

## RHETORIC AND ARGUMENT IN CHAPTER VI OF JEROME'S VITA MALCHI MONACHI CAPTIVI

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### ***Abstract***

*The authors argue that the density of rhetorical devices in Chapter VI of Jerome's Vita Malchi Monachi Captivi not only serves as proof of Jerome's literary competence, but also informs the reader about the real purpose of this short work, namely to serve as an argument in favour of celibacy. Rhetorical devices such as apostrophe, rhetorical questions, biblical allusions, metaphor, antithesis, polarity, rhyme, alliteration, parallelism and chiasmus in this short chapter are pointed out while some parallels are also drawn with the work of a contemporary Syriac-speaking author, Aphrahat the Persian Sage.*

### **1. Introduction**

At the end of his delightful essay, which he calls a "history of chastity for the chaste," Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus gives a hint as to the purpose of writing this little book: "Virgins, I exhort you to guard your chastity."<sup>1</sup> He thus explicitly identifies at least the inner circle of his audience as those who have pledged themselves to chastity.<sup>2</sup> If this direct address to the "virgins" describes the purpose of the work, it would seem to differ from the stated purpose in the introduction to this book where Jerome explains that the short work would serve to "wipe the rust" from his tongue and that it was written so that he could "practice" himself towards writing a larger history of the Church (Chapter I).

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<sup>1</sup> VM 10: "Castis historiam castitatis expono. Virgines virginitatem custodire exhortor."

<sup>2</sup> E. Coleiro, St. Jerome's Lives of the Hermits. *Vigiliae Christianae* 11 (1957), pp.161, calls this "a moral exhortation to the reader".

The history which he subsequently narrates about the character Malchus, seems to dissolve the doubt about its purpose, since it supports the notion that the real purpose was to encourage those who pledged themselves to chastity and celibacy to persevere in their conviction: The narrator Malchus relates two incidents where people in authority tried to force him into marriage: His parents when he was a young man (Chapter III) and his owner when his head was already turning grey (Chapter VI). In both cases he successfully avoided sexual union with a woman – by running away to a monastery when he was young and when he was middle-aged, by accepting a sexless marriage. It seems reasonable, therefore, to infer from this *inclusio* of Malchus' life that the true purpose was to encourage those who had similar dilemmas.

In the final paragraph of the work he actually uses the verb “*exhortor*” (which can be translated with “to exhort, encourage, incite”) with regard to his purpose with the essay. If this was his purpose with the essay, it raises the question as to the *textual strategy* of Jerome through which he wanted to render the exhortation effective. One answer to this question would be the *genre* he chose, namely that of a short story. But we propose to analyse in this article the *rhetorical strategies* employed in one chapter of this short work, namely Chapter VI, in order to determine what Jerome probably viewed as a prospectively successful “exhortation,” and to make brief comparisons as we go along with regard to the use of rhetorical devices in similar literature from the Syriac sphere of influence and originating in more or less the same time, namely the *Demonstrationes* of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage.

## 2. A translation of Jerome's *Vita Malchi*, Chapter VI

*'O nothing is ever safe when the devil is near! O, how numerous and unspeakable his snares! And so his envy also found me while I was hiding. The master saw that his flock was increasing and he found no deception in me (for I knew that the apostle had commanded us to serve our masters faithfully as if we were serving God). And because he wanted to reward me, to make me more loyal toward him, he gave that fellow slave, the woman who had been captured with me, to me as wife. But when I refused and said that I am a Christian and that I am not allowed to marry a woman whose husband was still alive (her husband had indeed been captured with us, but he was led away by another master), that merciless owner of ours became furious, and he began to approach me with his drawn sword. And if had not quickly reacted to grab the woman by the arm, he would have spilled my blood right there. Now a night darker than usual and much too soon had dawned for me. I took my new wife into a half-ruined cave and with sadness as our maid of honour we both detested each other, but didn't confess it. Then I truly felt my captivity; I threw myself to the ground and began to mourn the monk, whom I was losing, saying:*

