

# The Devil in Gregory of Tours

## Spirit Intercession and the Human Body

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Upon cutting down some wood in a forest glade, a man from Bourges was attacked by a swarm of flies and soon became insane.<sup>1</sup> Making his way to the province of Arles, the man 'dressed himself up in animal skins and spent his time in prayer as if he were a religious. In order to encourage him in his deception further, the Devil gave him the power of prophesying the future'. As the man left Arles he practiced increasingly greater deceptions, 'eventually going so far as to pretend that he was Christ'. The man from Bourges gave gifts to the poor and foretold the future, and soon gathered a huge following; 'more than three thousand people followed him wherever he went' – 'not only the uneducated, but even priests in orders'. After he was eventually killed by a servant of Bishop Aurelius, his followers were dispersed, although some were 'so far deranged by his devilish devices' that they continued to profess the man's divinity. A number of other men across Gaul subsequently 'acquired great influence over the common people' through similar trickery, who 'put it about that they were saints'.

\* The present article is based on my BA dissertation, 'The Devil in Gregory of Tours: Spirit Intercession and the Human Body', which was awarded the Sir Ian Kershaw Prize for Best Dissertation Outside of British History (July 2013, University of Sheffield). I would like to thank Simon Loseby (my dissertation supervisor and special subject tutor) for his guidance and support, and the 'Gregory of Tours and his world' special subject Class of 2013 for their (unfailing witty) contributions.

<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, SRM 1, 1, X, 25. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are from the versions cited in the bibliography.

This account of the false Christ of Bourges is recorded by Gregory of Tours, our most valuable source for the Merovingian period, and is one of several miracle stories concerning the appearance of fraudulent holy men featured in Gregory's writings.<sup>2</sup> The episode highlights the problematic nature of spirit recognition during the medieval period and reflects the variance of responses to arrivals of holy men, as members of the community attempted to categorise those under spiritual inspiration. This difficulty is not restricted to Gregory's period; instances of ambiguous spirit recognition can be found in earlier centuries and continue well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Despite being recognised as holy by his many followers, Gregory adamantly denied the man from Bourges' holiness, attributing his powers, instead, to 'devilish arts and... tricks which [Gregory could not] explain'.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the man dressing himself in animal skins, praying, and prophesying the future – clothing and behaviours that signify holiness – why did Gregory so adamantly deny this man's holy inspiration?

In an attempt to understand why Gregory designated some holy men as imposters under demonic influence, despite their appearance being similar, if not indistinguishable, from 'real' holy men, my focus will be predominantly centred upon how Gregory recognised the Devil and his demons during their intercession with the human body. Importantly, my examples will be drawn from both Gregory's hagiographical writings – the eight 'Books of Miracles' – and his *Histories* – a universal history consisting of ten books. Late twentieth-century scholarship has demonstrated the fruitfulness of relating Gregory's *Lives* and miracle stories to his history, and vice versa, rather than treating Gregory's hagiographies as free-standing material.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, by exploring notions of the demonic across these different writings, I hope to gain a more nuanced understanding of Gregory's thought-world. Of course, the way in which Gregory viewed the spiritual world and its beings was not necessarily how his contemporaries saw it; not everyone sharing the same culture perceive things in the same way.<sup>6</sup> During this paper, I am not claiming that everyone in Gaul during Gregory's time shared his views; I am aiming to uncover Gregory's understanding of spiritual beings.

Research concerning the holy in Gregory's works has largely focused on the lives of certain saints, the formation and promotion of individual cults, the goals and methods Gregory had as a

<sup>2</sup> Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, X, 25; VII, 44; IX, 9; Gregory of Tours, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, SRM 1, 2, VIII, 4; IX, 2; X, 2.

<sup>3</sup> N. Caciola, 'Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42 (2000), pp. 268-303; D. Frankfurter, 'Where the Spirits Dwell: Possession, Christianization, and the Saints' Shrines in Late Antiquity', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 103 (2010), pp. 27-46. See also N. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, X, 25. Nancy Caciola notes how it is not possible to recognise assuredly an interceding spirit's nature by the 'gifts' its host receives, for both the holy and demonically possessed can retain abilities to prophesise and perform miracles; see Caciola, 'Mystics', p. 272. For false prophets dressing in the same attire as real holy men in Gregory's writings, see Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IX, 6; X, 25; VII, 44.

<sup>5</sup> For a historiographical overview, see K.A. Winstead, 'The Transformation of the Miracle Story in the "*Libre Historiarum*" of Gregory of Tours', *Medium Aevum*, 59:1 (1990), pp. 1-15, esp. pp. 1-2. Winstead addresses the nature and function of the *Lives* and miracle stories within the *Histories*.

<sup>6</sup> C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 206-7.

hagiographer, or, quite differently, in terms of the wider context of political history.<sup>7</sup> Particular attention has been given to the elements of propaganda within Gregory's writings: through promoting certain saints' cults (such as those of St. Martin and St. Julian) and specific styles of worship, Gregory sought to enhance, and stabilise, episcopal authority more widely – especially his own.<sup>8</sup> These wider issues surrounding episcopal authority and vested interests in saints' cults are particularly relevant to this paper; Gregory, and other bishops, worked to suppress 'alternative' forms of sanctity – such as wandering holy men, stylites, and soothsayers – as they could have detracted attention from the saints' cults and relics that legitimised their own claims to holiness.<sup>9</sup> This may explain why it was important for Gregory to write about both holy and demonic interceding spirits: upon identifying a spirit as holy or unholy, Gregory increased his own authority by 'correctly' perceiving the interceding spirit, and, furthermore, by either promoting his own saints' holiness or effectively eliminating competing sources of holy power through revealing their demonic nature. It is predominantly bishops who come to recognise the unholiness of someone in Gregory's works, even if they are already accepted as holy by the general populace. This self-ascribed role to tell their flock how to perceive the person in question was both a result of bishops' holy authority, and part of their claim to it.<sup>10</sup>

However, whilst the current research concerning Gregory's hagiography is predominantly centred on his presentation of the holy, explorations into his perceptions and portrayals of the unholy remain, to my awareness, limited in comparison. That is not to say the unholy has not been studied: Peter Brown examined the appearance of false prophets and soothsayers in Gregory's works in terms of the betrayal of *reverentia* by local communities. Elsewhere, especially in the works of Giselle de Nie and Martin Heinzelmann, false prophets are identified as evidence that Gregory saw the end of the world and Last Judgement approaching, and are analysed as part of larger debates over the structure

<sup>7</sup> The focus on lives of certain saints and cult formation/promotion is a trend true of wider scholarship on hagiography: see, for example, J. Howard-Johnston & P.A. Haywood (eds), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 1999). For an extensive study on Gregory's records of the saints' cults at Tours and Brioude, see R. Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993). Additionally, Ian Wood explores the religious topography of Vienne and Clermont in his article 'Topographies of Holy Power in Sixth-Century Gaul', in M. de Jong, F. Theuvs and C van Rhijn (eds), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 137-54.

