

# The significance of the second cave episode in Jerome's *Vita Malchi*

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The authors argue that the second cave episode in Jerome's *Vita Malchi Monachi Captivi* should, in view of the similarities with the first cave episode and the high incidence of literary devices employed in it, be recognised for its value in the interpretation of this *vita*. The book was intended as a defence of, and an exhortation to a life of celibacy and this dual purpose is clearly demonstrated in both episodes in which a cave is used as the setting. The second cave episode has been neglected in the scholarly debate about the purpose of the book and this article attempts to set the record straight.

## Introduction

In her discussion of Jerome's *Vita Malchi* (VM), Weingarten (2005:171–174) provides a detailed discussion of the role of the first cave scene and the interaction that is described in it between Malchus and his new wife (VM par. 6). She calls it the central event of this *vita*.<sup>1</sup> There is, however, also a second cave episode (VM par. 9) and although Weingarten says that '[t]he saint with a lioness and a cave play an important part in the *Vita Malchi*,<sup>2</sup> she does not discuss this episode in detail, but merely mentions it in the summary she gives of Jerome's book:

Eventually they decide to escape, and after floating down the Euphrates on inflated bladders are pursued by their Saracen master into another cave. Here a lioness saves them miraculously by eating their pursuers. (Weingarten 2005:167)

The purpose of this article is to take a closer look at the second cave episode, given that the authors believe that this chapter also forms a very important part of the narrative and definitely deserves fuller treatment. Although there is no obvious intertext, as is the case with the first cave episode with its play on the *Aeneid* of Virgil, it is highly probable that Jerome did have other narratives in mind when he composed the second cave episode. Such possible allusions, the parallels between the two cave episodes and the high incidence of literary tropes found in the second cave episode will be examined in an attempt to prove that Jerome probably devised this scene as the climax of his argument in favour of *castitas*. This is not meant, however, to distract from the importance of the first cave episode, which, as Weingarten has ably demonstrated, Jerome devised to define ownership and use of the body by the idealised Christian holy man, who would voluntarily choose asceticism (cf. Weingarten 2005:172).

## The semiotic use of the cave in the *Vita Malchi*

Seeing as caves are so central in the *Vita Malchi* narrative, it seems useful to give a short overview of the semiotic use of the cave in ancient literature. For this section, we rely to a large extent on the article of Georgiadou (2005/2006). Although his article focuses on Greek literature, it is clear that this discussion of the semiotic use of the cave is just as relevant for the Classical (and also Early Christian) Latin literature.

From the earliest times, caves functioned as shelters for people to live in. The first cave episode in the *Vita Malchi* narrative seems to imply that Malchus and his wife also lived in a cave.<sup>3</sup> Later in human history, when humans abandoned caves as primary living spaces, they would still use them as burial places and sanctuaries. In the second cave episode the idea of the cave as burial place is actually mentioned.<sup>4</sup> This ambivalent significance of caves, the cave as a place for the

1. Weingarten (2005:172): 'This is the central event in this *vita* written to display *castitas*.' Earlier in her book, she refers to it as 'the central episode' (2005:168).

2. The context in which she notes this is the connection which was eventually made between Jerome himself and a lion; from the Middle Ages onwards, he was often depicted in paintings in a cave in the desert in the company of a lion (cf. Weingarten 2005:192).

3. The cave as place of domicile seems strange, but should probably be ascribed to Jerome's stereotypical description of the primitive habits of the barbarians who captured Malchus. In this vein, Jerome depicts them in this book as living in marginal areas, eating half-raw meat, roving about half-naked, displaying sexual promiscuity and strange habits, and so forth. In this regard, see Weingarten's analysis (2005:181–191).

4. *Vita Malchi* 9: 'si iuvat dominus miseris, habemus salutem; si despicit peccatores, habemus sepulcrum.' [if the Lord helps wretched people, we have found safety; if he despises sinners, we have a tomb.]

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living or the dead, is also explicitly mentioned in Malchus's story and these themes indeed also play an important role in the narrative of the second cave scene. Georgiadou (2005/2006:5) states that the reason why caves had excited the imagination of the ancient Greeks so much was because of the predominance of darkness in them, a characteristic which gave birth to fear and intense mysticism. In the *Vita Malchi* the *light versus darkness* antithesis also plays an important role and although the darkness causes fear, it simultaneously provides a hiding place for the two fugitives, a place where Malchus and his wife become 'invisible'.<sup>5</sup> Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996:167–172) describe the 'cavern' (the cave is also included under this heading) as the archetype of the maternal womb and state that it features in myths of origin, rebirth and initiation. In the *Vita Malchi* this idea is perhaps not so prominent, but the escape of Malchus and his wife from the cave indeed marks the beginning of their new way of life; after their escape they join separate monasteries and henceforth lead a monastic life.

## The first cave episode

Weingarten draws a detailed comparison between Jerome's description of the first cave episode of Malchus and his wife in paragraph 6 of the *Vita Malchi* and the cave episode of Aeneas and Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid* iv.165–172.<sup>6</sup> She indicates that the chastity of the Christian Malchus and his wife is set in stark contrast to the pagan Aeneas and Dido's sexual consummation of their 'marriage'.<sup>7</sup> Weingarten discusses this passage and other allusions to Virgil in detail and points out how Jerome 'creates a series of antitheses opposed one by one to the elements of the *Aeneid* narrative' (Weingarten 2005:171–174). The contrast also extends to the subsequent lives of both pairs.<sup>8</sup> Although this episode will not be discussed here, a comparison between the two cave episodes will subsequently be provided.

