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»*Monachum ecclesia peperit postumum*« (Hier., Ep. 66.4.2): Metaphors of Conversion to Asceticism in Jerome's *Letter 66*

»*Monachum ecclesia peperit postumum*« (Hier., Ep. 66.4.2): *Metafore spreobrnjenja k asketskemu življenju v Hieronimovem Pismu 66*

Abstract: Conversions are usually narrated in metaphors. This is also true for the conversions to asceticism present in several of Jerome's letters. This article examines the use of metaphors of conversion in Jerome's *Letter 66* to Pammachius. The addressee's wife, Paulina, is presented as a young mother who died in labour. I will argue that this pregnancy may be read as a transformative metaphor for Pammachius's conversion to asceticism. The choice of this surprising metaphor, changing the relation between Paulina and Pammachius from wife and husband to mother and son, serves several intra- and extratextual functions.

Keywords: Conversion, Metaphor, Jerome, Letters, *Epistula 66*

Povzetek: Spreobrnjenja so ponavadi opisana z metaforami. To velja tudi za spreobrnjenja k asketskemu življenju, ki so navzoča v nekaterih Hieronimovih pismih. Članek obravnava rabo metafor spreobrnjenja v Hieronimovem *Pismu 66*, ki ga je naslovil na Pamahija. Paulina, naslovljenčeva žena, je prikazana kot mlada mati, ki je umrla ob porodu. Predstavljena teza zagovarja idejo, da je to nosečnost mogoče razumeti kot transformativno metaforo za Pamahijevo spreobrnitev k asketskemu življenju. Izbira te presenetljive metafore, ki spreminja odnos med Paulino in Pamahijem iz odnosa žena – mož v odnos mati – sin, je vpeljana z različnimi nameni tako znotraj besedila kakor zunaj njega.

Ključne besede: spreobrnjenje, metafora, Hieronim, pisma, *Pismo 66*

1. Introduction

Conversions to asceticism are pervasive in Jerome's *Letters* and are particularly important in those letters dealing with a beloved person's death. For instance, the narrator announces only to praise the deceased's life after his or her conversion (Hier., *Ep.* 77.2.2). The conversion, almost like the baptism, seems to create a wholly new person. Jerome's own wish to convert to a more devout Christian lifestyle free from sin manifests itself in an early letter: the Lord should save him by calling: »Hieronyme, ueni foras« (4.2.2).¹ This claim is provided by the biblical story of Lazarus's resurrection (John 11:1-46, esp. 43) and is also used in *Letter* 38. There, Jerome describes Blesilla's conversion to asceticism by alluding to the same story: Blesilla was lying in her metaphorical tomb, suffering from a fever, tied up by the bonds of the earthly world when Jesus exclaimed: »Blesilla, exi foras« (38.2.2). She converted to asceticism and recovered from her sickness. In other letters, individual conversions are presented using the metaphors of a survived shipwreck (77.6.1) or a change of clothes (130.5.4).²

Conversion is depicted with metaphors in all these narratives, which is not surprising considering that the very term ‚con-versio‘ is a metaphor. In its literal sense, it means that you turn back and thus denotes a spiritual reversal. Conversion is, although it occurs in earthly life, experienced as a transcendent phenomenon. Visualizing conversion, measurable only by the status of the converted before and after the event, demands the use of metaphors from the immanent domain: »the ‚transcendental‘ (the ‚absent‘ /.../) that religious communication is based on, itself cannot be communicated and therefore must be described using ‚immanent‘ (known, ‚present‘) means« (Krech 2012, 24).³ Metaphors of conversion enable communication about this reconstructed experience. At the same time, how conversions are narrated and which metaphors are chosen has an impact on other people's conversion experiences.⁴ Therefore, the literary use of metaphors not only mirrors conversions that have taken place and creates a way of thinking about this complex phenomenon; it also triggers new perceptions of conversions. As metaphors are always selective,⁵ they shed light on different aspects of conversion. Thus, we can analyze how metaphors shape cultural understandings of conversion, how they conceptualize and systemize realities, and how they model extratextual and extralinguistic acts through imagination.

¹ I quote Jerome's text from Hilberg's CSEL edition.

