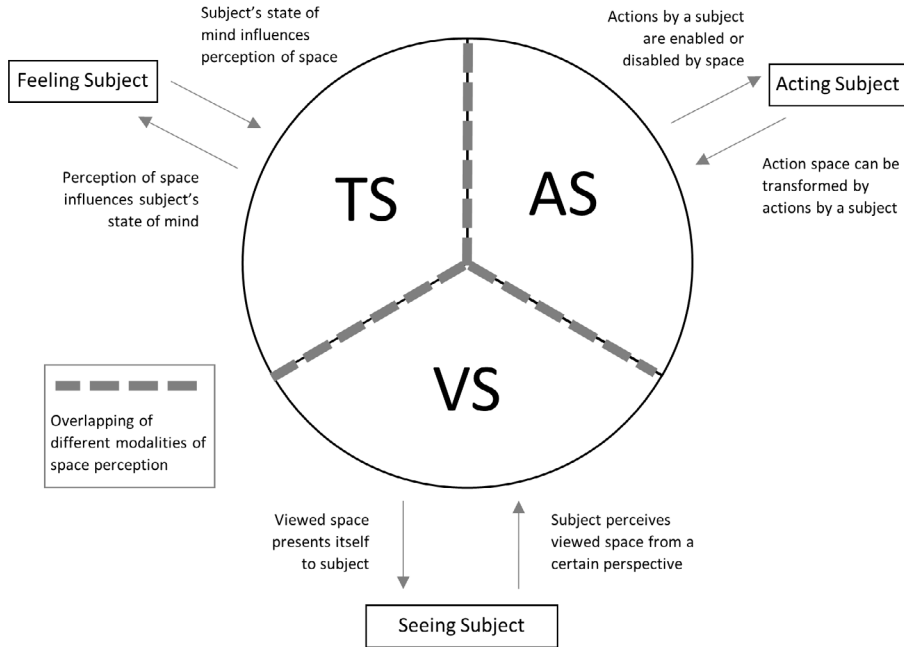
For *Viewed Space* (*VS*), finally, visual perception is essential, especially the question of how a subject sees space and how space presents itself to the perceiving subject.

18 Elisabeth STRÖKER, *Philosophische Untersuchungen zum Raum*, Frankfurt a. M. 1965.

19 Gerhard HOFFMANN, *Raum, Situation, erzählte Wirklichkeit*, Stuttgart 1978.

20 Birgit HAUPT, *Zur Analyse des Raums*, in: Peter WENZEL (ed.), *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse. Kategorien, Modelle, Probleme*, Trier 2004, pp. 69–87, esp. pp. 70–73. See also KIRSTEIN, *Raum – Antike* (note 8), pp. 210–211. The English terminology used here follows the proposal by KIRSTEIN, *Introduction* (note 8), p. 250.

21 Cf. KIRSTEIN, *Introduction* (note 8), pp. 251–252; KIRSTEIN, *Raum – Antike* (note 8), p. 211. On GENETTE's notion of focalisation see: Gérard GENETTE, *Figures III*, Paris 1972, pp. 183–203; Gérard GENETTE, *Die Erzählung*, Paderborn 2010, pp. 104–118; MARTÍNEZ and SCHEFFEL (note 5), pp. 50–67.



**Fig. 1** | Modalities and Perceptions of Narrative Space according to HAUPT (note 20), p. 72.

Narrative space is always mediated by a narrator and, accordingly, individual spatial aspects of a narrative are strategically accentuated. Thus, for example, differing perceptions of space by several figures can be used as a means of indirect characterisation.

Apart from its emphasis on dynamic interdependencies, the major advantage of HAUPT's phenomenological model is that the accentuation of a modality of narrative space can be identified by relatively concrete linguistic markers. In order to accentuate *TS*, adjectives are often used that explicitly name a certain atmosphere (safe / dangerous, bright / gloomy, beautiful / ugly), but also figures, objects and other spatial elements with certain – so to speak – 'natural' semantics such as executioners, graves or specific weather phenomena (e.g. a storm, sunshine). Verbs of movement, on the other hand, primarily accentuate *AS*. If verbs of sensory perception, especially of seeing and being seen, are in the foreground, accentuation shifts to *VS*.

