

THE HERMITS' LOVE IN THE *ANTONIAD* BY MAFFEO VEGIO

O AMOR DOS EREMITAS NA
ANTONIAS DE MAFFEO VEGIO

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the depiction of love in the Renaissance epic *Antoniad* by Maffeo Vegio. In the work, the epic tale of love between the hero and his beloved is transformed into a platonic bond between two hermits – Saint Paul and Saint Antony. The spiritual love of the hermits reflects Divine love and attests to their sanctity. This portrayal of the hermits' love partly arises from the Christian reinterpretation of the epic genre, which viewed the *Aeneid* as a path to virtue. However, the description of the relationship between the monks includes substantial imagery borrowed from love elegy. The *Antoniad* also draws on medieval readings of Vergil's work as a story of Aeneas' romantic love for Dido. Vegio thus reinterprets the epic genre in the spirit of Christian humanism, creating a hagiographic epic tailored to the sensibilities of his time.

Keywords: Hagiographic Epic; Christian Humanism; *Antonias*; Maffeo Vegio.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a representação do amor na *Antonias*, poema épico renascentista de Maffeo Vegio. A obra transforma a tradicional narrativa épica de um amor romântico entre o herói e sua amada em um vínculo platônico entre dois eremitas, São Paulo e Santo Antônio. Esse amor espiritual, símbolo do amor divino, torna-se uma expressão da santidade dos protagonistas. A representação do amor entre os eremitas reflete uma reinterpretação cristã do gênero épico, que, na *Eneida*, identificava um caminho em direção à virtude. Ao

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la representación del amor en la *Antonias*, un poema épico renacentista de Maffeo Vegio. La obra transforma la narrativa épica tradicional de un amor romántico entre el héroe y su amada en un vínculo platónico entre dos ermitaños, San Pablo y San Antonio. Este amor espiritual, símbolo del amor Divino, se convierte en un testimonio de su santidad. La representación del amor entre los ermitaños refleja una reinterpetación cristiana del género épico, que en la *Eneida* identificaba un camino hacia la

mesmo tempo, porém, a descrição da relação entre os monges revela influências claras da elegia amorosa. A *Antonias* também se inspira nas leituras medievais da obra de Virgílio, especialmente como narrativa do amor romântico entre Eneias e Dido. Dessa forma, Vegio reformula o gênero épico no espírito do humanismo cristão, criando uma epopeia hagiográfica perfeitamente alinhada aos valores e sensibilidades de sua época.

Palavras-chave: épica hagiográfica; humanismo cristão; *Antonias*; Maffeo Vegio.

virtud. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, la descripción de la relación entre los monjes muestra claramente influencias de la elegía amorosa. La *Antonias* también se inspira en las lecturas medievales de la obra de Virgilio, en particular como relato del amor romántico entre Eneas y Dido. De esta manera, Vegio reelabora el género épico en el espíritu del humanismo cristiano, dando lugar a una epopeya hagiográfica perfectamente alineada con los valores y las sensibilidades de su época.

Palabras clave: poema épico-hagiográfico; humanismo cristiano; *Antonias*; Maffeo Vegio.

At the opening of the third book of the *Antoniad* (Lat.: *Antonias*),¹ Maffeo Vegio's epic paraphrase of Jerome's *Vita Sancti Pauli*, the reader encounters Antony, the eponymous hermit, as he embarks on a quest to find the secluded dwelling of Paul, the first hermit. Guided by a thirsty she-wolf searching for water,² Antony is led to a cave nestled in the mountainside. Upon entering, he briefly finds himself in darkness before noticing a faint glimmer of light. With renewed urgency, he moves toward the light, like a deer drawn to water:

*Suspensio mox se fert intra limina passu
progređiens, simul intentis atque auribus omnem
luminibusque locum explorans, tum forsitan atram
per noctem tremulum lumen splendescere uidit.
Quo uiso properare et iam sperare quietem
incertaeque uiae melius confidere coepit,
non secus ac si quando, sitis quem torquet anghela,
sollicito ceruus gressu dubioque per umbras
siluarum ingentes per camposque anxius errat*

¹ On the biography of Maffeo Vegio, see, among others: MINOIA, 1959; CONSONNI, 1908; COX BRINTON, 1930, p. 5-24; SOTTILI, 2006; KALLENDORF 2006; LA BELLA, 2011. For further discussion of the *Antoniad*, see: DOSSENA, 1959, p. 45-48; PUTNAM; HANKINS, 2004, p. xxxvi-xlvi; FOJAS; HANKINS, 2004, p. 266-268; AUGOUSTAKIS, 2006; LOPOMO, 2010-2012; SCHMITZ, 2012; CREMASCOLI, 2014, p. 159-161; CREMASCOLI, 2016, p. 441-442.