<sup>8</sup> P. Brown, 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', in P. Brown (ed.), *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), pp. 222-50, at p. 223. See also P. Haywood, 'Demystifying the role of sanctity in Western Christendom', in Howard-Johnston & Haywood (eds), *The Cult of Saints*, pp. 115-42, at pp. 117-18, 124-7. For Gregory's strong familial attachments, see Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, pp. 50-81; Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power', pp. 139-45. Notably, Conrad Leyser highlights the dangers of reducing Gregory's narratives into a single story about self-interest in his article "'Divine Power Flowed from This Book": Ascetic Language and Episcopal Authority in Gregory of Tours' *Life of the Fathers*' in K. Mitchell & I. Wood (eds), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 281-94, at p. 282.

<sup>9</sup> P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: its Rise and Function in Late Antiquity* (Chicago, IL, 1981), pp. 120-4; Haywood, 'Demystifying the Role of Sanctity', pp. 125-6.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, VIII, 4; Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, VII, 44; IX, 6; X, 25.

of Gregory's *Historiae*.<sup>11</sup> On a different yet related note, Brown analysed the performance of exorcism, and stressed the relationship between the possessed and the community, represented by the exorcist. Van Dam similarly explores the interaction between communities and their possessed members in late antique Gaul, though in the context of possession as a 'social illness'.<sup>12</sup> However, the ways in which Gregory describes how unholiness is made manifest - and in so doing attempts implicitly or explicitly to explain it - has been comparatively neglected in recent historiography.

In the following pages this paper will offer a case study of perceptions and presentations of unclean spiritual beings featured in Gregory's writings, and takes how Gregory recognised spirits back to the most fundamental level: what is a spirit? What form, appearance, or abilities could a spirit adopt? Understanding the ways in which spirits were conceptualised at this level is essential for realising the complexity and dynamism of unclean spirits' form, and highlights the fluidity and permeability of the boundary between the visible and invisible worlds. I have chosen the interactions unclean spirits had with the human body as the focal point for this investigation; as I shall argue, the interactions a spirit had with the body were Gregory's preferred way of 'correctly' identifying the spirit's nature. The effects of such interactions on the body can be divided into three categories, each presenting itself as a method Gregory liked to use to recognise the nature of interceding spirits: the type of discharge or odour expelled from the body; the region of the body involved; and the state of the body's preservation. The analysis of Gregory's employment of these three methods forms the basic structure of this paper, and collectively shapes my wider argument that, for Gregory, unclean spirits bore corporeal qualities.<sup>13</sup>

Before exploring Gregory's first method of spirit recognition, preliminary consideration should be given to Gregory's wider world view, and how he believed the world around him worked, as illuminated by his writings. During Gregory's time, science was not able to provide men with a coherent system of the universe; instead, the spiritual realm and beings were recognised as responsible for the everyday functioning of the world - an ideology fundamentally different from how we conceptualise the world today.<sup>14</sup> Then, the world was divided between the realm of God and the realm of man, not between the natural and supernatural - a distinction not made until the seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> For Gregory, the blossoming of trees and the movements of stars were both wonders that belonged to the realm of God, not 'nature', with miracles similarly belonging to God's

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *Cult of Saints*, pp. 118-24. G. de Nie, 'Roses in January: A Neglected Dimension of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*', *Journal of Medieval History*, 5 (1979), pp. 259-89; M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 76-88.

<sup>12</sup> P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), pp. 88-9; R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (London, 1985), pp. 256-68.

<sup>13</sup> To clarify, when I refer to corporeal or 'physical' qualities of spirits, I do not mean to suggest that they have an actual physical body or form. I am stipulating that they have some physical power or presence in the earthly world, which may manifest itself in 'physical' objects - like blood or vomit - or result in 'physical' harm - like falling from a cliff top.

<sup>14</sup> Stancliffe, *St. Martin*, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup> E. James, 'A Sense of Wonder: Gregory of Tours, Medicine and Science', in M.E. Meyer (ed.) *The Culture of Christendom* (London, 1993), pp. 45-60, at p. 60.

realm, not to the 'supernatural'.<sup>16</sup> This understanding was, on its own terms, a 'rational' way of thinking – that is, 'orderly in a reasoning way'.<sup>17</sup> In a society that believed spiritual beings determined the weather, harvest, and man's health and fertility, 'common sense' would explain why a man who farmed his crops on a festival day would later find his house burnt down.<sup>18</sup> As Brown explains, 'fortune and misfortune were thought of as... direct and palpable consequences of the remission and retribution of sin'.<sup>19</sup>

In Gregory's writings, and throughout the Early Middle Ages, the Devil and demons were understood as the corrupting forces of the universe and inextricably connected to sin, either as encouragers or instigators of sinful acts or behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, when I refer to sin or corruption I am assuming the implication of the Devil's involvement or presence, even if it is not explicitly stated. For purposes of clarification, I will use 'unclean spirits' as an umbrella term to denote spirits of a corrupted nature, including the Devil and his demons. However, where an episode in Gregory's work is specific about the involvement of the Devil or demon(s), I will refer to them in the same terms as Gregory. Alternatively, spirits of a holy or pure nature will be referred to as 'clean' spirits – again, unless Gregory is more specific. It is important to note that the use of these 'static' terms is inherently problematic, as categorisation of spirits can be biased, and presupposes what spirit is interceding.<sup>21</sup> Although I agree with recent suggestions about the value of formulating 'more neutral, dynamic, and flexible categories' I have not followed them; this paper centres upon the constructions to which Gregory subscribes, and so – in this instance – it is arguably more damaging to try and neutralise this language.<sup>22</sup> Throughout his writings, Gregory records numerous healings using graphic language and disturbing descriptions, usually entailing vomit, blood, or some sort of bodily discharge: it is to these descriptions which I will now turn as I explore Gregory's method of using discharges to identify unclean spirits.

His unembarrassed tales of bodily malfunction are often tied to the removal of unclean spirits, with bodily discharge frequently marking the completion of exorcism. One typical exorcism story in Gregory's hagiographical works is that of Desiderius, a possessed man who began shouting madly in his cell that St. Martin was burning him; 'as he was shouting... he coughed up an unfamiliar pus and

<sup>16</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>17</sup> G. de Nie, 'History and Miracle: Gregory's Use of Metaphor', in I. Wood (ed.), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 261-79, at p. 264.

<sup>18</sup> Stancliffe, *St. Martin*, p. 212. For a discussion of Gregory's Sunday/Sabbath miracles, see I. Wood, 'Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Countryside', in D. Baker (ed.), *The Church in Town and Countryside* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 61-79.

<sup>19</sup> P. Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', p. 232.

<sup>20</sup> T. Ling, *The Significance of Satan: New Testament Demonology and its Contemporary Relevance* (London, 1961), pp. 95-6.

