7 The Ambiguity of the Devil

A Discourse-Linguistic Reading of Sulpicius Severus’ *Vita Martini*
21 and 24

Introduction

In late antique Christianity, the devil and the demons are ambiguous figures. On the one hand, the conception of the demonic is often employed to create clarity: to oppose good and evil, demonstrating which is which. The demons represent evil: they form the black which helps to foreground the white of salvation.\(^1\) In developing their harmful schemes, however, they are able to take on different shapes and forms. They are not always easy to recognize. This is why the virtue of discernment (*diakrisis* in Greek, *discretio* in Latin) is so vital. It becomes particularly difficult for the Christian believer when demons take on “holy” shapes and forms, for instance, when they appear quoting Scripture. And when the devil impersonates Christ himself, who will be able to unmask him? Thus, it appears that demons are conjured up to create clarity, while simultaneously staging confusion. There is both a didactic and an existential side to this dynamic. On the one hand, it encourages and challenges readers to discern for themselves and to arrive at an understanding of both the black and the white in order to make a personal decision about which to choose. On the other hand, this didactic aspect is transcended by the more existential belief that the faithful are actually involved in a permanent battle between good and evil: in this way, the depiction of the devil and his demons illustrates the hazards of life itself and the spiritual journey one may undertake.

In addition to the double role played by the demons as symbolizing both clarity and confusion on both a literary and an existential level, the dividing line between the demons, the devil, and the faithful is not always so marked. The demons are sometimes described as inhabiting human beings, infiltrating their thoughts, and taking over their neighbours. This view occurs, for instance, in the long speech delivered by saint Antony in his *vita*:

> So, when they see that all Christians, and especially monks, love to work and to make progress, they first attack them and tempt them by placing obstacles in their way. Their obstacles are impure thoughts. But we shouldn’t fear their suggestions. [...] It also happens that they take on the appearance of monks feigning to speak piously.\(^2\)

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1 See, for instance, Vos (2011), 159 – 182.
2 Quotations are from VA 23,1–2 and VA 25,3 (my translation); see also VA 20,9 (“let us guard ourselves against impure thoughts”).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110632231-008
Compared to this hagiographical representation, the images offered in letters and sayings may be even more diffuse as they allow for notions that are quite ambiguous. In Letter 6, Antony daringly says: “we are their bodies”.\(^3\) In the same letter, the pluriformity of the demons is – in a way reminiscent of Origen’s ideas – contrasted with the One, to which humans will eventually return.\(^4\) Thus, their multiplicity symbolizes the limitations and problematic nature of life on earth. Similarly, the sayings often present the demons as *logismoi* – as thoughts inhabiting human minds, creating a close identification between the human and the demonic. When a brother, for example, asked abba Isaiah why it was necessary to practice *hēsychia* (peace/quiet) in the cell, he answered: “To practice peace within the cell is to prostrate oneself before God and to do what one can in order to oppose every thought which is sown by the Enemy”.\(^5\) Therefore, while demons bring out the clarity of evil, they also constitute confusion – they are even part of humanity itself. They are, in the eyes of Evagrius of Pontus, the vices we can counter with our virtues.\(^6\)

Generally speaking, the demons are imagined as both external and internal figures: in the external world, they are more easily recognized and boundaries may be quite defined. Internally, however, the situation may be more muddled and ambiguous as boundaries become more fluid. Still, the genre of hagiography mostly seems to present images of holiness that are – compared to letters and sayings – relatively straightforward, including saints that are often described as lacking in internal conflict. In this genre, then, confusion tends to be employed as a tool to construct clarity and this article will present a case in point as I will discuss two passages from Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of Martin*, written towards the end of the fourth century CE.\(^7\)

Thus, I will focus on the specific genre of hagiography, exploring the ambiguity of the demonic. In doing so, I will take a discourse-linguistic approach. Basically, discourse linguistics pays close attention to linguistic phenomena in order to clarify how discourse is constructed and what it aims to effect. Within the field of classics, its application has led to the development of a methodology that correlates linguistic features with the so-called “discourse modes”, which will be discussed in the following section. The term “discourse modes” refers to the different ways in which an author can communicate with his audience, for instance, a narrative mode, when he is telling a story, or an argument mode, when he is making an argument. Research has shown that different modes of discourse are characterized by certain linguistic features, which sheds light on how texts are constructed, especially on the meso-level of the text,\(^8\) that is, on the level in between the micro-level of the sentence and

\(^3\) Rubenson (1995), 219.
\(^5\) My translation. The quotation is from the chapter on *hēsychia* in the Systematic Collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (saying 15), 132–133.
\(^7\) For more on this particular *vita* and its author, see Stancliffe (1983).
the macro-level of the text as a whole. An analysis of textual units occurring on the meso-level of the text, where the variations in the modes of discourse appear, deepens our understanding of an author’s narrative technique and of the ways in which the modes of discourse may oscillate between, for example, narration and argumentation. In the specific case of Sulpicius Severus, whose *Vita Martini* is the focus of this article, a discourse-linguistic reading of the text brings into focus the author’s narrative and argumentative technique as well as the envisaged aim of this carefully constructed text. In the following section, I will introduce some basic methodological tools needed for our analysis of *Vita Martini* 21 and 24.