### 'The Power of the Hermit': St Martin Converts a Robber in the Alps (Mart. 5, 4–6)

HAUPT's model will first be applied to a passage at the opening of the 'Vita Martini'. After Martin had left the Roman army (Mart. 4) and had spent some time with Hilary of Poitiers (Mart. 5, 1–2), he decided, inspired by a dream, to visit his still pagan

parents.<sup>22</sup> On his way to his Pannonian birthplace Sabaria (today Szombathely in Hungary), he set out to cross the dangerous Alps and fell into the hands of a robber band. One of them was willing to kill Martin immediately with his axe but was prevented from doing so by one of his accomplices. After this, Martin was handed over to only one of the thieves. The latter brought him to a remote place and began to ask questions.<sup>23</sup> Martin explained that he was a Christian, and when asked if he was afraid, he answered “with complete assurance that he had never been less so, as he knew the Lord’s mercy would be specially present to help him in times of testing. Rather, he said, he felt sorry for the robber, who, in as much as he pursued a life of robbery, was unworthy of the mercy of Christ”. After Martin had preached the Gospel, the robber confessed Christ, released Martin and led him back to his former way.<sup>24</sup>

Applying HAUPT’s spatial narratological model to this passage, one notices that, at first, accentuation lies on *TS*. The introductory authorial notes by the ‘external primary narrator-focaliser’ (to use Irene DE JONG’s terminology once again)<sup>25</sup> that Hilary enjoined Martin with many tears and entreaties (*precibus et lacrimis*) to come back and that Martin embarked on the journey to his birthplace with sadness (*maestus*) evokes a melancholic mood. This is intensified by Martin’s testifying that he would suffer many adversities (*multa se adversa passurum*), which would be confirmed by the course of events. This foreshadowing of the dangers Martin would get into is then increased by naming the alpine mountains, which are in literary tradition connected with all sorts of threats,<sup>26</sup> and by strikingly calling the path Martin chose *devia*.

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22 On the difficulties concerning the chronology of these events and of Martin leaving the Roman army see: Timothy P. BARNES, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tria Corda 6), Tübingen 2010, pp. 207–208; Timothy P. BARNES, *The Military Career of Martin of Tours*, in: *Analecta Bollandiana* 114 (1996), pp. 25–32; STANCLIFFE (note 13), pp. 134–148; Ernest-Charles BABUT, *Saint Martin de Tours*, Paris 1912, pp. 112–132.

23 Mart. 5, 3–4: *Ex voluntate sancti Hilari profectus est, multis ab eo obstrictus precibus et lacrimis ut rediret. Maestus, ut ferunt, peregrinationem illam ingressus est, contestatus fratribus multa se adversa passurum; quod postea probavit eventus. Ac primum inter Alpes devia secutus incidit in latrones. Cumque unus securi elevata in caput eius librasset ictum, ferientis dexteram sustinuit alter; vinctis tamen post tergum manibus uni asservandus et spoliandus traditur. Qui cum eum ad remotiora duxisset, percontari ab eo coepit quisnam esset.*

24 Mart. 5, 5–6.

25 DE JONG (note 1), pp. 47–56.

26 In antiquity, the Alps were considered a dangerous place due to their harsh climate and natural forces. See Amm. 15, 10; Claud. 26, 340–348; Liv. 21 passim; Pol. 2, 15 and 3, 55; Sen. nat. 4, 2, 19; Strab. 4, 1, 12 and 6, 5. While areas along the main routes were Christianised from the fourth century onwards, more remote parts (cf. *devia*) are occasionally associated with pagan practices until the ninth century. However, caution is advised here since there are hardly any reliable sources on paganism in the Alps in post-antique times. Cf. Katharina WINCKLER, *Die Alpen im Frühmittelalter. Die Geschichte eines Raumes in den Jahren 500 bis 800*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2012, pp. 173–184; Lutz E. VON PADBERG, *Die Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1998, pp. 58–62; Jacques FONTAINE, *Sulpice Sévère. Vie de Saint Martin*, tome 2: *Commentaire (jusqu’à Vita 19)* (SChr 134), Paris 1968, pp. 561–562. – In the context given, however, literary predecessors presenting alpine tribes as ferocious, reluctant and rebellious are probably more important (cf. Hor. *carm.* 4, 4, 17–24 and 4, 14, 7–16; Vell. 2, 90, 1).