## The second cave episode

### Translation of Chapter IX

Chapter IX can be translated as follows:

Three days later we looked back and saw dimly in the distance two persons riding on camels and approaching at great speed. And, immediately anticipating trouble, we thought that our master was planning to kill us and we saw the sun turning dark. While we were afraid and realised that we had been betrayed by our tracks in the sand, a cave, extending deep into the earth, appeared on our right hand side. And so, although we were scared of poisonous animals (since snakes, basilisks, scorpions and other similar reptiles tend to seek out the shade to avoid

5.A more extensive discussion of the theme of darkness is given in what follows.

6.She (Weingarten 2005:171) mentions that De Vogüé was responsible for noting the allusion in this work of Jerome to the cave episode of Dido and Aeneas in book 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, but asserts that the detailed discussion is her own (cf. De Vogüé 1993:91).

7.According to Roberts (2005:138), caves were associated with illicit sex in the classical period, as the myth about Selene and her love for the sleeping Endymion in the cave on Mt. Latmus exemplifies.

8.Weingarten (2005:173–174): 'It is a magnificent paradox that whereas consummation of sexual union is followed by parting (and Dido's suicide) for Dido and Aeneas, rejection of sexual union is followed by living together for the rest of their lives for Malchus and his companion.'

the heat of the sun) we entered the cave. But immediately as we entered, we took refuge in a pit on the left hand side. We did not go any further, so that we might not incur death, while trying to escape from it. We were thinking the following: if the Lord helps wretched people, we have found safety; if he despises sinners, we have a tomb. Can you imagine how we felt, how terrified we were when the master and our fellow slave, having arrived at our hiding place after following our tracks, were standing close by in front of the cave? O, how much harder is the anticipation of death than its infliction! My tongue is stammering again with anguish and fear and I do not dare to speak, just as if I could still hear my master shouting. He sent the slave to drag us from the cave. The master himself held the camels and, with his sword in his hand, waited for us to come out. Meanwhile the slave had taken two or three steps into the cave and we could see his back from our hiding place (for the nature of our eyes is such that someone who enters the dark from the sunlight cannot see anything). His voice echoed through the cave: 'Come out, you scoundrels, come out to die! Why are you waiting? Why are you delaying? Come out! The master is calling you.' He was still speaking, but look, through the darkness we saw that a lioness had attacked the man, strangled him, and dragged his bloody body further into the cave. Good Jesus, what terror, what joy did we experience at that moment! We were witnessing the death of our enemy, while his master was unaware of it. But when he saw that the slave was delaying, he assumed that the two of us were resisting the one man. The master, unable to control his rage, came to the cave with his sword in his hand and while shouting furiously, accused the slave of carelessness. But he was seized by the wild beast before he could reach our hide-out. Who would ever believe that before our eyes a wild beast was fighting for us? But with that fear removed, we envisaged a similar end for ourselves, except that it was better to suffer a lion's rage than the wrath of men. We were terrified to death and while we did not even dare to move, we awaited the outcome, protected as if by a wall, from such great dangers by the consciousness of our chastity alone. Early in the morning, the lioness, afraid of a trap and sensing that she had been seen, picked up her cub with her teeth and carried it out, granting us the lodging. But we were not confident enough to rush out at once and waited a long time. Whenever we considered going out, we pictured ourselves running into the lioness again.

## Discussion

The most prominent theme in the second cave episode is the fear<sup>9</sup> of Malchus and his wife, who flee into a cave to escape their pursuers. The objects of their fear can be listed as follows: Their pursuers: the master and his slave; poisonous animals: vipers, basilisks, scorpions and other similar animals; and the lioness which eventually kills both the master and his slave.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore basically a fear of death.<sup>11</sup> There is even a

9.Cf. all the references to fear in this passage: '*Statimque mens mali praesaga ...*'; '*Dumque timemus ...*'; '*Igitur timentes ...*'; '*quid putas nobis fuisse animi, quid terroris, ...*'; '*O multo gravior expectata quam illata mors!*'; '*Rursus cum labore et timore lingua balbutit, ...*'; '*Iesu bone, quid tunc nobis terroris, ...*'; '*Sublato autem illo metu similis ante oculos nostros versabatur interitus ...*'; '*Pavemus intrinsecus et ne movere quidem nos ausi praestolamur eventum ...*' and '*Neque tamen satis creduli statim erumpimus, sed expectamus diu et egedi cogitantes illius nobis semper figuramus occursum*'. The next paragraph begins with the words '*Sublato ergo terrore*', indicating that they were now released from their fear.

10.See Roberts (2005:138) for the association between caves and monsters in Greek myth, exemplified by the Cyclopes.