² In Vegio's work, the she-wolf is described with the epithet *anbelans*. Referring to the source of Vegio's epic, we learn that the animal is panting from thirst: *intuetur lupam sitis ardoribus anbelantem ad radicem montis inreperere* (Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, 9.2, our emphasis).

*ignarusque locorum ignotas quaeritat undas.
Tunc si forte sonum crepitantum et murmur aquarum
auditum agnorint aures, laetatur et acri
iam uolitat pede, iam liquidi spem concipit amnis.
Sic pater.
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 3.18-31)³*

The comparison of the hermit to a deer serves as a genre marker of the epic, which is known for its elaborate animal similes, including those involving deer.⁴ However, biblical intertexts lend the passage an allegorical dimension. The poet draws on the psalmic image of a soul thirsting for God's presence, likened to a deer longing for water from a stream (Ps. 42[41], 2; see Górka; Plago, 2024, p. 159). This divine presence is equated with light shining in darkness, echoing New Testament imagery (*Antonias*, 3.20-21; cf. John 1, 5). In this way, Antony's journey into the cave becomes a spiritual quest, further emphasized by a description of Paul's hermitage in terms of an earthly paradise, *paradisus terrestris* (see below). Paul – an untainted man, resembling the first parents before the Fall – becomes for Antony the embodiment of God's presence.

The image of a thirsty deer has long have been interpreted as a symbol of the ascetic, who, through a virtuous life, hastens toward the salvific waters, overcoming Satan along the way. Such an interpretation of the Psalm is found, for instance, in the famous medieval treatise *Physiologus*.⁵ Antony, the hermit, can thus be likened to a deer longing for God's presence,⁶ as he repeatedly faces demonic forces throughout the *Antoniad*. But Antony could also be compared to the she-wolf, who, like the deer, panting from thirst, directs

³ All quotes from the *Antoniad* are according to the edition of Putnam and Hankins (PUTNAM; HANKINS, 2004, p. 130-165, p. 172-173).

⁴ Cf., e.g., Homer, *Ilias*, 22.189-194; Vergil, *Aeneis*, 4.69-73, 12.749-757. Vegio had a particular affinity for animal comparisons and metaphors; in the *Antoniad*, for instance, he draws comparisons to dogs (2.102-103) and a boar (3.43-45). This focus on nature likely reflects the spirit of Maffeo's time and aligns with key features of the International Gothic painting style.

⁵ Cf. *Physiologus*, 30.1-4 and 6 (ed. F. Sbordone); 30.6: "The ascetics also, in some respects, resemble the deer, for they lead virtuous and arduous lives, marked by great austerity. Like those parched with thirst, they hasten to the springs of salvific repentance, where, through the tears of confession, they extinguish the fiery arrows of evil. By trampling upon the enormous serpent, that is, the devil, they ultimately destroy him" (our translation).

⁶ Water is one of the symbols of salvation and of God as the Holy Spirit, both in the Old Testament (see, e.g., Isa. 55, 1: "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters") and the New Testament (see, e.g., John 4, 14: "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst – ever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." All English quotes from the Bible in this article are from the *Legacy Standard Bible* (LSB).

her steps toward the cave that houses the hermitage of Paul, God's servant. This choice is striking, as the Bible generally portrays wolves as predators with negative connotations, particularly in the New Testament, where they represent evil in opposition to the sheep, Christ's followers.⁷

Antony's desire to encounter God through Paul reflects a theological love for both God and humanity, aligning with the foundation of Christian teaching. Vegio may have been directly inspired by Psalm 42 or by the depiction of a thirsty deer as a metaphor for romantic love in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*:

*E' non si vide mai cervo nè damma
con tal desio cercar fonte nè fiume
(Petrarca, RVF, 240.20-21)⁸*

In this paper, we aim to show that Vegio portrays the love between the two hermits in a rather unusual way, blending the language of erotic love with that of spiritual devotion. Immediately following the *prooemium* of the *Antoniad*, Vegio offers a description of the main protagonist:

*quo non consilio maior, quo purior alter
non foret, integriorue Deiue ardentior alter
(Vegio, Antonias, 1.40-41)*

