

Three Love Stories, Three Caves, Three Suicides

Aeneas and Dido, Pyramus and Thisbe, Malchus and His 'Wife'

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Summary

In her commentary on Jerome's *Vita Malchi*, in the section called 'Literary form and texture' Gray discusses the existing literature on which Jerome drew in composing *Vita Malchi*. She provides a detailed account of the sources and possible influences on Jerome under the headings Christian literature, biblical quotations and allusions, and secular literature. In a previous article, I have indicated multiple references and allusions to both classical sources and the Bible in this work of St Jerome. In this article the focus falls on a possible allusion to the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, a source which has not previously been considered amongst the possible influences on *Vita Malchi*. The love stories of Aeneas and Dido and Pyramus and Thisbe are compared to and contrasted with the story of Malchus and his 'wife'.

Keywords

Jerome – Life of Malchus – Pyramus and Thisbe

In her commentary on *Vita Malchi*, in the section called 'Literary form and texture', Gray discusses the existing literature on which Jerome drew in composing *Vita Malchi*.¹ She provides a detailed account of the sources and possible influences on Jerome under the headings of Christian literature, biblical

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1 C. Gray, *Jerome: Vita Malchi. Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary* (OCM), Oxford, 2015, pp. 15-42.

quotations and allusions, and secular literature. In agreement with many scholars before her,² Gray recognises the importance of the novelistic elements, but states that this work does not belong to one specific genre.³ Weingarten says of *Vita Malchi* that “the story has been written up in the form of a new literary creation” in which he makes use of both biblical and classical models, while also using contemporary local material from Ammianus and the Babylonian Talmud.⁴ There are a considerable number of references and allusions to both classical sources and the Bible in Jerome’s *Vita Malchi* and the function of many of these references and allusions has been dealt with in a previous article.⁵ The following classical sources have been identified, but none of them is mentioned by name in the work itself:⁶ Virgil,

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- 2 See e.g. M. Fuhrmann, *Die Mönchsgeschichten des Hieronymus*, in: *Christianisme et forms littéraires de l'antiquité*, Geneva, 1977, pp. 41-99, at p. 64: “Die *Vita Malchi* ist überhaupt dem Roman verpflichtet: in der Erzähltechnik, in der Zeichnung des Helden und vor allem in der Struktur und den Motiven der Handlung; man kann sie geradezu als eine Übertragung des Liebesromans in das Mönchsmilieu bezeichnen.”; T. Adamik, “The Influence of the Apocryphal Acts on Jerome’s Lives of Saints,” in: *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, ed. by J.N. Bremmer (Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, 1), Kampen, 1995, pp. 171-182; H. Kech, *Hagiographie als Christliche Unterhaltungsliteratur*, Göttingen, 1977, p. 93; and S. Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography,” in: *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. by T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (TCH, 31), Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2000, pp. 110-138, at p. 123.
- 3 Gray, *Jerome: Vita Malchi*, p.15: “It is clear from my analysis that the *VM* does not emulate one single piece of writing or belong to a strictly circumscribed genre” and “The attempt to separate out possible influences has illustrated some fundamental connections between genres as diverse as epic, comedy, novel and biography.”
- 4 S. Weingarten, *The Saint’s Saints: Hagiography and Geography in Jerome* (AJEC, 58), Leiden, 2005, p. 165.
- 5 J.P.K. Kritzinger, “The Use of Comparison and Contrast in Shaping the Identity of a Desert Monk,” in: *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium. Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen*, ed. by G.D. Dunn and W. Mayer (SuppVC, 132), Leiden–Boston, 2015, pp. 208-224.
- 6 Cf. Fuhrmann, *Die Mönchsgeschichten*, p. 74: “Hieronymus hat sich ausserdem erlaubt, heidnische Autoren ins Feld zu führen dieser Verlockung hat er nur in seinem hagiographischen Erstling so offennachgegeben, während er sich in der *Vita Malchi* under *Vita Hilarionis* mit Anspielungen begnügte, die nur der Kundige bemerkt.”