1 Hagiography and Discourse Linguistics: Methodological Prolegomena

In the two passages from *Vita Martini* that I will be discussing shortly, the devil appears as an external figure, which seems to be characteristic of the hagiographical genre. First, he appears as an external figure that can be easily recognized, while in the second instance he causes ambiguity — all of this, as we shall see, in the service of portraying Martin as a saintly figure who is in possession of both *virtus* (virtue/power) and discernment. This function of the devil’s appearances as highlighting the saint’s discernment becomes clear when we analyze the narrative using concepts from both discourse linguistics and narratology.

This approach combines the notion of discourse modes, that was briefly introduced in the previous section and that will be elaborated on below, with a basic set of narrative elements that constitute a story. In recent years, this integration of linguistics with reflections on how narratives, and other texts or text types, are constituted has also been applied successfully to early Christian texts. Paula Rose, for example, has written a discourse-linguistic commentary on Augustine’s tractate on the care for the dead: *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*. In addition, doctoral work has been more recently completed and is in its final stages which applies discourse linguistics to other early Christian texts: Augustine’s *Confessions* and *Carmen Paschale*, the *Easter Song* — a work of biblical epic by Sedulius from the 5th century. This research on Augustine and Sedulius demonstrates how texts are made up of smaller textual units that display the features of a variety of discourse modes, moving, for instance, in and out of narration, and in and out of argumentation or comment. Such a reading allows us to see how texts that are often viewed primarily as narrative

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9 Rose (2013).
texts, such as Augustine’s *Confessions* and Sedulius’ paraphrase of the Gospel story in *Carmen Paschale*, are actually highly argumentative. Now, let us take a closer look at how this works.

Discourse linguistics, as practiced by Greek and Latin classicists at Amsterdam,¹¹ basically consists of two important components. First, they work with a framework of narrative structure based on the work of William Labov.¹² In the seventies, Labov developed a set of narrative elements: basic building blocks of which stories are made up. I will characterize these briefly. Generally speaking, stories start with an *abstract*: a short summary of what the story will be about. Then the *orientation* follows in which the scene is set. Next, the story starts to develop: the *complication*. When the story comes to a head, this is defined as the *peak*. After the peak, the *resolution* follows, explaining what happened afterwards – how the story ended. Often, the story is accompanied by some *evaluation*: the narrator draws conclusions about the meaning of the story. Finally, a *coda* may be included: the end of the story is clearly marked, a final conclusion may be drawn, and in the case of an embedded story (a shorter story embedded within a larger narrative or argumentative framework), the narrator will move back to the main line of the argument or the wider narrative context. It is important to note that these building blocks do not always occur all at once and they may deviate from the pattern just described: some elements may be left out or – alternatively – may be included more than once, and they may appear in a different order.¹³ Still, these basic elements help to analyze what is going on in stories: how they are set up, how they develop, and which point they are trying to make.

Added to this basic scheme of storytelling (originally developed in the context of oral storytelling on the streets of modern cities) is the theory of discourse modes that has already been mentioned briefly above.¹⁴ This theory states that in texts, authors may use various discourse modes (also called [local] text types) – different ways in

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¹¹ Major contributions to the development of this methodology have been made by Caroline Kroon, Irene de Jong (with a focus on narratology), Rutger Allan, Lidewij van Gils, Suzanne Adema, and David Stienaers. A representative collection of articles is available in *The Language of Literature. Linguistic Approaches to Classical Texts*, ed. Rutger Allan and Michel Buijs, Leiden 2007. An important monograph is *Textual Strategies in Greek and Latin War Narrative* ed. Lidewij van Gils/Irene de Jong/Caroline Kroon, Leiden 2019. This study is based on the research project led by Irene de Jong (professor of Greek) and Caroline Kroon (professor of Latin) on “Ancient War Narrative”.

¹² Labov (1972). Cf. Jong (2014), 39–41. The original scheme did not include the element of the “peak”; this term, or rather its equivalent “the climax”, was introduced by Longacre (1996). See for the use of Labov in the context of classical studies also Rose (2013), 56–58; Allan (2009), 186–189 (see also Allan [2007], 93–121; esp. 110–113); and Stienaers (2013). In his article, Stienaers includes a section entitled “The prototypical narrative structure of an episode” as well as an appendix that is similar to the one included in this article that is based on a lecture given by Caroline Kroon at Yale University in 2010.

¹³ Cf. Allan (2009), 189.

