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St. Martin's Clowns: The Miracle of the Blind Man and Cripple in Art and Drama

Martin W. Walsh

The legend of St. Martin of Tours was a particularly strong magnet in attracting popular-cultural elements.¹ Beginning as a species of Late Antique biography with the writings of Sulpicius Severus, Martin's *vita* was more than doubled by the inclusion of his posthumous miracles, collected chiefly by Gregory of Tours in the late sixth century. Early on Martin passed into European folkways and popular literature, and, reciprocally, folkloric motifs attached themselves to Martin at the more elevated levels of his cult. One of the more unusual of these popular accretions to the *Vita Martini* is the motif of the sturdy Blind Man and the frail Cripple who, in symbiotic union, form one complete, self-satisfied Beggar and actively resist the cure of their handicaps. The motif received several treatments in the visual arts and drama, and reached its culmination in 1496 in one of the great comic plays of the Middle Ages, Andrieu de la Vigne's *Moralité de l'aveugle et du boiteux*.²

The sighted Cripple riding on the Blind Man is a very widespread folkloric motif assigned the Stith Thompson index number N 886.³ The pair can be found from Celtic Ireland in various

¹ See Martin Walsh, "Martin of Tours: A Patron Saint of Medieval Comedy," in Sandro Sticca, ed., *Sancta, Sanctus: Studies in Hagiography*, Acta 4 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 283–315.

² Text from André Duplat, ed., "*La Moralité de l'aveugle et du boiteau d'Andrieu de la Vigne* (Étude littéraire et édition avec notes et glossaires)," *Travaux de linguistique et de littératures romanes* 21, no. 1 (1983): 41–79; translation in Roger Sherman Loomis and Henry W. Wells, eds., *Representative Medieval and Tudor Plays* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), 49–60.

³ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58), 5:118, 138.

wonder tales, to late medieval Russia in icons based on the parable of Bishop Turovskogo, to Hopi Arizona in the antics of their Koyemsi “mudhead” clowns.⁴ In addition to a purely folkloric stratum, there is also a literary tradition of the Blind Man-and-Cripple in classical epigram where they serve as an emblem for cooperation and mutual assistance. Thomas More, for one, handled the motif in seven different Latin epigrams. The begging pair also appear in Renaissance emblem literature, as in Andreas Alciatus’ *Emblematum Libellus* of 1531.⁵ Where the pair occur in isolation in medieval sermon literature they are likewise positive emblems. In the *Gesta Romanorum*, for example, they form their union in order to answer a king’s invitation to a great feast and are moralized as the powerful of this world (the Blind Man) guided by the devout (the Cripple) to the Kingdom of Heaven (the royal feast).⁶ Such uses of the motif, it should be clear, are not even mildly satiric in tone. Comic/satiric possibilities are released only when supernatural power intersects with the mendicant symbiosis, and exclusively, as far as one is able to discover, in conjunction with the posthumous miracles of St. Martin.

The pair’s entry point into the Martinian literature appears to be the *Reversione beati Martini a Burgundia Tractatus*. This is a chronicle supposedly by Odo of Cluny and purports to record events from the Viking era when Martin’s relics were transferred to Burgundy for safe-

⁴ See also Gustave Cohen, “Le theme de l’aveugle et du paralytique dans la litterature française,” in *Mélanges offerts à M. Emile Picot*, 2 vols. (Paris: Damascene Morgand, 1913), 2:393–404. Cohen does not make a clear distinction between Blind Man and Cripple *per se* and the recipients of St. Martin’s cure.

⁵ Anthony S. G. Edwards, Clarence H. Miller, et al., eds., *The Complete Works of Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963–97), 3:2:118–121; Andrea Alciatus, *Emblematum Libellus* (Paris, 1542), “Mutuum auxilium XXII” (edition consulted).