² Jerome accords great importance to the differences between a worldly Christian and an ascetic lifestyle. He describes the decision to embrace asceticism with the same metaphors that are used elsewhere to describe conversions from one religion to another. Therefore, I decided to use the expression ‚conversion to asceticism‘ in this article.

³ Palmisano (2019) has for instance shown in a recent article how the concept of the fear of God is developed through metaphors in Ben Sira.

⁴ For the idea that metaphors are not only part of language, but also shape thought and action, cf. Lakoff and Johnson 2003.

⁵ Using a metaphor, you select items of the *explanans* as well as of the *explanandum*. These virtual items are actualized in the process of metaphorization. Cf. Black 1954–1955, 287; Le Guern 1973, 19.

2. Jerome, Letter 66: A Case Study

This article focuses on a very original description of conversion to asceticism, the one of Pammachius, which is described in Jerome's *Letter 66*. The occasion for this letter is the death of Pammachius's wife, Paulina. She was a daughter of Jerome's lifelong companion Paula and thus one of Eustochium's sisters. Pammachius was a Roman aristocrat and senator, as well as a friend of Jerome.⁶ After Paulina's early death in 396,⁷ Pammachius converted to Christian asceticism. The way his conversion is described turns out to be crucial for the structure and argumentation of Jerome's *Letter 66*. Therefore, I will first consider the conversion narrative in more detail before turning to the metaphor's textual functions. My analysis will focus on how this conversion metaphor influences the structure of *Letter 66*.

Pammachius's conversion to asceticism is closely linked to Paulina's death. Indeed, she is said to have died in labour. I contend that her being in labour is a metaphorical process instead of the end of a natural pregnancy. The son to whom she gives birth is the ascetic Pammachius. Jerome takes up the conversion-as-rebirth motif but develops it further and thereby alters it. I will show that Paulina's metaphorical pregnancy develops in four steps.

2.1 Introduction of the Conversion Metaphor

First, the metaphor is carefully introduced but is still ambiguous: in Hier., *Ep.* 66.1.2, Paulina is described as a *parturiens rosa*, a »rose coming into flower«, and a *papillatus corymbus*, a »cluster of flowers being in the bud«. The imagery of blooming flowers is a *topos* in obituaries and often stresses that the deceased has died young (Hier., *Ep.* 60.13.1–2; Paul. Nol. *Ep.* 13.6). Jerome continues by developing the floral image,⁸ but striking is the use of *parturiens* and *corymbus*. Both expressions may refer either to a flower or to the description of a woman who is about to give birth or who has just given birth to a child. In the *parturiens rosa*, the metaphor is created by combining the proper meaning of *parturio* to the metaphor of the rose, thus becoming »a rose in labour, a rose giving birth«. While the rose is undoubtedly a flower, the word *corymbus* can either refer to a cluster of flowers, which is the most common and the proper meaning, or that of a nipple which refers to a woman breastfeeding a child. In consequence, both expressions not only portray Paulina as a good woman who died in the prime of life but also as the mother of an infant child: the *parturiens rosa* hints to a pregnant woman, who is about to give birth at the moment of her death; the *papillatus corymbus* presents her as a breastfeeding mother. Besides the possibility of an

⁶ For Paulina, cf. for instance Fürst 2016, 228, and for Pammachius Fürst 2016, 223–224.

⁷ Nautin (1978, 547; 550) also analyses that Jerome wrote and sent his letter to this occasion in 398. Paulinus of Nola wrote his *Letter 13* for the same reason in the winter of 396/7. Fürst (2016, 228) dates Paulina's death to 396 or 397.

⁸ Cf. »Quis parturientem rosam et papillatum corymbum, antequam in calathum fundatur orbis et tota rubentium foliorum pandatur ambitio, immature demessum aequis oculis marcescere uideat?« (Hier., *Ep.* 66.1.2)

actual pregnancy with a miscarriage,⁹ this might also be read metaphorically and already hints at the birth of a metaphorical, spiritual heir.