¹⁴ This combining of narrative elements and discourse modes was introduced by Caroline Kroon and Rutger Allan: see Kroon (2002), 189–200; Allan (2009), 171–199.
which they are presenting their material. For the analysis of Sulpicius Severus’ Life of Martin presented below two discourse modes are especially relevant: the narrative mode and – what is now generally called – the discursive mode.

The first, narrative mode is – unsurprisingly – used for telling stories. Suzanne Adema, having researched Vergil’s Aeneid and Livy’s Ab urbe condita, distinguishes between two ways of storytelling or two variants of the narrative mode: retrospective and pseudo-simultaneous. In a narrative mode that is retrospective, the narrator is positioned in the “here and now”, and looks back, telling a story that is situated in

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15 See, for instance, the work of Suzanne Adema (2008). A monograph based on this dissertation is Adema (2019). Chapter 1 of the study by Adema includes an exposé on the application of the theory of discourse modes to Vergil’s famous epic. The terms of “discourse mode” and “(local) text type” were developed by Carlota Smith in her study Modes of Discourse. The Local Structure of Texts, Cambridge 2003. Three other relevant publications for the field of classics (all included in The Language of Literature edited by Allan and Buijs in 2007) are by Suzanne Adema (“Discourse Modes and Bases in Vergil’s Aeneid”, 42–64, with a useful table on 44), Caroline Kroon (“Discourse Modes and the Use of Tenses in Ovid’s Metamorphoses”, 65–92, with a helpful table on 72) and Rutger Allan (“Sense and Sentence Complexity, Sentence Structure, Sentence Connection, and Tense-Aspect as Indicators of Narrative Mode in Thucydides’ Histories”, 93–121). See also Allan (2009).

16 As the theory is currently developing, terms and definitions are still under debate. Some scholars do not speak of a “discursive mode” but may use other, more specific, terminology such as “report mode”, “comment mode” or “argument mode”. (These modes can be understood as specifications of the more general notion of the “discursive mode”; common denominator is the fact that the narrator communicates from the standpoint of “discourse now” as opposed to “story now”. See for the notions of “discourse now” and “story now” Allan (2009), 173–174 and 181–182.) Depending on the term chosen, a different semantic value is attributed to the discourse mode. “Report mode” signals that an author reports in a non-narrative manner (giving the facts from the standpoint of “speaker’s time” without paying attention to sequence of events), “comment mode” refers to the fact that the narrator/author includes comments that can be distinguished from the story proper. The term “argument mode” emphasizes that there is an argumentation going on within the text. For the oscillation between narrative mode and argument mode, see the study by Van Gils (2009). Other modes are: informative/information mode (providing generally valid information); descriptive/description mode (describing persons, objects, places in the story world); direct mode (representing direct speech).

See for the definitions regarding the different modes also the publications mentioned in footnote 15 (cf. esp. Kroon (2007), 67–71, with a helpful reference to the categories of Smith (2003), 67).

17 Adema (2007) explains these two modes of narration in her article using, however, a different terminology from which she has now departed. Adema (2019) speaks of retrospective versus pseudo-simultaneous narrative mode. Kroon refers to “a retrospective narrative discourse mode” (2007), 77, but the term “pseudo-simultaneous” is not yet employed. This term is used in an article by Stienaers (2015), 212. Stienaers, however, does not use the term “retrospective narrative mode” for the counterpart of the pseudo-simultaneous narrative mode. Rather, he speaks of “subsequent narrative mode” (Ibid., 212). In the context of Greek narrative, Allan makes a similar distinction referring to “immediate diegetic mode” (for pseudo-simultaneous mode) and “displaced diegetic mode” (for retrospective/subsequent narrative mode); see Allan (2007 and 2009). In Allan (2007), 102, the term “mimetic mode” is included as a synonym for “immediate mode” (with reference to Kroon (2002)); the latter is preferred by the author. The difference between the two types of narrative mode are visualized by Kroon (2007), 70 and Allan (2007), 100.

18 This standpoint may also be referred to as “speaker’s time”, see Kroon (2007), 70 and 72.
the past: the “perfect” tense is used to express the sequence of events. Another way of telling the story occurs when the narrator moves, as it were, into the story world,\(^{19}\) taking the readers (or “narratees” in narratological terms) – with him – sometimes even immersing them in the story.\(^{20}\) In this case, the “historical present” is used. It is also significant that as the narrator recedes into the background, the story becomes increasingly alive.\(^{21}\)

The second discourse mode that is crucial for our reading is called “discursive” mode.\(^{22}\) This mode refers to those portions of a text in which the narrator is positioned in the present, in “discourse now” as it is called,\(^ {23}\) communicating with his/her (envisaged) audience.\(^ {24}\) Therefore, the “actual present” may be used, but also particles that are related to what has been referred to as “interactional management”, that is, management of the interaction between author and audience (by the author/narrator). In her work on Latin particles, Kroon distinguishes between particles that are related to the narrator’s interaction with his audience and those which function primarily on an intratextual level. The latter are related to textual coherence (indicating, for instance, causal connections between units in the text) and textual advancement (signalling the development of an argument or storyline).\(^ {25}\)