⁶ Hermann Oesterley, ed., *Gesta Romanorum* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1872), 385–86.

keeping. Actually it was manufactured by the monks of Martin's foundation of Marmoutier in the mid-twelfth century.⁷ Amid many other miracles en route back to Tours, the *Tractatus* asserts, the relics of St. Martin cured two pathetic beggars against their will. This was near the village of Derre, and the Chappelle-Blanche was founded to commemorate the event. The two are simply labeled *paralytici*, and the incident is included for the obvious purpose of magnifying the power of the patron saint—one does not even need faith to be cured, for the saint's *virtu* is so powerful that it even overcomes active resistance to its work in the world. The topos is certainly not a new one. Einhard, in celebrating the translation of the relics of St. Marcellus in the Carolingian period, recorded the words of a blind man who refused to pray for the restoration of his sight: "Why do I need the vision I lost so long ago? It is worth more to me to be deprived of it than to have it. Blind, I can beg and none will repulse me. Rather, they hasten to attend my needs."⁸ Einhard's emphasis, of course, is not on the blind man's point of view but on a perversely negative attitude which the saint's power will eventually overcome.

The obdurate beggars of the *Tractatus* were incorporated in Péan Gatineau's Old French *Vie de Monseigneur Saint Martin de Tours* of the late-twelfth century.⁹ The pair became differentiated as specifically a Blind Man and a Cripple, and assumed their characteristic piggy-back position

⁷ The work has been discussed by Sharon Farmer, in *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 56–62 and 79–90.

⁸ Quoted in Pierre Riche, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*, trans. JoAnn McNamara (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 249.

⁹ Péan Gatineau, *Leben und Wunderthaten des Heiligen Martin. Altfranzösisches Gedicht aus dem Anfang des XIII Jahrhunderts von Péan Gatineau*, ed. Werner Söderhjelm (Tübingen: Litterarischen Verein in Stuttgart, 1896), ll. 8100–47.

soon thereafter. It is impossible to determine whether a folkloric or a literary influence predominates in elaborating the rather bald early accounts. Nor must one discount the simple formula of “the blind and the lame” in Gospel miracle stories. In any event, the great preacher Jacques de Vitry employed a fully realized Blind Man-and-Cripple team as an exemplum in one of his *Sermones Vulgares* (c.1240) :

When the body of St. Martin was borne in procession, it healed all the infirm who met it. Now there were near the church two wandering beggars, one blind, the other lame. They began to converse together and said, “See, the body of St. Martin is now being borne about in procession, and if it catches us we shall be healed immediately, and no one in the future will give us any alms. But we shall have to work and labor with our hands.” The blind man said to the lame, “Get up on my shoulders because I am strong, and you who can see well can guide me.” They did this, but when they tried to escape, the procession overtook them; and since, on account of the throng, they were not able to get away, they were healed against their will.¹⁰

Notice that there is no reference to Martin’s relics returning from Burgundy. The Blind Man and Cripple are local Tournois. De Vitry’s account is not anchored to any particular moment in the history of Martin’s relics, but later versions would tend to place the perverse miracle at the historical moment of the removal of Martin’s body from the village of Candes, where he expired, back to the city of Tours. This incident itself bears ironic overtones, for the custody of Martin’s body was a matter of dispute between religious delegations sent from Poitiers and from Tours. The Tournois thereupon experienced a “miracle” when they slipped Martin’s body through a window in the middle of the night while the Poitevins slept. Perhaps the holy trickery practiced against the two

¹⁰ *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History* 2:4 (1901), 12, and Thomas Frederick Crane, ed., *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry* (London: Folk-Lore Society, 1890), 52, 182.

beggars was meant to resonate with this *furta sacra*. Be that as it may, the early de Vitry version most importantly presents the core of a dramatic comic action, which certainly invited further development.



Fig. 1. St.Martin Healing the Blind Man and the Cripple
Picture-Book of Saints (c. 1270). Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 370, fol. 6r
© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The far from exemplary pair of the Blind Man and Cripple would have a fairly long lifetime in popular religious iconography and in preaching. They were included in Martin's vita in most variants of the late thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*, and passed into vernacular lives, such as the fourteenth-century *Von Sant Martin* in the Alemannic-Alsatian dialect of German, or the late fifteenth-century *Les beaux miracles de Monseigneur Sainct Martin* from Touraine.¹¹