This crescendo of foreshadowed dangers then culminates in the event that actually threatens Martin's life: *incidit in latrones*. That Martin leaves safe Gaul and enters the dangerous mountain range of the Alps, marked by a verb of movement (*ingressus est*) in combination with the participle of movement *secutus*, might be seen as an act of crossing semantic borders in the sense of LOTMAN's notion of 'event' (see below).

It is striking in this context that this transgressive act of the hero-agent coincides with a shift of accentuation from *TS* to *AS*. It also induces a process of both spatial and personal isolation as well as of atmospheric intensification: Martin started out from the caring Gallic Poitiers, where he led a secure life together with bishop Hilary, "whose faithfulness in the things of God at that time were well known and attested" (Mart. 5, 1) and his *fratres*, and proceeded via the alpine *devia*, which were controlled by pagan bandits, to even more remote regions: *ad remotiora*. The comparative is certainly not accidental here. In parallel with this spatial isolation, we can identify a personal, since only one of the thieves takes Martin to this remote place. Thus, the figural isolation is, in a way, made spatial. The verb of movement describing these actions, *ducere* (as well as *tradere* before), continues to accentuate *AS*. This intertwined spatial and personal zoom-in, which is generated by the actions of the subjects within the narrative, prepares for the central event of this episode. For readers familiar with classical Latin literature, this creates suspense, since such narrative dispositions, primarily the atmospheric setting at the beginning, are often used, e.g. in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', to initiate a dramatic transformation narrative.<sup>27</sup> Even in the 'Vita Martini', this is not the only instance where we find such a disposition. The accounts of Martin bringing dead people back to life, for instance, are introduced by similar spatial and personal zoom-ins combined with comparable shifts of spatial accentuation.<sup>28</sup>

This spatialised isolation of the episode's main protagonists, however, serves not only to prepare atmospherically for the key event and to create suspense. This narrative also makes Martin's immaterial and inner hermit-like ascetic life spatial. It is in the framework of the latter that the very strength of his faith and the very trust in God's mercy at the moment of fear of death becomes apparent, which ultimately brings about the robber's conversion and the resolution of the conflict.

The strength of faith that comes to the fore here is a manifestation of Martin's eremitic life, which he would actually realise only later. At the very beginning of the 'Vita Martini', the narrator noted that Martin had already aspired to this ideal at the age of twelve. Although his young age still prevented him from becoming a hermit, he always pursued this goal in his heart (Mart. 2, 4). As Jacques FONTAINE has already

27 Some of these were analysed by KIRSTEIN (note 12) from a spatial narratological point of view.

28 Mart. 7–8. The same applies to the way Martin used to drive out evil spirits in possessed people described by Sulpicius in dial. 3, 6, 3. Similar 'spatial isolations' can also be found in other anachoretic life descriptions, sometimes combined with encounters with robber bands as well, see e.g. Athan. vit. Anton. 8–10, 12–13 and 49–50; Hier. vita Hilar. 3, 1–2; 6, 1–4; 31, 1–10, vita Malchi 4–5, vita Pauli 5; Dionys. Exig. vita Pachom. 12 (PL 73, 236–237); cf. Vitae patr. 7, 34–35 (PL 73, 1052–1053).

pointed out,<sup>29</sup> it must also be stressed in this context that *remotiora*, the local adverb discussed earlier, evokes associations of an anachoretic life and of the desert as a place of penance, asceticism and encounter with God.