<sup>21</sup> Caciola, 'Mystics', p. 275.

<sup>22</sup> Frankfurter, 'Spirits', p. 29.

blood; the demon was cast out, and he was cleansed'.<sup>23</sup> This exorcism story demonstrates Gregory's use of a generic structure composed of three main parts: a description of the possessed person (Desiderius) and their behaviour (shouting); the trigger for exorcism (saint's name); and the expulsion of bodily discharge (pus and blood). This structure is utilised across Gregory's works, with the specific details tailored to each episode.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it echoes the wider narrative framework of distress-supplication-relief employed by Gregory in his other miracle stories.<sup>25</sup> The use of dramatic elements may also reflect the need for a climactic moment (in this case, the expulsion), which is typical of early medieval dramatic narrative.<sup>26</sup>

Such episodes are found throughout Gregory's writings, and we learn of possessed men 'uttering great cries, and suddenly vomiting' after being shown the sign of the cross, and of others confessing their misdeeds and spitting 'some unknown filth from their mouths' before being healed by saints' powers.<sup>27</sup> Whatever the trigger for exorcism or the expulsion of bodily discharge, a connection between this visible manifestation of discharge from the body and the expulsion of the unclean spirit is apparent. The most explicit example of this is found in *The Miracles of Saint Martin*. After stopping at an inn, a citizen of Tours finds the host's wife demonically possessed, shouting about the arrival of St. Martin. Once she had taken a drink of consecrated wine, 'soon the demon was expelled *in* some blood' and she was cleansed.<sup>28</sup> Here, then, the expulsion of blood was not just a precursor to exorcism; it was the exorcism, carrying the demon out of the body with it.

Notions of embodiment in discharges of this sort have been similarly explored by Martha Bayless in her study on filth and sin in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup> Bayless discusses the relationship of filth and excrement to sin and corruption, and proposes that during the Middle Ages filth was not merely a symbol for or metaphor of sin: 'it embodied sin'. The clarification that filth was sin is crucial to understanding medieval world views; it is a radical difference between medieval and modern attitudes. Although he was writing in an earlier period than that covered by Bayless' study, Gregory seems to share comparable ideas of embodiment, drawing connections between bodily discharges and the Devil – as the example of the innkeeper's wife demonstrates. Elsewhere in his work, Gregory records a story of a possessed man in the East who announces that the relics of St. Julian were on board a ship. When the ship came into port, the possessed man 'knelt on the ground in front of the ship, his *contamination* flowed from his mouth and nose, and [he] was cleansed'.<sup>30</sup> Here, the

<sup>23</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, SRM 1, 2, II, 20.

<sup>24</sup> See also Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, SRM 1, 2, 9; Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, VIII, 11, XVII, 4; Gregory of Tours, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, SRM 1, 2, 35, 45; Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 34, II, 37, III, 59, IV, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Winstead, 'The Transformation of the Miracle Story', p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> See J.M. Pizaro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XVII, 4; Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, IV.21. My emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> M. Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: the Devil in the Latrine* (New York, 2012), p. xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 33. My emphasis. This also reflects how possessed people were used to announce the arrival of new relics. See Brown, 'Relics and social status', p. 237; Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, SRM 1, 2, 89.

uncleanliness of the spirit possessing the man is made obvious by Gregory's use of contamination or putrefaction (*tabes*), whilst the spirit's embodiment in discharge is again highlighted. The gross nature of the discharges accompanying the expulsion of demons is in itself a clear indication of the demons' uncleanliness, especially when contrasted to the discharges Gregory associates with holy spirits. After the Apostle Paul had been stabbed, for example, Gregory records how 'milk and water flowed from his holy body'.<sup>31</sup> Here, the flow of milk (first nourishment received at birth) and water (essential for survival) from Paul's body represent his pure, clean spirit.<sup>32</sup> Instead of embodiment in blood or vomit, clean spirits are embodied in nourishing, life-sustaining fluids.

With these notions of embodiment in mind, we can consider other accounts of healings in Gregory that involve gross discharges but which include no explicit reference to the Devil. Although for the most part the connection of demons to illness remains implicit, one gets the impression that, for Gregory, unclean spirits play a part in all sicknesses and ailments.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Gregory often seems to assume their presence and agency. This is particularly true regarding blindness: although explicitly attributed to attacks by 'treacherous' demons in some stories, Gregory does not always mention their involvement.<sup>34</sup> Whilst a demon that 'provoked a blast of wind' that filled one's eyes with dust was held responsible for causing a young boy's blindness, elsewhere a similar scenario bears no mention of any demon.<sup>35</sup> The presence of a demon is, nevertheless, implied. Similarly, there are many episodes that follow the structure of Gregory's exorcism tales that are not explicitly referred to as 'exorcisms'. Pertaining to cases of blindness, two blind men's eyes were 'withered and obscured by a sticky discharge'; upon praying to St. Martin 'the bonds that blocked their eyelids were broken, blood flowed from their eyes, [and] their sight was completely clear'.<sup>36</sup> The prayer here acts as the trigger for exorcism, and is swiftly followed by blood flow – a discharge repeatedly mentioned during exorcisms. As there is an apparent trigger and evident discharge, one must reasonably infer that a cleansing of unclean spirits is implicit in the process.

The Devil's expulsion in discharges, then, demonstrates that his being is capable of material manifestations. In the Late Middle Ages the dominant opinion was that, during possession, spirits (unclean or holy) literally entered the body, reflecting the physicality of interceding spirits.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, upon a person's death Gregory often describes how their spirit is 'exhaled' or 'breathed

<sup>31</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 8. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 29, 30.

<sup>32</sup> For development of milk/lactation theme in later medieval writing and art, see C. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 268–71.

<sup>33</sup> G. de Nie, 'The Body, Fluidity and Personal Identity', in G. de Nie, *Word, Image and Experience* (Hampshire, 2003), pp. 1–13, at p. 5. See also G. de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 231, 236.; Stancliffe, *St. Martin*, p. 209; R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (London, 1985), p. 260.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, II, 12; III, 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 16; IV, 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Caciola, 'Mystics', p. 279.

out', suggesting it needed a literal exit from the body.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, late medieval iconography represented this tradition by illustrating a small person rising from the corpse's mouth.<sup>39</sup> In medieval thought, then, spirits were rather more than invisible and formless. In Gregory's writing's the tangible form of interceding spirits is made clear by the bishop's insistence that unclean spirits must exit the body through an orifice, in the form of blood, vomit, and gases.