Their earliest appearance in the visual arts is most probably a tinted drawing in an *English Picture-Book* (c.1270) now in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS. 370 (Fig. 1). The *Picture-Book* contains two full-page illustrations devoted to St. Martin. One is the well-known incident of Martin sharing his cloak with the Beggar. The other is a more enigmatic scene, Martin as bishop interacting with two secular figures each with a large water- or wine-skin. M. R. James was unable to identify the incident in his 1937 article on the *Picture-Book*.¹² He was clearly unsatisfied with his own tentative attribution, that the image refers to the historical incident of Martin's capture by brigands in the Alps. Not only did this event occur before Martin was a bishop, but the two figures in the Fitzwilliam drawing are clearly on the receiving end of the action. They are dressed as commoners with no indications of wealth or rank, their water-skins perhaps meant to convey the fact that they are vagabonds, as can be seen in the woodcut for the chapter on beggars in Brant's *Narrenschiff* some two centuries later. The blue wash background and the symbolic hillock upon

¹¹ Anton Birlinger, ed., *Von Sant Martin: Alamannisch-elsässzische Sprachproben des XIV Jahrhundert aus dem Cod. Germ. 6 der Munchener Hof- und Staatsbibliothek* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1862), 9; and L'Abbe Chevalier, ed., *Les Beaux Miracles de Monseigneur Sainct Martin, archevêque de Tours, publié d'après un manuscrit du XVe siècle de la Bibliothèque municipale de Tours* (Tours: J. Bouserez, 1874), 18–19.

¹² M. R. James, "An English Picture Book of the Late Thirteenth Century," *The Walpole Society* 25 (1936–37): 23–30.

which the recumbent figure rests clearly signal an outdoor scene. What is most telling, however, is the unusual configuration of the two and their evident expressions of dismay. We are catching the pair at the comic climax of their double-miracle. The perfect symbiosis of Cripple upon Blind Man has collapsed upon encounter with the supernatural figure of Bishop Martin. The somewhat larger figure, the former Blind Man, still lies where he has tumbled, his left hand resting on the side of his face in the traditional gesture of distress or despair. The smaller and more youthful figure has risen up from the ground in response to the Saint's gesture. The severely down-turned corners of his mouth (well beyond this artist's convention for a serious face) indicate that he too is unhappy with the situation. We seem to have here an instructional/devotional image with a decidedly comic tinge.

It must be admitted that a procession with Martin's relics is nowhere in evidence, but this need not negate the attribution here proposed. The Fitzwilliam draftsman was obviously interested in limiting his scenes to a few monumental figures and a minimum of props. The presence of a saint in *propria persona* at the moment of cure, moreover, was an established convention for portraying healing by means of relics. As a model book for popular images, Fitzwilliam MS. 370 would belong, then, to the same general level of popular evangelical activity as the de Vitry exemplum of a generation earlier. In both, the Blind Man/Cripple motif finds a legitimate, if not exactly "canonical" place.

The team fails to appear in Martinian cycles in thirteenth- or fourteenth-century cathedral glass (Tours, Angers, Le Mans, Bourges, Chartres, Canterbury, York). These, as a rule, confine themselves to the biographical incidents narrated by Sulpicius Severus. But they do occur in a small illumination for a chapter of the Chantilly manuscript (c.1340) of the "moralizing encyclopedia for the laity" known as *Ci nous dit*. They also appear as minor characters on a mid fourteenth-century

embroidered altar frontal from Liège.¹³ A century later, they are more prominently displayed in a single embroidered rondel from another altar frontal or vestment from Burgundy, now in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York (Fig. 2).¹⁴ This scene is highly dramatic and almost certainly intended to be comic, though it is perhaps too much to claim that it was influenced by theatrical realizations. Although the needle-work is in a somewhat damaged condition, the features of the three figures are still very expressive and the “body language” of the two beggars is clear. Like the *English Picture-Book*, the pair is dealing, not with relics but with an image of the Saint himself at large in the world (unlike the dramatic versions which always employ a reliquary). They are obviously not aware of what they are about to encounter around the corner of the building which neatly divides the rondel in two. The Cripple’s hands convey a sense of nervousness, while the Blind Man plods confidently on. In its compression and balance this image is structurally identical to the modern single-frame cartoon. It freezes a moment when the trajectory of action is experienced as inevitable, allowing evaluation of the two planes of a “bisociation” which Arthur Koestler finds the fundamental structure of all jokes. The St. Martin rondel is indeed a miniature comic masterpiece. By contrast, the *Picture-Book* scene, in seizing upon the denouement of the miracle, is more redolent of pathos, more inclined toward didacticism.