*“Have I in my misery been saved for this? Have my transgressions brought me to this, that I, a virgin whose head is already turning grey, should become a husband? Of what use is it, that I have forsaken my parents, my fatherland and my family property for the Lord, if I do the thing I wished to avoid doing when I despised them? Unless I am perhaps undergoing this, because I longed for my fatherland. What do we do now, my soul? Do we die or conquer? Do we wait for the hand of the master or do we kill ourselves with our own sword? Turn the sword against yourself! Your death must be feared more than the death of the body. Preserved chastity has its own martyrdom. Let the witness of Christ lie unburied in the desert. I shall be my own persecutor and martyr!”*

*Having said this, I drew my sword flashing in the darkness and with the sharp point turned against myself, I said:*

*“Farewell, unfortunate woman! Regard me as a martyr rather than a husband.”*

*Then she fell at my feet and said:*

*“I beg you by Jesus; I ask you by the necessity of this hour not to spill your blood and incur a charge against me. Or if you want to die, turn the sword against me first. Let us rather be joined in this way. Even if my husband were to return to me, I would preserve my chastity, which our captivity has taught me. I would indeed rather die, before I give it up. Why should you die, not to marry me? I would die, if you wanted to get married. Regard me therefor as a partner in chastity and love the joining of the soul rather than that of the body. Let our masters believe that you are my husband; Christ will know that you are my brother. We shall easily convince them that we are married, when they see that we love each other in this way.”*

*I admit, I was astounded and while admiring the virtue of this woman I loved her more than a wife. However I never gazed at her naked body and I never touched her flesh, afraid to lose in peacetime, what I had preserved in battle. Many days passed in such a kind of matrimony. Our marriage made us dearer to our masters. There was no suspicion of flight and sometimes I, as faithful shepherd of the flock, was away in the wilderness for a whole month.’*

### **3. Rhetorical stratagems in Jerome’s *Vita Malchi*, Chapter VI**

#### **3.1 *Apostrophe***

Chapter VI, which describes how Malchus was forced into marriage with a fellow slave woman, begins with two *apostrophic exclamations* expressing amazement at Satan’s resourcefulness and success in finding potential objects of temptation and his strategies to attain his objective (of destroying chastity): *“O nihil umquam tutum apud diabolum! O multiplices et ineffabiles eius*

*insidiae!*” This represents a change from the first person narrative style used previously in Jerome’s book to a direct address of the reader and already signifies his hortative intent.<sup>3</sup> The meditative tone of the previous section, which ends with Malchus’ thoughts that he was actually delighted (“*delectabat*”) by his captive state,<sup>4</sup> is rudely interrupted to catch the reader’s attention. As is typical in this style of Christian address, the person who is addressed is not identified. Similar to what Aphrahat does in his *Demonstrationes*, the apostrophic particle of address is “O.” This is pronounced almost exactly the same as the Syriac particle of address, (nw). Aphrahat also often uses this style precisely when he is addressing “virgins,” thus very similar to what Jerome does here.<sup>5</sup> Both these introductory sentences are further also brachylogical or elliptic, adding to its exclamatory quality and thus to the sense of urgency attached to the apostrophe. All of this tells the discerning reader that important arguments are now being tabled for his or her consideration.

### 3.2 *Rhetorical questions*

That the hortative intention with these apostrophes is correctly interpreted by us, is supported by the fact that Jerome further *dramatizes* the account by having Malchus describe how he prostrated himself on the ground and began to lament the loss of his monastic state. This exaggerated self-dialogue, which is inserted for the sake of an argument rather than merely the plot of the story, opens with three rhetorical questions:

*“Huccine miser servatus sum? Ad hoc me mea scelera perduxerunt, ut incanescente iam capite virgo maritus fierem? Quid prodest parentes, patriam, rem familiarem contempsisse pro domino, si hoc facio, quod ne facerem, illa contempsi?”*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> L. Haefeli, *Stilmittel bei Afrahat dem persischen Weisen*. Leipziger Semitische Studien, Neue Folge 4. Leipzig, 1968. p. 50 lists apostrophe as one of the devices of “*Stilbewegtheit*” or “*style of strong sentiment*.” Similar devices in this category are exclamations, rhetorical questions, direct addresses to the reader or listener, literary and paraenetic clues, and dialogues which all entail a change of person and tone from the surrounding material.