2.2 Paulina the Mother, Pammachius the Infant Child

This assumption is proved by another, much clearer passage: Jerome presents Pammachius's conversion as a birth; he, therefore, transforms Pammachius the ascetic into a newborn child and Paulina into his mother, who is still alive when he first sees the light of day. She dies shortly afterwards (Hier., *Ep.* 66.3.3):

»quamquam illa inito semel matrimonio nihil aliud diebus ac noctibus cogitavit, nisi ut reddito fructu nuptiarum secundum castimoniam gradum arriperet et, tanti dux femina facti (Verg., *Aen.* 1.364), uirum proposito suo iungeret non relinquens salutis comitem, sed expectans. dumque crebris abortiis et experta fecunditate conceptuum non desperat liberos et sorcus auiditatem maritique tristitiam praeponit inbecillitati suae, passa est aliquid de Rachelis exemplo et pro filio doloris ac dexteræ (cf. Gen. 35:18) uirum desiderii sui peperit heredem.«

»Though indeed she had once entered into marriage, she was only thinking day and night about seizing the second degree of chastity as soon as she should have borne the fruit of her marriage, and inducing as »a female leader in this high venture«, her husband to follow her course, not forsaking her companion in salvation, but waiting for him. She did not give up the hope of having children because she had experienced in many miscarriages that she was not infertile; she prefixed the eagerness of her mother-in-law and the sadness of her husband to her own weakness. Thus, she suffered much as Rachel suffered, although instead of bringing forth, like her, »a son of grief and the honoured,«¹⁰ she bore an heir who was the husband she had been longing for.«

Paulina and Pammachius indeed tried to have descendants, and Jerome's hint at Paulina's pregnancies and miscarriages might depict reality. However, the heir Paulina finally gets does not seem to be a baby since her husband Pammachius is depicted as her heir. The word *uir* is used twice, each time linked to another substantive, respectively *comes* and *heres*. In the first case, it is unambiguously Pammachius who is called *uir*; it is thus unlikely that *uir* describes someone else in the second sentence. Furthermore, if you understand a real *heres*, you would think of a child and not an adult, a meaning *uir* does not take.¹¹ Pammachius is then Paulina's *heres*.¹² This passage suggests that Paulina died after her heir's birth,

⁹ For Paulina's miscarriages, cf. Hier., *Ep.* 66.3.3 and *infra*.

¹⁰ Benjamin is given the name Benoni (*filius doloris*) by Rachel and the name Benjamin (*filius dexteræ*) by his father Jacob (Gen. 35:18).

¹¹ Cf. »Contrasted w.[ith] a child, etc., as implying maturity of age.« (*Oxford Latin Dictionary* 2012, s.v. »*uir*«).

¹² Cf. Hier., *Ep.* 108.4,2 for a similar description: »Paulina /.../ sanctum et admirabilem uirum et propositi

thus after having influenced Pammachius towards asceticism.¹³ According to this passage, Paulina has had ascetic ambitions, which are stressed in this passage by the verb *cogitavit*. She is said to have favoured asceticism long before Pammachius (*salutis comitem /.../ expectans*),¹⁴ which explains why she is described as the mother and Pammachius as her child. At the same time, the verb *cogitavit* also states that, although she might have been in favour of the ascetic life, she had not embraced it: Pammachius as her spiritual heir fulfils these ambitions after her death.¹⁵ Using the verb *peperit* in perfect tense compared to *parturiens* used before highlights a dynamic process, which describes Paulina's transformation from a woman in labour to a woman who has already given birth to her child.

2.3 From a Spiritual Leader to a Physical Mother

Paulina's leading role in the ideal of asceticism is underlined on the one hand using a Virgilian quotation (Verg., *Aen.* 1.364), which in its pretext describes Dido leading a group of Tyrians away from their home country to a new land. On the other hand, her pioneer role is highlighted by comparing her to Rachel, Benjamin's mother, who died in labour (Gen. 35:18). This death functions as the *tertium comparationis* for the two women. However, the comparison only assumes its whole meaning when an heir is born. Jerome draws a parallel between Benjamin, the *filius doloris ac dexteræ*, and Pammachius, the *uir desiderii Paulinae*. He alludes once more to Rachel and twice to the wife of Phineas, Eli's daughter-in-law, who also died in labour while giving birth to Ichabod (1 Sam. 4:19-21).¹⁶ Paulina's comparison to Rachel and the wife of Phineas on the one hand, and Pammachius's association with Benjamin and Ichabod on the other, thus insist on the image of birth: the reader is encouraged to imagine a physical birth. It is thus specific by this comparison that the

et rerum suarum Pammachium reliquit heredem.«

¹³ Shanzer on the contrary maintains that Paulina was probably dead in childbed. But she also underlines Paulina's »consolation that the reformed Pammachius was the offspring she had wished for.« (2009, 100–101; 101, n. 67).