Thus, the isolation in the middle of the life-threatening Alps not only spatialises and updates Martin's wish from childhood, it also stands for his later ascetic and hermit-like life, which became most apparent in his foundation of a hermitage in Logociacum (today Ligugé near Poitiers), treated in Mart. 7, 1. It was also reinforced later when, having become a bishop, he established a 'monastery' (*monasterium*) for himself at Marmoutier (Mart. 10, 3–4). Both steps are to be considered as a (Western) adaption of the ascetic hermitism practised in the East.<sup>30</sup> It is striking that the narrator tags Marmoutier with the adjective *remotus* as well, explicitly classifying the dwelling there as an equal substitute for an eremitic life in the desert: "This place was so remote and sequestered that it lacked none of the solitude of the wilderness."<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, it is the strength of Martin's faith becoming manifest in his ascetic eremitic way of life that makes him fearless in the face of the robber, and that has the latter convert to Christianity. Thus, the narrative space in which the narrated events happen emphasises the power of the ascetic and hermit Martin.

This way of Christian life as pursued by Martin, however, was not accepted by all of his and Sulpicius' contemporaries, especially his fellow bishops,<sup>32</sup> and so it had to be defended offensively in the saint's *vita*. With its specific spatial semantics and its typological connections to various stories from the New Testament, including a story about the apostle Paul, who is also said to have fallen into the hands of a robber band,<sup>33</sup> the episode under discussion also serves to illustrate the equivalence of 'Martin the Ascetic' to, if not superiority over, his bishop colleagues.

### **'Master of Spaces': Martin and a Pagan (Sacrificial?) Procession (Mart. 12)**

The second passage to be analysed leads us back to Gaul, but it fast-forwards us to the other, much larger part of the 'Vita Martini'. In this, its protagonist is primarily concerned with taking action against various expressions of misbelief and with performing miraculous healings and exorcisms.

<sup>29</sup> FONTAINE (note 26), pp. 564–565, 671–672.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. HUBER-REBENICH (note 13), pp. 81–82.

<sup>31</sup> Mart. 10, 4: *Qui locus tam secretus et remotus erat ut eremi solitudinem non desideraret*. Cf. Sulpicius' *remotior cellula* in Primuliacum (Sulp. dial. 1, 1, 4).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. HUBER-REBENICH (note 13), pp. 114–115. For Martin's enemies see BABUT (note 22), pp. 112–132.

<sup>33</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11, 26; cf. Luke 10, 30. Also see BURTON (note 13), pp. 170–171; FONTAINE (note 26), pp. 563–564.

One day, according to the beginning of chapter 12, Martin was on his way to some place not further specified in the narrative when he met a funeral procession carrying the body of a pagan to his grave. When the throng was still far away, he could not see what it actually was. From the fact that those people were peasants and that linen cloths were draped over the corpse and fluttering in the wind, he concluded that they were conducting pagan sacrificial rites. For there was in those times a "wretched madness", as the narrator emphasises, "among the Gallic peasants to carry images of the demons, covered with a white veil, around their territory".<sup>34</sup>

In order to have a closer look at these things, Martin held the sign of the cross against them and bade them not to move from their place but to lay down their burden. First, they were stiff as stones. Then, although trying hard to move forward, they were unable to proceed any further. They "span around in the most laughable state of giddiness, until, overwhelmed, they laid down their burden". After Martin had realised that it was 'only' a pagan funeral ceremony and not a sacrifice, he raised his hand and let them go on their way.<sup>35</sup>

Walter BERSCHIN has drawn attention to the fact that by a conspicuous accumulation of military vocabulary, Martin is stylised here as an *imperator Dei*.<sup>36</sup> A spatial narratological analysis of this episode can, however, reveal that even greater power is attributed to Martin than this analogy to a Roman general suggests; he is, in a sense, equipped with the omnipotence of the narrator itself.

At the beginning of this account, AS is obviously accentuated: Martin is on a journey (*dum iter ageret*), the funeral procession is coming towards him (*obvium haberet*), the corpse is being borne to its burial (*deferebatur*). But then, accentuation shifts to VS since Martin sees (*conspicatusque*) the things happening in front of him from a distance and, out of ignorance (*ignarus*) as to what it is, stands still for a while (*paululum stetit*), observing the procession still approaching him (*difficile fuerit dinoscere quid videret*). This shift of accentuation is accompanied by a change of focalisation: from the 'external primary narrator-focaliser' to an 'explicit embedded

