

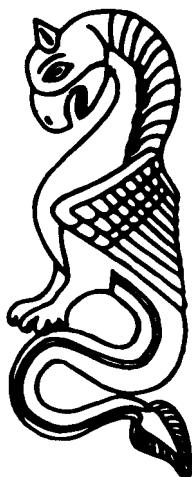
Leeds Studies in English

Article:

Judith Gaites, 'Ælfric's Longer Life of St Martin and Its Latin Sources: A Study in Narrative Technique', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 13 (1982), 23-41

Permanent URL:

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AELFRIC'S LONGER *LIFE OF ST MARTIN* AND ITS LATIN SOURCES: A STUDY IN NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* are in some respects a rather neglected area in the body of Old English prose. Such work as has been carried out has tended to concentrate mainly on linguistic and stylistic analysis with particular attention to the question of "rhythmic prose".¹ Appreciation of the literary qualities of Ælfric's work can be extended by an examination of his handling of his subject matter in relation to his sources, such as has been carried out by Cecily Clark in her comparison between Ælfric's *Life of St Edmund* and Abbo of Fleury's Latin life, which is his source.² This paper will attempt a similar kind of study of Ælfric's second *Life of St Martin*³ in relation to its main sources. G.H. Gerould has written on Ælfric's treatment of his source material in his two *Lives of St Martin*, but his brief observations are mainly restricted to Ælfric's selection and arrangement of material.⁴ The earlier version of the *Life of St Martin* is included in the *Catholic Homilies*⁵ but this is a very compressed, although comprehensive account, and the fuller version in the *Lives of Saints* affords a better opportunity of observing Ælfric's skill in selecting and manipulating his material.

Ælfric's second *Life of St Martin* was written in 996 or 997⁶ and is based on Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Sancti Martini* and its supplementary epistles;⁷ however, he incorporates additional material from Sulpicius' *Dialogi*⁸ and Gregory of Tours' *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini*.⁹ The *Dialogi* were used simply to augment the number of miracles, and Gregory's *De Virtutibus* furnished additional material for the account of miracles associated with Martin's death, an important feature of hagiographical narrative. In his opening remarks, Ælfric acknowledges that his main debt is to Sulpicius:

Sulpicius hatte sum snoter writere .
ðe wolde awritan þa wundra and mihta
þe martinus se mæra mihtiglice gefremode
on þisre worulde . and he wrat þa be him
.
and we þæt englisc nimað of þære ylcan gesetnysse .
(Skeat, 218/1-4; 220/8)

Yet the overall structure of Ælfric's *Life* differs considerably from that of the *Vita*. This is partly because he draws on additional sources which enable him to give a complete account of

Martin's life and death, whereas Sulpicius' main work on Martin, written between 391 and 397, the year of Martin's death, was really a collection of anecdotes that had grown up around the saint during his lifetime. The *Vita* could not relate the circumstances of his death, which were to form a central episode in Ælfric's *Life*.

This difference in structure is also a reflection of the differing purpose of the biographers. The focus of Sulpicius' attention is Martin himself, and his intention seems to be to gain recognition for him and his way of life amongst his contemporaries. By the time Ælfric was writing, however, some six hundred years later, Martin was a well-established saint. Ælfric's intention, therefore, was to tell the story in a way that would meet his didactic aims as a preacher, and this is reflected in his adaptation of his material to suit the needs of his audience. He carries out these adaptations in a variety of ways, not only through supplementation of the *Vita* with information from other sources, but also through abridgement, omission and reordering of his source material. It is with an examination of these techniques that I begin.

1. Abridgements

In his Latin preface to the *Lives of Saints* Ælfric makes known his intention of abridging the longer texts:

Hoc sciendum etiam quod prolixiores passiones
breviamus verbis, non adeo sensu, ne fastidiosus
ingeratur tedium si tanta prolixitas erit in propria
lingua quanta est in latina.¹⁰

However, in presenting his account of the life and miracles of Martin, Ælfric adds to the narrative by his inclusion of material from other sources and omits little, apart from the dedicatory epistle and introduction to the *Vita* and some personal anecdotes towards the end of it. It is more characteristic of Ælfric to condense material which is of no particular interest to him, as he does in Section VII, where he abridges an episode in Sulpicius' *Vita*:

Nam cum fortuito lector, cui legendi eo die officium
erat, interclusus a populo defuisset, turbatis
ministris, dum expectatur qui non aderat, unus e
circumstantibus, sumpto psalterio, quem primum versum
invenit, arripuit. (Vita, 9/5)

This detailed account is condensed by Ælfric into two simple sentences:

ac se rædere was utan belocen . þa ge-læhte sum preost
anne sealtre sona . and þæt ærest gemette
rædde him æt-foran . . . (Skeat, 236/274-276)

Often it is rhetorical material that is omitted, as, for example, Sulpicius' introductory section which follows his dedicatory epistle. He uses this to explain both his motivation in writing

an account of Martin and his stylistic intentions. Since the collection of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* as a whole has a Latin and an English preface, there is no need for further explanation of this kind, and Ælfric proceeds directly with the narrative. Another type of material which Ælfric omits is political comment that has only historical relevance and thus has no part in Ælfric's plan. Sulpicius includes such a passage immediately prior to his account of Martin's relationship with the Emperor Maximus (*Vita*, 20/1). There, Sulpicius criticises the corruption among the churchmen of his age and uses the example of Martin as a contrast to this. Ælfric, instead, reproduces only the action of the story (Skeat, 258/610-649). The historical content of the passage was certainly irrelevant to Ælfric's purpose, but he might well have retained the general moral point.