The physical quality of spiritual beings is a difficult paradox to come to terms with, especially when considering that relics or holy oil – material, visible substances – can transmit their healing power through the patient's skin, transcending physical boundaries, whilst unclean spirits – supposedly immaterial, invisible beings – cannot move through the skin during their expulsion.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that Gregory reserved a special permeable property for holy materials, reflecting the complexity and fluidity between the visible and invisible worlds, whilst the need of unclean spirits for a physical way out of the body postulates that, although invisible, such spirits had earthly manifestations. Indeed, when an orifice was not reachable, another exit was sought: the curious possession of a man's thumb by a demon was rectified by rubbing holy oil on the area, after which 'the skin broke, blood flowed, and the demon left'.<sup>41</sup> The demon could not simply vanish, but needed an escape route – hence the splitting of the skin of the thumb. More extreme cases of exorcism likewise provide insights into this physicality of interceding spirits. If, for example, initial attempts to remove the demon are unsuccessful, the healer takes more direct action and inserts his fingers into the mouth of the victim to '[chase] out the evil spirit'.<sup>42</sup> Using an orifice – the mouth – to reach the spirit suggests that the spirit needed a physical push or pull to be removed, and advocates that the spirit has a palpable form when inside the human body.<sup>43</sup>

The tangibility of spirits can be explored further in Gregory's treatment of unclean spirits outside the body, where he describes the 'physical strength' of the Devil or demons. Was Gregory merely attributing human acts to demons, or did he recognise unclean spirits as corporeal beings? Before Gregory, Jerome, writing in the early-fifth century, speculates about the form of unclean spirits; he develops Augustine's beliefs that demons possessed ethereal bodies composed of light and air, insisting that demons adopted grotesque forms, and could be seen, heard and felt by humans.<sup>44</sup> After

<sup>38</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 17, 46a; Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 39; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 12, 22, 80; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 38, 39, 79, 98.

<sup>39</sup> Caciola, 'Mystics', p. 281; C. Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 45-52.

<sup>40</sup> The special property of holy material merits its own discussion outside this paper.

<sup>41</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, II, 1. See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, IV, 4; IX, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Inserting fingers into the mouth may be to prompt the Pharyngeal reflex: triggered by touching the back of the mouth, tonsils or throat, the reflex prevents choking. It can be deliberately triggered to induce vomiting, perhaps in this case by exorcists to 'complete' exorcism.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, cap. iii, 7 (J. Migne (ed.) *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, vol. 40, cols. 584-5); Jerome, *Liber contra Vigilantium*, 9 (J. Migne (ed.) *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*, vol. 23, cols. 363-4), both cited in N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: an enquiry inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (London, 1975), pp. 66-8.

Gregory, the portrayal of unclean spirits became increasingly corporeal; the *Acts of St. Afra*, composed c. 700-850, depicts the Devil as jet-black, naked, and covered with wrinkled skin – a representation that became commonplace in the later Middle Ages.<sup>45</sup> The association of black colouring with unclean spirits is evident in Gregory's work, reflecting his place in the development of this notion. In *Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory describes how 'a hideous black spirit whose likeness was similar to nothing except a demon' urged a man to commit suicide; upon a second spirit's arrival warning of Paul's approach, the two spirits 'vanished'.<sup>46</sup> Gregory recognised the unclean nature of these spirits by the colour of their form (black) and their appearance (hideous), and, as the spirits could be seen by the man, they are perceived as tangible beings.

Gregory's use of physical language shows that demons were more than just visual apparitions. Perhaps the most obvious signs of the physical properties of demons are the occasions in which they inflict violence on people – throwing stones at Lupicinus and Romanus in the desert, pushing Ammonius from a cliff top, and ambushing and attacking other victims.<sup>47</sup> Clare Stancliffe argues that the writer – in this case Gregory – 'was well aware that it was a human agent who was immediately responsible for the deed in question, simply using "devil" as a shorthand for "man acting under demonical inspiration"'.<sup>48</sup> This is certainly a plausible explanation for the apparently physical form of unclean spirits in Gregory's writings; indeed, it may have just been men throwing stones at the fathers as they prayed in the desert, or who pushed, attacked or ambushed unfortunate passers-by.

Suzanne Wemple, too, advocates the use of the demonic to explain acts of violence. After a young girl remained in the workshop alone, 'a terrifying demon appeared who seized and began to drag the girl away. But she shouted and screamed, and... tried to resist manfully'.<sup>49</sup> Here the 'demon' may be used as a short-hand for 'a man demonically possessed', and Wemple suggests that the girl merely attributes the attack to a demon in order to conceal the shame of being raped by a man.<sup>50</sup> The Devil in Gregory's writings, then, may act as a criminal 'other' – an explanation for violence against persons, and a means of distancing 'criminals' from the community. Similarly, Flint highlights how demons were effectively used as scapegoats by the Church, which assigned the practices or behaviours of which it disapproved to the intervention of demons, or one's cooperation with them.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, 5 August, para. 9, cited in Cohn, *Inner Demons*, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 28. For other devil-assisted suicide, see Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum* IV, 39. For 'vanishing' spirits, see Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, IX, 2, X, 2, XVI, 3; Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, I, 1, XVII, 3; Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, I, 20, II, 37, III, 28, III, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Stancliffe, *St. Martin*, p. 194.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, III, 37.

<sup>50</sup> S.F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> V. Flint, 'The Early Medieval "Medicus", the Saint – and the Enchanter', *Social History of Medicine* 2 (1989), pp. 127-45, at p. 141.

Attributing violence to demons is not always a straightforward matter, however; both Stancliffe and Wemple's interpretations run the risk of over-simplifying Gregory's understanding of demonic activity. When Landulf arrived at St. Martin's church a 'savage demon boldly and eagerly assaulted him... [and more] demons arrived conspicuously with the loud clatter of their weapons and tried to stab him with the useless points of their spears'.<sup>52</sup> Gregory uses strong language to denote the demons' actions: 'boldly and eagerly assaulted him', 'open attack', 'stab', and so forth. This language ascribes a vivid physical presence to the demons, accentuated by the noise they make: 'with the loud clatter of their weapons'. At first glance, these demons may well be possessed men, as Stancliffe postulates. However, this interpretation becomes increasingly problematic when one considers how the demons that attacked Landulf vanished into thin air, as is so often the case in Gregory's works: 'Landulf did not move; instead he piously opposed [the demons] with the sign of the cross and fearfully scattered these demons into thin air'.<sup>53</sup> During Landulf's attack, the demons' certainly possess a tangible form (for example noise and weapons), yet they paradoxically possess the ability to disappear 'into thin air'. Similarly, in the story of the 'hideous black spirit' that sought to encourage a man's suicide, it is notable that – despite the spirit's apparently material form – it 'vanished', along with its companion.<sup>54</sup>

The story of Landulf's attack demonstrates clearly the fluidity and dynamism of unclean spirits' form, and reveals the complexities of Gregory's view of the spiritual world. Perhaps Landulf's attack exemplifies how Gregory visualises an onslaught of demons, and how he believes they would attack their victim. The visual immediacy created in these passages reflects how the invisible nature of spirits is a reality for Gregory, one which he tries to illustrate to his reader and bring to life in a vivid and dramatic way.<sup>55</sup> Here it may be worthwhile to briefly compare Gregory's visualisation of demons to that of his close contemporary, Caesarius of Arles. During his sermon on a man possessed by the Devil, Caesarius describes how 'a man has as many devils as the number of vices he possesses': indeed, if one 'loves pride... harbours envy ...and commits adultery... he is possessed by three devils'. Add a love of falsehood to this list and 'he is subdued and overwhelmed by a whole legion of devils'.<sup>56</sup> If Gregory shared similar sentiments, it can reasonably be inferred that bad behaviour on Landulf's part caused the onslaught of demons, reflecting Gregory's wider theme of transgression and punishment.