<sup>4</sup> Since he found his monastic state back which he was on the verge of losing in civil society, the one thing Satan now once more almost again made him lose.

<sup>5</sup> Homily VI.7 of the *Demonstrationes*, “O you virgins who have pledged your soul to Christ!” (Syriac text in D.J. Parisot, *Aphrahates Sapiientis Persae Demonstrationes*, I–XXII. Patrologia Syriaca, I/1–2. Paris, 1894 p. 271).

<sup>6</sup> “Have I in my misery been saved for this? Have my transgressions brought me to this, that I, a virgin whose head is already turning grey, should become a husband? Of what use is it, that I have forsaken my parents, my fatherland and my family property for the Lord, if I do the thing I wished to avoid doing when I despised them?”

The questions are in fact addressed to the reader.<sup>7</sup> Haefeli<sup>8</sup> describes the source of the dialogical style with rhetorical questions in Aphrahat's work as that of the public disputation or controversy. In Aphrahat's *Demonstrationes*, he asserts, one can detect behind the rhetorical questions fragments of dialogues between Christian teachers and their students.<sup>9</sup> In having a character arguing with himself, the author is in fact appealing to the logic of the reader or listener, and this is also the case in Jerome's *Vita Malchi*.

After Malchus' suggesting a reason why he had landed in this predicament (because he had longed for his fatherland and his patrimony),<sup>10</sup> the self-address is taken up again and it becomes even more dramatic and lively, since the narrator now addresses his own soul with three more rhetorical questions: *Quid agimus, anima? Perimus an vincimus? Expectamus manum domini an proprio mucrone confodimur?*<sup>11</sup> The argument seems to be that he and his soul have two options: To die or to conquer. The preferable option is to conquer, and for this there are two possible options: To wait for the hand of the master, or to kill himself with his own sword. The *dominus* which he refers to seems to be his owner rather than the Lord.<sup>12</sup> The only viable option for Malchus is to avoid marriage by dying. The second rhetorical question thus also constitutes *irony* and forms a *paradox*. There are two ways to inflict death upon himself: If he persistently refuses to consummate the marriage, his owner will probably kill him as he was on the verge of doing just a short while ago. He could also kill himself, and this is the option he chooses. The *paradox* of achieving *victory* by *killing* oneself (whether indirectly through the sword of the owner or directly by his own sword) is based on the *locus classicus* of paradox in the New Testament, as Haefeli<sup>13</sup> refers to it – Luke 9:24, “*Whoever wants to save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for my sake will save it.*” Malchus is willing to

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<sup>7</sup> A distinction is sometimes made between the “*interrogatio*,” which serves simply to elicit an emphatic “yes” or “no,” and a rhetorical question requiring a more special answer which is called a “*quaesitum*.” Cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*. Translated by M. T. Bliss, A. Jansen, D. E. Orton; edited by D. E. Orton and R. Anderson. Leiden, 1998, p. 341).

<sup>8</sup> Haefeli, *Stilmittel*, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Haefeli, *Stilmittel*, p. 61, notes that one is often amazed to see “*wie stark und mit welcher Spitzfindigkeit um jene Zeit die gedankenmässige Zergliederung und Entwicklung des christlichen Lehrinhaltes vorangeschritten war*,” and ascribes this to the fact that the Christian disputation had already entered the public sphere in the genuine Byzantine tradition.

<sup>10</sup> “...*quia patriam desideravi*.” Possibly a subtle warning to Jerome's intended audience.

<sup>11</sup> “What do we do now, my soul? Do we die or conquer? Do we wait for the hand of the master or do we kill ourselves with our own sword?”

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Jerome intentionally left the interpretation of *dominus* open to the reader to allow for different possible interpretations. The fact that Malchus' life is spared through the intervention of the woman, may be regarded as a provision by the Lord (*manum domini*).

<sup>13</sup> Haefeli, *Stilmittel*, p. 40.

lose his life in order to preserve his chastity and by doing so, to save his soul. The probability of Jerome's having had the pronouncement in Luke 9:24 in mind is supported by the next sentence Malchus is said to have addressed to his soul: "*Tua magis mors timenda quam corporis est.*"<sup>14</sup> This certainly also contains a subtle biblical allusion to another context which further enhances the argument with an *appeal to authority*, but this will be explained in a next section. What is important to note in terms of the argument, is the way in which the author entices the reader to engage with the dilemma of betraying one's chastity when there is pressure from someone in authority to do so. The solution suggested is that one should listen to the highest authority and rather die than lose one's chastity. Fortunately, it seems, God provided an escape route and this is probably also what Jerome advises his readers to do if possible.