Aeneid 1.218; 2.204; 4.165-172;⁷ 4.402-407;⁸ and 10.843; Seneca, *Troades* 510-512;⁹ and pseudo-Quintilian, *Declamationes maiores* 13.2.

There are numerous references and allusions (some more obvious than other) to biblical passages: Genesis 3:5; 18:11, 29:23-30; 30:4-9; Exodus 2:15-22; Proverbs 6:6-8;¹⁰ 26:11; 30:25; Daniel 6:16-24;¹¹ Matthew 14:4; Luke 1:5; 9:24, 62; 14:26; John 10:12; Acts 4:32; 5:1-11; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22-23; Titus 2:9-10;¹² and 2 Peter 2:22.

In this article the focus falls on a possible allusion to the story of Pyramus and Thisbe,¹³ a source which has not previously been considered amongst the possible influences on *Vita Malchi*. The love stories of Aeneas and Dido¹⁴ and Pyramus and Thisbe are compared and contrasted with the story of Malchus and his 'wife'.

7 A. de Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'Antiquité, 1: Le monachisme latin de l'itinéraire d'Égérie à l'éloge funèbre de Népotien (384-396)* (Patrimoine Christianisme), Paris, 1993, p. 91, notes the allusion to the cave episode of Dido and Aeneas, but Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, pp. 173-174, provides a more detailed and very useful discussion of this passage.

8 S. Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics: A Study on the Apologists, Jerome, and Other Christian Writers* (Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 62/Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, 6), Göteborg, 1958, p. 118, has also pointed out similarities between Jerome's description of the ants and an ant scene following the cave episode in *Aeneid* 4. See Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, p. 173, for details.

9 G.E. Duckworth, "Classical Echoes in St. Jerome's Life of Malchus," *CB*, 24 (1947/1948), pp. 28-29, at p. 29, pointed out Jerome's dependence on the formulation of Seneca, *Troades* 510-512: "Fata si miseros iuvant, | habes salutem; | fata si vitam negant, | habes sepulchrum."

10 The reference to Solomon in Jerome, *VM* 7.3; *Jérôme. Trois Vies de moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*, ed. by P. Leclerc, E.M. Morales, and A. de Vogüé (SC, 508), Paris, 2007, 202, is the only direct reference to a specific author: "... unde recordatus Salomonis, ad formicae solertiam nos mittentis, et pigras mentes sub tali exemplo suscitantis ..."

11 In J.P.K. Kritzinger and P.J. Botha, "The Significance of the Second Cave Episode in the *Vita Malchi*," *HTS Theologise Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1) (2014), pp. 1-8 (doi:10.4102/hts.v70i1.2004), it is argued that there exists a strong possibility that Jerome had the Daniel narrative as an intertext in mind when he wrote *Vita Malchi*.

12 The reference in Jerome, *VM* 6.2; SC, 508.196: "... sciebam – enim Apostolum praecepisse, dominis sic quasi Deo fideliter seruiendum – ..." to the apostle's command to serve your master loyally is not specific and could refer to three different biblical passages, but with the word *apostolum*, he clearly refers to St Paul.

13 Ovid, *Met.* 4.55-92.

14 Virgil, *Aen.* 4.

I first provide short summaries and shall then proceed with a comparison between the three stories.

1 The Story of Aeneas and Dido

Virgil relates the famous love story of Aeneas, the Trojan prince, and Dido, the Carthaginian queen, in the fourth book of *Aeneid*. After the sack of Troy, on his way to Italy where he was destined to found Rome, Aeneas and his men land in Carthage, where they are welcomed by Queen Dido. Although hesitant at first, she falls in love with Aeneas. Juno sees Dido's love for Aeneas as a way of keeping Aeneas from fulfilling his destiny. She convinces Aeneas' mother, the goddess Venus, to assist her in finding a way to unite them in marriage. One day while they are hunting, a thunder storm, arranged by Juno, breaks out and forced the hunting parties to seek shelter. Dido and Aeneas end up alone in a cave, where they make love. Dido now considers their relationship as a marriage, but for Aeneas it is still a love affair. When Jupiter realises what is happening with the two of them, he sends Mercury to remind Aeneas of his divine calling. Aeneas prepares to leave Carthage and when confronted by Dido, he informs her that he has no choice but to obey the will of the gods. The story comes to a tragic end when Aeneas and his men sail away, since Dido commits suicide after cursing him and his descendants.