Thus, it must be noted that discourse modes are qualified by specific linguistic features such as the use of particular tenses and the use of particles. In addition, Greek and Latin linguists have established correlations between the different discourse modes and the narrative building blocks of Labov and scholars that elaborated upon his work such as Robert Longacre.\(^ {26}\) The various narrative elements of Labov and Longacre have also been linked to other linguistic features such as attention to detail and the use of specific vocabulary. A schematic outline of the correlations between narrative elements, discourse modes, and linguistic features is included in an appendix to this article.\(^ {27}\) In the following section, we will see what discourse linguistics has to offer with reference to our Martinian text. We will consider two embedded

\(^{19}\) Other terms referring to the dimension of the “story world” (the term is used, for instance, by Kroon (2007), 81 are: “reference time” (Adema (2007), 42) and “story now” (Allan (2009), 173–174).

\(^{20}\) For the literary phenomenon of immersion, see for instance Schaeffer (2014), 191–194. See also the Dutch article by Allan/Jong/Jonge (2014), 202–223. For an introduction into the narratological reading of classical texts, see De Jong (2014).

\(^{21}\) Cf. Allan’s discussion of the two subtypes of the narrative mode in Allan (2009), 173–179 with a reference to the notion of “narratorial control” on (173–174).

\(^{22}\) See, for instance, Allan (2009), 181–186.

\(^{23}\) There is no temporal progression in discursive mode. See, for instance, Allan (2009), 183 (cf. also the table on 186). This is also true for the description mode. See, for instance, Adema (2007), 51; Kroon (2007), 71–72; Allan (2009), 179–181. Note the narratological term “pause” in Allan’s table (2009), 186 with reference to both the descriptive and the discursive mode.

\(^{24}\) Cf., for instance, Allan (2009), 181–186.


\(^{26}\) Cf. also the work of Fleischmann (1990); Toolan (2001); Fludernik (2009).

\(^{27}\) This table is based on an unpublished paper by Kroon (2010).
stories in chapters 21 and 24 that frame a specific textual unit on appearances of the devil set within the context of apocalyptic expectations.

2 Life of Martin 21: A Murder Mystery

Vita Martini 21 opens with an abstract-like section which concerns the entire unit of 21 through to 24. It announces what the following passages and stories will be about:

It is certain (Constat autem) that angels often appeared to Martin, even going so far as to enter into conversation and talk with him. But as for the devil, Martin could see him so easily and so clearly that whether he retained his own form or turned himself into various evil shapes, Martin could recognize him, whatever his disguise. But when the devil realized that he could not escape, he would frequently hurl abuse at Martin, because he was unable to deceive him by his wiles.²⁸

Significantly, the particle autem is used in the opening sentence to signal the advancement of the argument as the author starts a new thematic chain in the discourse structure.²⁹ In the opening section, which functions as an abstract in the Labovian sense, we learn that Martin conversed with the angels and that he was able to see the devil, whether he appeared in his “own nature” (in propria substantia) or in some kind of disguise: in diversas figuras nequitiae (the verb transtulisset used in this sentence signals the notion of transformation). The main point Sulpicius (or strictly narratologically speaking: the narrator) is making, is this: in whatever form he appeared, Martin was able to recognize him. Here, we have a reference to the many forms the devil may take on and the crucial virtue of discernment needed to unmask him.³⁰ The abstract continues: because the devil knew he couldn’t escape Martin, he haunted him. Subsequently, in chapters 21–24, we read a number of embedded stories – all relating to this theme, the first and last of which we will consider up close.³¹

The first (embedded) story is actually quite strange from a Labovian point of view: a proper orientation appears to be lacking and there doesn’t really seem to