¹³ Christian Heck, *Le ‘Ci nous dit’: L’image médiéval et la culture des laïcs au XIVe siècle, les enluminures du manuscrit de Chantilly* (Turnhout: repols, 2011), 239, 354; Jules Helbig, *La peinture au pays de Liège et sur les bords de la Meuse* (Liège: Henri Poncelet, 1903), 43–45, pl. iii. See also M. Calberg, “L’antependium de l’Église Saint-Martin à Liège,” *Bulletin des Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire* 17 (1945): 22–43.

¹⁴ Margaret B. Freeman, *The St. Martin Embroideries* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1968), pl. xxxi.



Fig. 2 The Blind Man and the Cripple about to Encounter St. Martin
Embroidered rondel from a Burgundian altar frontal or vestment (c.1440).
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York.

The miracle is also cursorily represented in a woodcut illustrating the *Vita Martini* section of the *Legenda Aurea* printed by Anton Koberger in Nuremberg in 1488. A mural in the porch of the Harkeberga church, Uppland, Sweden, of c.1485 likewise portrays the pair. In the central panel

of a 1518 Austrian altarpiece depicting St. Martin's Charity they can also be found. The latter work is by the eponymous "Master of the Brucker Martin Panel."¹⁵ Though very Italianate in inspiration, the piece is crowded with typically northern grotesques—three times more devastated beggars than the historical Martin had to deal with. Through an arch, which serves as the gate of Amiens, one can glimpse in the distance the climactic scene of the Blind Man and Cripple's unintentional intersection with a procession bearing Martin's body. Thus in a single panel the young Saint's *virtu* is projected even beyond his earthly career. Somewhat earlier, c.1500, is another version of the miracle together with the "Charity" and Martin's miracles of resurrection as background scenes for an episcopal portrait of the saint on a wing panel from the Master of the Hildesheim Johannesaltar, now in Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz Museum. The pair can also be found in the background of a "Death of St. Martin" scene painted by Johann von der Leyten as part of the SS. George and Martin altarpiece (1514) in the Elisabethkirche, Marburg. The scene can be glimpsed through the window of the Saint's death-chamber at Candes. Similarly, in the 1508 high altar for the Church of SS. John the Baptist and Martin in Schwabach, Dürer's teacher, Michael Wolgemut and Wolf Traut include the pair fleeing a draped coffin in the distant background of a panel representing Martin's three miracles of resurrection.¹⁶

¹⁵ For *Legenda Aurea* woodcut and Harkeberga mural, see Ingalill Pegelow, *Sankt Martin i svensk medeltida kult och konst* (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1988), 170–71; Bruck an der Mur: Exhibition catalog, *Gotik in der Steiermark* (St. Lambrecht: Kultur-referat der Steirermarkischen Landesregierung, 1978), 144, color pl. 5.

¹⁶ Marburg: Margaret Lemberg, *Die Flügelaltare von Ludwig Jupp und Johann von der Leyten in der Elisabethkirche zu Marburg* (Marburg: Historische Kommission für Hessen, 2012), 114-17. Schwabach: Günter Bauer, *Der Hochaltar der Schwabacher Stadtkirche* (Schwabach: Verlag Schwabacher Tagblatt, 1983), 197.

These many German examples of the motif belie the fact that there are no surviving German-language Martin plays and consequently no Blind Man and Cripple scenes. The dramatic versions are all French, as we shall see below. One visual example at least comes from the Italian Renaissance, a predella panel by Luca Signorelli in his “Coronation of the Virgin with Saints” (1522/23) for the Church of San Martino in Foiano dell Chiana in which the Cripple aloft on the Blind Man points dramatically away from the procession bearing Martin’s body.¹⁷

From this point on I have not been able to locate further examples of the Blind Man and Cripple associated with St. Martin in the fine arts. In the exemplum literature of the late medieval period, however, the Blind Man-Cripple team continued to be recycled, appearing in Etienne de Besançon’s *Alphabetum Narrationem*, later translated by Caxton; in John Herolt’s *Promptuarium exemplorum*; and in John Mirk’s sermon for St. Martin’s Day in the early fifteenth century.¹⁸ The latter exemplifies the developments that have taken place in the basic tale. Mirk’s pair had formed their union well before any fear of being cured by Martin’s relics, in fact had long prospered as one complete master-mendicant. As in the Burgundian rondel, their climactic scene is precisely imagined: “Wherefore þe schapud hem to gone oute of þe way into anoþur strete þereas þe schrone schulde not comun. Bot þan it felle so þat soddeunly þei metten þe schrone at a cornell of a strete, and anone þei weronn hole boþe.” More importantly, they speak ironic words of thanksgiving: “We þonkyn þe for þe grete gyfte þat we haue hadde for þi loue, but for oure hele we þanke þe ryghte

¹⁷ Tom Henry and Laurence Kanter, *Luca Signorelli: The Complete Paintings* (New York: Rizzoli, 2002), 254, pl. 146/4.