2 The Story of Pyramus and Thisbe

The love story of Pyramus and Thisbe is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4:55-92. A young man and a beautiful young girl, who are still living with their parents in the city of Babylon, fall in love but their fathers do not approve of their relationship. The two families are neighbours and their houses share a common wall in which the lovers discover a thin crack through which they share their love messages. One day while sitting at the different sides of the wall, they decide to escape the guards, leave the city and meet each other after dark at the grave of Ninus under a mulberry tree. Thisbe arrives first at the said place, but when she notices a lioness fresh from the kill, she flees into a dark cave, leaving her veil behind. The lioness after having quenched her thirst, comes across the veil and rips it apart. When Pyramus arrives, sees the tracks of the lion and Thisbe's veil, he assumes that she was killed and commits suicide by thrusting his sword into his belly. Thisbe returns and realising what has happened, kills herself with the same sword. Before she dies she appeals to their

parents and the gods to allow them to be buried in the same tomb and to be together at last. The story ends with the statement that her requests were granted by the gods and their parents.

3 The Story of Malchus and His 'Wife'

When his parents tried to force him into marriage, Malchus left his hometown Nisibis to join a group of monks in the desert of Chalcis. Many years later, when he got the news that his father had died, he decided to leave the monastery and return home to claim his inheritance. On his way home he and his fellow travellers are taken into captivity by Saracens. Being forced into marriage with a fellow captive, (as reward for his loyal service to his owners), Malchus and the woman, who became separated from her husband when she was taken captive, decided to live in chastity and only pretend that they were living as a married couple. Malchus eventually got tired of his captivity and after he informed his companion of his escape plan, she joined him. When their pursuers caught up with them, they fled into a cave and after being saved by a lioness, which killed both pursuers, they got away unharmed and arrived safely at a Roman camp. Malchus subsequently joined a group of monks again and 'his wife' was entrusted to a group of virgins. They finally settled in Maronia where they spent their last years in chaste companionship.

4 Comparison of Three Stories

Important features of the three narratives are now presented in table format in order to point out similarities and differences:

| Virgil: Aeneas and Dido (<i>Aen.</i> 4) | Ovid: Pyramus and Thisbe (<i>Met.</i> 4.55-166) | Jerome: Malchus and his 'wife' (<i>Vita Malchi</i>) |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Aeneas: He is a Trojan hero. He was married previously, but his wife got lost when they fled from Troy.</p> <p>Dido: Often referred to as Dido Sidonia, she was the daughter of Belus, a king of Tyre. Dido was married to Sychaeus but he was killed by her brother. She made a</p> | <p>Pyramus and Thisbe: They are both from Babylon, but we do not know much more about them.</p> | <p>Malchus: He is of Syrian descent. His name means king.</p> <p>His 'wife': was married, but she and her husband were separated when captured and sold into slavery to different owners. She remains anonymous.</p> |

Virgil: Aeneas and Dido
(*Aen.* 4)

Ovid: Pyramus and Thisbe
(*Met.* 4.55-166)

Jerome: Malchus and his 'wife'
(*Vita Malchi*)

promise to Sychaeus that she would never marry again.

Mother of Aeneas, Venus (and Iuno) played a decisive role in making them fall in love. Iuno hopes it will stop Aeneas from fulfilling his mission to found a new Troy.

Parents/fathers of Pyramus and Thisbe forbade their relationship, but no reason is given. Their love grows despite the disapproval of their parents.

Parents of Malchus tried to force him into marriage, because he was the only child and heir.

Married?:

According to Dido they are married; the cave episode is described as a wedding scene and she no longer considers the relationship as a secret love affair (*furtium amorem*) but as a marriage (*coniugium uocat*).

Unmarried:

They wish to get married; but because of their fathers' prohibition they have a secret affair.