Vegio draws on the famous Horatian phrase, *integer vitae scelerisque purus* (Horace, *Carmina*, 1.22.1). In Horace's erotic ode, the lyric subject's virtue serves as armor, protecting him from danger and allowing him to pursue romantic pleasures without fear. Horace describes a difficult journey to his beloved, assured by virtue, across barren and desolate landscapes: *nec Iubae tellus generat, leonum / arida nutrix [...]* *pone sub curru nimium propinqui / solis, in terra domibus negata* (Horace, *Carmina*, 1.22.15-16, 21-22). Vegio mirrors this imagery in Antony's journey through the desert to Paul's hermitage (see Górká; Plago, 2024, p. 51-52, p. 112, p. 143). However, in Vegio's version, the hero's protection comes not only from Horatian virtue but also from faith, which shields him from harm and leads him to his destination. Yet the goal is no longer the enjoyment of Lalage's charms; instead, in a new Christianized context, it is love for Paul.

When Antony finally reaches Paul's hermitage, he finds the door barred by the frightened inhabitant. He stands before it, pleading for Paul to let him inside:

⁷ See, e.g., Ezek. 22, 27, Zeph. 3, 3, Hab. 1, 8, Jer. 5, 6, Matt. 7, 15-20, Luke 10, 3.

⁸ In a similar way, Tasso, much later, used the psalmic image of the deer in his play *Aminta* (ll. 1059-1060).

*Tum bonus ante fores clausas senioris amici
multa diu placido fundens Antonius ore,
perstitit obsecrans aditum:
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 3.46-48)*

Antony's pleas eventually succeed, and Paul allows him to enter. The Christian symbolism in the scene invites us to interpret it as a fulfilment of Christ's admonition, *pulsate, et aperietur vobis* (Matt. 7, 7). Yet, a classically educated reader will also easily recognize the *paraklausithyron* motif (*amator exclusus* in Latin), where a poet-lover stands before the closed door of his beloved.⁹ Antony stands in the darkness of night (*caeca sub nocte*, *Antonias*, 3.33) before the locked entrance to Paul's dwelling (*ante fores clausas*, *Antonias*, 3.46) and tries to persuade the old eremite to let him in. This scene closely mirrors the *amator exclusus* motif as described in Ovid's *Fasti*:

*primus amans carmen vigilatum nocte negata
dicitur ad clausas concinuisse fores,
eloquiumque fuit duram exorare puellam,
proque sua causa quisque disertus erat.
(Ovid, *Fasti*, 1.109-112, our emphasis)*

In the *Antoniad*, the role of the elegiac *puella dura* is replaced by the holy man, who initially refuses to open the door. Antony's pleas, rich with biblical allusions, resemble the typical *querimonia amantis*.¹⁰ The setting of the *vigilatio ad clausas fores* in a cave directs the reader toward the pastoral version of this motif in Theocritus' *Idyll* 3, where a goatherd sings a plaintive serenade before Amaryllis' grotto.¹¹ This connection is reinforced by the depiction of Paul's hermitage as a pastoral *locus amoenus*, and the slightly comical nature of the meeting between the two hermits.¹² At the same time, Vegio retains the erotic dimension of the *paraklausithyron*, preserving its key

⁹ The motif of *paraklausithyron* can already be observed in Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, 9.4-5; see LECLERC, 1988, p. 262-263; GRAY, 2020, p. 239. An erotic interpretation of *Vita Pauli* is provided by BURRUS, 2004, 24-33.

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Antonias*, 3.51-52: *tua namque, fatebor, / haud mereor, pater, ora tuos vultusque tueri*; cf. Matt. 8, 8: *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum*; *Antonias*, 3.54-56: *Concedesne feris aditus hominique negabis, / qui per tot te dura petit discrimina, per tot / incertasque gravesque vias aestusque furentes?* Cf. Luke 12, 6-7, Matt. 6, 26-27.

¹¹ Vegio knew Greek and may have read Theocritus in the original, who was known in Italy in the first half of the 15th century. See BOTLEYS, 2010, p. 102.

¹² Antony, on his way to the cave in darkness, stumbles over a stone, which sounds like an epic parody. GÓRKA; PLAGO, 2024, p. 160.

elements. For instance, in his plea to open the door, Antony uses the phrase *pande foras*, unmistakably associated with love elegy,¹³ and even threatens death if his demands are not met (cf. Theocritus, *Idylls*, 3.26-27).