¹⁸ *Alphabet of Tales: An English 15th Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationem of Etienne de Besançon*, ed. Mary Macleod Banks (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1904), 273–74; and Johannes Herolt, *Sermones de sanctis cum promptuario exemplorum et de b. virgine* (Cologne: J. Koelhoff, 1481), Sermo. xlii.

noght, for now we moton geton oure lyuelode wyth swynke and travayle and haue lyue[d] at oure ese before.”¹⁹

It is not a very large step from the dramatized voices of a sermon to dramatic comedy itself. The pair first appeared on stage in the final incident of the *Mystère de la vie et hystoire de monseigneur saint Martin*, possibly the play performed for Charles VII in Tours in the February of 1441.²⁰ According to Gustav Cohen, it was produced on at least two other occasions in the early sixteenth century and reached print at about the same time.²¹ *Laueugle* and *Lespette* (the “thick,” distorted one?) occupy the last five openings of the printed text. They each enter with a begging speech, recognize each other’s voices, and exchange news—chiefly about the miracles occurring around the recently deceased Bishop of Tours. The Cripple comes up with idea of the partnership. Together they will lead *la vie martin*, the idiom for easy living here ironically applied. A stage direction then calls for the Cripple to mount the Blind Man and the two to proceed across the playing area. Meanwhile Martin’s successor, St. Brice, and a deacon organize Martin’s funeral procession, evidently set on a collision course with the piggy-back couple. A sound cue is employed: *Chanteron chants melodieux*, provoking the Cripple to evasive action. *Tourne toy tourne*, he orders the Blind Man and they take refuge in a *maison* where they pause to rest. The house corner, so prominent in the Burgundian rondel and Mirk’s sermon, seems to function here as well. When the pair resume their configuration, the Blind Man complains of aches and pains and

¹⁹ John Mirk, *Festial: Edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II*, ed. Susan Powell, EETS, o.s. 334–35, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009–11), 2:246.

²⁰ Katherine A. Knutsen, ed., “Le Mystère de la vie et histoire de Mon. Saint Martin, Edition critique” (Ph.D. Diss. University of Massachusetts, 1976), 364–77.

²¹ Cohen, “Le theme de l’aveugle et du paralytique,” 395.

wants the Cripple to climb down again. It is evidently during this wrangling that the pair run into the procession and are summarily healed. The Blind Man directs some strong language at the Cripple (or is it at Martin?), but the two are quickly won over and thankfully approach the bier of the saint: *Icy vont au corps saint Martin*. St. Brice draws the obvious moral lesson from the miracle, bids us honor Martin, and calls for the concluding *Te Deum*.

A more elaborate and more accomplished St. Martin play was that of Andrieu de la Vigne, commissioned by the small Burgundian town of Seurre south of Dijon, in 1496.²² La Vigne had been secretary to the Bishop of Angouleme, the Duke of Savoy, and Queen Anne de Bretagne, before serving as *facteur du Roy* during Charles VIII's expedition to Naples. Intended for Martin's summer feast of 4 July, the play's more than 10,400 lines were clubbed up in five weeks, as the playwright boasts in his *Proces-verbal* (an average of 300 verses a day!). For various reasons the performance was delayed until mid-October, but nevertheless proved a great success. It had 152 roles for about 120 actors, took three days to perform, and was punctuated with *diableries*, some scenes of "tavern realism," and an interlarded scatological farce *Le meunier de qui le diable emporte l'âme en enfer* (*The Miller whose soul was carried to Hell by the Devil*). But the Blind Man and Cripple episode La Vigne chose rather to decant and serve up as a separate farce, or *moralité joyeuse* at the end of the entire festival.