In another instance Ælfric both achieves conciseness and increases dramatic tension by an omission of this nature. This occurs during the account of Martin's death (Skeat, 302/1325-1370), when Martin replies to the monks' tearful entreaties to remain with them. He makes a moving speech expressing his willingness to submit to the will of God. In his version in the *Epistula Tertia* Sulpicius interrupts this speech to insert a passage that explains Martin's psychological condition and that draws a moral from his behaviour. Ælfric, however, allows the speech to continue, relying on its impact to convey Martin's motives and character. This helps to make the scene one of the most dramatic in the *Life of St Martin*, since it consists of a number of exchanges between Martin and his disciples, with more direct speech concentrated in it than in any other section of the *Life*.

Ælfric's handling of reported and direct speech generally is very skilful, and frequently contributes a dramatic quality to his writing. Similar observations have been made by Cecily Clark¹¹ in her discussion of the way in which Ælfric condenses long passages of speech into a few terse lines in the *Life of St Edmund*. The same techniques are apparent also in the *Life of St Martin*, where the rendering of long passages of direct speech (often highly rhetorical in character) into reported speech considerably shortens them, and the issues involved are sharpened by a judicious and sparing use of direct speech. This is the case in Section XIV, where the lengthy appeal of a paralysed girl's father to Martin is summarised, with only one line directly quoted:

ic ge-lyfe he cwæð . þæt heo libbe purh þe .

(Skeat, 250/494)

This simple expression of confidence in Martin strikes us today as more moving and more persuasive than the emotional rhetoric employed by Sulpicius in accordance with the conventions of his age.

On occasion, however, Ælfric is motivated solely by the desire for brevity, and may even reduce the dramatic content of the writing by the use of reported speech, as in Section XVI, where Martin's exorcism of a demon is described. In the *Vita*, Martin

addresses the demon in a single line of direct speech:

si habes, inquit, aliquid potestas, hos devora.
(*Vita*, 17/6)

But this is reported as part of the narrative in *Ælfric's Life* (Skeat, 254/540). In fact it shortens the episode only slightly, and reduces the sense of conflict; nevertheless, the rejection of the device of direct speech in the minor incidents means that it has all the more impact when *Ælfric* employs it during the relation of more significant scenes, such as the death of the saint.

In order to keep his narrative short and direct and to prevent it from becoming static, *Ælfric* frequently leaves out extended descriptions and so gives a general account without the support of elaborating details. He does so in Section II, when Martin does not quit the military service after his baptism, but stays on "for his leafan ealdormenn" (Skeat, 224/91). This conveys Martin's reason quite adequately and in terms which would have been readily comprehensible to an Anglo-Saxon audience. It is, however, briefer than the explanation in the *Vita*, which goes on to describe Martin's relationship with his captain:

Nec tamen statim militiae renuntiavit, tribuni sui
precibus evictus, cui contubernium familiare praestabat.
(*Vita*, 3/5)

In this instance, *Ælfric's* omission of detail is perfectly acceptable, since the general statement gives sufficient information. However, this is not the case in his account of Martin halting a pagan funeral procession (Skeat, 242/366-87). *Ælfric* tells us that the men were carrying a corpse that Martin mistook for an idol, but does not, as Sulpicius does, explain that the corpse's white wrappings fluttering in the breeze looked like the garments used to deck idols. Thus, not only does *Ælfric* leave us without the vivid visual image of the funeral procession, but he provides no explanation for Martin's mistake. Both the above examples, the second in particular, suggest that *Ælfric's* main interest is in the events themselves, rather than with how they are brought about.

Another device which *Ælfric* uses to condense descriptive passages is to select one representative item from a catalogue of details in the *Vita*. He does this in Section I, when he gives an account of Martin's treatment of his servant:

þam he sylf þenode . swiþor þonne he him .
and samod hi gereordoden swa swa gelican .
(Skeat, 222/38-9)

The general statement is made and supported with one specific example, but in the corresponding passage in Sulpicius there are further details, including the facts that Martin removes and cleans his servant's boots, as well as most often serving him at table (*Vita*, 2/5). The effect of the omission is to change the emphasis

of the passage; in Sulpicius, Martin adopts a subservient role, but he is shown to treat the servant as an equal in Ælfric's version.

In the passage where the bishops are debating Martin's suitability to become Bishop of Tours, Ælfric registers the opposition to him by quoting the objection:

bæt martinus nære wyrðe swa miceles hades .
for his wacum gyrlum . (Skeat, 236/269-70)

This single detail epitomises the catalogue of criticisms in the *Vita*:

dicentes scilicet contemptibilem esse personam,
indignu esse episcopatu hominem vultu despicabilem,
veste sordidum crine deformem. (*Vita*, 9/3)

Moreover it is not chosen without due consideration, for, as the most trivial of the objections, it emphasises the poor judgement and misplaced priorities of those bishops who opposed Martin.