11.Cf. all the references to death in this paragraph: '*Statimque mens mali praesaga, putare dominum meditari mortem ...*'; '*...nequaquam ultra progredientes, ne dum mortem fugimus, incurramus mortem, ...*'; '*O multo gravior expectata quam illata mors!*'; '*Exite furciferi, exite morturi!*'; '*leae nam invasisset hominem et gutture suffocato cruentum intro trahere*'; '*Spectabamus hostem nostrum perire domino nesciente*'; '*... prius a fera tentus est, quam ad nostras latebras perveniret*' and '*... similis ante oculos nostros versabatur interitus*'.

suggestion that they are afraid of God's punishment, but this motif seems to be inserted for the sake of creating a parallel to Seneca.<sup>12</sup>

To balance the themes of fear and death, there are also a few references to salvation, but on the whole it would seem highly unlikely that they could escape unharmed in view of all the dangers that threatened them. The first indication of hope is the mention of the cave itself, which mysteriously appears after they first noticed their pursuers.<sup>13</sup> The passive form of the verb *offertur* seems to suggest that God is understood to have provided the cave as an escape mechanism. The next shimmer of hope is found in the remark that they might be saved if God helps wretched people.<sup>14</sup> After their fellow slave was then killed by the lioness, they experience both terror and joy.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, after the lioness had killed the master as well, Malchus, in a rhetorical question, voices his amazement at the fact that a wild animal had fought on their behalf.<sup>16</sup> The conclusion which Malchus reaches is that they had been safeguarded from all the dangers by their chastity.<sup>17</sup> This is one of the most profound theological statements in the book as a whole and serves as a strong argument in favour of *castitas*. When the lioness picks up her cub and carries it from the cave, Malchus says that she left her lodging to them<sup>18</sup> and although they were still hesitant to leave at once, it marks the end of this episode. The whole episode thus vacillates between fear and hope, danger and relief, and ends on a positive note.

Several references to darkness emphasise their miserable situation and therefore also highlight their eventual salvation.<sup>19</sup> There are also references to light and it is noted that Malchus and his wife could see in the darkness, whilst those entering from outside were blinded at first. It is clear that both darkness and light are ambivalent in this scene: On the one hand, the darkness can be seen as a danger and a threat; on the other hand, it offers an escape to the fugitives. This is similar to what Malchus remarks about the reason why all kinds of dangerous animals seek shelter in a cave; they try to escape from the blazing desert sun. Light, which is normally regarded as positive, on the other hand, also has a slightly negative connotation in this episode: It is associated with the burning sun, which blinds the eyes of the slave and the master when they enter the cave, although in

12. *Vita Malchi* 9: '... si iuvat dominus miseris, habemus salutem; si despicit peccatores, habemus sepulchrum.' Duckworth (1947/1948:29) points out Jerome's dependence on the formulation of Seneca (*Troades* 510–512): 'Fata si miseris iuvant, / habes salutem; / fata si vitam negant, / habes sepulchrum.'

13. *Vita Malchi* 9: '... offertur ad dexteram specus ...'

14. *Vita Malchi* 9: '... si iuvat Dominus miseris ...'. The word *miseris* could here perhaps be translated with 'the poor'. From the outcome of the episode, we might infer that God indeed helps those in need. Cf. Lausberg (1998:§386–387) for the rhetorical device employed here.

15. *Vita Malchi* 9: 'Iesu bone, quid tunc nobis terroris, quid gaudii fuit!'

16. *Vita Malchi* 9: 'Quis hoc unquam crederet, ut ante os nostrum pro nobis bestia dimicaret?'

17. *Vita Malchi* 9: '... praestolamur eventum rei inter tanta pericula, pudicitiae tantum conscientia pro muro saepti.'

18. *Vita Malchi* 9: '... nobisque cedit hospitium.'

19. *Vita Malchi* 9: '... solem cernere nigrescentem'; '... specus longe sub terram penetrans'; '... ceteraque huiusmodi fervorem solis declinantia umbras petere ...'; '... nobis ex occulto tergum eius videntibus ...' and '... per tenebras aspicimus ...'.

this case their blindness is to the advantage of Malchus and his wife. On the level of symbolism, it is perhaps important that Malchus and his wife were *seeing* how their *blinded* adversaries, who entered too deeply into the dangerous cave, were killed through their lack of *vision*.

Another theme that is linked to the theme of fear is that of *rabies/ira*. At the beginning of paragraph 9 of the book, it is stated that the fugitives are thinking that their master was planning to kill them.<sup>20</sup> They are in no doubt as to the intentions of their master with his drawn sword. When the master sees that his slave does not return, he decides to enter the cave, and here he is described as being unable to control his anger (*iram differre non valens*). Although the cruelty and ferocity of lions are often mentioned in ancient texts,<sup>21</sup> here the fact that both the slave and his master were killed by the lioness is merely stated and not graphically described.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting that Malchus compares the ferocity of the lion to the anger of men and states that it is better to suffer a lion's rage than the wrath of men.<sup>23</sup> It sounds like a general statement, but he applies it to their situation by using the imperfect form of the verb (*erat*). The *furor* of the master was also mentioned in paragraph 6 when he got angry because Malchus did not want to marry the woman he gave to him.<sup>24</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that two main themes of the *Aeneid*, namely that of love, which features so strongly in the first four books, and that of *furor*,<sup>25</sup> which is so prominent in the last four books, are also central to the two cave episodes. As we have seen in the first episode, there is a stark contrast between the sexual relationship of Aeneas and Dido and the chaste union of Malchus and his wife. In the second cave episode, Malchus and his wife are miraculously protected from their master's rage (*furor*) through the intervention of the lioness. But they are also saved from the expected fierceness of the lioness, which has just killed the master and his slave. Where Malchus and his wife's chaste relationship clearly trumps the tragic relationship of the Roman hero, Aeneas and queen Dido, the *furor*, which overcame Turnus and eventually also Aeneas himself, did not get the better of Malchus and his wife.