Having discussed the physical manifestations and corporeal power of unclean spirits, we will now turn to Gregory's second method of identifying spirits: the area of the body involved. Gregory's association of unclean spirits with grossness extends beyond their manifestations in bodily discharges, to their association with particular regions of the body. Most notably, the Devil and his

<sup>52</sup> Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 18. See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, X, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> For discussion of visual immediacy (*enargeia*, or *evidentia*) as a tenet of ancient literary theory popular in late antiquity, see L. Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London, 2004), pp. 42, 111-12, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*, vol. 1 (1-80) (The Fathers of the Church, vol. 31), 79. See also W. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: the Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 156-64.

demons are often connected to the viscera and other lower parts of the human anatomy.<sup>57</sup> The strong association constructed between the Devil and the lower parts of the body may reflect Gregory's wider conception of the universe. The Devil and his demons – expelled from Heaven – existed in lowly places, close to Earth in the confines of our atmosphere – if not lower.<sup>58</sup> It seems that for Gregory the loftiness of Heaven and lowliness of Hell are not merely metaphorical concepts, but part of a fundamental orientation with the cosmic system.<sup>59</sup> The weight of one's sins determined one's place within the vertical spiritual hierarchy; the weightier the sins, the lower one will be. This vertical orientation of the cosmos can be seen in microcosm within the human body, where corrupt, unclean spirits nearly always reside in the lower parts. This is essential for understanding Gregory's concept of the human body: anatomically, and universally, Gregory maintains the view that 'lower' is inextricably tied to sin and corruption.<sup>60</sup>

This connection between unclean spirits and the viscera is clearly presented when one of Gregory's own servants is cured of an illness after drinking dust from St. Martin's tomb:

Immediately the boy requested a private place [to relieve] his digestive system... with a powerful blast of air [from his bowels], two worms at once proceeded from him in the manner of serpents that... moved in such a way that they were thought to be alive. Once these worms had been expelled from him, the boy was at once completely cured.<sup>61</sup>

In this instance, then, the cause of the illness is expelled in the form of two worms that are almost certainly, for Gregory, a manifestation of the Devil: 'the Devil often takes the shape of the wily serpent'.<sup>62</sup> With the understanding that the Devil had manifested itself as worms in the boy's innards, this story can be understood as an exorcism, particularly since it is presented in Gregory's standard format. As the Devil resides in the boy's lower parts, Gregory makes the Devil's area of residence within the human body clear to the reader.

The 'blast of air' that accompanies the expulsion of the Devil in this episode is similarly recorded elsewhere in Gregory's works. For example, one man who 'possessed a more hideous demon' was

<sup>57</sup> In Gregory's writings, his vehement hatred of heretics is made clear by his repeated associations between them and lavatories, see de Nie, 'Body', p. 2. For examples, see Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, II, 23, III, pref., V, 43, IX, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Cohn, *Inner Demons*, p. 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67; Stancliffe, *St. Martin*, p. 215. For examples of a vertical orientation of the universe in Gregory's work, see in particular the story of Patroclus' dream, Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, IX, 2. See also Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, II, 23; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum* 62; Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum* X, pref., XI, pref.

<sup>60</sup> For the body as a model for wider systems, see M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966); M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London, 1970).

<sup>61</sup> Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, III, 59. See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XIX, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XI, 1.

cured by the application of holy oil, immediately after which ‘the man expelled the demon in a blast of air from his bowels’.<sup>63</sup> It is notable that even though the demon is not in a liquid or solid form, the spirit must still be expelled through an orifice, implying it has a tangible presence – often exaggerated by the accompaniment of an unpleasant smell. The manifestation of unclean spirits in unpleasant gases is made explicit by Gregory in the *Life* of Caluppa: after a serpent had ‘entwined himself insidiously around [Caluppa’s] legs and feet’, Caluppa – addressing the serpent as ‘Satan’ – commands him to leave. The serpent retreated, ‘letting out a formidable noise from its rear end as it did so, and filling the little cell with such a stink that it could be none other than the devil himself’.<sup>64</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Gregory leaves no doubt about the Devil’s embodiment in gas and unpleasant odours.

Unclean spirits’ embodiment in foul odours is exacerbated when compared to the pleasant fragrances often emitted from saints’ corpses – a well-known *topos* in hagiographical literature, reserved for the ‘Very Special Dead’ (to borrow from Peter Brown).<sup>65</sup> For Gregory, sweet fragrances were a sure indicator of one’s holiness, as is evident in the *Life* of Friardus: after his death, ‘the whole cell shook, and was filled with a sweet odour; from which it is certain that angelic power was there, which perfumed his cell with divine odours in order to mark the saint’s merit’.<sup>66</sup> Here, Gregory not only describes how the ‘divine odours’ marked Friardus’ merit, but directly connects the fragrances to the presence of a clean, angelic spirit. The angel’s arrival is signalled by the shaking of the cell, as is made more explicit by Gregory’s account of the same episode in the *Histories*: ‘the whole cell shook. I have no doubt that he was being visited by an angel, which made the place tremble as he died’.<sup>67</sup>

Gregory similarly views the growth of flowers and the fragrance they emit as a sign of the holy, too. The deacon Urbanus, for example, discovered red roses covering the pavement around St. Julian’s tomb, ‘the fragrance of their scent was overpowering’.<sup>68</sup> These flowers were particularly special according to Gregory, as he notes how they were later used to make medicine, which even cured a possessed person: after he ‘swallowed a drink soaked [with these roses], his demon was ejected and he [was] cleansed’.<sup>69</sup> In this scenario, then, the ingestion of the roses acts as a trigger for exorcism; the subsequent expulsion of the demon reflects how the roses appear to embody Julian’s power and spiritual cleanliness.<sup>70</sup> Gregory’s poignant use of flowers to reflect one’s spiritual state is particularly

<sup>63</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XI, 1. I cannot pursue in detail here the related question of the Devil and his manifestation in serpents/snakes, but for serpents/snakes in Gregory’s work see Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum* V, 2, XV, 3, XIX, 3, 4; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 32, 87; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 81, 98.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Brown, ‘Relics and Social Status’, pp. 226-7.

<sup>66</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, X, 4. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 83, 102; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory, *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV, 37. Again, as discussed above, Gregory presents the notion that spirits had physical power or presence in the material world.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 46b. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 73, 90; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 40.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 46b.