Vegio's use of erotic language to express spiritual love between Antony and Paul is a central feature of the *Antoniad*. As in the *amator exclusus* motif, this is a 'totalizing' love – an all-encompassing passion that dominates a person's entire life (Copley, 1956, p. 70). However, unlike in Christian interpretations of love poetry, this affection leads not to ruin or moral downfall¹⁴ but to eternal happiness in union with God, who is Love itself.

When Paul finally allows Antony inside, the latter throws himself into the old man's embrace and places a kiss upon his lips:

[...] *Sic fatus est. Olli
arridens dextra postes patefecit amica
suscepitque hominem sanctum sanctissimus hospes,
inque ruens eius complexum atque oscula iungens*
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 3.64-67)

This scene, while carrying erotic overtones, simultaneously directs the reader to a biblical intertext. The reunion of Laban and Jacob in Genesis similarly describes the exchange of kisses and embraces (Gen. 29, 13).¹⁵ The kiss with which Antony greets Paul is a Christian sign of peace (cf. Rom. 16, 16; 1 Cor. 16, 20; 2 Cor. 13, 12), replacing the kisses an *amator exclusus* might bestow upon the closed door.¹⁶

After this joyful reunion, Paul leads Antony into his hermitage, "burning with extraordinary love" (*eximio flagrans amore*, *Antonias*, 2.74). This marks a departure from the typical realization of the *paraklausithyron*, where the lover is usually not admitted to his beloved (e.g., Ovid, *Amores*, 1.6.71-74). Paul not only allows Antony to enter, but also shows him affection, unlike the typical *puella dura*. The use of such an emotionally charged phrase immediately following the *paraklausithyron* is undoubtedly intentional. The reader, well

13 See, e.g., Fausto Andreilino, *Amores sive Livia*, 1.2.81-82: *O quotiens Naso lachrymis suffusus abortis / 'Pande fores,' dixit, 'pande, Corynna, fores.'* The very concept of doors (Lat. *ianua, foras*) already evoked the theme of love in ancient literature; see, e.g., Horace, *Carmina*, 1.25.3-4.

14 A notable expression of this view on erotic literature was the popular 15th-century anti-neo-Catullan current represented, among others, by the Carmelite Baptista Mantuanus; see, e.g., CASTRO, 1996, p. 93-133.

15 *Qui cum audisset venisse Iacob filium sororis suae, cucurrit obviam ei: complexusque eum, et in oscula ruens, duxit in domum suam* (our emphasis).

16 See [Theocritus], *Idylls*, 23.36-44; Propertius 1.16.42: *osculaque impressis nixa dedi gradibus*; Lucretius 4.1179: *foribus miser oscula figit*.

aware of the distinctly erotic connotation of the cave as a literary setting for love encounters (consider, for example, Dido and Aeneas in *Aeneid* 4.165-172; cf. Augoustakis, 2006, p. 9), might expect the narrative to maintain an amorous or erotic tone.

However, immediately following these words comes the description of the interior of Paul's hermitage, portrayed as an earthly paradise modelled after the medieval *hortus conclusus* (*Antonias*, 3.75-78; see Górká; Plago, 2024, p. 162-163). It is a pure space, filled with the presence of God, where two elements hold particular significance: a palm tree, symbol of Christ's victory over death,¹⁷ and a spring of pure, flowing (and thus 'living') water, symbol of salvation. This space is open, much like the pastoral *locus amoenus*, often situated under the open sky, further emphasizing the direct connection between the hermit and the divine realm of the heavens. Thus, the physical and spiritual encounter between the hermits occurs within a Christianized version of the medieval 'garden of love' (Giamatti, 1966).

Paul's hermitage is contrasted with other rock chambers nearby, which contain remnants of a mint from the time of Cleopatra and Mark Antony.¹⁸ This mint once produced counterfeit coins, but now, within the same mountain, lives a righteous man, untouched by the temptations of wealth and worldly vanity. As Bazyli Degórski (2020, p. 13) notes in his commentary on a similar passage in Jerome, 'the poverty of St. Paul [...] is juxtaposed with the hunger for money and its false value'. Similarly, the mention of Antony and Cleopatra – lovers whose romance ended in tragedy – serves as a metaphorical contrast. The debauchery of the Roman general is set against the purity of the hermit (Weingarten, 2005, p. 31 and 67; Augoustakis, 2006, p. 9).