20. *Vita Malchi* 9.1: 'Statimque mens mali praesaga, putare dominum meditari mortem ...'

21. For references, see what follows.

22. Of the slave: '... laenam invasisse hominem et gutture suffocato cruentum into trahere.' And of the master: '... a fera tentus est, ...'

23. *Vita Malchi* 9. 9: 'Sublato autem illo metu similis ante oculos nostros versabatur interitus, nisi quod tutius erat leonis rabiem quam iram hominum sustinere.' Compare also similar comparisons between man and lion in Proverbs 19:12 'sicut fremitus leonis ita et regis ira et sicut ros super herbam ita hilaritas eius' and 20:2 'sicut rugitus leonis ita terror regis qui provocat eum peccat in animam suam.' Cf. also Comm in prophetas minores, In Amos, lib. 1, cap. 3, l. 292: '... diximus illum artis suae usum esse sermonibus, ut quia pastor gregum nihil terribilius leone cognoverat, iram domini leonibus compararet' (emphasis added by authors).

24. *Et cum ego refutarem diceremque me Christianum, nec mihi licere uxorem viventis accipere (siquidem captus nobiscum vir eius ab alio domino fuerat abductus), herus ille implacabilis in furorem versus evaginato me coepit appetere gladio.*

25. There are a number of 'lion passages' in the later books of the *Aeneid* in which different warriors are compared to lions and their ferocity is most of the time the point of comparison. See the comparison of Nisus's anger with that of a lion at a sheepfold: *impastus ceu plena leo per ouilia turbans / (suadet enim uesana fames) manditque trahitque / molle pecus mutumque metu, fremit ore cruento (Aen. 9.339–341)*. (Just like a starving lion running amuck through full sheepfolds, / (for a raging famine drives him) he gnaws and drags / at the tender flock mute with fear, and roars with blood-stained maw.)



Here, as in the first cave episode, the virtue of chastity saves them; in the first episode the woman's confirmation that she would live with him in chastity saves Malchus's life – he relinquishes his resolve to commit suicide and the master also abandons his intention to kill Malchus. In the second episode, Malchus states explicitly that they were *protected* from all these great dangers by the consciousness of their chastity, as if they were enclosed by a wall. There is, however, a difference between the two episodes; the prospect of living together in the cave posed a threat to their chastity, whilst their chastity is not under direct threat in the second episode.<sup>26</sup> Here, their 'proven chastity' serves as a virtue which dispels the dangers.

The second cave episode and the dangers the heroes face in it also call a biblical scene to mind, namely that of the prophet Daniel who was thrown into the lions' den as described in chapter 6 of the book of Daniel. There are no quotations or direct allusions to the book of Daniel in the *Vita Malchi*, but the fact that Malchus and the woman are saved from a lioness whilst their pursuers are killed, relates to the narrative in the book of Daniel, where Daniel is saved but his opponents are killed by lions. The order of events, however, differs; in the *Vita Malchi* the master and slave are killed first and then Malchus and his wife are spared. In the book of Daniel, Daniel is saved and once he has been released, his opponents with their wives and children are thrown into the lions' den and are immediately killed.<sup>27</sup> It is not mentioned at what time of day Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, but he spent at least one night there, and was released early the next morning. Malchus and his wife apparently fled into the cave in the late afternoon and only left the next day towards evening. Thus, in both cases the long duration of staying unharmed in the presence of lions is contrasted with the immediate death of their pursuers.

There is another interesting similarity between the two narratives. The reason for Daniel's safety is described in verse 23: '... because righteousness before him (i.e. God) was found in me and I have committed no wrong before you, o king.'<sup>28</sup> As previously mentioned, Malchus and his wife's safety is ascribed to their chastity.<sup>29</sup> They are therefore saved as a result of their virtues, *iustitia* and *castitas* respectively. In the book of Daniel, the death of Daniel's opponents *with* their families proves that the lions were hungry and ferocious, but also carries with it a suggestion of divine vindictive punishment for the unrighteous persecution of Daniel. The redemption of Malchus and his wife (as a kind of 'family')

26. It is notable however, that the threat against chastity is still obliquely present; the use of the phrase *evaginato gladio* and the word *fovea* both have sexual connotations. Cf. Fovea (Lewis & Short 1980:775): 'a small pit, esp. for taking wild beasts, a pit fall ... Transf.: genitales feminae, i.e. the womb, Tert. Anim. 19.' Cf. also Weingarten (2005:174, fn. 32): 'The sexual overtones of the sword are made clear by the description of his master's sword on both occasions: *evaginato gladio*.'

27. In the *Vita Malchi* the slave and the master are both killed when they enter the cave, whilst Malchus and his wife spend a long time inside the cave in the presence of the lioness.

28. Daniel 6:23 '... *quia coram eo iustitia inventa est in me sed et coram te, rex, delictum non feci*.' Cf. also *Comm in Danielelem*, lib. 2, cap. 6, l. 397: '*non leonem feritas immutata est sed ritus eorum, et rabies conclusa est ab angelo, et idcirco clausa: quia prophetae bona opera praecesserant, ut non tam gratia liberationis sit quam iustitiae retributio*' (emphasis added by authors).