<sup>70</sup> For discussion of saints’ pure state restoring the bodies of others see, de Nie, ‘Body’, p. 4.

reflected in the changing state of the lily Severus placed by his own tomb: it grew withered and brittle for a whole year, but upon Severus' death 'the lily was revived with a new freshness'.<sup>71</sup> This anecdote offers a vivid insight into Gregory's world view; the lily – a symbol of Severus' purity – was damaged and dishevelled whilst Severus remained alive on earth, but upon his spirit entering heaven the lily revived, reflecting Severus' migration from the sinful world below.

The sweet fragrances associated with saints are, therefore, consistently contrasted to the foul smells produced by those who have committed sin: a sheep-stealing deacon, for example, 'produced such a stench that scarcely any of the bystanders could tolerate it'.<sup>72</sup> The secretion of such a foul smell emphasises the decaying state of the deacon's body, and is exploited by Gregory to reflect the man's decomposition even before death, in sharp contrast to his famous account of St. Julian's posthumous preservation.<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere, Gregory records how a drunken false prophet found asleep in St. Julian's church 'smelt so foul that compared with the stench that rose from him the noisome fetor of lavatories and sewers quite pales into insignificance'.<sup>74</sup> Although Gregory rigorously constructs the connection between the Devil, lower parts of the body, and the unpleasant odours emitted from those regions, corruption is not necessarily limited to lower regions of the body. This is very subtly presented in the *Life of Patroclus*, whose thoughts were perpetrated by the Devil; soon after 'he felt the poison dripping into his heart'.<sup>75</sup> Assuming that Gregory perhaps only meant the dripping of poison metaphorically, this extract nevertheless implies that the Devil's inducements can reach the heart, even in the most holy persons.<sup>76</sup> By dubbing the sinful persuasions poisonous, Gregory exacerbates the damage the Devil inflicts on Patroclus' wellbeing, and his spiritual state. Here, corruption clearly breaches the 'clean' upper parts of the body, and, whilst later medieval thought advocates that access to the heart is restricted to the Holy Spirit, the boundary constructed between the upper and lower body in Gregory's writings is, in some instances, permeable.<sup>77</sup>

As I have demonstrated, unclean spirits can manifest themselves materially in bodily discharges or unpleasant odours, and usually reside within the lower parts of the human anatomy; such manifestations can, therefore, aid the identification of the interceding spirit's nature. Finally, let us turn to a third way Gregory used to identify the state of an interceding spirit, that is, the changing outward appearance and physical condition of the human body. Of course, physical changes are not necessarily indicative of the activity of unclean spirits. Peter Brown, for example, has examined how

<sup>71</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 50. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 73, 90.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, IX, 9. See also Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, IV, 12. For discussion of this episode, see Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', p. 227.

<sup>75</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, IX, 2. See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XX, 3.

<sup>76</sup> See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XV, pref.-2, XX, 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> Caciola, 'Mystics', p. 282. See also N. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2003), pp. 25, 179.

ascetics would reduce food intake over years of ascetic devotion to return both their body and spirit to an 'original, natural and uncorrupted state', resulting in 'drastic' physical transformations.<sup>78</sup> The visible physical changes apparent on corrupted bodies are presented rather differently though, as although sin and demonic influence have substantial physical effects on the body's composure, they also manifest themselves outwardly on the body in forms of decay and distortion. Such signs of decay are strongly juxtaposed to holy ones' bodies that remain fully preserved, even after death: indeed, Gregory, and early medieval hagiographers more widely, transform the physical death of the 'Very Special Dead' into a thing of beauty and refinement.<sup>79</sup>

Before exploring Gregory's contrasting presentations of pure and corrupt bodies, it is worthwhile briefly noting what Gregory considered as 'pure'. Giselle de Nie argues that chastity was a key signifier of purity, as it indicated the 'wholeness' of body and soul that even overcame death, demonstrated in the body's apparent escape from forces of decay.<sup>80</sup> Brown shares similar sentiments more generally, suggesting that 'what was most enduringly physical about [the ascetic] – his sexual needs and lingering sexual imagination – seemed most intimately interwoven with the state of his soul'.<sup>81</sup> The inextricable connection between sexual desires and the state of one's soul, then, strongly presents chastity as the path towards spiritual purity.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, whilst Gregory consistently associates the Devil and demons to sexual desires and adultery, chastity and purity are often connected, as one would expect.<sup>83</sup>

In his descriptions of holy corpses, Gregory typically makes reference to their remaining hair and facial hair, lack of deterioration of the skin, untouched and ageless burial arrangements, and sweet fragrances emitted from the body – all deliberately noted to infer the person's holiness. Usually these factors are presented separately or in reduced numbers, but in a few rare instances Gregory provides the reader with a substantial 'check list' of holiness, as his description of Valerius' intact corpse does:

No hair had fallen from it, the beard was not spotted, and no deterioration or decay was seen on the skin. Everything was untouched, as if it had been recently buried, and such a sweet fragrance reeked from the tomb that there was no doubt a friend of God was buried there.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>78</sup> P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London, 1989), p. 223.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, 'Relics and Social Status', pp. 226-7.

<sup>80</sup> De Nie, 'Body', p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Brown, *Body*, p. 236.

<sup>82</sup> Gregory's understanding of chastity was complex; one could be sexually active and remain chaste, if the matter was approached in the 'proper' way. See, for example, Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> For chastity/purity, see Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, I, 47 (Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 31); Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum* 41; Gregory *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 69; Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XII, 3. For devil/sexual desires, see Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, I, 44; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 75; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 69; Brown, *Body*, p. 214; I. Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (New York, 2000), pp. 42-6.

<sup>84</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 83. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum* 34.

Accordingly, then, the loss of hair and discolouration of the skin signify corruption in Gregory's works, and it is these signs of decay I will now examine. In what follows, I suggest that the degree of corruption outwardly visible on the body was perhaps the most obvious indication of the nature of the interceding spirit or the extent of one's sins.

During the Early Middle Ages, hair bore substantial social and symbolic significance, with different hairstyles – and facial hair – carrying different meanings depending on social context.<sup>85</sup> In Merovingian society, the loss of one's hair, through cutting or tonsure, often symbolized a loss of social standing.<sup>86</sup> The implications of haircutting for members of the Merovingian royal family were particularly high; long hair was both a necessity for and distinguishing feature of Frankish kingship.<sup>87</sup> On more than one occasion in the *Histories* Gregory highlights the exclusivity of long hair to the Merovingian line, and how the removal of this royal hair effectively constituted political disqualification.<sup>88</sup> Seen as part of the symbolic capital of the royal family, and more widely as an indicator of social status, then, Gregory's presentation of the length, state, and colouring of one's hair should not be overlooked in other contexts, such as its use as a gauge of one's spiritual state.