### 3.3 *Appeal to Scriptural authority*

Christian authors from this period generally were very fond of allusions to and quotations from Scripture. This can often be described as a technique of *explanation*, especially with regard to the so-called "predication," a reference to a biblical authority whose name is then augmented with epithets, predicates, or relative sentences representing the characteristics these persons were commended for in early Christianity.<sup>15</sup> In this chapter, Jerome for instance refers to the "apostle" (Paul) having given the instruction that masters should be faithfully served like God.<sup>16</sup> There is a possible allusion to the patriarch Jacob in this chapter as well. At the end of the previous section, the character Malchus compares his shepherding inter alia to that of "Jacob in sacred history," and it seems significant, therefore, when he mentions shortly afterwards that his master, seeing that his flock increased and finding nothing fraudulent ("*nihil fraudulentiae*") in him, wanted to reward him. Its significance lies in the fact that the patriarch was known for (and named after) his fraudulence,<sup>17</sup> and the fact that he increased his own wealth to the detriment of that of his father-in-law<sup>18</sup> when he was shepherding his uncle's flocks in the same part of the world where Malchus now had this same obligation.

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<sup>14</sup> "Your death must be feared more than the death of the body."

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the description in Haefeli, *Stilmittel*, p.113.

<sup>16</sup> The Vulgate translation of Eph 6:5 refers to "*dominis carnalibus*" being served "*sicut Christo.*"

<sup>17</sup> In the Vulgate version of Gen 27:35 his stealing of the first-born blessing from his brother is described by his father with the adverb "*fraudulenter.*"

<sup>18</sup> Gen 30:27–43. Jacob tells Laban about his flock and states that, "the little you had before I came has increased greatly" (v. 30), after which he tricks Laban into a contract which he manipulates to his advantage. Cf. in this connection the remark in the *Vita Malchi* about the "increase" in the flock of Malchus' owner. The Vulgate does not use the word *crescere*, although the motif is exactly the same.

More significant than these allusions for the sake of Jerome's argument, however, is the subtle allusion to texts such as Mark 6:18 (John the Baptist's criticism of Herod for taking his brother's wife), and Jesus' pronouncements on remarrying as adultery in Mark 10:2–9 (cf. Matt 19:3–9) and also Luke 16:18. In these verses, canonical authority pronounces marriage to a woman who has been divorced as constituting adultery.<sup>19</sup> The illicit nature of such a marriage is possibly strengthened by an obscure allusion to another incident related in the Bible which must have been very disconcerting to Jerome and monks in general. We are referring to the successful attempt by the daughters of Lot to get pregnant through having sex with their unknowing and intoxicated father in Gen 19:30–38. Possible links to this context are suggested by the use of "*in speluncam*" in the *Vita Malchi* and "*in spelunca*" in Gen 19:30, and through the fact that Lot was already an "old man" ("*pater noster senex est*," v. 31), while Malchus refers to his "greying hair" when being (also) forced to have sex with a woman. What is more certain and authoritative, however, is the reference to Mark 8:36–37 and Matthew 10:28 (see also Luke 9:24 already referred to above). In the first of these texts, Jesus exhorts his audience by rhetorically asking what the profit for a human being would be to win the whole world and harm one's own soul ("*animae*") or what one would give in exchange for one's soul ("*quid dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua*" in the words of the Vulgate). In the last-mentioned text, Jesus warns his audience not to be afraid ("*nolite timere*") of those who kill the body ("*corpus*") but cannot kill the soul ("*animam*"), but to rather fear the one who is able to destroy ("*perdere*") both soul and body in hell. Jerome effects the allusion by having Malchus address his own "*anima*" and by declaring "*Tua magis mors timenda quam corporis est.*" The authority of Jesus himself is thus called upon to exhort the audience of virgins to remember that carnal pleasure can never make up for the loss of one's soul in hell. It provides a very convincing and effective argument why Malchus would rather kill his body than harm his "soul" by giving up his chastity, and it simultaneously presents what is probably the strongest argument in the entire essay, that one should never betray the conviction that a life of chastity is what Christ requires of us.