Connected with this method of abridgement is the technique adopted by Ælfric in relating the resurrection of the dead man in Section VI (Skeat, 234/244-53). In the previous section a similar miracle had been recounted, including a description of the process of the dead man's revival, following closely that in Sulpicius (*Vita*, 7/3):

þa æfter twæm tidum astyrode se deada
eallum limum . and lociende wæs .
(Skeat, 234/220-221)

Having already given such an account once, Ælfric does not follow Sulpicius in repeating a description of the process on the second occasion, but states briefly,

he sona ge-edcucode . (Skeat, 234/250)

There is little loss here in the reduction of the second description to a bare statement, since only a repetition is involved. However, in another episode where he reduces the description to statement, there is a loss of enjoyment for the reader. This occurs in Section X, during the account of the felling of a pine-tree sacred to the heathens. Sulpicius takes great delight in evoking an atmosphere of tension and drama in his narration of the incident, drawing out the description of events to make the scene more vivid:

cum iam fragorem sui pinus concidens edidisset, iam
cadenti, iam super se ruenti, elevata obviam manu,
signum salutis opponit. Tum vero - velut turbinis modo
retro actam putares - diversam in partem ruit.
(*Vita*, 13/8)

Ælfric, as usual, spurns embellishment here and proceeds in his terse style:

and se beam þa feallende beah to martine .
 Martinus þa unforht ongean þæt feallende treow
 worhte rode-tacn . and hit wende þa ongean .
 (Skeat, 246/413-415)

Although Sulpicius' account is the more lively because of his overt use of his rhetorical skills, this would be uncharacteristic of Ælfric, writing in a different mode and at a different time. He is equally skilled in the arts of rhetoric, but practises them only to express his meaning in the most effective way, never for sheer delight in obvious rhetorical adornment. His method of relating this episode, then, is in keeping with the rest of the work and again reflects his interest in the progress of the action rather than its causes and attendant circumstances.

2. Reordering

The structure of Ælfric's work is affected also by his re-organisation of material, and this is often very skilfully carried out. Generally speaking, he keeps separate material from the different sources, so that the first twenty-seven sections are drawn almost exclusively from the *Vita*; the following section is based on an incident from *Epistula Secunda*, and sections XXIX-L are drawn from material in the *Dialogi*. *Epistula Tertia* is the source for sections LI-LII and the remaining material is from Gregory of Tours' *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini*. Thus, the work can be divided broadly into two parts, the first based on Sulpicius' *Vita Sancti Martini* and the second on the three additional sources, somewhat intermingled, but still in their own individual blocks. Within this framework, however, Ælfric carried out a good deal of rearranging.

One of his principles in reordering material was to gather together incidents of a similar nature, so that, for example, sections X-XVIII relate some of Martin's experiences in destroying heathen temples, while in sections XIV-XX a number of accounts are given of Martin performing miraculous cures. Although this is to some extent a feature of the whole structure of the *Vita*, the relationship between episodes is often better achieved by Ælfric, as can be seen by his treatment of the theme of appearances of the Devil to Martin.

Ælfric begins his account of diabolic visions in Section XXIV, drawing his introduction from the *Vita*:

Diabolum vero ita conspicabilem et subiectum oculis
 habebat ut, sive se in propria substantia contineret,
 sive in diversas figuras nequitiae transtulisset,
 qualibet ab eo sub imagine videretur. 2. Quod cum
 diabolus sciret se effugere non posse, conviciis eum
 frequenter urgebat, quia fallere non posset insidiis.
 (*Vita*, 21/1-2)

Ælfric renders this as:

Eac swilce þa deofla mid heora searo-cræftum
 him comon gelome to . and he on-cneow hi æfre .

.
 Mid þusend searo-cræftum wolde se swicola deofol
 þone halgan wer on sume wisan beswican .
 and hine ge-sewen-licne on manegum scin-hiwum
 þam halgan æteowde

(Skeat, 264/ 706-7; 710-13)

In the *Vita* the episode which follows has little to do with this introduction; it cannot properly be called a diabolic vision of the kind suggested. The clause "sive se in propria substantia contineret" indicates that the Devil appears to Martin undisguised, but the emphasis of the passage certainly leads us to expect the following episode to deal with a vision of the Devil in a false form. The Devil indeed appears to Martin, but not in disguise, and the incident is primarily concerned with the killing of one of Martin's men. Ælfric, on the other hand, selects as his introductory material an unequivocal account of devils (he uses the plural form) appearing to Martin under various forms and then turns to a later passage in the *Vita*, where Sulpicius relates how the Devil appears to Martin in the guise of various pagan gods (*Vita*, 22/1). This provides an excellent illustration of the general comments made in Ælfric's introduction to the section. Ælfric continues to follow Chap. 22 of the *Vita*, where the Devil, having failed to deceive Martin's sight, turns to verbal attack. Ælfric then turns to Chap. 24 for a further appearance of the Devil disguised, this time as Christ. Only now does Ælfric return to Chap. 21 to relate the Devil's appearance to Martin in which he is openly himself, claiming to have killed one of Martin's men. It is a curious fact that, following this event Ælfric retains Sulpicius' comment on Martin's foresight (Skeat, 268/788-9), since this particular incident demonstrates, if anything, the opposite.

These examples illustrate how Ælfric selects and arranges material from his major source, but he also applies this principle to material gathered from his supplementary sources, although he achieves this in a slightly different way. It has already been noted that his general tendency is to keep most of the material from a particular source together, so that, for example, there are further instances of miraculous cures in the later sections of the *Life* which are drawn from the *Dialogi*, although the topic has already received attention in sections XIV-XX. There are, nevertheless, occasions where material from one of the supplementary sources is incorporated into a passage based on the *Vita*. One such example occurs in Section XXII. The preceding section, following Chap. 20 of the *Vita*, had recounted Martin's relationship with Maximus and the fulfilment of his prophecy of Maximus' death at the hands of Valentinian. Both the fact that the episode was concerned with Martin's conduct towards a ruler and the mention of Valentinian make it appropriate that Ælfric should include the story of Martin's experiences with Valentinian as a ruler at this point; the source for this is *Dialogus* II, Chap. 5. Thus Ælfric gathers together episodes of similar significance or circumstances to form a

coherent passage. By this means he also achieves a sense of continuity and plan in his presentation of material which is, of itself, somewhat disjointed.