Married? (*Contubernium*):

Jerome asks about the nature of their relationship and the story explains how it happened that they are living together.

According to Aeneas it is just a love affair; there was no official ceremony.

They desire to be united and to have full bodily contact.

Malchus never saw her naked and never touched her.

Escapes:

1. Aeneas escapes from a burning Troy.
2. Aeneas, reminded of his mission by Mercury, decides to leave Carthage without Dido.

After this scene, there is a description of ants^a.

Escape:

Pyramus and Thisbe decide together to escape from their parents' house and leave the city at night.

Escapes:

- 1 Malchus leaves his parents' house to join a monastery.
2. He leaves the monastery to return to his family after his father's death.
3. He escapes from slavery; his 'wife' joins him; they leave in the evening. He is encouraged by a colony of ants, the description of which shows similarities with the ant scene in *Aeneid*.

Cave episode:

They flee into a cave to escape a thunderstorm – implied consummation of the marriage.

Cave episode:

Thisbe flees into a cave to escape from a lioness.

Cave episode(s):

1. Live together in a cave but in chastity.
2. Flee from their owner into a cave, where a lioness lives.

Virgil: Aeneas and Dido
(*Aen.* 4)

Ovid: Pyramus and Thisbe
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Role of the lion:

A lion is mentioned in the passage preceding the cave episode, but doesn't play an important role. Aeneas' son, Ascanius wishes that they would come across a lion during the hunt. Here a lion would add excitement to the hunting experience.

Role of the lioness:

She plays an important part. Thisbe flees into the cave when she saw the lion. Assuming that Thisbe has been killed by the lioness, Pyramus addresses the lions to tear his body apart before he commits suicide.

Role of the lioness (and her cub):

They play an important role in protecting Malchus and his wife from their owner and his helper. Malchus and his wife are also terrified by the presence of the lioness.

Suicide of Dido:

Dido uses Aeneas' sword to kill herself because she cannot live with the humiliation and disgrace.

Suicides of Pyramus and Thisbe:

Pyramus commits suicide with his sword, because he is convinced that Thisbe has been killed by a lion. Thisbe then uses Pyramus' sword to commit suicide.

Suicidal Threats of Malchus and his wife

Malchus threatens to commit suicide to preserve his chastity. The woman also wants to use the same sword which Malchus has threatened to kill himself with. She convinces him to abandon his plan and live with her in a chaste relationship.

Outcome:

Aeneas later met Dido in Hades, but she doesn't want to see or talk to him.

Aeneas is blamed for his betrayal and Dido for the breaking of her vows and for her '*furor*'.

Faithless passion leads to war and shameful suicide.

Outcome:

After their suicides, they are buried together.

The couple could possibly be commended for their love for which they are willing to die, but Pyramus is blamed for arriving too late. Dido also blames herself as being the cause of Pyramus' death.

Faithful love and desire lead to fateful premature deaths.

Outcome:

After spending several years in separate monasteries, Malchus and his wife live together in chaste '*contubernium*'.

Their mutual commitment to chastity enables them to withstand all temptations and saves their lives, literally and spiritually.

Preservation of chastity leads to a holy life of devotion and old age.^b

a See Kritzinger, "The Use of Comparison and Contrast," pp. 217-218, for a fuller description of the function of the ant passages.

b Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, pp. 173-174, draws attention to the different outcomes of the cave encounters of the two pairs: "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. Malchus, of course, will go to Heaven: Aeneas later meets Dido in Hades."

5 Further Remarks about the Three Narratives

The issues of marriage, remarriage, and adultery play an important role in these narratives. Dido feels that she has betrayed Sychaeus, because she has broken the vow which she made not to marry again. She also feels betrayed by Aeneas, who does not consider their union as a marriage. Pyramus and Thisbe cannot wait to get married but their parents would not allow them. But it is not only about marriage; the issue of remarriage is addressed in two of the three narratives.¹⁵ Malchus told his owner that he is not allowed to take a married woman as his wife, because according to his religion such a marriage would constitute adultery.¹⁶

If we compare Malchus' story with the love romances mentioned earlier, e.g. Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*, we notice that the plots of these novels are very complicated in comparison with the three stories we have discussed. There are certainly striking correspondences with Hellenistic novels, but it seems as if his main inspiration was the biblical and Latin classical sources.