¹⁴ This is presented similarly in another letter of Jerome's (*Hier., Ep.* 77.10.1): »Inter laudes feminae subito mihi Pammachius meus exoritur. Paulina dormit, ut ipse uigilet; praecedit maritum, ut Christo famulum derelinquat. hic heres uxoris et hereditatis alii possessores.«

¹⁵ Cain (2013, 158) understands the quoted paragraph in the way that Pammachius »and Paulina vowed to live together in a state of lifelong marital celibacy, and [that] from that point on, until her death near the end of 396 /.../, Paulina regarded Pammachius as her *heres* in the faith.« (*Hier., Ep.* 66.3.3) Jerome mentions Paulina's *castum /.../ cubile* (*Hier., Ep.* 66.2.1) and her *cubile immaculatum* (*Hier., Ep.* 66.3.2, quotation from Heb. 13:4). But 'chaste' does not absolutely refer to complete sexual renunciation, as states Courtray: »la chasteté n'est pas l'abstention de toute activité sexuelle. /.../ La chasteté peut être définie plus justement comme un comportement ordonné de la sexualité, comme une maîtrise qui coordonne le corps, l'esprit et l'âme dans une unité de tout l'être, comme un respect également de son état de vie.« (2009, 442) The quoted passage of Jerome's shows on the contrary that Paulina and Pammachius tried to have children until her death as is shown by the expressions *non desperat liberos* and *reddito fructu*. Cf. also van 't Westeinde 2017, 20–21. Paul. Nol., *Ep.* 13.3 also says that Pammachius has turned to asceticism only after Paulina's death.

¹⁶ The narrator insists on the virtuousness and faith of these women and their sons: *De prima* [i.e. Rachel] *Beniamin, hoc est, filius uirtutis ac dexteræ, de secunda* [i.e. wife of Phineas] *inclitus sacerdos dei ex arcae cognomine nascitur* [i.e. Ichabod]. (*Hier., Ep.* 66.4.1).

metaphorical words describing conversion as birth are to be taken in their proper and not transferred meaning. This makes this metaphor of conversion grotesque since, according to worldly rules, Pammachius was Paulina's husband and not her infant son, as is stressed by the double use of the substantive *uir*.

2.4 Returning to ‚Reality‘

Finally, the narrator turns away from the imagery that distorts the relationship between Paulina and Pammachius, but only after alluding one last time to the metaphor of pregnancy and birth. Paulina is enumerated *expressis uerbis* as the third woman who has died under the same circumstances (Hier., *Ep.* 66.4.2):

»Nobis post dormitionem somnumque Paulinae Pammachium monachum ecclesia peperit postumum et patris et coniugis nobilitate patricium, elemosynis diuitem, humilitate sublimem.«

»In our time, after Paulina has fallen asleep and passed away, the Church has born the monk Pammachius, her posthumous son, a patrician by the nobility of his parentage and marriage, rich in alms, and lofty in lowliness.«

While Jerome again insists on the metaphorical birth of Pammachius after Paulina's death, he still introduces a shift here. Paulina's death causes Pammachius's birth and thus his conversion to asceticism. After a long process, the final conversion to asceticism is described through the metaphor of birth as a violent process, in which the mother renounces her own life to give life to her son's ascetic life. Of course, grammatically, the Church and not Paulina gives birth; but ‚posthumous‘ can only acquire meaning when related to the death of Paulina and not to that of the Church. The vocabulary still corresponds to the imagery of pregnancy, labour, and birth (*peperit*), but since the *ecclesia* is subject to that verb, the image of a physical mother is less striking. As in the other occurrences of the conversion metaphor, death and birth are closely linked in this passage.