29. See footnote 28.

thus inversely points to God's grace as a reward for their righteous conduct under threat of unjust persecution. In his *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Jerome indicates that the lion and the wildest animal cannot be avoided unless there is repentance and conversion to the Lord, not only in mind, but also in works.<sup>30</sup> It seems that their chastity, which was not only confessed, but also practised, qualified to serve as protection against wild animals. It is also interesting to note what Jerome says in his commentary on the book of Daniel about a lioness with cubs.<sup>31</sup> According to Jerome, the lioness with cubs symbolises the kingdom of Babylon on account of its fierceness and cruelty or luxury and life in service of lust. But he then makes a further remark about lionesses with cubs, saying that those people who have written about the nature of wild animals, maintain that lionesses are fiercer (than lions), especially when they are suckling cubs and that they are always ready for mating. It is significant that the lioness in the *Vita Malchi* does not portray the typical fierceness and cruelty towards Malchus and his wife, although she did kill their pursuers. Nothing is said about the sexual nature of the lioness in the *Vita Malchi*, perhaps because the second cave can be regarded as a 'space of chastity'. It is also notable that the master and his slave are shouting, but that no mention is made of any noise made by the lion.<sup>32</sup> The lion's roar is typical and in many instances where lions are mentioned, reference is made to the frightening sound they make, but in this instance, ironically, the master and his slave are the ones making loud noises.

In the light of the aforementioned, the possibility that Jerome also had the Daniel narrative as an intertext in mind when he wrote the *Vita Malchi* could certainly be considered, especially because this opens up a better understanding of the second cave episode seen within its own context and seems to emphasise its importance in the narrative as a whole.

## The use of rhetorical devices in the description of the second cave episode

The high incidence of literary tropes in the second cave episode seems to emphasise its importance within the structure of the book as a whole. This is also a characteristic of the first cave episode and this additional similarity between the two chapters thus serves as a further pointer to the importance of the second cave scene. The density of figures of speech in both episodes and structural similarities, such as the fact that a cave provides the setting, the life-threatening presence of a furious master with an unsheathed sword, and the use of the metaphor of darkness to express the demise of hope<sup>33</sup>, all

30. *In Hieremiam prophetam*, lib. 1, CSEL 54, l. 25: '*aliter leonem et saevissimam bestiam vitare non possumus, nisi agamus paenitentiam et ad dominum convertamur non solum mente, sed et opere*.'

31. *Comm in Danielelem*, (lib. 2, cap. 7, l. 464): '*regnum Babylonis propter saevitiam et crudelitatem, sive propter luxuriam et vitam libidini servientem, non leo sed leaena appellatur – aiunt enim hi, qui de bestiarum scripsere naturis: leaenas esse ferociiores, maxime si catulos nutrant, et semper gestire ad coitum –; ...*'

32. *Vita Malchi* 9.4: '*... et quasi clamante domino non audeo loqui*'; 9.6 '*... vox per antrum sonat: Exite, furciferi; exite, morituri ...*'; 9.8 '*... et clamore rabido servi increpans socordiam ...*'

33. In the first cave episode, Malchus remarks that 'a night, darker than usual and for me too soon, had come.' In this chapter, he remarks that they 'saw the sun turning dark.'

seem to suggest that this chapter should be recognised for its important role in the interpretation of the book as a whole.

There are, of course, also differences between the two cave episodes. In contrast to the first cave episode where the character Malchus first deliberates with himself in a long monologue, which then develops into a dialogue with the slave woman who was forced upon him as a common-law wife a short while before, there is no report of a dialogue between Malchus and his coenobitic partner in the second cave episode. The only direct speech reported in this chapter is the loud, reverberating call of the fellow slave who accompanied the master and who was sent into the cave to apprehend the two fugitives: 'Come out, you scoundrels, come out to die! Why are you waiting? Why are you delaying? Come out! The master is calling you!' His voice was still echoing through the cave when he was seized and suffocated by the lioness. He did not have time to call for help or shout a warning to his master. His loud calling, which possibly is recounted to explain why he was killed by the lioness,<sup>34</sup> stands in stark contrast to his silent death, as well as the silence in the rest of the episode.

The purpose of emphasising the silence of Malchus and his companion, it would seem, is probably to focus more clearly on their thoughts and emotions. This inference is substantiated by the many references to cognitive processes and emotions in this chapter, especially the *fear* the two fugitives experienced (already noted previously):<sup>35</sup> 'And, immediately *anticipating* trouble, we *thought* that our master was planning to kill us';<sup>36</sup> 'While we were *afraid* and *realised* that we had been betrayed by our tracks in the sand ...';<sup>37</sup> 'we were *scared* of poisonous animals ...';<sup>38</sup> 'We were *thinking* the following ...';<sup>39</sup> 'Can you imagine how we felt, how *terrified* we were..';<sup>40</sup> 'what *terror*, what *joy* did we experience at that moment!';<sup>41</sup> 'We were *terrified* to death ...';<sup>42</sup> 'But we were not *confident* enough ...';<sup>43</sup> 'Whenever we *considered* going out, we *pictured* ourselves running into the lioness again.'<sup>44</sup> Without doubt, the purpose of these descriptions was to increase the dramatic effect of the story. The emotional effect the episode had is substantiated when the character Malchus, whilst relating the story of his life to Jerome, mentions that he still finds it difficult to speak when he has to recount this fearful

34. The same fate befalls his master, who shortly afterwards enters the cave, 'shouting like a madman' (*clamore rabido*). The exact words of his ranting are not given; only that he scolded his slave for taking so long. We are told that the master did not even reach the spot where the fugitives were hiding, so that his death came even quicker than that of his slave. Notably, the quick deaths of Daniel's pursuers are also explicitly mentioned in Daniel 6:25.