²² André Duplat, ed., *Le Mystère de Saint Martin 1496 par Andrieu de la Vigne* (Geneva: Droz, 1979); Edouard L. de Kerdaniel, *Un auteur dramatique du quizieme siecle: André la Vigne* (Paris: Honore Champion, 1923); Ernest Serrigny, *La representation d'un Mystère de Saint-Martin a Seurre, en 1496* (Dijon: Lamarche, 1888); and Graham A. Runnalls, "The Staging of Andre de la Vigne's *Mystère de Saint Martin*," *Treteaux* 3:2 (1981): 68–79.

As he skillfully dramatizes the tale, the two unfortunates are presented in split-focus, evidently using opposite ends of the playing area, the Blind Man lamenting that he has been abandoned by his boy, the Cripple that he is now stuck without any means of locomotion, his helper having absconded as well. This is, in effect, a doubling of the opening movement of the famous twelfth-century farce of *Le garçon et l'aveugle*. Gradually the two characters distinguish each other's voices and resolve to join forces. The playwright here relies upon some rather cruel physical comedy. The Cripple sees the Blind Man but can only rock in frustration as he shouts directions—e.g., “more to the right”—as the Blind Man attempts to grope his way toward him, eventually approaching on all fours for fear of stumbling. Their grotesque juncture, however, is poignant in its intensity:

Aveugle. *Ainsi?*

Boiteux. *Ouy!*

Aeugle. *Je suis hors de moy.*

Puisque je te tiens, mon beau maistre. (ll. 66–68)

Blind Man: This way?

Cripple: Yes!

Blind Man: I'm beside myself

To hold you tight at last, my dear sir.

They can now, after much fumbling and grumbling, form a union as one complete human being, with the frail, though sighted Cripple riding atop the sturdy, somewhat older Blind Man. With the reality of live actors, this odd couple becomes one of the funniest and most touching emblems of human need and cooperation ever produced by medieval art—a kind of profane Christophorus icon. Like the earlier playwright, La Vigne must have been aware of the physical strain the piggy-back

configuration would have had on his actors, for he soon builds in a pause. The Blind Man huffs and puffs as he laboriously returns the Cripple to the stage floor. He is not nearly so confident now that their union is a ticket to Easy Street, especially after the Cripple passes an enormous fart. But there is a further twist. The Cripple is immediately wary of the possibility of encountering the remains of the great miracle-worker, St. Martin, recently deceased. The pair would be sure to be cured then, thus ending their now carefree existence as one accomplished and mobile beggar man.

The action climaxes in their efforts to flee the funeral procession when they tumble down directly in front of the bier and are instantly cured. One can easily determine the sequence of physical comedy from indications in the text: the sound of the procession on the wind, the pair's scramble to restore their configuration, their stumbling about in panic, the bold intersection of the procession through the playing space, and presumably an amusing acrobatic tumble.

Two separate voices again, the Blind Man gives copious thanks to the saint for his vision, but the Cripple curses his new strength of limb. Interestingly, he has the last word. He even plans to anoint himself with a poison that will raise hideous boils simulating St. Anthony's fire. The play ends with him blasphemously rehearsing a new pitch for compassionate suckers to come:

*Reluysant seray plus que lart:
A ce faire je suis ydoyne.
Homme n'aura, qui ne me donne
Par pitie et compassion.
Je feray bien de la personne
Playne de desolcaion
"En l'honneur de la Passion,
Diray-je, voyez ce pauvre homme,
Lequel, par grant extorcion
Est tourment vous voyez comme!"* (ll. 246–54)

I'll make myself more sleek than lard,—
Don't think that I don't know the way,—
And there'll not be a man so hard
But will be melted with compassion.
Then too, I'm expert in the role
Of one whose body's one huge ache.
“In honor of the Sacred Passion,”
I'll quaver, “look at this poor soul,
And see these tortured members shake!”