In the *Vita*, the disjointed nature of the material is often glaringly obvious, as when Sulpicius resorts to such abrupt and stilted introductory phrases as:

Atque ut in minora tantis inseram . . .
(*Vita*, 20/1)

In such cases, Ælfric proceeds immediately with the narrative proper, as he does here (Skeat, 258/609). He does not attempt to justify the change of subject by a phrase that merely draws attention to the transition. Of course, linkage between episodes is sometimes competently managed by Sulpicius, as in *Vita*, 17/5, where the fact that two incidents take place in the same town allows him to introduce the second with the words: "per idem tempus, in eodem oppido". In this case, Ælfric accepts the transitional phrase, translating it: "On þære ylcan tide on þam ylcan fæstene" (Skeat, 252/527).

As well as attempting to gather together material of a similar nature, Ælfric also introduces into a single episode information from a variety of sources, where this is appropriate. For example, in Section VIII, Martin's appointment as Bishop of Tours is related, and Ælfric follows the *Vita*, Chap. 10 for this. Giving a brief account of Martin's qualities as a bishop, Sulpicius writes:

Idem enim constantissime perseverabat qui prius fuerat. 2. Eadem in corde eius humilitas, eadem in vestitu eius vilitas erat. (Vita, 10/1-2)

Ælfric translates this (Skeat, 238/288-9) and continues the theme by drawing on Sulpicius' concluding remarks on Martin's virtues in general (*Vita*, 26/2). This fulfils a dual purpose: it is an appropriate place to include a eulogy, since it is an occasion where Martin receives public recognition of his qualities, and it is a climax in the story. Ælfric's expansion of the passage is an acknowledgement of both these facts. Similarly, in relating Martin's healing of Paulinus' eyes (Skeat, 256/585-600), Ælfric incorporates a brief description of Paulinus drawn from a separate passage in the *Vita* (25/4). This adds to the interest of the miracle, for it emphasises Martin's holiness and adds to his authority when such a holy man as Paulinus is cured only by Martin's intervention.

As well as repositioning material so as to alter the structure of his work on a large scale, Ælfric employs similar methods in his treatment of individual episodes, and on a number of occasions he alters the way in which an anecdote progresses. This rearrangement of material within a narrative episode usually involves either an alteration in the order of events related, improving the clarity of the narrative, or a change in the order of presentation of circumstantial details (e.g. of description), thus shifting slightly the

emphasis or significance of the episode.

A good example of the first kind of rearrangement occurs in Ælfric's Section XX, in the introduction to the episode where Martin falls down a flight of steps. The Latin text reads:

Ipse autem, cum casu quodam esset de cenaculo devolutus
et, per confragosos scalae gradus decidens, multis vul-
neribus esset adfectus, cum exanimis iaceret in cellula
et inmodicus doloribus cruciaretur, nocte ei angelus
visus est. (Vita, 19/4)

The main clause of this sentence is not reached until "nocte ei angelus visus est", so that the whole of the preceding passage is, in fact, looking back into the past, and the action only starts to move forward from the point where the main clause is reached. Ælfric, on the other hand, treats the introductory material as part of the main structure of the narrative and presents it in chronological order:

On sumere tide martinus stah to anre up-flora .
þa wæron þære hlæddre stapas alefede on ær .
and toburston færinga þæt he feol adune .
and mid manegum wundum ge-wæht wearð swiðe .
swa þæt he seoc læg on his synderlican inne .
On þære nihte him com an engel to him
sylfum onlocigendum . . . (Skeat, 258/601-07)

This organisation of the material, which respects English rather than Latin syntactical structures, simplifies, clarifies and enlivens the tale and allows Ælfric to devote a new sentence to the appearance of the angel, the central point of the story.

On another occasion Ælfric repositions a whole section of an episode, although for a different purpose from that of the example cited above. When he relates Martin's escape from a fire (Skeat, 272/900-274/888), based on Sulpicius' *Epistula Prima*, Ælfric moves directly into the action of the episode, omitting all Sulpicius' introductory material, and giving no indication that he is turning to a new source. He has two reasons for this. The first is his desire to maintain the continuity of the work; the second is that Sulpicius is relating the story under a particular set of circumstances which he is at pains to describe, namely that he is refuting certain criticisms that have been levelled against Martin's behaviour on that occasion. Ælfric is not writing under any constraint of this kind, so the material would be inappropriate as an introduction to his own account. However, once the tale has been related, Ælfric remembers the adverse reaction of Martin's contemporaries and, extracting a general moral from Sulpicius' specific address, uses part of this introduction as his own conclusion, warning his audience against misinterpreting the story. Thus, where Sulpicius puts forward an argument and illustrates it with an anecdote, Ælfric relates a story and draws a moral from it, changing the construction of the episode for his own purpose.

Related to this are instances where Ælfric rearranges material in order to change subtly the interpretation or emphasis. This is particularly well illustrated by Section IV, where Martin is captured by a band of robbers. During his captivity he is questioned by one of them, and in Sulpicius' account (*Vita*, 5/4-5), the robber first asks him who he is, to which he replies that he is a Christian, and the robber then asks him if he is afraid, which he denies. The question about fear seems to arise naturally out of Martin's affirmation of his Christianity, and is tantamount to a test of the truth of the claim.