²⁸ Translation by Carolinne White (White [1998], 153); VM 21,1–2: Constat autem etiam angelos ab eo plerumque visos, ita ut conserto apud eum invicem sermone loquerentur. Diabolum vero ita conspicabilem et subiectum oculos habebat ut, sive se in propria substantia contineret, sive in diversas figuras nequitiae transtulisset, qualibet ab eo sub imagine videretur. Quod cum diabolus sciret se effugere non posse, conviciis eum frequenter urguebat, quia fallere non possent insidiis. The Latin is quoted from Fontaine (1967).
³⁰ Cf. my point made in the introduction to this article concerning Antony’s Letter 6 and the theme of “the one and the many”.
³¹ I thank Suzanne Adema for her willingness to analyze these stories with me and for her valuable comments.
be a complication.\textsuperscript{32} We read: Now at a certain time, he burst into his cell with an incredible noise, carrying the bloody horn of an ox in his hand. Showing his bloody hand he announced with glee a crime that he had just committed: ‘Martin’, he said, ‘where is your power? I have just killed one of your men.’\textsuperscript{33} As readers, or – narratologically speaking – narratees, we are immediately plunged into the peak of the story, which is unusual indeed. There is no orientation telling us where we are, introducing the characters and the action. There is no careful building up of tension, no development of the story in a complication. Instead, the narrator starts with the peak! We know this because of certain linguistic features, mainly strong visual detail and the inclusion of direct speech. The visual details are: the bloody horn and the bloody hand. The narratees are encouraged to imagine these vividly. Concerning direct speech, it must be said that this is an indicator of the peak because in direct speech \textit{narrative time} and \textit{narrated time} coincide.\textsuperscript{34} In stories, as one approaches the peak of the story, the pace of storytelling generally slows down: narrated time and narrative time are slowly moving towards equivalence. In direct speech, such equivalence is actually realized: in direct speech, narrated time and narrative are identical.\textsuperscript{35} In this case, it reads: ‘Martin, where is your power?’.

After this surprising peak opening, the story continues. In this particular case, we don’t have a complication culminating in a peak, but a peak that is followed by a complication. We read how the story develops: the tense that is employed is the present functioning as a \textit{historical present}. At first, it occurs no less than four times, mainly in combination with infinitives, creating instances of indirect speech: \textit{refert}, \textit{praecipit}, \textit{nuntiant}, and \textit{iubet}.\textsuperscript{36} In White’s translation, this portion of the text reads as follows (the verbs just mentioned are in italics):

\begin{quote}
Then Martin called the brothers together and \textit{told} them what the devil had revealed. He \textit{told} them to go carefully round all the cells to find out who had suffered this fate. They \textit{reported}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} Strictly speaking, the complication comprises three words: \textit{quodam autem tempore}. It signals the transition to the anecdote that follows.

\textsuperscript{33} This free translation or paraphrase is my own. The text (in \textit{VM} 21,2) reads: \textit{Quodam autem tempore, cornu bovis cruentum in manu tenens, cum ingenti fremitu cellulam eius inrupit, cruentamque ostendens dexteram et admisso recens scelere congaudens: ubi est, inquit, Martine, virtus tua? unum de tuis modo interfeci}. Translation by White (1998), 153: One time he burst into Martin’s cell with a loud roar, holding in his hand a bull’s bloody horn. He showed his bloody hand, and glorying in the crime he had just committed, he said: ‘Where is your power, Martin? I have just killed one of your friends.’

\textsuperscript{34} See, for instance, Fludernik (2009), 33.

\textsuperscript{35} On the slowing down of tempo and direct speech (and other characteristics) relating to the peak, see, for instance, Allan (2009), 187–188 with a reference to Longacre (1996), 38–50. See also Stienaers (2015), 908.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{VM} 21,3: \textit{Tunc ille convocatis fratribus refert quid diabolus indicasset; sollicitos esse praecipit per cellulas singularum quisnam hoc casu adfectus fuisset. Neminem quidem deesse de monachis, sed unum rusticum mercede conductum ut vehiculio ligna deferret, isse ad silvam nuntiant. Iubet igitur aliquos ire ei obviam.}
that none of the monks was missing but that one peasant, hired to transport some wood, had gone into the forest. Martin therefore ordered some of them to go and meet him.³⁷

Next, two additional instances of historical present are included: *invenitur* and *indicat*.³⁸ Thus, we are in pseudo-simultaneous narrative mode: the narrator has transported us to the story world and is telling the story in the historical present. We read in the translation by Carolinne White (and again the verbs cited above are in italics):

> He was found not far from the monastery, already on the point of death. As he breathed his last, he revealed to the brothers the cause of his deadly wound: when his oxen were yoked together, as he was tightening the straps which had come undone, an ox shook his head free and drove his horns into the peasant’s groin.³⁹

As said, we are in pseudo-simultaneous mode and the action narrated is quite dramatic, but by using *indirect speech* in the complication, the author is – as the term indicates – narrating “indirectly” and thus rather serenely; in fact, the events are narrated quite drily and the narrative tempo is relatively high.⁴⁰ Considering the content of the story, this is surprising, because the story as it develops in this section is actually quite exciting: Martin assembles the brothers and orders them to check all the cells to find out who the victim is. They visit the individual cells but all the monks are there and nobody is hurt. This is not a “whodunit”, since we know that the perpetrator of the murder is the devil, but there is a mystery to be solved: *who is the victim?* Next, they inform Martin that a farmer, hired to transport some wood, had gone to the forest. The saint orders them to go out to meet him. Not far from the monastery they find him: barely alive. He is drawing his final breaths explaining what has happened: one of the oxen broke loose and planted his horn in his groin causing a lethal wound. In this passage, the word for “horn” is repeated: *cornu*. It is the same *cornu* that was mentioned in the opening sentence of the story: the devil was waving the bloody horn. This repetition of *cornu* creates an instance of inclusion, connecting