The cave thus becomes a symbol of the Iron Age, when greed and lust reigned supreme (the era of the "old Antony"). Paul's hermitage transforms this place into a kind of *paradisus terrestris*, a Christian Golden Age, the era of Paul and the "new Antony" (Górká; Plago, 2024, p. 163). Vegio employs a progressive vision of the ages of humanity, equating the time before Christ's advent with an era of sin. The abandoned minting tools are like remnants of the Iron Age, serving as reminders of past crimes.¹⁹ The hermits, through their way of life – resembling that before the fall of the first humans – have the power to transform the sinful world, thus participating in Christ's redemptive work of renewing creation.

¹⁷ The palm appears in literary and iconographic depictions of the earthly paradise.

¹⁸ The forge is generally a space with chthonic connotations (cf. the forge of the Cyclopes on Etna). See also AUGOUSTAKIS, 2006, p. 8.

¹⁹ This evokes the phrase *praeae vestigia fraudis* from Vergil's *Eclogue* 4.31.

Paul and Antony sit by the spring and engage in conversation, resembling veterans reminiscing about past wars:

*Quales, diuersis si qui iunguntur ab oris,
militiae assueti duros tolerare labores,
congaudent, uarioque simul sermone fruentes,
magnorum heroum casus et bella recensent.*
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 3.101-103)

The themes discussed by the hermits reflect the definition of epic as outlined in late antique and medieval grammars.²⁰ In this way, Vegio clearly identifies the genre in which *Antoniad* was composed. However, placing this passage immediately after the extended *paraklausithyron* suggests additional layers of reference, particularly the elegiac *militia amoris*. The hermits, depicted as *milites Christi*, become warriors of faith, driven into battle by a love far more perfect than that of the elegy: the love for their Savior. God recognizes the love of the hermits and reciprocates it. As a visible sign of His affection, He sends them a raven bearing an entire loaf of bread, in place of the half-loaf that Paul had been previously receiving from the bird:

[...] *nunc te adueniente benignus
integra dona Deus ferri caelestia iussit,
dona suum quae longum in te testentur amorem.*
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 3.114-116)

This “gift from heaven”, a testament to God’s love, recalls the sustenance provided to the prophet Elijah by a raven during his time by the Brook Kerith (1 Kings 17, 4-6). Simultaneously, Paul’s words echo Vergil’s depiction of Andromache offering a farewell gift to Ascanius, who reminds her of her lost son:

*accipe et haec, manuum tibi quae monimenta mearum
sint, puer, et longum Andromachae testentur amorem,
coniugis Hectoreae. cape dona extrema tuorum,
o mihi sola mei super Astyanactis imago.*
(Vergil, *Aeneis*, 3.486-489)

²⁰ E.g.: *qui sunt versus hexametri dactyllici? qui tantum sex pedibus dactylicis constant, praeter bella et facta heroum quodlibet aliud continentes* (Audax, *De Scauri et Palladis libris excerpta, De hexametro versu heroico*, Keil, *Grammatici Latini* 7, p. 337). See GÓRKA; PLAGO, 2024, p. 101-102, p. 164-165.

The love of God for humanity is likened to the love of a parent for a child. The gift of bread given to the hermits is clearly a prefiguration of the Holy Communion, and its breaking into two parts alludes to the breaking of bread during the Eucharist. However, the two halves forming a single whole may also subtly reference the famous Platonic vision of love, reinterpreted through a Christian lens. In both halves of the bread – the body of Christ – the fullness of God’s love for humanity is revealed: for “He loved them to the end” (John 13, 1).

This bodily and spiritual nourishment, shared by Paul and Antony, serves as their final meal together. At the beginning of Book 4, Paul, aware of his approaching death, sends Antony to retrieve Athanasius’ cloak, hoping to spare him the sorrow of witnessing his passing (*Antonias*, 4.8-16). Paul’s preparation for death, as well as the subsequent descriptions of his soul’s ascent to heaven and his burial, mirror the New Testament narrative of the passion and death of the Lord, with Paul as a Christ figure and Antony as His disciple. Their final meal (*Antonias*, 3.126-129) prefigures the Last Supper, and their night spent in prayer (3.129-130) parallels Christ’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The image of Paul’s ascent to heaven in a triumphant procession (4.66-69) is reminiscent of Christ’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, a foreshadowing of the glory of the Resurrected Christ. Finally, Paul’s body being wrapped in a cloak²¹ and laid to rest (4.93-94, 127-128) corresponds to Christ’s body being wrapped in a shroud and placed in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea.²²

These biblical allusions lend Book 4 a solemn tone, in contrast to the occasionally humorous nature of the earlier books. The greatness of Paul, portrayed as the image of God on earth (4.54-55), and Antony’s deep reverence for the elder hermit are emphasized. Upon learning of Paul’s impending death, Antony pleads with him not to leave:

*Tum ne desereret sese, lacrimansque gemensque,
et comitem exciperet, quaecumque ad fata, rogabat.*
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 4.26-27)

²¹ This cloak was given to Antony as a gift by Athanasius (see Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, 12.2; cf. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 91.8). It alludes to the cloak of Elijah, which Elisha received after Elijah’s ascension (2 Kings 2, 13; cf. also 1 Kings 19, 19).