Ælfric changes the order of the questions and reframes them:

þa ongan se hine befrinan hwæðer he forht wære .
 oððe hwæt he manna wære . oþþe he cristen wære .
 (Skeat, 230/157-8)

The question about fear thus loses the significance given it by Sulpicius since it is not related to Martin's affirmation of his Christianity. Instead, it contributes to the drama and plausibility of the scene as the kind of question that a robber might well ask of a victim he was hoping to intimidate. The second question, "oððe hwæt he manna wære", is a free translation of Sulpicius' "quisnam esset". Ælfric's rephrasing of the rest of the question, "oþþe he cristen wære", is clearly based on Martin's reply in the *Vita*, "respondit Christianus se esse". In the Latin text this reply is not a logical response to the question framed by the robber, "quisnam esset" (*Vita*, 5/4), but the *non sequitur* has purpose: Martin's refusal to make a direct reply by giving his name shows that he considers his name to be of secondary importance and that he feels himself to be characterised primarily by his identity as a Christian. In Ælfric's version, Martin makes no direct statement of his faith, but it is inferred by the robber from his behaviour. This is typical of Ælfric and is ultimately more convincing to the reader or listener, since the awareness of Martin's Christianity emerges out of the events of the episode rather than out of his own stated opinion of himself.

3. Modification for the contemporary audience

One of Ælfric's major concerns is to present material that is appropriate to his audience and this is reflected on a number of occasions where he modifies his sources so that the matter dealt with can be more readily understood by his audience. With reference to the *Life of St Martin* in particular, G.H. Gerould¹² points out Ælfric's selectiveness about the inclusion of place-names, since he retains only those which his audience will be likely to recognise. Similarly, when listing the disguises under which the Devil appears to Martin, Ælfric retains the names of the Roman gods, but also gives their northern equivalents:

hwilon on ioues hiwe . þe is ge-haten þor .
 hwilon on mercuries . þe men hatað oðon .
 hwilon on ueneris þære fulan gyden .
 þe men hatað fricg (Skeat, 264/714-17)

The admonition, of which this forms a part, was both appropriate and topical, since Ælfric was writing when Christianity in the north of England was under threat from the Norse religion.¹³

Alteration in church practice also causes Ælfric to adapt his source material, as he does in his Section VII, when describing the way of life in the monastery established by Martin at Marmoutiers. Sulpicius tells us:

Rarus cuiquam extra cellulam suam egressus, nisicum
ad locum orationis conveniebant. (*Vita*, 10/7)

Ælfric omits this reference, probably because the monastic life-style of his own day no longer meant that monks lived apart in separate buildings, meeting only for prayers and meals. Similarly in Section XIII, Ælfric alters Sulpicius' description of the marvellous effect of Martin's preaching to the heathens. Sulpicius tells us that Martin often preached so effectively that "ipsi sua templa subverterent" (*Vita*, 15/4). Ælfric, however, perhaps remembering Gregory the Great's injunction to Augustine not to destroy the pagan temples but to convert them to the service of the true God,¹⁴ alters this so that the outcome of Martin's conversion of the heathens conforms with the way in which the early conversions were carried out in England:

þa bodode he him swa lange
þone soðan ge-leafan . oð-þæt he ge-liþe-wahte .
to geleafan heora wurðfullan templ .
(Skeat, 250/481-83)

In both cases, of course, the idols themselves were destroyed.

On other occasions Ælfric reinterprets events in his source in a way that reflects his own sense of propriety in personal belief, which tends to be orthodox rather than highly individual. An instance of his conformity is his treatment of the Antichrist theme, which occurs in Section XXII, after the account of the upsurge of false prophets. Ælfric adopts a very "safe" orthodox attitude to this topic, expressing the conventional view that Antichrist will be preceded by false prophets, but not taking the opportunity to sound the knell of doom as does Sulpicius in his account:

Ex quo conicere possumus, istius modi pseudoprofetis
existentibus, Antichristi adventum imminere, qui iam in
istis mysterium iniquitatis operatur.
(*Vita*, 24/3)

Of course, Sulpicius was writing some six hundred years before Ælfric so that, for the Old English writer, the specific examples given would be inappropriate, but nevertheless the theme was a current one and could have been applicable to Ælfric's own age. Other preachers - Wulfstan, for example - were ready enough to exploit the theme, and Ælfric refers to it. Ælfric retains the general statement about the forces of evil, but makes no specific application of it:

eac swilce lease witegan ær þisre worulde ge-endeunge
on gehwilce land cumað . and þone ge-leafan amyrrað .
oð-þæt antecrist sylf ende-next becym .

(Skeat, 272/842-44)

The sense of moderation displayed here is very characteristic and, as pointed out by Gerould,¹⁵ this moderation also guides his selection of material from Gregory of Tours' *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini*. It is further illustrated in his account of Martin's conduct just before he is trapped in a fire. Sulpicius portrays Martin as a rigorous ascetic at this point:

insuetam mollitiem strati male blandientis horrescit.

(*Epistula* I, 10)

This provides a dramatic explanation for the outbreak of the fire. In Ælfric's *Life*, however, this part of the episode has no direct connection with the fire (a point to which I shall return) and thus amounts to a complete episode in its own right. Nevertheless, Ælfric makes the scene less striking; he mitigates Martin's extreme reaction, so that his behaviour is much more normal, and also furnishes an example more practicable for Ælfric's audience to follow:

þa on-scunede he þa softnysse . þære seltcuðan beddinge .