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³⁷ White (1998), 153 [Italics N.V.].
³⁸ VM 21,4: *Ita haurd longe a monasterio iam paene examinis invenitur. Extremum tamen spiritum tranhens, indicat fratibus causam mortis et vulneris: iunctis scilicet bubus dum dissoluta artius lora constringit, bovem sibi excuso capite inter inguina cornu adegisse.* The verb *constringit* is part of a subordinate clause starting with *dum* which requires a present tense as a matter of course.
⁴⁰ For the occurrence of a relatively high narrative tempo in pseudo-simultaneous mode, see Stienaers (2015), 213: Stienaers argues that “the narrator is recounting events that are the most relevant to him”. Cf. Stienaers (2016), 913, footnote 13: “the story is recounted from a temporal proximity (historical present tense forms), but at a high narrative pace. The story appears to be reduced to the most essential events in the narrator’s opinion.” Concerning the combination of the historical present (used for the subsequent steps taken in the story) with indirect speech, Suzanne Adema has observed that this may create an atmosphere that is businesslike, distanced, and serene (observation shared by Suzanne Adema in private conversation, October 2015).
the opening sentence that exemplified the peak of the story to the closing sentence of the complication that followed.

The resolution, the wrapping up of the story in terms of Labov, takes up only one sentence: “Not long after he breathed his last” (*Nec multo post vitam reddidit*). The verb *reddidit* is a perfect tense, signalling that the narrator has now moved from a pseudo-simultaneous to a retrospective narrative mode. It means that he has changed the position from which he narrates (the so-called “base”): he no longer partakes in the story world and story now, but has moved to the time of speaking/speech, that is, “discourse now”. Consequently, we (the readers/narratees) have left the story world and have been transported back to “discourse now”. Thus, this shift from pseudo-simultaneous to retrospective narrative mode has resulted in a shift to “discourse now”, which – in turn – enables the next shift in discourse mode to take place, namely, a shift to the discursive mode. This is the mode in which “the states of affairs referred to by the speaker are directly related to the communicative situation”.

In what follows, it becomes clear that “the communicative situation” is in full view as the narrator even addresses the narratees individually by way of the second person singular, inviting them to reflect on the basis of which decision (judgement) God had provided the devil with the power to do all this. At this point, the readers have entered the realm of the evaluation: here, they learn the meaning of the story. One might have thought that this story suggests a weakness on the part of Martin since he was unable to save the farmer, but as it turns out, this is not the point the narrator wants to make at all. On the contrary: his point is Martin’s exceptional clairvoyance, for the saint knew what was going on even at a distance. Thus, he possesses the crucial virtue of discernment (*discretio*) – needed to fight against the devil and his demons. As Sulpicius is now communicating directly with his audience, it is apparent that he has taken on a different role: he is no longer telling a story, but making an argument. In fact, the story is told in service of the argument and the argumentation to which the author has now turned is marked by the shift in discourse mode: it is the discursive or, more specifically in this case, the argument mode that characterizes this evaluative portion of the text.

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42 See for the concept of the “base”: Kroon (2007), 66–70 (where she distinguishes between a retrospective base = base in narrator’s time and an internal base = base in reference time; cf. Figure 1 on 70). Adema also uses the term (see, for instance, Adema (2007), 42). Cf., in addition, Figure 1 in Allan (2007), 100.

43 Allan (2009), 181.

44 The Latin in *VM* 21.4 reads: *Videris quo iudicio Domini diabolo data fuerit haec potestas*. In translation: “It is for you to decide by what judgement of the Lord this power was granted to the devil.” (White (1998), 153).

45 For the notion of argument mode, and the possibility of qualifying it as a (sub-)type of the discursive mode, see footnote 16.
In view of this, it is important to note that in the opening sentence of the story, the devil asks: *Ubi est virtus tua?*, that is, ‘Where is your power?’ The story, then, provides an answer to this question: *virtus* is located precisely in this ability to discern. On a more general level, we must be aware that in the *Life of Martin* as a whole *virtus* is a central concept because it refers to different aspects of Martin’s holiness *at once*: his special powers (in this case, his clairvoyance), his virtue (which is the basis for his power rooted in his ascetic lifestyle), and his miracles because the plural *virtutes* denotes the many miracles that he performs.⁴⁶

Recapitulating, I would like to emphasize that some interesting things are going on in this passage: the story opens with the peak, pointing to the central category of Martin’s *virtus*, while the *actual story* about the murdered farmer, which has all the ingredients of an exciting tale – including “peak material”, is told rather swiftly and business-like, *without* the clustering of linguistic features that would indicate a “peak”. Thus, the story about the murdered farmer is subordinated to the opening scene in which the devil waves the horn. As a result, the expected peak has been displaced.⁴⁷ Taking this in, we see how cleverly the author has organized his material and opted for a mode of presentation that suits his communicative goal, which in this section is the highlighting of Martin’s special powers of clairvoyance and discernment. *These* become the focus of attention. Towards the end of this article, I will widen the scope and comment on the communicative aim of the *vita* as a whole. But first let us move to chapter 24.