For Gregory, the preservation of hair – both facial and on the scalp – is a sign of a pure spiritual state: he repeatedly marvels at the length and thickness of corpses' hair, remarking at the lack of its decay or discolouration.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, the perpetration of evil or sin is marked by the loss of hair. After abusing church property and accusing Bishop Franco of crimes he did not commit, Childeric, a man at King Sigibert's court, fell ill with fever for a whole year: despite this, 'his evil mind was not changed. Meanwhile all his hair and his beard fell out, and his entire head was... naked'.<sup>90</sup> Here, the deterioration of Childeric's hair is explicitly connected to his evil mind, whilst Gregory's use of 'naked' is perhaps exercised metaphorically to emphasise how Childeric's sins have been exposed.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, whilst Valerius' beard was 'not spotted' or decayed, Childeric's beard falls out completely. Thus Gregory creates a sharp contrast between the holy bearing full heads of hair, even after death, and the sinful whose hair decays prematurely.

<sup>85</sup> P.E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache: and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2004), pp. 3–42.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–17; M. Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms' in R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger and H. Reimitz (eds), *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artifacts* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 173–212, pp. 191–7; E. Goosmann, 'The Long-Haired Kings of the Franks: "Like So Many Samsons"?' *Early Medieval Europe*, 20:3 (2012), pp. 233–59, at pp. 243–4.

<sup>87</sup> Goosmann, 'Long-Haired Kings', p. 242.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, II, 41; III, 18; V, 14; VI, 24; VII, 38; VIII, 10. For the cutting/tonsure of hair as political disqualification, see Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, pp. 12–13; Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital', pp. 191–7; Goosmann, 'Long-Haired Kings', pp. 243–4.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 34, 83; Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 2.

<sup>90</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 70. See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, VI, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Similarly, a cataract blinded Goiswinth in one eye after her sinful persecution of Christians in Spain. See Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, V, 38.

Gregory exaggerates Childeric's poor physical state further by concluding that his appearance looked as if 'he had once been buried and recently taken from his tomb'.<sup>92</sup> This particular expression is a *topos* used throughout Gregory's writings as a device to demonstrate a person's physical state, which can be utilised to either promote or demote the state of one's purity. Indeed, it is more often deployed to highlight the purity of saints' corpses, which appear 'as if [they] had been recently buried', or who are 'thought to be sleeping rather than dead'.<sup>93</sup> Such serenity is a stark contrast to Gregory's portrayals of those who had been attacked by demons, who were, at times, in such a poor physical state they 'seemed to be dead'.<sup>94</sup> The corpse-like appearance of a body that is still alive, then, reflects how both demons and sin are capable of damaging their host's body before its death.

The degree of deterioration on the skin is another method Gregory uses to measure one's spiritual state. Valerius' purity was echoed by his unblemished skin, yet – like Childeric and his naked head – the skin is seen to decay before death in cases of particularly sinful behaviour.<sup>95</sup> After stealing sheep belonging to St. Julian's estate, a deacon not only produced an unbearable stench, but was 'struck with fever' and 'shouted he was on fire because of the martyr': '... even though water was brought... and often sprinkled on him, smoke poured from his body as if from a furnace. Meanwhile, his suffering limbs, as if on fire, turned black'.<sup>96</sup> Remember how, as we have seen, Gregory presents black as the colour of sin elsewhere in his works: after noticing bright lights shining through his oratory's windows, Gregory enters only to find the lights had disappeared 'because of the blackness of [his] sins'.<sup>97</sup> It seems, then, the worse one's sins are the 'blacker' they become, and could eventually manifest themselves visibly on the skin, turning the sinner 'hideous' and 'black', like a demon.<sup>98</sup> What more obvious sign of unclean intercession could there have been?

The blackness associated with demons and sin is further highlighted by Gregory's descriptions of the whiteness of saints' bodies after death. Gregory leaves no doubt about the connection of the colour white to the purity of one's spirit in his description of the nun Disciola's body, which 'shone with a snow-white purity'.<sup>99</sup> Gregory emphasises this sharp contrast between the white colouring of the holy person's skin and the blackness of deterioration elsewhere, describing a young girl exhumed from her burial 'as [white as] a lamb and intact...nor discoloured by any blackness'.<sup>100</sup> The use of snow to describe the whiteness of Disciola's body develops the white/black dichotomy further; whilst black is usually accompanied by heat and fire (as discussed below), white is associated with snow –

<sup>92</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 70.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 83; Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 2. Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 34. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 45. See also Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, II, 18, III, 37.

<sup>95</sup> See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 34.

<sup>96</sup> Gregory, *Liber de passion et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, 17.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 28.

<sup>99</sup> Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, VI, 29. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 34; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 50; Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, I, pref., VII, 3, IX, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 34.

cool, calming and preserving. Gregory's development of this imagery is consistent with notions of a lowly hell and lofty heavens: fire is, of course, often associated with Hell, whilst snow descends through the air from the heavens.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, Gregory writes how 'snow falling from heaven covered [Eulalia's] blessed body...with soft wool'.<sup>102</sup> The association with the colour white and pure spiritual state is similarly developed in the writings of Gregory's contemporary, Venantius Fortunatus, reflecting a wider literary theme.<sup>103</sup>

The connection of fire and burning to sinful behaviour is presented in the sinful deacon's story, in which it seems that the deacon is enduring the torments of hell whilst living. The punishment suffered by the deacon, who apparently burns alive as if already in Hell, is reflected elsewhere in Gregory's works, too: after Count Nantinus bribes bishops, 'his body became so black that you would have thought it had been placed on glowing coals and roasted'.<sup>104</sup> Again, the blackness of the sufferer's skin is highlighted, whilst Gregory additionally dehumanises Nantinus for his actions; placement on glowing coals and the use of 'roasted' conjures up the image (and perhaps implicitly the odour) of cooking animal meat – a highly derogatory depiction.<sup>105</sup>

In both cases, the fire and burning are used metaphorically ('as if on fire') by Gregory to describe the state of the sufferers' bodies. Yet in other cases, consumption by flames was a reality that undoubtedly reflected one's spiritual state. After a young Jewish boy participated in Mass, he returned home and shared this news with his father. His father became angry and 'seized the boy and threw him into the mouth of a raging furnace... After the flames had been beaten back... [the Christians] found the boy reclining as if on very soft feathers. When they pulled him out they were all astonished that he was unhurt'.<sup>106</sup> When asked what he used as a 'shield', the boy explained how Mary appeared and covered him with her cloak, reflecting how saintly power could provide material protection for those worthy, and consequentially implying the purity of the boy's spirit.<sup>107</sup> The boy's purity is further highlighted by Gregory, for when the father is subsequently thrown into the furnace as punishment, 'the fire burned him so completely that somehow scarcely a tiny piece of his bones was left'.<sup>108</sup> Here, the man's corruption is what permits the fire to devour him, drawing complex

<sup>101</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 57; Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, III, pref.

<sup>102</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 90. See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, XIX, 1; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, ed. F. Leo, *MGH AA 4* (Berlin, 1881), 4.22, 8.21 and 9.2.