(Skeat, 272/854)

In keeping with the attitudes which the two writers display here is the treatment accorded by each of them to the first anecdote illustrating Martin's saintliness, when he clothes the beggar at the gates of Amiens (Skeat, 222/57ff.; *Vita*, Ch. 3). Ælfric presents the deed as a simple act of charity; it is pity that constrains Martin to help the man:

Martinus þa ongeat þæt he moste his helpan .

þa ða þa oðra noldon .

(Skeat, 224/64-5)

However, Sulpicius makes this almost a mystical experience, where Martin consciously feels himself to be responding to God's selection of him personally:

Intellexit vir Deo plenus sibi illum, aliis miseriacordiam non praestantibus, reservari.

(*Vita*, 3/1)

We feel that, although he has already exhibited many signs of his promise as a Christian, this incident is the true turning-point of his commitment, leading on to complete dedication to God. This is then reinforced by his vision of Christ. In his version, on the other hand, Ælfric loses this exposure of Martin's psychological and spiritual state, but gains in his expression of a simple act of practical charity, which can be understood and emulated by all members of his audience.

Although it is usual for Ælfric to portray Martin in a more simple and human light than does Sulpicius, the reverse of this occurs in the episode where Martin exposes a cult of the burial place of a false martyr. In Sulpicius' account we learn that Martin is doubtful about the belief:

Sed Martinus non temere adhibens incertis fidem . . .
(*Vita*, 11/2)

Ælfric states directly and firmly:

Martinus þa ne ge-lyfde þam leasum ge-dwimore .
(Skeat, 240/346)

In the *Vita*, the lack of satisfactory answers to Martin's questions leaves him uncommitted:

Cum aliquandiu ergo a loco illo se abstinuisset, nec derogans religioni, quia incertus erat, nec auctoritatem suam vulgo adcommodans, ne superstitione conualescerat.
(*Vita*, 11/3)

He eventually sets out to discover the truth. In Ælfric's version, on the other hand, his failure to obtain sure information reinforces his earlier opinion and he forbids people to visit the place (Skeat, 242/351), a direct contradiction of Sulpicius. Ælfric may well have felt that there was some ambiguity in Martin's having doubts on the subject, for Sulpicius is often at pains to point out Martin's foresight (see, for example, *Vita*, 21/5). This aspect of Martin's saintliness is stressed still more by Ælfric, particularly since he is anxious that all issues should be clear and uncomplicated to suit the needs of his audience. Thus, it is important for him to portray Martin's conduct at all times as in keeping with the character established for him.

Ælfric's modifications are carried out in order to make his material readily comprehensible and to fit in with Anglo-Saxon culture, and they are generally successful in this respect. However, on one occasion this technique is itself a cause of confusion. In his account of Martin's escape from the fire, Sulpicius explains in detail the circumstances which give rise to the conflagration (*Epistula* I, 10), and he seems to be describing a hypocaust system:

mansionem ei in secretario ecclesiae clerici paraverunt multumque ignem scabro iam et pertenui pavimento subdiderunt.
(*Epistula* I, 10)

This Roman method of heating would have been unknown to the majority of Anglo-Saxons and may indeed have been unfamiliar to Ælfric himself, so when he comes to describe the fire he writes only,

. . . . and þær micel fyr wæs gebet,
(Skeat, 272/847)

We learn later that the fire was simply "on þære flora" (Skeat, 272/850), which is the usual Anglo-Saxon method of heating a room, and which thus gives no occasion for confusion or distraction from the main point of the story. But the disadvantage of Ælfric's brief statement is as follows. In Sulpicius' account the cast-off bedding lay on the broken paving, so that the fire caught it some time after it had been thrown off. Since the fire in Ælfric's version is quite open in the room, there could have been no delay before the straw caught alight. Thus, Ælfric is forced to treat the rejection of the bedding as an event which has nothing to do with the outbreak of the fire, and he is left with no real explanation of this:

þa wearð þæt fyr ontend swyðe færlicum bryne .
and þæt litle hus mid þam lige afylde .

(Skeat, 272/858-9)

4. Ælfric and Blickling Homily XVIII

Ælfric's ambitious approach and his skill in the execution of his techniques of selecting, reordering and modifying material is particularly evident when one compares his longer *Life* with some slightly earlier accounts of Martin's life that use the same Latin source. Three such are Blickling Homily XVIII,¹⁶ Vercelli Homily XVIII,¹⁷ and MS Oxford Bodleian Junius 86, ff.62-81.¹⁸

As Napier has shown, there is a clear relationship between the three homilies, and the wording is identical at many points, so that it seems probable that they were all descended from the same primary source.¹⁹ The Blickling MS can be assigned to 971,²⁰ while the Vercelli collection and MS Bodleian Junius 86 are thought to have been compiled slightly earlier.²¹ The original homily from which these accounts appear to have descended was probably composed early in the tenth century, while Ælfric's *Life* was written at the end of that century. Since the Blickling homily is the most complete of the three versions it will be convenient to use Blickling alone for the following comparisons.

The differences between Ælfric's account of Martin and that in the Blickling collection were conditioned partly by the circumstances in which each was written and partly by the different methods and skills of the two writers. The Blickling homily was intended for oral delivery, as is made clear in the homilist's opening address, "Men þa leofestan . . ." (Morris, 211/1). Ælfric's *Life* could equally well be listened to or read, as he himself states in his Preface:

Hunc quoque codicem transtulimus de Latinitate ad usitatem Anglicam sermocinationem, studentes aliis prodesse edificando ad fidem lectione huius narrationis quibuscumque placuerit huic operam dare, sive legendo, seu Audiendo.²²

It may, therefore, be expected that Ælfric will aim for greater literary finish than the Blickling homilist, even apart from the writers' differences of skill.