34 Mart. 12, 1–2: *Accidit autem insequenti tempore, dum iter ageret, ut gentilis cuiusdam corpus, quod ad sepulcrum cum superstitioso funere deferebatur, obvium haberet; conspicatusque minus venientium turbam, quidnam id esset ignarus, paululum stetit: nam fere quingentorum passuum intervallum erat, ut difficile fuerit dinoscere quid videret. Tamen, quia rusticam manum cerneret et agente vento lintea corpori superiecta volitarent, profanos sacrificiorum ritus agi credit; quia esset haec Gallorum rusticis consuetudo, simulacra daemonum candido tecta velamine misera per agros suos circumferre dementia.*

35 Mart. 12, 3–5: *Levato ergo in adversos signo crucis imperat turbae non moveri loco onusque deponere. Hic vero mirum in modum videres miseros primum velut saxa riguisse. Dein, cum promovere se summo conamine niterentur, ultra accedere non valentes ridiculam in vertiginem rotabantur, donec victi corporis onus ponunt. Attoniti et semet invicem aspicientes, quidnam sibi accidisset, taciti cogitabant. Sed cum beatus vir comperisset exsequiarum esse illam frequentiam, non sacrorum, elevata rursum manu dat eis abeundi et tollendi corporis potestatem.*

36 BERSCHIN (note 13), pp. 202–204. On Mart. 12, especially on its interaction with the preceding chapter, see also Fabio RUGGIERO, San Martino di Tours di fronte a un culto contaminato. Per una nuova interpretazione del capitolo 11 della biografia sulpiciana, in: *Rivista Liturgica* 105 (2018), pp. 79–95.

focaliser'. We are told from the inside view of the protagonist what he believes he is seeing based on his own background knowledge about pagan peasant practices in contemporary Gaul (*quia rusticam manum cerneret [...], profanos sacrificiorum ritus agi credit*: Mart. 12, 2).

When Martin then raises the sign of the cross against the approaching crowd, accentuation shifts, though only for a brief moment, back to *AS* (*imperat turbae non moveri loco*). In the following, however, we find an extremely curious constellation, not only in terms of the *fabula*, but also concerning the narrative representation (*story*) of its space. The participants in the procession struggle to go forward but cannot proceed. Reading this part of Sulpicius' account through the lens of HAUPT's spatial narratological model, one could argue that these text-internal figures strive with all their strength to accentuate *AS* but are stuck in *VS* by Martin's miraculous act. Accordingly, in this passage, we can find a mixture of verbs of (vainly tried) movement on the one hand (*promovere se [...] niterentur, ultra accedere non valentes*) and of standstill on the other (*velut saxa riguisse*), which Martin and the reader, who is indirectly addressed by *videres*, observe: "Then it was wondrous to behold how the wretched peasants were at first stiff as stones, then, striving [...] to go forward, they were unable to proceed any further."<sup>37</sup> Their ridiculous spinning around (*ridiculam in vertiginem rotabantur*) may be seen as a manifestation of their unsuccessful attempt to shift accentuation from one modality of narrative space to the other.

Finally, the throng abandons all attempts to move forward, looking at each other as if struck by thunder (*attoniti [...] aspicientes*), considering in silence (*taciti cogitabant*) what is happening there. Therefore, accentuation again lies on *VS*. Only now is Martin able to realise the true nature of the procession and allows them to go their way. Then they are able to move again, in other words, to shift accentuation from *VS* to *AS*.

The crucial point that emerges from a spatial narratological close-reading of this episode is that the intradiegetic figure Martin is basically represented as a character that has the power to determine whether other text-internal figures are allowed to move forward or must stop so as to be seen or, in other words, which modality of narrative space they are allowed to accentuate, so to speak. Martin's absolute power over other text-internal figures and their movements is pointedly summarised in the concluding authorial remark of this passage: "So he both compelled them to stay when he willed it, and allowed them to go when he wished it" (*Ita eos et cum voluit, stare compulit, et cum libuit, abire permisit*).<sup>38</sup> The narrator presents the protagonist not only as a powerful *imperator Dei*, but also – and this is only revealed by looking at the spatial narrative structure of the episode – as an *imperator spatiorum*, a master of spaces, who in this scene appears to have the same omnipotence as the narrator. In addition to BURTON's intertextual reference to Christ in John 10, 18 (*potestatem*

37 Mart. 12, 3–4: *Hic vero mirum in modum videres miseros primum velut saxa riguisse. Dein, cum promoveri se [...] niterentur, ultra accedere non valentes.*

38 On this phrase see FONTAINE (note 26), pp. 731–737.

*habeo ponendi eam [sc. animam meam] et potestatem habeo iterum sumendi eam*),<sup>39</sup> this can be seen as a narrative manifestation of the immanent power which a saint thoroughly filled with God exercises over his earthly fellow human beings.