### 3.4 Metaphors

Metaphors are used in this chapter and the work in general not only for their explicatory value, but also for aesthetic effect.<sup>20</sup> Jerome, for instance, lets the character Malchus compare his state of mental suffering with the arrival of a "night much darker than usual and much too soon" ("*iam venerat tenebrosior*

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<sup>19</sup> There is a verbatim connection with some of these texts in the use of "*licere*" and "*uxor*," so that it seems probable that Jerome had these contexts, in whatever translation or Greek form, in mind.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Haefeli, *Stilmittel*, p. 153, about the purpose of metaphors.

*solito et mihi nimium matura nox*”). In Aphrahat’s *Demonstrationes*, he uses a comparable metaphor to describe the despair he felt with the prospect of an increase in the persecution of Christians in Persia.<sup>21</sup> In this chapter, Jerome also has Malchus express the *ironic* contrast to the usual, joyful celebration of marriage by stating that “sadness” was the “bride of honour” and adding that the marriage partners “detested” one another (instead of desiring one another), even though neither of the two partners would acknowledge the fact. The two metaphors in this part of Jerome’s book are thus used mainly for effect, to describe the background of the critically important self-address which is now to follow.

### 5.5 *Antithesis, parallelism, chiasmus and their effect on arguments*

Antithesis and polarity are often expressed with the help of chiastic parallels in biblical and other religious poetry. A beautiful example of both parallelism and chiasmus is found in Malchus’ rhetorical question to himself (which in truth represents Jerome’s argumentative question to his readers): “*Quid prodest parentes, patriam, rem familiarem contempsisse pro domino, si hoc facio, quod ne facerem, illa contempsit?*” In addition to the use of *alliteration* (note the sequence of *prodest*, *parentes*, and *patriam*) and *rhyme* (in the ending of the words *rem*, *familiarem*, *facerem* and in *si* and *contempsit*), which tropes turn the question into a truly memorable phrase, the inverted (chiastic) sequence of stems in *contempsisse*, *facio*, *facerem*, and *contempsit* arguably serves as a strengthening of the argument that such an inversion of values in the life of Malchus would defy all logic. What would, in truth, be the advantage of such a reversal? Such literary skill does not only serve to prove the aptitude of Jerome as an author, but also the effectiveness of his argument. In this regard it should be remembered that rhetorical arguments are not so much dependent on logic than on presentation for them to be successful.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “Even more clouds gathered above me”, in *Demonstrationes* XXI.1 (Syriac text in D.J. Parisot, *Aphrahates Sapiientis Persae Demonstrationes*, I–XXII. Patrologia Syriaca, I/1–2. Paris, 1907, p. 932).

<sup>22</sup> Literary arguments are not, and are not meant to be (were not, especially in antiquity), rigorous demonstrations or logical proofs. Cf. C. Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*. Translated by W. Kluback. Notre Dame, 1982, p. 53. Perelman posits 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 (C. Perelman, *The new rhetoric and the humanities: Essays on rhetoric and its applications*. Dordrecht, 1979, p. 18). According to M. Kraus, Ethos as a Technical Means of Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory, in T.H. Olbricht and A. Eriksson, (eds), *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse*. [Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference. Emory Studies in Early Christianity] New York, 2005, p. 73, ancient rhetoricians realized that the character of the speaker was an important means of persuasion and from the time of Aristotle onwards, the *ethos* of the speaker itself was ranked among the “technical” proofs in persuasion!

