The significance of the second cave episode in Jerome’s "Vita Malchi"

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.1 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’,2 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.3 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.4 This ambivalent significance of caves, the cave as a place for the...
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 \textit{Vita Malchi} the \textit{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’.\textsuperscript{5} 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 \textit{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.

\textbf{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 \textit{Vita Malchi} and the cave episode of Aeneas and Dido in Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} iv.165–172.\textsuperscript{6} 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’.\textsuperscript{7} 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 \textit{Aeneid} narrative’ (Weingarten 2005:171–174). The contrast also extends to the subsequent lives of both pairs.\textsuperscript{8} Although this episode will not be discussed here, a comparison between the two cave episodes will subsequently be provided.

\textbf{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 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 wepting people, we have found safety; if he despoils 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 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.

\textbf{Discussion}

The most prominent theme in the second cave episode is the fear\textsuperscript{9} 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.\textsuperscript{10} It is therefore basically a fear of death.\textsuperscript{11} There is even a...
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.\textsuperscript{12}

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.\textsuperscript{13} The passive form of the verb \textit{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.\textsuperscript{14} After their fellow slave was then killed by the lions, they experience both terror and joy.\textsuperscript{15} Subsequently, after the lions 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.\textsuperscript{16} The conclusion which Malchus reaches is that they had been safeguarded from all the dangers by their chastity.\textsuperscript{17} This is one of the most profound theological statements in the book as a whole and serves as a strong argument in favour of \textit{castitas}. When the lioness picks up her cub and carries it from the cave, Malchus says that she left her lodging to them\textsuperscript{18} 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.\textsuperscript{19} 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 seem 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 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 \textit{seeing} how their blinded adversaries, who entered too deeply into the dangerous cave, were killed through their lack of \textit{vision}.

Another theme that is linked to the theme of fear is that of \textit{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.\textsuperscript{20} 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 (\textit{iram differre non valens}). Although the cruelty and ferocity of lions are often mentioned in ancient texts,\textsuperscript{21} here the fact that both the slave and his master were killed by the lions is merely stated and not graphically described.\textsuperscript{22}

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.\textsuperscript{23} It sounds like a general statement, but he applies it to their situation by using the imperfect form of the verb (\textit{erat}). The \textit{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.\textsuperscript{24} It is perhaps no coincidence that two main themes of the \textit{Aeneid}, namely that of love, which features so strongly in the first four books, and that of \textit{furor},\textsuperscript{25} 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 (\textit{furor}) through the intervention of the lioness. But they are also saved from the expected fierceness of the lions, 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 \textit{furor}, which overcame Turnus and eventually also Aeneas himself, did not get the better of Malchus and his wife.

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\textsuperscript{12}Vita Malchi 9.9: ‘... si iuvat dominus miseros, habemus salutem; si despicit pecatores, habemus sepulcrum’. Duckworth (1947/1948:29) points out: Jerome’s dependence on the formulation of Seneca (Troades 510–512): ‘Fata s. miseros iuvant, / habes salutem; / fata si vitam negant, / habes sepulcrum.’

\textsuperscript{13}Vita Malchi 9.9: ‘... offertur ad dexteram specus ...’

\textsuperscript{14}Vita Malchi 9: ‘... si iuvat Dominus miseros ...’. The word miseros 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.

\textsuperscript{15}Vita Malchi 9: ‘... lose bone, quid tunc nobis terrors, quid gaudioi?’

\textsuperscript{16}Vita Malchi 9: ‘Quis hic hoc unquam crederet, ut ante os nostrum pro nobis bestia ...’. 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.\textsuperscript{20} 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 (\textit{iram differre non valens}). Although the cruelty and ferocity of lions are often mentioned in ancient texts,\textsuperscript{21} here the fact that both the slave and his master were killed by the lions is merely stated and not graphically described.\textsuperscript{22}

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\textsuperscript{20}Vita Malchi 9.1: ‘Statimque mens malit praesagia, putare dominum meditari ...’

\textsuperscript{21}For references, see what follows.

\textsuperscript{22}Of the slave: ‘... leonem invassisse hominem et gutture sufocato cruentum intohe.’ And of the master: ‘... a fera tentus est, ...’

\textsuperscript{23}Vita Malchi 9.9: ‘Subito autem illo metu similis ante oculos noscitur versanatur interitus, nisi quod tuthus erat leonis rabiem quam iram hominum sustinere.’ Compare also similar comparisons between man and lion in Proverbs 19:12 ‘scuit fremiens leonis ita et regis ira et scit ros super herbam ita bilatias eius’ and 20:2 ‘scit rugitus leonis ita terror regis qui provocat eum peccat in animam suam’. Cf. also Camm in prophetas minores, In Amos, lib. 1, cap. 3, l. 292: ‘... diximus illum artis suae usum esse sermonibus, ut quaia pridem gregum nihil territorios leones cognoverat, iram domini leonibus compararet’ (emphasis added by authors).

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

\textsuperscript{25}There are a number of ‘lion passages’ in the later books of the \textit{Aeneid} in which different warriors are compared to lions and their ferocity is most of the time the

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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. 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 lion’s 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 lionness 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 lion’s den and are immediately killed. 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.’ As previously mentioned, Malchus and his wife’s safety is ascribed to their chastity. 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 cruelty towards Malchus and his wife, although she did kill their pursuers. Nothing is said about the sexual nature of the lions 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. 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, all

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 …’; Transl.: gentiles feminae, i.e. the womb, Terr. Anim. 19: ‘… 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 lions.

28. Daniel 6:23 ‘… quia coram eo iustitia inventa est in me sed et coram te, rex, dictum non feci.’ Cf. also Comm in Danielem, lib. 2, cap. 6, l. 391: ‘non leonem feras immutata est sed ritus eorum, et rabies conclusa est ab angelo, et idiocha clausa: quia prophetae bona opera praeuenta, ut non tam grata liberationis sit quam iustitiae retributio’ (emphasis added by authors).