### 3 *Life of Martin* 24: The Devil in Disguise

In *Vita Martini* 24, paragraph 4, our second story starts. The section opens with one sentence, the abstract, announcing the tale to come: “I think I ought to mention what exceptional cunning the devil used to try and tempt Martin at that time.”⁴⁸ Then follows an orientation in which the devil is described: he appears dressed in a royal robe, enveloped in a purple light, wearing a diadem of gems and gold, with feet covered in gold, a serene face, and a joyful appearance. I would interpret this quite elaborate orientation as highlighting an allusion to the Son of Man from Revelation 1, which fits with the apocalyptic character of chapters 21–24 as a whole.⁴⁹ The narrator

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⁴⁶ Cf. for the important notion of *virtus* in the *Life of Martin*, Stancliffe (1983), 6, 9, 161–162, and 248.

⁴⁷ In her commentary on Augustine’s *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, Paula Rose provides a fascinating analysis of the same phenomenon, displacement of an anticipated peak. See Rose (2013), 57–58 and 517–555.

⁴⁸ White (1998), 156. The Latin (VM 24,4) reads: *Non praetereundum autem videtur quanta Martinum sub isdem diebus diabolus arte temptaverat.*

⁴⁹ Revelation 1,12–16: “Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were
comments on the appearance of this apocalyptic figure as follows: “No one would have thought it was the devil” or, in other words, “not in the least bit looking like the devil”, making Martin’s later recognition even more exceptional. But for now, the saint is struck dumb: “When Martin first saw him he was stunned and for a long time they both maintained a profound silence.”

Subsequently, this silence is broken by the devil and we move into direct discourse which signals the peak of the narration: “Acknowledge, Martin, whom you see: I am Christ. At the point of descending to earth, I wanted to reveal myself to you first.” Clearly, the devil alludes here to the second coming of Christ, a major theme in the Life of Martin. When Martin remains silent, the devil continues: “Martin, why are you in doubt? Believe your eyes: I am Christ.” Then, the narrator explains that the Holy Spirit reveals to Martin the truth, namely, that this is actually the devil. This mention of the Spirit’s revelation enhances the suggestion that this was indeed a very difficult disguise to recognize. Martin’s subsequent reply is also in direct speech, thus creating for the first time in the textual unit of chapters 21–24, on confrontations with the devil and his demons, a dialogue:

Christ has not foretold that he would return dressed in purple and shining with a diadem. I will not believe that Christ has come unless he appears in the form in which he suffered, carrying the signs of the cross.

white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a harp, two-edged word, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.” (Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version, Oxford 1989).

50 VM 24,4: Quodam enim die, praemissa prae se et circumiectus ipse luce purpurea, quo facilis claritatem adsumpti fulgoris induceret, veste etiam regia indutus, diademate ex gemmis auroque redimitus, calcis auro inlinitis, sereno ore, laeta facie, ut nihil minus quam diabolus putaretur, orante in cellula adstitit. White translates: “One day he appeared to Martin who was praying in his cell: he was preceded by a bright light with which he also surrounded himself in the hope of more easily tricking Martin by means of a feigned brightness. He wore a royal robe and was crowned with a diadem made of gold and jewels, were gilded sandals, had a serene expression and a look of joy – no one could have looked less like the devil!” (White (1998), 156).

51 White (1998), 156; VM 24,5: Cumque Martinus primo aspectu eius fuisset hebetatus, diu mutum silentium ambo tenuerunt.

52 My translation. White (1998), 156 renders the passage as follows: “Martin, recognize who you are looking at. I am Christ. Intending to come down to earth I wished to reveal myself first to you.” – VM 24,5: agnosce (inquit) Martine, quem cernis: Christus ego sum; descensurus ad terram prius me manifestare tibi volui.


54 VM 24,7: Tum ille, revelante sibi spiritu ut intellexeret diabolum esse, non Dominum [...]; “Then, as a result of the spirit’s revelation, Martin understood that it was the devil, not the Lord [...].” (White (1998), 156–157).

55 My translation. VM 24,7: non se, inquit, Iesus Dominus purpuratum nec diademate renidentem venturum esse praeditit; ego Christus, nisi in eo habitu formaque qua passus est, nisi crucis stigmata prae-
Then follows the resolution as the devil vanishes like smoke, leaving a distinctive stench.⁵⁶ Unlike some other stories that Sulpicius narrates in chapters 22–23,⁵⁷ having heard them from other people, he claims that he learned this story directly from the mouth of Martin himself. In this final coda-like sentence, the reader is encouraged to believe in this climactic dialogical story, which represents the peak of the entire unit of chapters 21–24.