In summary, it can be pointed out that in Jerome's letter, Pammachius's conversion to asceticism is described as a metaphorical birth. Pammachius is reborn as an ascetic, and Paulina is presented as the originator of this conversion to asceticism. Presenting Pammachius as Paulina's child, and insisting on this physical image by comparing Paulina to Rachel and the wife of Phineas, seems somehow grotesque as Pammachius was her husband. This metaphor thus asks for our attention. The first and the last step link the real to the metaphorical level, carefully introducing and discontinuing the metaphor. Once the way is paved, Jerome develops his metaphor, not only turning Paulina literally into a mother and Pammachius into an infant but even challenging the reader's imagination with the comparison to women who, according to some Old Testament passages, have physically died in labour. As soon as this metaphor has reached its climax, turning upside down the family's relations, the metaphor is discontinued with a change in subject; it is stressed once more that Pammachius's birth as an ascetic is due to Paulina, but the *ecclesia* becomes subject of the verb *pario*. Therefore, the reader is brought back to the real world: Pammachius is a natural infant in asceticism and needs guidance.

3. The Metaphor's Functions Inside the Letter

For this reason, one may now ask why precisely this conversion metaphor is employed and why it is highlighted by the four steps I have just presented; indeed, other more common metaphors would be conceivable.¹⁷ However, this metaphor serves several purposes inside the text. Therefore, I would like to show how far this metaphor impacts the letter's argumentation, structure, and function.

3.1 Glorification of a Worldly Christian, or: Praising a Sinner

Presenting Paulina as the source of Pammachius's asceticism and many other people's devout faith, Paulina is glorified according to the narrator's ascetic ideal. It seems that Paulina was not the saint whom everyone wanted to praise for her Christian virtues. Consequently, it was necessary to make some detours to glorify her posthumously. Since she did not embrace the ascetic life herself, as shown above, this metaphor presenting her as the origin of other people's conversions is needed to glorify her according to ascetic standards.

Although she was a religious Christian, she did not excel in any particular Christian virtue or action, as the narrator states himself when praising her *temperantia*, her 'moderation'.¹⁸ This argument is supported by the fact that Paulina is never praised on her own,¹⁹ but always together with her family: her mother Paula, her sister Eustochium and her husband Pammachius: true ascetics in the narrator's eyes.²⁰ Before recognizing the conversion metaphor, one might have considered these long explanations about the family's virtues as part of panegyric *res externae*.²¹ One now might ask whether they might be due to the narrator's embarrassment that he has to praise Paulina's mediocrity.²² The glorification of Paulina's family extends the praises on her person.

One might even go further: The narrator hints at Paulina's expensive clothes and jewellery²³ and voluntarily presents Paulina more as a sinner than a saint by high-

¹⁷ One may for example think about metaphors that present the transition from dirt to cleanness, from one place or path to another, from darkness to light, from blindness to strength of vision.

¹⁸ Cf. Hier., *Ep.* 66.3.1–2. Cf. Favez for this thought: »Certes, celle-ci avait été une croyante sincère, mais /.../ elle avait passé discrète et fervente, tout entière à ses devoirs d'épouse chrétienne, sans que rien l'eût signalée spécialement à l'attention de ses contemporains.« (1937, 27).

¹⁹ The only exception is the flower metaphor in Hier., *Ep.* 66.1.2, which is a *topos* of obituaries; cf. supra.

²⁰ For instance, these four family members are linked to the Stoic cardinal virtues *prudentia*, *iustitia*, *fortitudo*, and *temperantia* in Hier., *Ep.* 66.3.1.

²¹ Jerome talks about the rhetoricians' precepts of praising the deceased ancestors for example in Hier., *Ep.* 60.8.1; 77.2.3.

²² This also seems to be the reason why Jerome emphasizes that Paulina wanted to have descendants only to »produce virgins for Christ (*ut Christo uirgines pareret*).« (Hier., *Ep.* 66.3.3).

²³ Cf. »Ardentes gemmae, quibus ante collum et facies ornabatur, egentium uentres saturant; uestes sericae et aurum in fila lentescens in mollia lanarum uestimenta mutata sunt, quibus repellatur frigus, non quibus nudetur ambitio; deliciarum quondam supellectilem uirtus insumit.« (Hier., *Ep.* 66.5.1) Paulinus of Nola (Paul. Nol., *Ep.* 13.28) also mentions Paulina's valuable clothes and jewelry to contrast them with the poor whom Pammachius feeds with their returns (Shanzer 2009, 101). Cain (2013, 324) understands Jerome's passage in the way that Paulina herself had got rid of her valuable clothes and

lighting Pammachius's posthumous alms as a way of extinguishing Paulina's sins.²⁴ In this context, it is also essential to consider that Jerome refers back to this letter twice, respectively praising Pammachius through positive words and not Paulina.²⁵

Despite these points, the conversion metaphor enables some panegyrics on Paulina in this letter since she is presented as the origin of other people's conversions. Moreover, the metaphor allows for the comparison with two biblical women who died in labour, which elevates Paulina into the biblical realm and thus into the excellent line of God's good servants.