Blickling Homily XVIII differs from Ælfric's *Life* in that it relies for its source material almost exclusively on Sulpicius' *Vita*, only drawing on his *Epistula Tertia* for the essential account of Martin's death. Apart from the account of the death itself, very little purely biographical material is presented and the homily is composed as a sequence of eight episodes, each containing an incident or group of similar incidents, narrated in alternation with passages of general description, which briefly cover the events of Martin's personal life.

The incidents selected are concerned with Martin's miracles and conversion of the heathen, and reflect the homilist's interest in presenting his audience with an instantly recognisable portrait of a saint.²³ This aim is to some extent shared by Ælfric, but the structure of his *Life of St Martin* is so much more complex and incorporates so much more material that he succeeds in presenting a genuine biography, a faithful record (at least according to his sources) of Martin's career. The account in Blickling might rather be characterised as a collection of anecdotes within a biographical framework.

Ælfric shows greater skill in the adaptation and organisation of material, while Blickling is content to follow the *Vita* in the order of events and in the details of those incidents which are selected. Even the passages of general commentary which link the episodes proper are derived from the *Vita* and occur in the same order. It is also noteworthy that the Blickling homilist does not attempt to avoid repetition where it is found in Sulpicius, despite the fact that his brief selection of incidents from the *Vita* would suggest that brevity was one of his aims. This is illustrated by the passage, derived from the *Vita*, Chaps. 7-8, describing Martin's revival of two dead men. As I have commented (p. 27 above), Ælfric does not follow Sulpicius in repeating the description of the second man's reawakening. This is not the case with the Blickling homilist, who continues to follow the *Vita* closely and, indeed, carries this further by repeating the description of Martin's own reactions, although Sulpicius himself omits this in the second incident (*Vita*, 8/3).

In keeping with this rather slavish adherence to Sulpicius is the fact that the translation from the Latin is often very literal in Blickling, even to the extent of rendering "duodeviginti" as "twæm læs þe twentig" (Morris, 215/34). The homilist's indebtedness to his source is also expressed in a number of Latin quotations that are included in the text, always with explanatory translations following them, although no open acknowledgement of Sulpicius is made.²⁴ It is worth noticing that although Blickling generally provides the more literal translation of the Latin, the clumsier phraseology has less in common with Sulpicius than has Ælfric's prose, rich in rhetorical skills, albeit of a different kind from those of Sulpicius. Indeed, Ælfric's awareness of and debt to the patterns of Latin prose has been pointed out by many scholars.²⁵

This, perhaps, is why it is the Blickling homilist, rather than Ælfric, who feels it necessary to display his Latin scholarship by including Latin quotations in his text.

As I have suggested above, the narrative technique of Blickling can only be described as clumsy. There is little attempt at linkage between episodes, and each new incident is introduced with a variant of the stock phrase, "þæt gelamp sume siðe" (e.g. Morris, 213/29), despite the fact that Sulpicius makes chronological or thematic links between certain episodes, although inconsistently. Again, it is Ælfric who remains truer to the spirit of Sulpicius' writing, since he uses linkage successfully and judiciously, although his phrasing is often independent of Sulpicius.

In particular, the narrative technique of the two Old English writers exemplifies the difference in skill between them. The language of Blickling is simple in construction, with a tendency to prolixity and needless repetition, while Ælfric uses a more complex medium with greater control. The comparative inadequacy of the Blickling homilist's manipulation of language is illustrated by the following passage, from the episode describing the revival of the first dead man:

þa he þa Sanctus Martinus þæt geseah, þæt þa oðre broðor ealle swa unrote ymb þæt lic utan stonðan, þa weop he & eode into him. & him wæs þæt swiðe myccle weorce þæt he swa ungefulwad forðferan sceolde; getrywde þa hweðre mid ealle mode on Ælmihtiges Godes miht & on his mildheortnesse. & eode þa on þa cetan þær se lichoma inne wæs, & heht þa oðre men ut gangan, & þa ða duru inbeleac æfter him. & hine þa gebæd, & hine astreahte ofer leomu þæs deadan mannes. (Morris, 217/19-27)

Martin's entry into the cell is stated, but a digression then follows, in which the homilist points out Martin's trust in God. This is an element that is implicit in Sulpicius' account at a later point, when Martin's confident expectation of God's mercy is described (*Vita*, 7/3). Ælfric follows Sulpicius' technique (Skeat, 232/212), but the Blickling homilist finds it necessary to insert an explicit statement early in the course of events and, having done so, has to resume the narrative by repeating Martin's entry into the cell.

It can also be seen from the passage quoted that sentence structure is generally very simple; subordinate clauses are rare and the structure is most often paratactic. It is this inability of the homilist to provide parenthetical information or commentary through the arrangement of subordinate clauses that forces him to break the line of the narrative.

This lack of sophistication in style is also reflected in the nature of the vocabulary of Blickling Homily XVIII. In the introduction to his edition of the *Blickling Homilies* (pp.v-vi), Morris mentions the archaic quality of much of the vocabulary of the homilies and draws attention to the fact that it has more in common with the unsophisticated prose of the ninth century than

with the more polished prose of the Benedictine Revival period.