Let us consider for a moment the central theme of this adversarial scene: the nature of Christ – his suffering, his poverty – mirrored by Martin in his ascetic lifestyle. It means that this story about the devil points us to the central message of the entire vita. This is corroborated by the fact that the vision, occurring towards the end of the vita (after chapter 24 follow only chapters 25–27 which comprise 3 chapters adding up to some 3,5 pages) is mirrored structurally by the famous visionary story positioned at the beginning of the vita in chapter 3 (occurring after the dedication and the two opening chapters equaling 4,5 pages including the letter of dedication, with chapters 1 and 2 together covering 3 pages). In the memorable chapter on Martin’s so-called “conversion”, the narrator recounts how Martin gave half his mantle to the beggar at the gate of Amiens after which he sees Christ in a dream: the Saviour is wearing half of Martin’s mantle, identifying with the beggar. In a clever move, the narrator presents Christ as corroborating his own words, namely, “whatever you have done to one of these little ones, you have done to me” (Matthew 25:40), a statement from the apocalyptic chapter in Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 25.⁵⁸

Thus, the peak of chapter 24 in the vita not only functions as the peak of the larger unit comprising chapters 21–24, it also confirms the main message of the vita as a whole – as a mirror image of chapter 3: the true Christ and the false Christ juxtaposed.

**Conclusion**

When we consider the two embedded stories analyzed above and the vita as whole, we encounter at least two genres, or rather: two discourse modes. We come across narrative and argumentation represented in, respectively, narrative and discursive

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⁵⁶ *ferentem, venisse non credam.* In White’s translation (1998), 157: “and so he said, ,The Lord did not foretell that He would come in splendid clothes and with a shining crown; I will not believe that Christ has come unless He wears the same garments and has the same appearance as at the time of His suffering, and unless He bears the marks of the cross.”

⁵⁷ *VM 24,8: Ad hanc ille vocem statum ut fumus evanuit. Cellulam tanto foetore conplevit ut indubia indicia relinqueret diabolum seuisse.* In White’s words: “At these words the devil immediately vanished like smoke. He filled the cell with such a strong smell that he left clear proof that he was the devil.” (White (1998), 157).

⁵⁸ See White (1998), 154–156.

⁵⁸ See White (1998), 137–138, for the story about the beggar at the gate of Amiens and Martin’s subsequent visionary experience.
mode. When we look more closely, we find that the stories that are being told are embedded in a larger framework of argumentation: the author is making a point and trying to convince his audience (like Cicero) – not simply to entertain them.\textsuperscript{59} This seems to be typical of early Christian narrative texts: they tend to be highly argumentative as is the case with Augustine’s autobiographical \textit{Confessions} and Sedulius’ retelling of the Gospel story in \textit{Carmen Paschale}.\textsuperscript{60}

In these stories from the \textit{Life of Martin}, then, the ambiguity of the demonic, culminating in the devil’s claim to be Christ, is the black that foregrounds the white of Martin’s holiness. The representation of the devil posing as Christ in terms of wealth fits – as a photographic negative – with the author’s theological focus on the poor, suffering Christ and the \textit{imitation of Christ} in asceticism which the readers are encouraged to emulate.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, once more, the message of salvation is put into sharp relief with reference to the devil and his demons.\textsuperscript{62}

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\textsuperscript{59} Cf. the work of Van Gils (2009).

\textsuperscript{60} See the earlier section in this article entitled “Hagiography and Discourse Linguistics: Methodological Prolegomena”; cf. footnote 10.


**Appendix**: A Schematic Overview of the Correlation between Narrative Elements, Discourse Modes, Tenses, and Other Features (based on Kroon, 2010, reproduced with kind permission)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narratological function</th>
<th>Dominant discourse mode</th>
<th>Dominant tenses</th>
<th>Other features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>announcement &amp; outline of the story</td>
<td>discursive</td>
<td>perfect tense for past events; (actual) present &amp; future tenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>setting the scene, specifying participants, building up tension</td>
<td>narrative &amp; description</td>
<td>imperfect pluperfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complication</td>
<td>development of narrative action; advancement of narrative time</td>
<td>narrative</td>
<td>alternations of perfect &amp; imperfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak</td>
<td>climax or ‘hinge’ of story (pseudo-simultaneous) narrative</td>
<td>(pseudo-simultaneous) narrative</td>
<td>historical present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>e.g. comment on the content of the story and its significance; often contains the ‘ideological point’</td>
<td>discursive</td>
<td>perfect; (actual) present tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>outcome of story; aftermath</td>
<td>discursive &amp; narrative</td>
<td>perfect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>