3.2 Praise of Pammachius's Ascetic Actions

Second, the image of a metaphorical birth enables a transition from Paulina's to Pammachius's glorification: Pammachius's new ascetic lifestyle can be praised this way. With this association, Jerome links the *laudes* for Paulina to the *laudes* for Pammachius. The letter is announced as treating the death of a beloved person; the narrator calls himself a *consolator* and announces a *commemoratio*.²⁶ Thus, the reader might expect praises of the deceased. Nevertheless, the praises of the addressee Pammachius are much more important by their content and scale than those of the deceased Paulina. Namely, chapters 4 to 7 glorify Pammachius's efforts to convert more Christians to asceticism (Hier., *Ep.* 66.4.3–66.5.1),²⁷ his alms for the sick and the poor (66.5.2) that function as flowers on Paulina's tomb (66.5.3–4), his indifference about the other senators' opinions when he arrives in his monastic garb in the Senate (66.6.1–2) and his high reputation as ascetic (66.7.1–3). By presenting Pammachius as Paulina's spiritual heir, the glorification of Pammachius reflects on Paulina and makes the transition to Pammachius's praises natural and effortless.

jewelry, but the returns' benefits are mentioned in the context of Pammachius's actions for the poor, which is even clearer in Paulinus of Nola's passage.

²⁴ Cf. »Pammachius noster sanctam fauillam ossaque ueneranda elemosynae balsamis rigat. his pigmentis atque odoribus fouet cineres quiescentes sciens scriptum: »sicut aqua extinguet ignem, sic elemosyna peccata« (*Eccli. 3:30).« (Hier., *Ep.* 66.5.3) Cf. Shanzer's explication of this passage: »this may be the first explicitly documented example of *post mortem* alms offered by another (i.e. surrogate alms) to extinguish the sins of one deceased.« (2009, 100) Cf. Paul. Nol., *Ep.* 13.3; 13.11. This is implicitly stated in Hier., *Ep.* 66.5.4: »Gaudet huiusce modi filiae mater herede.« Shanzer explains that »the daughter who inherits is the *ecclesia pauperum*« (2009, 99, n. 56). Paulina must then be the *mater* who rejoices about the alms.

²⁵ Cf. »Ante hoc ferme biennium Pammachio meo pro subita peregrinatione Paulinae breuem epistulam dedi erubescens ad disertissimum uirum plura loqui et ei sua ingerere, ne non tam consolari amicum uiderer, quam stulta iactantia docere perfectum.« (Hier., *Ep.* 77.1.1) »Paulinam, quae sanctum et admirabilem uirum et propositi et rerum suarum Pammachium reliquit heredem, ad quem super obitu eius paruam libellum edidimus.« (Hier., *Ep.* 108.4.2) Both *epistula* and *libellus* refer to Hier., *Ep.* 66.

²⁶ Cf. »Ita et ego, serus consolator, qui inportune per biennium tacui, uereor, ne nunc inportunus loquar et adtractans uulnus pectoris tui, quod tempore et ratione curatum est, commemoratione exulcerem.« (Hier., *Ep.* 66.1.1)

²⁷ Ambrose (*Patr.* 12.57) refers to Rachel's death and to the name *filii doloris*' when he links the apostle Paul to his ancestor Benjamin and describes the former's efforts to convert his contemporaries to Christianity. We may here see a parallel to Pammachius's efforts to move his contemporaries to an ascetic Christian life.

3.3 Paving the Way for Pammachius's Exhortations

Third, depicting Pammachius's ascetic actions as Paulina's ambitions that she could not complete in her lifetime means exhorting and encouraging Pammachius to continue this way of life. As her posthumous heir, he should continue walking on the path she had decided on before her death. The rest of the letter includes a long exhortatory part, which is not, as might be expected in a letter written on the occasion of a death, on managing grief, but rather on the ascetic lifestyle.²⁸ This might also be the reason why the narrator is insisting a lot on Paulina's family: He shows his addressee that he can follow the exemplary lives of Paula and Eustochium. This might encourage and exhort Pammachius (and other readers) to asceticism since Paula and Eustochium are presented as *exempla* for this lifestyle. It perfectly fits the image of the infant ascetic, as Pammachius is depicted in the conversion metaphor, who still must be provided with sustenance for his faith and religious lifestyle.²⁹ These nourishing instructions are provided by Jerome's letter.