It is important to look for similarities between the different narratives, but the differences are often just as significant or even more important. I mention a few examples. The desire of Pyramus and Thisbe to meet with their complete bodies or just be able to kiss each other stands in stark contrast with Malchus' statement that he never saw his wife naked or touched her body. The fact that the parents of Pyramus and Thisbe forbade their relationship has the same effect as the actions of Malchus' parents who tried to force him into marriage – Pyramus and Thisbe as well as Malchus decide to disobey their parents and run away.

If we can use a metaphor to describe the similarities and differences between the three love stories, we may say that the different authors had more or less the same ingredients but they used different recipes. It almost seems as if Jerome wanted to 'improve' on the recipes of the classical authors and to point out that his end product was much better than theirs. He created, as it were, a Christian version of the classical stories, but replaced the erotic love 'ingredient' of the the classical stories with his idea of Christian brotherly love, which

15 Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, p. 174: "Jerome also uses the fate of Dido as part of his argument against remarriage in his letter to Geruchia (ep. 123): quoting Aen.IV.548-552, he writes: '*proponis mihi gaudia nuptiarum; ego tibi opponam pyram, gladium, incendium.*'"

16 Cf. also Kritzinger, "The Use of Comparison and Contrast," p. 215: "There is no direct allusion to John the Baptist in paragraph 6.2 and it might be difficult to prove that Jerome had John in mind when he wrote this, but the scenario between Malchus and his owner narrated here shows certain correspondences with the confrontation between Herod and John the Baptist, as described in Matt 14:3-4 and Mark 6:17-18."

is expressed in the chastity of Malchus and his 'wife', in order to align the inherited stories with Christian and, more specific, ascetic values. Virgil's story ends with the fury of Dido who curses Aeneas, wishing that he had rather never reached the shores of Carthage and then commits suicide, because she cannot live with the disgrace and humiliation. Ovid's story ends in the tragic suicidal deaths of two beautiful young people. Their loving and faithful relationship has a fatal ending, with the only positive note the fact that they are finally united, even if it only means that their ashes are contained in the same urn. Jerome's story has a happy ending and after their 'forced marriage' almost resulted in a double suicide, their mutual decision to live together in chastity not only saves their lives, but proves to be the reason why they still live together at an advanced age as holy people who please God.¹⁷

It is difficult to prove that Jerome had the Pyramus and Thisbe narrative in mind when he wrote *Vita Malchi*, because there are no direct references to the author or the work or the specific story. There are no specific verbal resonances, only the basic elements discussed above which the Pyramus and Thisbe story shares with the other two stories. Before de Vogüé¹⁸ has noted the parallel between the cave scenes of Aeneas and Malchus, the other structural parallels with book 4 of *Aeneid* were not so easy to identify either, but it now seems that it plays an important role in the interpretation of the *uita*. Weingarten¹⁹ regards the first cave scene as the central passage of the *uita*,²⁰ and the fact that it alludes to the *Aeneid* narrative contributes largely to the interpretation of the work as a whole. Fuhrmann states that Jerome has still made use of pagan classical sources in *Vitae Malchi* and *Hilarionis*, but he does not make it explicit by referencing them. Being under attack from people who criticized him for his use of the pagan classics, Jerome seems to be cautious to refer to the work of a pagan love poet in this work which mainly deals with the theme of chastity.²¹

17 Jerome, *VM* 2.3; SC, 508.188: "De his cum curiose ab accolis quaererem, quaenam esset eorum copula: matrimonii, sanguinis an spiritus; omnes uoce consona, sanctos et Deo placitos, et mira nescio quae respondebant."

18 Cf. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, p. 171, n. 20, for the full details of de Vogüé.

19 Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, p. 171: "The structural parallels are considerable, for Jerome creates a series of antitheses opposed one by one to the elements of the *Aeneid* narrative."