<sup>104</sup> Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, V, 36.

<sup>105</sup> For a similar use of animalistic connotations, see Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, V, 40, in which an alcoholic bishop collapses in Mass, neighing like a horse. Interestingly, blood also pours from his mouth and nostrils.

<sup>106</sup> Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> *Idem*. See also Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 81.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

parallels between moral states and physical infirmities.<sup>109</sup> This is perhaps presented most clearly by Fortunatus:

The worthy have light, the damned bewail the flames, the bright light nourishes those, the heat of the fire roasts these... for [fire] burns the unworthy with the same fire by which it proves the good.<sup>110</sup>

More widely, such stories of the survival of good and destruction of evil act as vehicles for Gregory's didactic style, encouraging the reader towards good moral standing by emphasising the consequences of sin and evildoing.<sup>111</sup>

For Gregory, then, there were three main methods that could be used to recognise the nature of an interceding spirit: the type of discharge or odour expelled from the body, the region of the body involved, and the state of the body's preservation. By studying Gregory's exorcism stories it becomes clear that unclean spirits could manifest themselves materially in gross bodily discharges, such as blood, pus, and vomit. The extent of their tangible presence in discharge is exacerbated by their need to exit the body through an orifice; the interceding spirit cannot simply transcend through the body's skin, implying it must have a physical presence. Marking the completion of exorcism, the spirits' expulsion in such discharges epitomises their unclean nature, especially compared to the nourishing substances that pour from holy ones' bodies or tombs.

This association between unclean spirits and grossness is developed throughout Gregory's works. The Devil is clearly connected to the viscera, whilst his embodiment in bad smells or unpleasant gases is emphasised, and sharply contrasted to the association of clean spirits with sweet fragrances. Furthermore, the presence of spirits in odours is a further indication of their corporeal form, and of how they could remain 'invisible' yet palpable. Whether manifested in discharge, odour, or in physical signs of bodily decay, it is clear the Devil and his demons have a tangible, material presence in Gregory's world. Moreover, Gregory's ascription of physical actions to them – pushing, pulling, and attacking their victims – further emphasises their materiality and possession of physical power. Although, in some cases, Gregory may be attributing human acts to demons, his understanding of demonic activity cannot simply be reduced to this.

Lastly, by observing the degree of decay a body did or did not suffer after death, Gregory could deduce the state of that person's spirit. Those who lived a holy life and remained morally uncorrupted had their bodies perfectly preserved, even years after death, those who sinned and became morally corrupted witnessed their bodies suffer decay before they had even died. The prevailing physical appearance of one's body, therefore, mirrors one's spiritual and moral state, and,

<sup>109</sup> Similarly, see trials by the hot water ordeal: Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 14; Gregory, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 80.

<sup>110</sup> Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, 4.26.

<sup>111</sup> See also Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, VIII, 5.

by manifesting themselves physically on the body, sin and evil become tangible realities in Gregory's world. The visible embodiment of corruption in blackness and baldness clearly demonstrates the highly permeable boundary Gregory establishes between the visible and invisible worlds.

Uncovering how Gregory conceptualised the spiritual world around him, then, this paper has aimed to contribute to our existing knowledge of Gregory's world view. By taking his perception of spiritual beings back to its most fundamental level – what is a spirit? – the complex relationship between the physical world and the spiritual world is revealed. Research into the form taken by unclean spirits demonstrates there was more to Gregory's world than what was visible. Gregory postulated the existence of an 'invisible' reality alongside the visible one, and these two realities had very fluid, permeable boundaries, shown through the ease in which spirits were able to move between them.<sup>112</sup> For Gregory, spirits were tangible beings, with highly dynamic forms, which were able to manifest themselves in the visible world in various ways. Gregory determines the nature of the interceding spirit through their material and physical manifestations, and this method of recognition remains consistent throughout his work.

Following the identification of the three methods Gregory utilised to recognise the nature of an interceding spirit, could such strategies help us understand Gregory's reasoning behind identifying 'false' prophets and ambiguous spirits? For Gregory, the imposter who escaped from prison to St. Julian's church had his unholiness proven by his awful smell, which was, according to Gregory, worse than the 'noisome fetor of lavatories and sewers'.<sup>113</sup> Elsewhere, the falseness of Desiderius of Tours who '[pretended] that he was able to work miracles', was proven as many of his patients were not cured at his hands but killed, as he corrupted and decayed bodies instead of reclaiming their wholeness.<sup>114</sup> It seems, therefore, that these methods were utilised by Gregory to recognise imposters. Yet, in some cases, they can disprove his judgement, too: despite Friardus recognising the spirit who had interceded with Secundelius as the Devil, 'when [Secundelius] put his hands on the sick in the name of Christ they were cured'.<sup>115</sup> Unlike Desiderius, Secundelius was somehow able to restore sufferers' wholeness, and did not decay or corrupt their bodies as unclean spirits are supposed to. Was Secundelius, then, really under demonic possession?<sup>116</sup> And how do we treat those episodes of spirit intercession that do not incorporate details such as the nature of the discharge that was produced, if any, or the degree of a body's preservation?

As with his writing on other topics, Gregory's treatment of spirits cannot, therefore, be reduced to a completely coherent system. Moreover, when considering how systematic Gregory's approach to

<sup>112</sup> De Nie, 'Body', p. 2.

<sup>113</sup> Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, IX, 6.

<sup>114</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>115</sup> Gregory, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, X, 2.

<sup>116</sup> See also Gregory, *Decem libri Historiarum*, VII, 44: Ageric's exorcism of a 'false' prophetess was unsuccessful, and no bodily discharge was expelled. Was the prophetess really 'possessed'?

unclean spirits was, one must tread carefully to avoid overly systemising his writings. Although the three methods of recognition identified in this paper are not always applied by Gregory to cases of spirit intercession, they do remain consistent whenever they are present. Unclean and clean spirits are exactly that, impure and pure, respectively. This juxtaposition is evident throughout Gregory's works, and reflects a fundamental need to try and recognise the nature of interceding spirits, and so understand the invisible world around him. Indeed, the confusion and divided opinion that arose during spirit recognition at the time, such as in the case of the Christ of Bourges, echoes the confusion that arises among scholars today trying to identify what spirits truly inspired notable medieval men and women. We are certainly faced with a difficult task. As Jeffrey Russell states, 'in themselves God, angels, and the Devil have no history, for they do not objectively exist, historians cannot get to them in order to investigate them. Historians can only establish the human concept of the Devil'.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, we will never know what spirit did inspire the Christ of Bourges, only that Gregory believed it was the Devil. In striving to establish how Gregory conceptualised the very form of the Devil and his demons, then, I have sought to gain a deeper insight into the complex nature of his thought-world, and address the ways in which he perceived unholiness to be made manifest – a subject neglected in current research. In an attempt to catch a glimpse of the Devil in Gregory of Tours, I hope this paper has made his invisible world a little more visible.

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