²² These individual scenes can also be read in an epic context. The meal recalls an epic banquet (e.g., Odysseus among the Phaeacians, Aeneas at Evander’s home); Paul’s ascension to heaven corresponds to the epic catasterism (Vergil, *Aeneis*, 1.289-290; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.832-860); see GÓRKA; PLAGO, 2024, p. 101 and 168. Antony wrapping Paul’s body in a cloak resembles Aeneas wrapping Pallas’s body in a robe (Vergil, *Aeneis*, 11.72-77); cf. AUGOUSTAKIS, 2006, p. 9.

Antony's plea is imbued with biblical resonance rather than with the laments of elegiac lovers.²³ On his return journey, Antony rushes to reach Paul before his death:

*Ergo ad grandaeuum citius tendebat amicum,
unum illum cupiens, unum illum, uita priusquam
linqueret aethereas et spiritus iret in auras,
complexi coram flagrans coramque tueri.*
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 4.61-64)

Although the poet uses the language of erotic love to describe Antony's emotions (*cupiens* [...] *flagrans*, *Antonias*, 4.62, 64), the depiction of Paul's death shifts the focus to a Passion-like image, aligning with the central interpretive framework of Book 4. The phrase "his spirit passed into the air" (*spiritus iret in auras*, *Antonias*, 4.63) recalls Matthew 27, 50: "And Jesus [...] yielded up His spirit." In this way, the poet transitions from a portrayal of human emotion – though reframed through a Christian lens – between the two hermits, to an evocation of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, the highest testament of love. This echoes the Gospel message: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15, 13).

Interestingly, even in the most dramatic moments, Vegio does not completely abandon the elegiac tone in expressing the love between the monks, which reflects Christ's love for creation. When Antony sees Paul's soul ascending to heaven, his mind is set ablaze with intense passion (*acri / ardore incensus mentis*, *Antonias*, 4.79-80). Filled with love, he hurried to Paul's cave and finds the lifeless body of his friend:

[...] *hunc uiuere primum
credidit orabatque simul gressumque tenebat,
quem postquam agnovit uitali lumine cassum,
proripuit subito, lacrimis atque oscula largis
mixta gerens, et inexplētis complexibus haerens,
ingentis gemitus dedit ingentisque ululatus.*
(Vegio, *Antonias*, 4.87-92)

The portrayal of a grief-stricken Antony is modelled after the despair of the lover at an imagined funeral of the poet in Tibullus' *Elegy* 1.1:

²³ Cf. Ps. 38(37), Matt. 27, 46. On the phrase *lacrimansque gemensque*, cf. Vergil, *Aeneis*, 11.150; Sedulius, *Carmen paschale*, 3.106-107.

*Flebis et arsuro positum me, Delia, lecto,
Tristibus et lacrimis oscula mixta dabis.*
(Tibullus 1.61-62)

Maffeo transforms the elegiac *foedus aeternum* into the love of God, which led Him to make the ultimate sacrifice of Himself. This universalist perspective on salvation lies at the heart of Christianity and is a central theme of Christian epics dating back to late antiquity. Vegio adopts precisely this perspective as well.

The *Antoniad* can, in part, be interpreted as a Christianized retelling of the *Aeneid*, viewed through its two primary Renaissance lenses – allegorical and romantic interpretations. On one hand, Antony becomes a Christianized Aeneas, a model of virtue, a *miles Christi* who embarks on an epic journey and engages in an epic battle with Satan. On the other hand, the *Antoniad* develops extensively the theme of love between monks. In doing so, it alludes to the medieval reading of the *Aeneid*, which emphasizes Aeneas' romance with Dido and his love at first sight for Lavinia. The image of love between Antony and Paul finds its roots in the fusion of these two interpretative traditions of the *Aeneid*, both subordinated to a Christocentric perspective.

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