The playwright is certainly not trying to underscore the obvious moral here—that of Christ's parable of the Lepers made clean—as does the scene from the anonymous Martin play and the exemplum literature behind that. At some level La Vigne wishes us to admire the comic resiliency of the unregenerate Cripple for whom the saint is not the great thaumaturge but simply a wry fabliau Trickster.²³

There is, as well, a kind of metatheatrical recapitulation in *L'aveugle et le boiteux*, the *moralité joyeuse* functioning in much the same way as the tiny inset scenes in the altarpieces previously mentioned. Its internal procession with the relics figures the three-day celebration as a whole, and its very human and contradictory relationship to the heroic and miraculous mirrors, perhaps, the reflections of the itinerant playwright himself. Blind Man and Cripple, indeed, embody the two fundamental aspects of the medieval Martinus cult, the high and the low, the one “officially” aligning itself with the active life of the Church Militant, the other facing wistfully toward the impossible life of perpetual Carnival. They are not self-annihilating, however, but

²³ In two thirteenth-century fabliaux St. Martin appears as a granter of wishes which go badly awry for their recipients. See Walsh, “Martin of Tours: A Patron Saint.”

mutually coexisting states. The historical saint and heroic ascetic, curiously, provides a hinge between the two.

The effect that La Vigne ultimately achieves is the polar opposite, if not the deliberate subversion of the “official” culture’s reading of Martin iconography in general, and of the Blind Man-and-Cripple motif in particular. The powerful archbishops of Mainz in their Cathedral of St. Martin, for example, invariably included an image of the saint’s Charity on their elaborate tombs—Martin as bishop with a miniature beggar tucked into the composition at his feet. A sixteenth-century panel, now in the Mainzer Landesmuseum, shows Martin as a well-fed, resplendent prince of the Church who drops a coin into a begging-box conspicuously bearing a seal, proof that this Beggar is a licensed member of the “worthy poor.” La Vigne’s Cripple will have none of this. He is an irreducible vagabond giving the lie to such patronizing images, maintaining himself tenaciously in the foreground of his composition. We are in a direct line to Victor Hugo’s “Court of Miracles” in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and Mr. Peachum’s emporium in *Threepenny Opera*. What began as an amusing afterpiece for a marathon saint’s play becomes, in the final analysis, a kind of Brechtian undercutting of the sacred event. The surprisingly modern ambivalence of effect seems intentional as the simple negative exemplum of previous centuries acquires an almost antiheroic status. La Vigne’s Cripple, indeed, points forward to the veritable “carnivalization” of the lower half of the Charity in the following century, exemplified by the fighting, singing, guzzling, spewing beggars surrounding the St. Martin engravings of the Bosch and Breughel schools.²⁴

²⁴ See esp. Louis Maeterlinck, *Le genre satirique dans la peinture flamande* (Brussels: G. van Oest, 1907), 230–31 and pl. xxiii for a curious harbor-scene “Charity of St. Martin”; Otto Kurz, “Four Tapestries after Hieronymus Bosch,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967): 150–62; and George Marlier, *Pierre Brueghel le Jeune* (Brussels: Robert Fink, 1969), 324–27 for “The Wine of St. Martin.”

Another Blind Man and Cripple scene can be found at the end of the *Histoyre de la vie du glorieux Sainct Martin euesque de Tours en Touraine* produced by the town of Saint-Martin-de-la-Porte, Murienne (Savoy) in 1565, but it is decidedly underdeveloped. Only slightly more elaborate is the scene in the Provençal *Istoria translationis predicti sancti (Martini)*, also of the sixteenth century, produced by another small community, Saint-Martin-de-Queyrieres (Haute Alpes). Its Latin stage direction summarizes the essential action: “*Tunc onerat cecus contractum et fugiant. Et obviant corpori ab improviso.*” At the end of their scene the two share an ironic rondeau in which they sadly bid “*Adyou lo bon temps.*”²⁵

La Vigne’s *moralité joyeuse*, however, constitutes the highpoint of our motif in popular hagiography and as such seems to have been long remembered. Rabelais probably refers to it in chapter 47 of the *Tiers Livre* (1546), for La Vigne’s play remained in print well into the seventeenth century.²⁶ Molière’s enemy, Edmé Boursault, recalled the pair in a letter to the Bishop of Langres, while the late nineteenth-century cartoonist, Wilhelm Busch, recycled them in a piece entitled “Unbeliebtes Wunder” (“The Unloved Miracle”).²⁷ The *moralité joyeuse* was clearly in J. M. Synge’s mind in 1905 when he composed *The Well of the Saints*, where the male lead is Martin Doul (Blind Martin).²⁸ William Butler Yeats was even closer to the medieval play in his Irish

²⁵ F. Truchet, ed., “Histoyre de la vie du glorieux Sainct Martin, euesque de Tours en Touraine,” *Travaux de la Société d’Histoire et d’Archeologie de la Maurienne (Savoy)* 5 (1881): 357–59.