3.4 A Broader Audience and a Wider Impact

Fourth, the metaphor transforms traditional aristocratic values, such as wealth and male heirs, into Christian ascetic ones, such as almsgiving and producing children in the faith (Hier., *Ep.* 66.4.3):

»Tales Paulina morte sua nobis liberos edidit, quos uiuens cupiuerat possidere. ›Laetare, sterilis, quae non paris, erumpe et clama, quae non parituris« (Gal. 4:27; Is. 54:1), quoniam, quot Romae pauperes sunt, tot filios repente genuisti.«

»These are the children that Paulina has given birth to for us in her death, whom she had desired to have in her lifetime. ›Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour!«,³⁰ because you have brought forth all of a sudden as many sons as there are poor people in Rome.«

This passage explains that the new ascetic ideal subverts the old aristocratic wish of descendants. Spiritual children replace those related by blood; inheritance is given not to the heirs in the bloodline but to the poor. Jerome visualizes these transformations by employing his conversion metaphor. Paulina and Pammachius

²⁸ Cf. Hier., *Ep.* 66.8–13. Here one also has to take into consideration that this letter has been written two years after Paulina's death and that Pammachius has already overcome his grief at the time when Jerome was writing his letter. Cf. Hier., *Ep.* 66.1.1.

²⁹ In the exhortatory part of the letter, there is a long allegory that develops some metaphors of the Song of Songs (cf. Hier., *Ep.* 66.10.1–2). Within this allegory, the topic of a faith that has to be nourished and starts its being as an infant that grows slowly is repeated: »Ibi ei da mamillas tuas, sugat de erudito pectore et requiescat ›inter medios clericos, pinnae deargentatae columbae et interiora eius in fulgore auris« (Ps. 67:14). Paruulus iste et puer, qui butyro et melle saginatur, qui inter caseatos nutritus est montes, cito crescit in iuuenem, uelociter in te hostes spoliat, mature praedatur Damascus et regem uincit Assyrium.« (Hier., *Ep.* 66.10.2).

³⁰ Translation taken from the English Standard Version.

thus become models for the Roman world of their time. According to the passage, Paulina's heir has been multiplied in the following months since Pammachius has not only given alms to the poor but has also brought his faith to them. These people are here presented as Paulina's children (*liberi, filii*).³¹

4. Conclusion

The example of Jerome's *Letter* 66 illustrates in many ways how the choice of metaphor generates meaning. This letter presents Pammachius's conversion to asceticism as a birth, selecting and insisting on transferring the ascetic ideal from Paulina to Pammachius and thus on Pammachius's spiritual dependence on Paulina. It is irrelevant whether this presentation depicts reality: More importantly, it influences the letter's argumentation and structure and therefore plays a vital role in the transmission and promulgation of Jerome's ascetic ideal.

The conversion metaphors chosen by Jerome, in general, refer to a variety of worldly objects and events. With these, different aspects of conversion are selected. The depiction of conversion is therefore not a homogenous field. Metaphors present a broad panorama of views on this complex phenomenon. As a result, metaphors of conversion do not only shape our perception of Jerome's contemporaries more than 1600 years after their death but, more importantly, have always been a way of narrating and alternating events. Metaphors provide a graspable explanation for a complex phenomenon.

Abbreviations

Ambr., Patr. – Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De patriarchis*.

Hier., Ep. – Hieronymus, *Epistulae* [Hilberg 1996].

Paul. Nol., Ep. – Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistulae*.

Ser., Med. – Q. Serenus, *Liber medicinalis*.

ThLL – Thesaurus Linguae Latinae.

Verg., Aen. – Vergilius, *Aeneis*.

³¹ In the next chapter, the idea that sick people claim that Pammachius and Paulina brought them relief, is repeated: »Ille caecus /.../ clamitans heres Paulinae, coheres Pammachii est.« (Hier., Ep. 66.5.1)

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