29. See footnote 28.

30. In Hieremiam prophetam, lib. 1, CSEL 54, 1. 25: ‘aeter leonem et saevissimam bestiam vitare non possimus, nisi agamus paenitentiam et ad dominum convertamur non solum mente, sed et opere.’

31. Comm in Danielem, lib. 2, cap. 7, l. 464: ‘regnum Babylonis propter saevitiam et crudelitatem, sive propter luxuriam et vitam libidi servientem, non leo sed leonem appellatur – quod enim hi, qui de bestiarum scripserunt naturae: leonem esse fieri, maxime si catulus nutratur, et semper gestire ad coitum; …’

32. Vita Malchi 9.4: ‘… et quasi clamante domino non audae loqui.’ 9.6: ‘… vox per antrum sonat: Exite, furciferi; exite, morituri …’ 9.8: ‘… et clamore rabido servi increpans sacrodam …’

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.’
The same fate befalls his master, who shortly afterwards enters the cave, ‘shouting...
finds it difficult to speak when he has to recount this fearful
relating the story of his life to Jerome, mentions that he still
had is substantiated when the character Malchus, whilst
pictured
confident
...'
immediately
fugitives experienced (already noted previously):
And,
anticipating
trouble, we thought that our master
planning to kill us...
...'
'We were afraid and realised
that we had been betrayed by our tracks in the sand...
...'
'tive
were scared of poisonous animals ...
...'
We were thinking the following ...
...'
'Can you imagine how we felt, how terrified
we were...
...'
'what terror, what joy did we experience at that
moment!..
...'
'We were terrified to death ...
...'
'But we were not confident enough ...
...'
'Whenever we considered going out, we
pictured ourselves running into the lioness again.

Without doubt, 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):
And,
immediately
anticipating
trouble, we thought that our master
planning to kill us...
...'
'We were afraid and realised
that we had been betrayed by our tracks in the sand...
...'
'tive
were scared of poisonous animals ...
...'
We were thinking the following ...
...'
'Can you imagine how we felt, how terrified
we were...
...'
'what terror, what joy did we experience at that
moment!..
...'
'We were terrified to death ...
...'
'But we were not confident enough ...
...'
'Whenever we considered going out, we
pictured ourselves running into the lioness again.

Without doubt, the purpose of these descriptions was to increase the
dramatic effect of the story. The emotional effect the episode had
was 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

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.
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. 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

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 mensa mali praesago putare...

37. Dumque timemus et vestigii per arenas nos proditos intelligimus...

38. Timente venenata animalia...

39. Illudque nobiscum reputantes...

40. Quid putas nobis fuisse animi, quid terroris, cum ante spectum hauru procul
starent dominus et conservus et vestigio indice iam ad latebras pervenissent?

41. Quid tunc nobis terroris, quid gaudiui fuit!

42. Pavemus intrinsecus ...

43. Neque tamen satis creduli ...

44. Exgredi cogitantes illius nobis semper figuramus occurrum.

45. ’Rurus cum labore et timore lingua balbuti, et quasi clamante domino non audio laequ.’

46. Haefeli (1968:50) describes rhetorical questions as one of the literary tropes
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).

47. ‘Quid putas nobis fuisse animi, quid terroris, cum ante spectum hauru 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. ‘Iesus bone, quid tunc nobis terroris, quid gaudiui fuit’

49. ‘Quis hoc unquam crederet, ut ante os nostrum pro nobis bestia dimicare?’

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. ‘Quil cuius uideret illum moras facere, suspicius duos uni resistere sed et iram
differre non valent, scit tenebat gladium, ad speluncam venit...’

52. ‘...et clamore rabido servi increpan sociam...’
some snare.\textsuperscript{50} 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 praesega 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 progresientes, ne, dum mortem (A) fugimus (B), incurramus (B) in mortem (A), illudque nobiscum reputantes: si iuvat (C) dominus miseros (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 parallellism 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 uxorquam credaret (A), ut ante (B) os nostrum (C) pro (B) nobis (C) bestia dimicare (A)?’ The subjunctive verbs ‘crederet’ and ‘dimicaret’, the prepositions ‘ante’ and ‘pro’, and the pronouns ‘nostrum’ and ‘nobilis’, 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 lions: 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) rahibem (B) quam iram (B) hominum (A) sustineré’). 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 lionsess, her cub, and the two corporses 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.\textsuperscript{54} They owe their preservation to their chastity and this is underscored by rhetorical devices: ‘Pavenus intrinsecus et ne movere quidem nos ausi praestolamur eventum rei inter tanta pericula, pudicitiae tantum conscientia pro muro saepi.’ 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 ‘pudicitiae 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, we told that the two fugitives first notice the two pursuers riding on camels ‘dimly in the distance’ (‘dubio aspecto procul’) but they realise that their footsteps (‘vestigia’) 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.\textsuperscript{55} When they become aware of their persecution, they felt that the sun was turning dark. They fled into a cave, which is

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\textsuperscript{50}On this account she left the cave, thereby giving the two fugitives a safe haven.

\textsuperscript{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.’

\textsuperscript{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 lionness 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’, there is an echo of the Angel of the Lord standing before the ass of Balaam in Numbers 22:22 and 31. 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 (Gen 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.

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 castititas.

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.
- In both episodes, life and death are mentioned repeatedly.
- The anger of the owner with his drawn sword is prominent in both paragraphs.
- Whilst tristitia is mentioned twice in paragraph 6, the emotions of fear and joy are mentioned repeatedly in paragraph 9.
- 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.
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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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