²⁶ P. Guillaume, ed., “*Mystère de Saint-Martin (Istoria translationis predicti sancti)*,” *Revue des Langues Romanes* 52 (1909): 497–501.

²⁷ Edmé Boursault, *Le Reporter d’un Évêque: Lettres de Boursault à Monseigneur de Langres*, ed. Emile Colombey (Paris: Librairies-Imprimeries Reuines, 1891), 145–46; Wilhelm Busch, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Otto Noldeke (Munich: Braun und Schneider, 1943), 354–55.

²⁸ Gertrude Schoepperle, “John Synge and his Old French Farce,” *North American Review* 214 (1921), 503–13

Kyogen drama, *The Cat and the Moon* of 1926.²⁹ A year later l'Abbe Marcel Courtonne of Nantes recycled the pair in a musical one-act, *Un miracle de Saint Martin d'après un Vieux Fabliau*, particularly developing the contrast between the grateful and the cynical personalities, while French language professor and puppeteer Mathurin Dondo gave the pair nagging wives who force the healed beggars to return to their old ways in the 1928 one-act "A Miracle of St. Martin."³⁰ Samuel Beckett's *Rough for Theatre I* (1975) also seems indebted to the old farce, and the contemporary Italian clown and comic playwright Dario Fo directly incorporated the *moralité* scenes into his famous monodrama *Mistero Buffo* though, as is typical of his sloppy scholarship, Fo turns the French playwright into an Italian, Andrea della Vigna!³¹ These few modern instances suffice to show that, far from being a remote medieval aberration, the legacy of St. Martin's clowns is indeed a rich and paradoxical one—and still very much with us.

²⁹ W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 296–302. The healing saint is Colman, however, not Martin.

³⁰ L'Abbé Marcel Courtonne, *Un miracle de Saint Martin. Piece en 1 Acte, d'après un Vieux Fabliau* (Niort: H. Boulord, 1928); Mathurin Dondo, "A Miracle of St. Martin," in *One-Act Plays for Stage and Study*, 4th ser. (New York: Samuel French 1945), 310–25.

³¹ Dario Fo, *Mistero Buffo/Comic Mysteries*, trans. Ed Emery (London: Methuen, 1988), 27. Contemporary Irish playwright Tom Murphy included nearly the whole of La Vigne's farce, apparently in his own translation, in a biographical collage of Synne material entitled "Epitaph under Ether," which plays on the title of an essay by the aging playwright. The piece was staged as a curtain-raiser to Murphy's production of *The Well of the Saints* at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1979 (unpublished typescript, Abbey Theatre).

Appendix

A Preliminary List of Martin's Cure of Blind Man and Cripple in the Visual Arts:

1. Ink and wash drawing, *English Picture-Book* (c.1270). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
2. Embroidered altar frontal from the Église Saint-Martin, Liège (mid fourteenth century). Diocesan Museum, Liège.
3. Embroidered rondel from a Burgundian altar frontal or vestment (c.1440). Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York.
4. Mural, porch of Harkeberga church, Uppland, Sweden (c.1485).
5. Woodcut from an edition of the *Legenda Aurea* printed by Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1488.
6. Master of the Hildesheim Johannesaltar, left wing-panel (c.1500), Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne (Inv. 125283).
7. Michael Wolgemut and Wolf Traut, third panel of scenes of Martin's life, High Altar, Stadtkirche St. Johannes der Täufer und St.Martin (1508), Schwabach, Franconia.
8. Johann von der Leyten, SS. George and Martin Altar (1514) from the Elisabethkirche, Marburg (1514).
9. Central altar panel, from the Burgerspalkirche (1518), Bruck an der Mur, Steiermark.
10. Luca Signorelli, predella of "Coronation of the Virgin with Saints" (1522–23), Chiesa di San Martino, Foiano della Chiana.

Theater specialist Martin W. Walsh provides this study of a comedy in which a pair of mutually dependent beggars, one blind and the other lame, are healed by the relics of St. Martin of Tours passing by in a procession. Originally published in The Early Drama, Art, and Music Review 17, no. 1 (Fall 1994), 8–21.