It is not only the character Malchus who is represented as having rhetorical skills, but his wife-without-name seems to be his equal when she uses *rhyme* and *chiasmus* to convince Malchus not to kill himself, but to rather opt for a sexless marriage with her:

*Etiam si vir meus ad me rediret, servarem castitatem, quam me captivitas docuit, vel interirem, antequam perderem. Cur moreris, ne mihi iungaris? Ego morerer, si iungi velles. Habeto ergo me coniugem pudicitiae et magis animae copulam amato quam corporis. Sperent domini maritum; Christus noverit fratrem.*<sup>23</sup>

In this speech, note should be taken of the *rhyme* in **servarem**, **interirem** and **perderem**; **quam**, **antequam** and again **quam**; **moreris** and **iungaris**; the *semantic parallel* formed by *moreris ... iungaris ... morerer ... iungi*; the *antithesis* between *animae* and *corporis* and the *chiastic enhanced antithetic parallel* formed by *Sperent* (A) *domini* (B) *maritum* (C); *Christus* (B') *noverit* (A') *fratrem* (C'). There is also *antithesis* between *servarem* and *perderem* in the first line above and in this case the rhyme between the two words serves to draw attention to the contrast which also formed the main argument in Malchus' speech, namely that it is better to die than to lose one's chastity. It is repeated once more in Malchus' confession never to have seen her naked or touched her flesh (see below). Aesthetic adornment and chiasmus thus serve to enhance the *contrast* between the poles of a *polarity* formed by *spiritual* and *carnal* marriage. A final example<sup>24</sup> of *antithesis*, which also occurs exactly where Jerome seems to want to strengthen the argumentative quality of the composition, is the *metaphorical* motivation why he never looked at his wife when she was naked or "touched" her flesh: "*timens in pace perdere, quod in proelio servaveram.*" To lose in peace what was preserved in battle cleverly contrasts the married state with monasticism and probably also middle-age with youth – while he was a more virile young man, Malchus was enveloped in a moral struggle to keep his chastity; now as

<sup>23</sup> "Even if my husband were to return to me, I would preserve my chastity, which our captivity has taught me. I would indeed rather die, before I give it up. Why should you die, not to marry me? I would die, if you wanted to get married. Regard me therefor as a partner in chastity and love the joining of the soul rather than that of the body. Let our masters believe that you are my husband; Christ will know that you are my brother."

<sup>24</sup> There is thus an abundance of instances of antithesis in this important episode. The high incidence can probably be linked to the argumentative importance of this chapter, since the trope known as antithesis has the effect of polarizing opposites and consequently of reducing an issue to a choice between two fundamental options. Cf. the article of P.J. Botha, "Antithesis and argument in the hymns of Ephrem the Syrian." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 44 (1988) pp. 581-595, on the role of antithesis in arguments. Two cases which are not further discussed are the antithesis of *virgin* state vs. *married* man (*virgo::maritus*), and expect the hand of the **master** vs. **pierce ourselves** with our own sword.

someone more advanced in age, this battle has subsided, but he could still easily lose his chastity if he was not very careful. The reference to “battle” contains an allusion to the prologue of the *Vita Malchi* and therefore seems to provide a deeper, allegorical meaning to the opening chapter as well. The purpose of the work was to propagate chastity as a virtue of the Church in a time of laxity and probably especially in the face of authoritarian opposition to asceticism.

### 3.6 *Diverse aesthetic literary tropes enhancing arguments*

Jerome displays knowledge of rhetorical techniques also in the use of other devices. Among these are *synecdoche* (referring to the “hand” of the master as representative of the master’s act of taking his life<sup>25</sup>), and *aphorism* which expresses a general truth seen to be central to the argument for chastity, namely “Preserved chastity has its own martyrdom.” This aphorism is adorned with the effective use of rhyme as well: “*Habet et pudicitia servata martyrium suum.*” This statement with its rhyme pattern of aa–bb–cc establishes a connection between chastity and martyrdom, subtly arguing that chastity is one of the sublime virtues of the Church, since Jerome describes the period of persecution and martyrdom in the Church as a coronation (Chapter I). This notion is further strengthened with the inclusion of *paradox*: The climax of Malchus’ argument with himself, in which he becomes convinced that suicide is the only honourable and viable option for him, is reached with the conviction “*Ipse mihi ero et persecutor et martyr!*” It is a *paradox* that one can be persecutor and martyr, object and subject at the same time, but the paradox effectively expresses his dilemma of being forced into a sexual relationship (as he saw it at this moment) and wanting to preserve his chastity. The use of rhyme (in the first instance) and repetition (of the conjunction *et* in the second instance) in these two examples can be described as a “melopoetic” strengthening of the argumentative quality of the essay – a “musical or sound orchestration that directs the flow of meaning by the appeal of sound.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> If ‘*manum domini*’ is interpreted as ‘the hand of the Lord’ it refers to God’s act of taking one’s life at the predestined time, or as his protective care of his children.