35. Italics are added in these quotations by the authors to make the ideas more visible.

36. *Statimque mens mali praesaga putare...*

37. *Dumque timemus et vestigiis per arenas nos proditos intellegimus...*

38. *timentes venenata animalia...*

39. *Illudque nobiscum reputantes ...*

40. *Quid putas nobis fuisse animi, quid terroris*.

41. *quid tunc nobis terroris, quid gaudii fuit!*

42. *Pavemus intrinsecus ...*

43. *Neque tamen satis creduli ...*

44. *egredi cogitantes illius nobis semper figuramus occursum.*

episode. This, in turn, explains and further highlights the silence of the characters in the cave: 'My tongue is *stammering* again with *anguish* and *fear* and I *do not dare to speak*, just as if I could still hear my master shouting.'<sup>45</sup>

In retelling Malchus's story, Jerome, however, is not stammering. He shows himself to be proficient in the use of literary devices to embellish his narrative. *Rhetorical questions*, for instance, are used for dramatic effect to emphasise the fear, but also the joy of the characters after they have been saved by the lioness.<sup>46</sup> The rhetorical questions are addressed to Jerome by the character Malchus and thus also form *apostrophic* interpolations into the narrative: 'Can you imagine how we felt, how terrified we were when the master and our fellow slave, having arrived at our hiding place after following our tracks, were standing close by in front of the cave?'<sup>47</sup> A second set of rhetorical questions a short while later in the story is further amplified by an *exclamation*: 'Good Jesus, what terror, what joy did we experience at that moment!'<sup>48</sup> Another rhetorical question expresses the miraculous nature of their salvation: 'Who would ever believe that before our eyes a wild beast was fighting for us?'<sup>49</sup> Literary devices therefore serve to emphasise the silence, the mortal danger, the fear, and the miraculous escape and thus, increase the dramatic effect and argumentative quality of the narrative.<sup>50</sup> The reader is coaxed into experiencing, reliving, and accepting the dramatic redemption of people who have embraced life-long *castitas*.

It is interesting to note that the emphasis on *thought* in this chapter does not only concern the thoughts of the two fugitives. The author also focuses on the thoughts of the master who came to look for them, and even on the thinking of the lioness. The master, when he *saw* that the slave he sent into the cave was taking his time, *thought* the fugitives, on account of their being two against one, offered resistance, and thus also came into the cave with his sword still in his hand.<sup>51</sup> The reader is told that the master was impatient in his rage and that he shouted like a madman, reprimanding the slowness of his slave.<sup>52</sup> His exact words are, however, not repeated. This strengthens the general lack of dialogue in the chapter. The lioness also has thoughts of her own: She was *aware* of the fact that she had been seen and was *afraid* of

45. *Rursus cum labore et timore lingua balbutit, et quasi clamante domino non audeo loqui.*

46. Haefeli (1968:50) describes rhetorical questions as one of the literary tropes devised to increase variety and enliven discourse.

47. *Quid putas nobis fuisse animi, quid terroris, cum ante specum haud procul starent dominus et conservus et vestigio indice iam ad latebras pervenissent?* The questions serve to draw the reader or listener into the narrative, so as to share in the experience and emotions of the character Malchus.

48. *Iesu bone, quid tunc nobis terroris, quid gaudii fuit!*

49. *Quis hoc umquam crederet, ut ante os nostrum pro nobis bestia dimicaret?*

50. In a discourse such as this, emotion is a greater aid to argument than logic. Cf. Perelman (1982:53). Perelman states that non-formal arguments do not consist of a chain of ideas of which some are derived from others, according to accepted rules of inference; but rather of a web formed from all the arguments and all the reasons that combine to achieve the desired result (Perelman 1979:18).

51. *Qui cum videret illum moras facere, suspicatus duos uni resistere sed et iram differe non valens, sicut tenebat gladium, ad speluncam venit ...*

52. *...et clamore rabido servi increpans socordiam ...*

some snare.<sup>53</sup> On this account she left the cave, thereby giving the two fugitives a safe haven.

The single monologue in this chapter, but then also the contents of the thoughts of the main characters, are embellished by *aesthetic* literary tropes. This also draws attention to the almost poetic quality of the reflections in the chapter. So, for instance, is Malchus's thoughts about the master's purpose to put them to death characterised by *alliteration of m and p*, and rhyme of *-em* and *-re*: 'Statimque mens mali praesaga putare dominum, meditari mortem, solem cernere nigrescentem' ('And, immediately anticipating trouble, we thought that our master was planning to kill us and we saw the sun turning dark'). The reason why they did not penetrate deeper into the cave but sought shelter in a cavity to the left, and the reasoning about what fate would befall them in the cave, also resemble poetry: '... nequaquam ultra progredientes, ne, dum mortem (A) fugimus (B), incurramus (B) in mortem (A), illudque nobiscum reputantes: si iuvat (C) dominus miseris (D), habemus salutem (E); si despicit (C) peccatores (D), habemus sepulcrum (E)' ('We did not go any further, so that we might not incur (B) death (A), while trying to escape (B) from it (A). We were thinking the following: if the Lord helps (C) wretched people (D), we have found safety (E); if he despises (C) sinners (D), we have a tomb (E)'). The two *parallelisms* in this description serve to enhance the antitheses between fleeing from death and running into it and of finding either a safe haven or a grave in the cave. The first antithesis also constitutes dramatic *irony*, whilst the second highlights the *polarity* between the Lord's justice and mercy.