### 'Immobile Asceticism Defeats Mobile Luxury': Martin Faces the Devil in his Cell (Mart. 24, 4–8)

The final text passage to be discussed shows the potential that can result from a combination of HAUPT's notion and Jurij M. LOTMAN's semantic model of space. The latter defines the crossing of a topological, semantic and/or topographical border between mutually complementary subsets by a mobile hero-agent as the criterion for an 'event' or 'sujet' (i.e. narrativity).<sup>40</sup> Although it was designed for the global structure of a text, various studies, particularly in the fields of classical philology and biblical studies, have shown that it can also be applied productively to analyses of minor text units.<sup>41</sup>

One day, as the narrator says, when Martin was praying in his cell, the Devil appeared before him, clad in purple light, "robed in kingly raiment, crowned with a diadem of gold and gems, his shoes smeared with gold, his countenance so calm, his face so joyful, that one would think him anyone but the Devil."<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning of this passage, its narrative space is atmospherically coloured negative (*TS*). This is already indicated by the introductory authorial remark by the 'external primary narrator-focaliser' explicitly mentioning the Devil (*diabolus*) as an agent and his fraudulent behaviour (*quanta [...] arte temptaverit*). Moreover, his appearance corresponds not only to the typical dress worn by the late antique Roman

39 BURTON (note 13), p. 213.

40 Jurij M. LOTMAN, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, transl. by Ronald VROON, Ann Arbor 1977, esp. pp. 217–244. See also NILI (note 9), pp. 63–66; MARTÍNEZ and SCHEFFEL (note 5), pp. 158–163. – On the concept of 'the male mobile hero' and 'female immobile heroine / female obstacle' in classical epic see Alison KEITH, *Versions of Epic Masculinity in Ovid's Metamorphosis*, in: Philip HARDIE, Alessandro BARCHIESI and Stephen HINDS (eds.), *Ovidian Transformations. Essays on the Metamorphoses and its Reception*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 214–239; cf. Alison KEITH, *Engendering Civil War in Flavian Epic*, in: Lauren D. GINSBERG and Darcy A. KRASNE (eds.), *After 69 CE. Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome*, Berlin 2018, pp. 295–320; Alison KEITH, *Sexuality and Gender*, in: Peter E. KNOX (ed.), *A Companion to Ovid*, Chichester, Malden 2009, pp. 355–369.

41 See e.g. Berenike JOCHIM-BUHL and Robert KIRSTEIN, *Lots Frau (Gen 19, 1–29). Grenzüberschreitung als Ereignis. Der Versuch eines gemeinsamen narratologischen Zugangs von Literatur- und Bibelwissenschaft*, in: *Theologische Quartalschrift* 198 (2018), pp. 114–24; NILI (note 9).

42 Mart. 24, 4: *Non praetereundum autem videtur quanta Martinum sub isdem diebus diabolus arte temptaverit. Quodam enim die praemissa prae se et circumiectus ipse luce purpurea, quo facilius claritate assumpti fulgoris illuderet, veste etiam regia indutus, diademate ex gemmis auroque redimitus, calceis auro illitis, sereno ore, laeta facie, ut nihil minus quam diabolus putaretur, oranti in cellula adstitit.* Also note the apocalyptic colouring of this description evoked by motivic references to Revelation 17, 4: *Et mulier erat circumdata purpura et coccino, et inaurata auro et lapide pretioso et margaritis.* On this whole passage see also Vos (note 4), pp. 145–147.