20 Cf. Kritzinger and Botha, "The Significance of the Second Cave Episode," p. 8: "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."

21 Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, p. 171, mentions another plausible reason for the lack of direct citations from Latin literature: "The *vita Malchi*, Jerome tells us, is based on the

Jerome certainly knew the story of Pyramus and Thisbe and he also quotes a whole sentence from *Metamorphoses* 4.57-58 in his commentary on Hosea: And this man's wife, Semiramis, about whom many wonderful things are told, built the walls of Babylon. And the well-known poet testifies about her when he says: which city Semiramis is said to have surrounded with walls of brick long ago."²² This line comes from the beginning of the story and is as far as I know the only line of Ovid, quoted by Jerome.²³ The husband of Semiramis to whom he refers here is Ninus, the founder of Nineveh, at whose grave Pyramus and Thisbe plan to meet.

In the following lines of the same passage of the Hosea commentary, Jerome also refers to Aeneas and Dido.²⁴ He discusses the city of Babylon and their god Baal and he also mentions the book of Daniel in the same context. It might perhaps be a coincidence that Jerome mentions Aeneas and Dido (and quote a line from *Aeneid* 1.729), quotes a line from the Pyramus and Thisbe story and refers to a passage in Daniel – three sources which I think he alludes to in *Vita Malchi*. The one thing which these stories have in common is the fact that they have something to do with the East and the gods of the East. Pyramus and Thisbe lived in Babylon, Daniel was in exile there and Dido originally came from Tyre. The main characters of *Vita Malchi* are also from Syria and it is specifically mentioned that Jerome met them there when he was in Syria as a young man.

Syrian Malchus' own account: perhaps it is because of this that there are no direct citations from Latin literature which might look incongruous."

- 22 Jerome, *Commentariorum in Osee Prophetam* 1.2.16-17; *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera*, 1, *Opera exegetica*, 6, ed. by M. Adriaen (CCL, 76), Turnhout, 1969, p. 28: "Huius uxor Semiramis, de qua multa et miranda referuntur, muros Babylonis exstruxit. De qua insignis poeta testatur dicens: quam dicitur olim | Coctilibus maris cinxisse Semiramis urbem."
- 23 Cf. Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics*, p. 283: "The *Metamorphoses* are mentioned, one line (IV.57 sq.) quoted and one passage (I.111 sq.) paraphrased. To these instances noticed already by Lübeck (pp. 191 sq.) I can only add **In Eccles.* p.442~ *Met.* I. 19-20 (p.129)."
- 24 Jerome, *Commentariorum in Osee Prophetam* 1.2.16-17; CCL 76.28: "Hic aduersus Zoroastrem magnum, regem Bactrianorum, forti certamine dimicauit; et in tantam peruenit gloriam, ut patrem suum Belum referret in Deum, qui Hebraice dicitur Bel et in multis prophetis, maximeque in Daniele iuxta. Theodotionem, sub idolo Babylonis, hoc appellatur nomine. Hunc Sidonii et Phoenices appellant Baal; eadem enim inter beth et lamed litteras consonantes, ain uocalis littera ponitur, quae iuxta linguae illius proprietatem nunc Beel, nunc Baal legitur. **Vnde et Dido Sidonia regii generis, cum Aeneam suscepisset hospitio**, hac patera Ioui uina delibat, qua *Belus et omnes a Belo soliti*." (my bold emphasis).

The remarkable similarities (and differences) between the three 'love stories' have been indicated and have led the author to the conclusion that *Vita Malchi* is presented as a Christian 'love story' with a happy ending – an alternative to the tragic love stories of Virgil and Ovid. I am convinced that Jerome had not only used the love story of Dido and Aeneas as intertext or countertext,²⁵ but that he also had the Pyramus and Thisbe story in mind when he wrote *Vita Malchi*.

25 Here I strongly agree with Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, p. 171, that "Jerome does use Virgil's pagan poetry to provide an opposing contrast and a countertext against which to construct Malchus, his Christian hero."