<sup>26</sup> R.R. Jeal, *Melody, Imagery, and Memory in the Moral Persuasion of Paul*. in T.H. Olbricht and A. Eriksson, (eds), *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse*. [Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference. Emory Studies in Early Christianity] New York, 2005, p. 162; cf. E. Pound, *How to Read*. New York, 1971, p.25. The terms *melapoeia*, *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia* were invented in 1927 by Ezra Pound in an essay with the title “How to Read,” in which he “described his understanding of how language is ‘charged’ or ‘energized’ in three fundamental, rhetorical ways.” Cf. the enlightening application of his insights in an analysis of the moral persuasion of the Apostle Paul by Jeal, *Melody, Imagery, and Memory*, pp.160–178. This quotation is on p. 162 of his essay. Jeal notes that the exact date of writing of the essay by Pound is uncertain, but that it has been republished a number of times. He used a 1971 republication of the article.

The end of this chapter successfully resolves the *tension* created at its beginning (the threat of Satan's attack no matter where one hides): Malchus mentions that the "marriage" carried on for a long time in this manner and that he was away for long periods, taking care of the flock in the wilderness. The section thus ends in a way very similar to the expression of contentment at the end of Chapter V. And yet, a new adventure is introduced and the suspense is raised even higher than before when he notes that there was no suspicion of their fleeing from their master.

#### 4. Conclusion

It would seem that the density of rhetorical figures in the chapter discussed and the drift of the argument in this context both point to the conclusion that the purpose of the *Vita Malchi* was indeed, as the conclusion indicates, to encourage those who had pledged themselves to chastity to persevere in their conviction and way of life.<sup>27</sup> It serves as a warning not to underestimate the resourcefulness of Satan in a spiritual battle in which Satan uses weapons such as parental and ecclesiastical authority, carnal desire, the yearning to live, and even the gratefulness of a heathen slave-owner to destroy the "spirit" of a Christian. In this battle for the preservation of a conviction, Jerome proves himself to be someone who has no rusted tongue at all<sup>28</sup> and who does not fear to utilize all the rhetorical and argumentative techniques known to him in order to convince his audience.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> I doubt whether Coleiro, *St. Jerome's Lives*, p. 163 is completely correct in his inclusion of the *Vita Malchi* as a history which was "elaborated by a machinery of rhetorical adjuncts so as to provide entertainment as well as information." In my view, the *Vita Malchi* differs in this regard from the two other Lives of which this evaluation certainly seems to be correct. The fictitious dialogues were not only meant to be entertaining and vivid in the case of this, the shortest of the three Lives, but were also meant to strengthen the case for celibacy.

<sup>28</sup> Jerome was well acquainted with the Latin and Greek pagan authors, with the poets as well as the rhetoricians, and it is clear that he was skilled in their techniques despite his vow to keep away from them after the dream he had in 374 in which he was reproached for being a follower of Cicero rather than Christ. Cf. W.C. McDermott, *Saint Jerome and Pagan Greek Literature. Vigiliae Christianae* 36, (1982), p. 372.

<sup>29</sup> A. Cain, *Vox Clamantis in Deserto: Rhetoric, Reproach, and the forging of Ascetic Authority in Jerome's Letters from the Syrian Desert*, *Journal of Theological Studies* (NS) 57, (2006) pp. 500–525, has recently argued that Jerome's rhetorical inclination in his desert letters has been wrongly interpreted as proof that he was a "borderline neurotic" (Cain, *Vox Clamantis*, p. 503). Cain instead argues that such a reading of Jerome's early letters "vastly underestimates the multiple layers of rhetorical obfuscation at work in the correspondence as well as the rich literary traditions in which Jerome was working." He asserts that "it would not be an overstatement to say that Jerome was one of the most skilled and riveting letter writers in all of pagan and Christian antiquity..." (Cain, *Vox Clamantis*, p. 504).