emperor, as FONTAINE has already highlighted,<sup>43</sup> but also, from a decidedly Christian point of view, to the vanity of earthly life. In contrast, the ascetic Martin dwelling in his cell like a hermit stands out only because of his prayer (*oranti*). This antithesis between earthly mammon and ascetic hermitism directed towards the kingdom of heaven is particularly emphasised by the contrast between the number of words describing the appearances of both protagonists.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, the Devil is, in terms of LOTMAN's model, presented as a mobile, transgressive and thus *sujet*-generating ("sujethafter") hero-agent who crosses the topographical, topological and semantic border between the earthly world and the monk's cell. Here, the verb *adstare* describing his action is used in a completely different way than in the episode discussed above<sup>45</sup> and therefore paradoxically accentuates AS. Martin, on the other hand, is presented as an immobile antagonist; by his reaction to the Devil's appearance VS is distinctly accentuated:

[5] At first sight of him, Martin was long astounded, and for long both kept a speechless silence. Then the Devil spoke first: 'Martin, acknowledge', he said, 'whom you behold! I am Christ. About to descend to earth, I willed first to manifest myself to you.' [6] Then, as Martin kept silence and gave no reply, the Devil had the audacity to repeat his audacious claim. 'Martin, why do you hesitate? Believe, as you see! I am Christ.'<sup>46</sup>

As Martin notices the figure that has entered his cell, he looks at it in astonishment (*primo aspectu eius fuisset hebetatus*). Then, after a while, it is again the Devil who takes the initiative by addressing Martin (*prior diabolus*, 'Agnosce' inquit, 'Martine, quem cernis'). By the relative clause *quem cernis* providing a *verbum sentiendi*, the Devil explicitly points out, so to speak, that Martin is accentuating VS. Even when the Devil, at first, pretends in cunning disguise to be Christ about to descend to earth and to reveal himself to Martin first, the latter remains immobile in VS. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of his resolute determination not to let himself change his mind.

After this, the Devil becomes active again and in the same way as before. Here, too, he stresses by a *verbum sentiendi* (*cum videas*) that VS is accentuated by Martin. Finally, however, Martin becomes more active than before. Yet the verb describing

43 Jacques FONTAINE, Sulpice Sévère. *Vie de Saint Martin*, tome 3: Commentaire (fin) et index (SChr 135), Paris 1969, pp. 1022–1028, cf. BURTON (note 13), pp. 247, 250–251.

44 Cf. BURTON (note 13), pp. 249–251.

45 On the mobile aspect of (*ad*)*stare* often used for gods or humans suddenly appearing (not least by Sulpicius) see: ThLL 2, cols. 953, 5–956, 16 s. v. *adsto*, here col. 955, 24–39.

46 Mart. 24, 5–6: *Cumque Martinus primo aspectu eius fuisset hebetatus, diu mutum silentium ambo tenuerunt. Tum prior diabolus, 'Agnosce' inquit, 'Martine, quem cernis: Christus ego sum; descensusus ad terram prius me manifestare tibi volui.' Ad haec cum Martinus taceret nec quidquam responsi referret, iterare ausus est diabolus professionis audaciam: 'Martine, quid dubitas? Crede, cum videas! Christus ego sum'.*

his reaction (*intelligere*) is still a *verbum sentiendi* and therefore still accentuates *VS*. Significantly, Martin does not become active of his own accord, but it is the "spiritual revelation" (*revelans spiritus*) that makes him react:

Then Martin, understanding by spiritual revelation it was the Devil, not the Lord, spoke. 'Not clothed in purple', he said, 'nor radiant with diadem did the Lord Jesus say he would come. Unless he come in that fashion and form in which he suffered, unless he come bearing the marks of the Cross, I shall not believe that Christ has come.'<sup>47</sup>

In his direct speech, it becomes clear that the only mobile authority which the praying Martin allows into his cell is Christ, since he alone is here connected with verbs of movement (*venire, praeferre*). Thus, Martin ironically defeats the Devil by his immobility, by his actions accentuating *VS* and by this professing statement. In contrast, the flight of the Devil is again characterised as an immediate mobility: "At these words the Devil vanished like smoke."<sup>48</sup>

In this episode, too, narrative space is more than a mere background foil against which the narrated events take place. Its different modalities evoked by the actions of the Devil and Martin illustrate their fundamental antagonism. Martin's defeat of the active, mobile, classificatory borders transgressing diabolic *luxuria* by means of his 'unheroic' immobility shows the power of the ascetic hermit praying in his bare cell.