Jerome's fondness of polarity can also be seen in the description of their fright when Malchus exclaims how much worse death is when it is expected than when it is suddenly inflicted upon one. This constitutes an inverted 'better than' saying, which is often found in wisdom material in the Bible, thereby demonstrating their predicament, given that they were now in a position where they expected to be executed at any moment.

The loud exclamation of the slave who was unwittingly sent to his death contains a number of *repetitions*, which consequently also form two *parallels*: 'Exite (A), furciferi (B), exite (A) morituri (B)! Quid (C) statis (D), quid (C) moramini (D)? Exite (A)! Dominus vos vocat' ('Come out (A), you scoundrels (B), come out (A) to die (B)! Why (C) are you waiting (D)? Why are you delaying (D)? Come out (A)! The master is calling you.').

Three further contemplations of Malchus in this chapter deserve consideration. The first of these is the *paradox* in which Malchus also employs *rhyme* and *parallelism*: 'Who would ever believe (A) that before (B) our (C) eyes a wild beast was fighting (A) for (B) us (C)?' The parallel is more pronounced in the Latin: 'Quis hoc umquam crederet (A), ut ante (B) os nostrum (C) pro (B) nobis (C) bestia dimicaret (A)?' The subjunctive verbs 'crederet' and 'dimicaret', the prepositions 'ante' and 'pro', and the pronouns 'nostrum' and

53. 'Leaena insidias cavens et visam se esse sentiens ...'

'nobis', clearly form a parallel, emphasising the miraculous nature of the outcome of this dilemma, an escape which must have been provided to them by the Lord. The poetic quality of the reflections in this chapter is also demonstrated in the subsequent *comparison* between the fury of the master and that of the lioness: Malchus expresses the conviction that 'it was better to suffer a lion's rage than the wrath of men' ('nisi quod tutius erat leonis (A) rabiei (B) quam iram (B) hominum (A) sustinere'). This *chiastic* arrangement of elements in the comparison serves an aesthetic purpose, but it probably also stresses the anger of the master who was compared to a madman a little earlier.

The climax of tension in this chapter is reached when the two fugitives have to spend the night, probably huddled together closely, in the pitch dark cave with the lioness, her cub, and the two corpses of their pursuers. The dangers are comparable to those experienced by Daniel in the lions' den, given that he also had to wait until 'early in the morning' before being able to escape the dangers (cf. Dn 6:19). The 'dangers' ('pericula') that Malchus mentions possibly included the threat to their vow of chastity.<sup>54</sup> They owe their preservation to their chastity and this is underscored by rhetorical devices: 'Pavemus intrinsecus et ne movere quidem nos ausi praestolamur eventum rei inter tanta pericula, pudicitiae tantum conscientia pro muro saepti.' This can be translated as: 'We were terrified to death and while we did not even dare to move, we awaited the outcome, protected as if by a wall, from such great dangers by the consciousness of our chastity alone.' Through the *chiastic alliteration* of 'tanta pericula' with 'pudicitia tantum', the idea is emphasised that 'only chastity' can provide protection against 'such dangers'. This seems to constitute an *aphorism*, which makes the purpose of this short 'history' remarkably clear: *Chastity is a protective wall that saves its possessor from mortal danger*. This explicit formulation suggests the culmination of Jerome's line of argumentation in the book.

A number of other literary tropes in this chapter deserve mention: *Repetition* is used to increase tension. So, for instance, are we told that the two fugitives first notice the two pursuers riding on camels 'dimly in the distance' ('*dubio aspectu procul*') but they realise that their footsteps ('*vestigii*') will betray them. A short while later, after Malchus and his wife have entered the cave, the master and fellow slave are described as being 'close by' ('*haud procul*'), having been guided by their footsteps ('*vestigio indice*') to their hiding place. The development of the immediate context of the repeated words serves to increase tension.

There is situational *irony* in many aspects of this description.<sup>55</sup> When they become aware of their persecution, they felt that the sun was turning dark. They fled into a cave, which is

54. In Chapter X of this book, Jerome hints at what dangers Malchus had in mind: The story is to be retold 'so that they (i.e., later generations) may know that amid swords, and amid deserts and wild beasts chastity is never a captive, and that he who is dedicated to Christ can die, but cannot be conquered.'

55. Structural or dramatic irony is meant in the sense that the outcome is the opposite of the expected and not ironic statements in the strict sense in which the literal meaning would be nonsensical and has to be replaced by a derived meaning. Cf. the definition of irony in Watson (1986:307–308).



described as a shady place where all kinds of dangerous creatures hide from the heat of the sun. As was pointed out previously, it is the *darkness* that saves them, however, given that they can see the slave who enters the cave whilst his eyes are still adjusting to the dark. They can even see the lioness which strangles him and drags him *deeper into the cave*, whilst the poor man was sent to drag them *from the cave*. So adjusted are their eyes to the dark, that they can also see ('before our eyes') how the lioness fights on their behalf. During the night they can see nothing, but 'early in the morning', it would seem, the sun is growing bright again, as they can see how the lioness grabs her cub in her mouth and leaves the cave. The irony is heightened when we realise that *one* person was sent into the cave to *drag out two* fugitives, and it turns out that *one* lioness drags the *two* pursuers *deeper into* the cave.