In comparing Ælfric's *Life* with the Blickling Homily on St Martin, one is left with a sense that, although they differ slightly in intention, the two Old English homilists are writing in the same tradition but with great disparity in their literary abilities. On the other hand, in comparing Sulpicius' work with that of Ælfric, one has an impression of equal skills, but varying purposes and traditions of composition, which account to a great extent for the differences between them. The *Vita* is a work designed to be read privately and thus its style is highly rhetorical, involving complex syntax and the rhythms and rhyme associated with the art of Latin prose composition of the period. In comparison, Ælfric's style appears bare and direct, yet close examination of his work reveals that he uses language equally skilfully but with less ostentation. His *Life of St Martin* is designed equally to be listened to or read privately, and thus he narrates simply and directly, always expressing his meaning concisely and clearly in his alliterative and rhythmic prose, so that he combines simplicity and clarity with artistry. The organisation of his material and his subtle use of rhetorical skills make the work a pleasure to read, as it must have been also to hear.²⁶

NOTES

- 1 See for example G.H. Gerould, "Abbot Ælfric's Rhythmic Prose", *MP* 22 (1925) pp.353-66; D. Bethurum, "The Form of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*", *Studies in Philology* 29 (1925) pp.516-33.
- 2 "Ælfric and Abbo of Fleury", *English Studies* 49 (1968) pp.30-6.
- 3 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, II, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS, OS 94, 114 (1890, 1900; reprinted as one volume, 1966) pp.218-312. Subsequent references to Ælfric's longer *Life of St Martin* are by page and line number as printed in Skeat's edition, except where it is occasionally more convenient to use Skeat's section numbers.
- 4 "Ælfric's *Lives of St Martin of Tours*", *JEGP* 24 (1925) pp.206-10.
- 5 *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series. Text*, ed. M. Godden, EETS, SS 5 (1979) pp.288-98.
- 6 See P. Clemoes, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Work", in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. P. Clemoes (London, 1959) pp.212-47.
- 7 For an edition of the *Vita Sancti Martini* (hereafter referred to as *Vita*), see *Sulpice Sévère: Vie de Saint Martin*, I, ed. J. Fontaine, Sources Chrétiennes 133 (Paris, 1967). This edition also includes the texts of Sulpicius' supplementary *Epistles* about the life of Martin. All subsequent references to the *Vita* and *Epistles* are to this edition. References to the *Vita* will be by chapter and section number, while references to the *Epistles* will be by section number alone.
- 8 Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, ed. J.P. Migne, PL 20 (Paris, 1845) cols. 183-222. Subsequent references will be to the number of the dialogue and the chapter.
- 9 Gregory of Tours, "De Virtutibus Sancti Martini", ed. B. Krusch, in *Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum*, I, MGH (Hanover, 1885) pp.585-661.
- 10 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, I, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS, OS 76, 82 (1881, 1885; reprinted as one volume, 1966) p.4, ll.25-8.
- 11 "Ælfric and Abbo of Fleury", p.31.
- 12 "Ælfric's *Lives of St Martin of Tours*", p.209.
- 13 See also Ælfric's "De Falsis Diis", in *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, II, EETS, OS 260 (1968) pp.667-75; Wulfstan's "De Falsis Deis", in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. D. Bethurum (Oxford, 1957) pp.221-24.
- 14 Bede, *Historia Gentis Anglorum*, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* (Oxford, 1896), I, p.65 (Lib. I, Cap. XXX).
- 15 "Ælfric's *Lives of St Martin of Tours*", p.209.
- 16 *The Blickling Homilies*, ed. R. Morris, EETS, OS 58, 63, 73 (1874, 1876, 1880; reprinted as one volume, 1957) pp.211-27. All references are to the page and line number of this edition.

- 17 *Vercelli Homilies IX-XXIII*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Toronto, 1981) pp.57-67.
- 18 This has not yet been printed. My thanks are due to the Librarian of the Bodleian Library for his permission to consult the manuscript.
- 19 A.S. Napier, "Notes on the *Blickling Homilies*", *MP* 1 (1903) pp.303-8. Napier has established that none of the manuscripts is a copy of one of the others, since the differences in the readings are inconsistent with this. Where the readings vary, Vercelli and Junius are most frequently in agreement: twenty instances are cited where they both differ from Blickling, while Blickling and Junius share readings not in Vercelli on six occasions.
- 20 Morris, p.v.
- 21 D.G. Scragg, "The Corpus of Vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints' Lives before Ælfric", *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979) pp.223-70. The date of the Vercelli Collection is discussed on p.225, while the Blickling and Junius MSS are discussed on pp.234-6.
- 22 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, I, p.1.
- 23 Similar observations are made by Paul Szarmach with reference to the selection of material in Vercelli Homily XVIII; see "The Vercelli Homilies: Style and Structure", in *The Old English Homily and its Background*, ed. P. Szarmach and B. Huppé (Albany, 1978) pp.258-9.
- 24 These Latin phrases are not a feature of the Vercelli or Junius versions of Martin's life, and thus represent a major point of difference between the homilies.
- 25 See, for example, F.R. Lipp, "Ælfric's Old English Prose Style", *Studies in Philology* 66 (1969) pp.689-718; G.H. Gerould, "Abbot Ælfric's Rhythmic Prose".
- 26 This paper originally formed part of a dissertation written for the degree of MA at the University of Leeds. My thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr Joyce Hill, for her constant advice and encouragement, and also to Mr R.L. Thomson, for his assistance with the Latin text of the *Vita*.