## Conclusion

In his monumental commentary on the 'Vita Martini', Jacques FONTAINE makes some effort to pinpoint the events of the first episode under discussion here. Although he says, on the one hand, that it is not easy to clarify exactly where a traveller leaving Poitiers for Milan would have crossed the Alps, he comes to the relatively unequivocal conclusion that Martin probably travelled via Lyon, but then without any doubt ("sans doute") through the Graian Alps via the Little Saint Bernard Pass or through the Cottian Alps via the Mont Cenis Pass to Italy.<sup>49</sup> As melodramatic as the narrated events may seem, according to FONTAINE, this anecdote is perfectly plausible, especially considering the reputedly well-known rebelliousness of the Alpine people in antiquity.

47 Mart. 24, 7: *Tum ille, revelante sibi spiritu ut intellegeret diabolum esse, non dominum, 'Non se' inquit, 'Iesus dominus purpuratum nec diademate reidentem venturum esse praedixit; ego Christum nisi in eo habitu formaque qua passus est, nisi crucis stigmata praeferentem, venisse non credam'.*

48 Mart. 24, 8: *Ad hanc ille vocem statim ut fumus evanuit.*

49 FONTAINE (note 26), pp. 560–562.

FONTAINE also presents three more or less plausible explanations for the curious and ridiculous behaviour of the procession participants in Mart. 12, 4 after Martin raised the sign of the cross against them: (1) physiologically, this could be interpreted as symptoms of a nervous disease (with reference to Macr. Sat. 7, 9, 2) or (2) as cramps which befell the possessed when they were brought to graves of martyrs (cf. Sulp. dial. 3, 6; Hil. c. Const. 8; Hier. epist. 108, 13) or (3) as typical behaviour of people worshipping demons.<sup>50</sup> BURTON, too, can explain this scene, which admittedly is hard to visualise, only by some biblical references (Isaiah 19, 14; Psalms 82, 14; Ecclesiasticus 33, 5).<sup>51</sup> The spatial semantics of the third episode treated above, finally, are discussed by neither of them, nor by other commentators.

Such questions, which sometimes lead to rather speculative and unsatisfactory answers, despite all efforts, are mainly irrelevant for a spatial narratological analysis as presented here. In this context, it is necessary to bear in mind that biographical or hagiographical texts like the ‘Vita Martini’ are not committed to an ‘absolute’ or ‘factual’ but to an ‘ethical’ truth. They “are prescriptive rather than descriptive: they offer moral *exempla*”, as Danny PRAET puts it.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, one should be careful to locate these or similar narratives in their contemporary life-world, time and space. The study has shown that by their specific semantisation of narrative space, these episodes do not primarily serve the purpose of a factual historical account or a reconstruction of the protagonist’s *vita*, but rather help to illustrate the outstanding power emerging from an ascetic and eremitic life as Martin leads it. This core message of Sulpicius Severus’ ‘Life of St Martin’ is not only explicitly propagated in terms of content.<sup>53</sup> Applying Birgit HAUPT’s spatial narratological model, which was combined in this article with Jurij LOTMAN’s semantic model of space, the analysis has shown that the narrative space of the ‘Vita Martini’ is not a mere background foil against which the narrated events take place but that it rather has its own semantics that highlight, illustrate and enlarge the holiness and power of the narrative’s hero Martin.

This exemplary study on the semantisation of narrative space in Sulpicius Severus’ ‘Vita Martini’ might serve as a starting point for subsequent analyses of further contemporary and later hagiographic texts, for many of which this *vita* was a somewhat archetypal model worth imitating. Together with further studies to come, this may contribute to opening up a diachronic perspective on the functionalisation of space in hagiographic narratives.

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50 FONTAINE (note 43), pp. 728–729.

51 BURTON (note 13), p. 213.

52 PRAET (note 16), p. 134. Cf. FETZ (note 16).

53 Cf. HUBER-REBENICH (note 13), pp. 114–118.