One last literary device deserves mention: The author succeeds in employing *echoes of biblical passages* in the narrative. The parallels with the story of Daniel in the lions' den have been pointed out, but there are probably more. So, for instance, when we hear of the master holding the camels with 'unsheathed sword',<sup>56</sup> there is an echo of the Angel of the Lord standing before the ass of Balaam in Numbers 22:23 and 31.<sup>57</sup> He, too, is standing there with an 'unsheathed sword'. Balaam is at first not able to see the angel and consequently is very irritated (*iratus vehementius* in the Vulgate) and beats his donkey to urge him on. The words of the fellow slave who enters the cave to call forth the two fugitives also have biblical echoes. He informs them that the lord is calling them ('*Dominus vos vocat*'). In the Garden of Eden, after they had become aware of their nakedness, the first human pair is said to have been called by the Lord God (Gn 3:9): '*vocavitque Dominus Deus Adam*'. Is there perhaps a pang of remorse for Malchus about his 'sin' of having left the monastery when he hears that 'the master is calling you'? Is there a parallel between the two of them hiding from their master and Adam and Eve hiding from God? There certainly are parallels in terms of his remorse about earlier being ensnared by the Devil to leave the monastery and his awareness of the danger of the sexuality of his partner with whom he had a sexless marriage.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

We hope to have proved that, compared to the first, the second cave episode forms an equally important part of the narrative. In the first cave episode, the erotic symbolism of the cave is highlighted by the antithetic parallels with Virgil's *Aeneid* (Weingarten 2005:171–174). The second cave episode recalls the experience of Daniel in the lions' den and through this association, the cave becomes a symbol of danger. Both

episodes employ a high density of literary devices to increase the literary quality of the book and add to its dramatic effect. Both also give more or less unequivocal substantiation to the claim that the book as a whole was written to encourage Christians to embrace a life of *castitas*.

To conclude, a comparison between the two episodes that took place in two different caves summarises the salient points:

- In both episodes, there are references to darkness, which obviously has symbolic value.<sup>59</sup>
- In both episodes, life and death are mentioned repeatedly.
- The anger of the owner with his drawn sword is prominent in both paragraphs.<sup>60</sup>
- Whilst *tristitia* is mentioned twice in paragraph 6,<sup>61</sup> the emotions of fear and joy are mentioned repeatedly in paragraph 9.<sup>62</sup>
- Whilst marriage and chastity are the main themes of the first episode, the master's *furor* and the expected *furor* of the lioness are prominent in the second episode, but chastity is experienced by the two fugitives as a protective wall against both dangers.
- In the first episode, the passage from book 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid* serves as intertext, whilst it seems as if chapter 6 of the book of Daniel serves as intertext for the second episode.
- The main theme of the *vita* is chastity and it is prominent in both episodes. In episode one it is under threat, but preserved by the woman's proposal of a chaste marriage. In the second episode, the chastity is not under direct threat, but their proven chastity saves them from the *furor* of the master and his slave and from the *furor* of the lioness.
- In the first episode, the direct speech of both Malchus and the woman is recorded. In the second episode, the shouting of the owner and his slave is mentioned, but there is not a word from Malchus or his wife – not even a prayer.
- In the first episode, the woman's reaction to Malchus's threat to kill himself saves both of them and creates life from death (living together in chastity). In the second episode, they leave the cave to enter a new life – a life of dedication to the monastic ideal.

We believe that the first cave episode should not be regarded as the single most important event of the *vita* and that a closer reading of the second cave episode and a comparison of this passage with the first episode contribute to a fuller understanding of the work as a whole.

56.The expression '*evaginato gladio*' also constitutes a play on chastity; chastity provides protection against the 'unsheathed sword'.

57.Also translated by Jerome at more or less the same time in the 'Vulgate' with '*evaginato gladio*'. The usual date assigned to the writing of the *Vita Malchi* is around 391 AD, whilst he worked on his own translations for the Latin Bible, which later came to be known as the 'Vulgate', from circa 390–405 AD.

58.In chapter 6 he says that he never looked at her naked body or touched her flesh for fear of 'losing in peace what he had preserved in battle'. Weingarten, in *The Saint's Saints* (2005:165), asserts that Jerome's realism in the *Vita Malchi* is interwoven with biblical and classical allusions to create a picture of the ascetic subjugation of sexuality.

59.In the first episode, *Vita Malchi* 6: '*iam venerat tenebrosior solito et mihi nimium matura nox*'; '*Sic fatus eduxi in tenebris micantem gladium ...*' For the second cave episode, see footnote 21.

60.*Vita Malchi* 6: '*... herus ille implacabilis in furorem versus evaginato me coepit appetere gladio*.' And *Vita Malchi* 9: '*Ipse camelos tenet et evaginato gladio nostrum expectat adventum*.' and '*... sed et iram differre non valens, sicut tenebat gladium ad speluncam venit et clamore rabido ...*'

61.*Vita Malchi* 6: '*... et pronubante nobis tristitia ...*' and '*Tristitiam animi vultu dissimulare non potui*'.

62.See footnotes 11 and 17.

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### Authors' contributions

J.P.K. (University of Pretoria) wrote the introduction and literary analysis of the second cave episode, P.J.B. (University of Pretoria) wrote about the literary devices and relevance for the interpretation of the second cave episode.

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