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"Emotional Rescue": Heroic Chastity and Devotional Practice in Iacopo Sannazaro's *De partu Virginis*

Bryan Brazeau

During the fifteenth century a number of Italian humanists sought to compose a religious epic similar in tone and style to the great epics of antiquity. Maffeo Vegio's *Antonias* (1436), Girolamo delle Valli's *Jesuida* (1446), Battista Spagnoli (Mantuan)'s *Parthenice Mariana* (1481), and Macario Muzio's *De Triumpho Christi* (1499) all testify to this desire to create a Christian epic.[1] One element that all of these short epics have in common is their attempt to harmonize an appreciation of ancient culture with a Christian system of belief. Just as Italian humanists progressively began to grasp the radical difference between their contemporary Christian culture and classical Greco-Roman culture, so too did a rift begin to appear between pagan models of martial heroism and Christian values. This difference was most deeply felt in Christian epics of the period and posed several fundamental problems for the genre. Was it even possible to write a work that would resemble a classical epic while portraying a Christian hero? How would such a hero come to be represented? Could Christian epic feature a female protagonist? Poets began to struggle with these and other questions as they aimed to create a non-martial form of epic heroism predicated on Christian principles. Of all these poems, Jacopo Sannazaro's *De partu Virginis* (1526) would come to be considered by several writers in the late sixteenth century as the first modern Christian epic.[2] It was also among the first to propose a radically new model of heroism.

One of the most innovative of Sannazaro's characters in the *De partu* is never explicitly referred to as a "hero." Nevertheless, Mary embodies a model of heroic virtue that markedly differs from the *pietas* found in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas's *pietas* is characterized by filial and religious piety—to his divine destiny, his ancestors, his father, the men under his command, his son, and his descendants—even, at times, at the cost of his own desires. *Pietas,* in the *Aeneid,* implies dutiful submission to one's family, to one's gods and to one's *fatum,* regardless of

[1] As Luciana Borsetto has pointed out, this humanist tradition of creating Christian epics existed alongside a more popular tradition of Scripture adaptation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For Borsetto, a writer such as Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici was concerned in her *Ystoria di Iudith* with pleasing her public and not specifically with "l'ornato epico della comunicazione classica" ("the epic's literary ornateness in classical writing"). See Luciana Borsetto, "'Storie di Giuditta' in Europa tra Quattro e Cinquecento: il 'cantare' di Lucrezia Tornabuoni; il poema di Marko Marulić," *Colloquia Maruliana* 7 (1998): 100.

[2] See, for example, the introduction to Erasmo di Valvasone's *Angeleida* (1593), ed. Luciana Borsetto (Alessandria: Edizioni Dell'Orso, 2005), 33; along with Leonardo Orlandini's preface to Matteo Donia's *ll Giorgio, poema sacro et heroico* (Palermo: Gio. Battista Maringo, 1600), 3r. Regarding the poem's reception, as Charles Fantazzi and Alessandro Perosa have illustrated in their meticulous critical edition of the *De partu*, the poem enjoyed great success both within and outside of Italy in the sixteenth century. This is attested to by the numerous editions (18 in Italy, 11 in France), commentaries (Lazzaro Cardona's in 1584 and Valentino Odorico's in 1593), and translations and imitations of the work (four into Italian in 1552, 1575, 1578 and 1588, and two into Spanish in 1547 [reprinted 1549] and 1591). See "Introduzione," in Jacopo Sannazaro*, De partu Virginis*, ed. Charles Fantazzi and Alessandro Perosa (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1988), xcvii-cxxvi. Prandi has released a helpful modern edition of Giovanni Giolito de' Ferrari's 1588 translation into Italian with the facing Latin text of the poem. See Jacopo Sannazaro, *Il parto della Vergine, volgarizzamento di Giovanni Giolito de' Ferrari (1588) a fronte*, ed. Stefano Prandi (Rome: Città Nuova, 2001).

personal feelings or frustrations.[3] It was this notion of heroic piety that made Aeneas and the poem that contained him so easily adaptable to Christian and Neoplatonic allegorization. At first glance, Sannazaro's Mary appears to channel the *pietas* of Aeneas: she follows a divinely ordained plan as revealed to her by a heavenly messenger.

As we will see, however, there appear to be marked differences between Sannazaro's Mary and Virgil's Aeneas. Although devout, Sannazaro's Mary does not follow God's plan regardless of her individual desires. Instead, Mary's heroism is characterized by her personal dedication to chastity. Even in the face of a divine plan that would violate her commitment, Mary is steadfast in devotion to her own vow and accepts her role as the mother of God solely on her own terms. Sannazaro appears to portray such individualism as heroic, though it radically differs from the *pietas* of Virgil's protagonist. Thomas Greene has claimed that "the poised and regal figure of [Sannazaro's] Virgin lacks a heroic dimension because her moral distinctiveness is asserted but never dramatized; no moral austerity is demanded of her."[4] In this article, however, I will argue that Sannazaro's text presents Mary as a new kind of non-martial hero for Christian epic. Mary's unconventional heroism emerges most sharply in the moment of the Annunciation where she accepts her motherhood in heroic terms. As will be argued below, Sannazaro seems to frame Mary's reaction to the Annunciation as a response to two scenes in Virgil's *Aeneid* and in dialogue with late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century preaching tropes that imagined Mary's emotional and mental state during the Annunciation. Moreover, the imagining of Mary's emotional states seems to stage a devotional itinerary in the poem for both the poet and the reader.

Divine interactions in Virgil's *Aeneid*

Sannazaro's portrayal of the Annunciation combines two key moments from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Both scenes involve a visit from a divine messenger and both clearly demonstrate the role of *pietas* in Virgil's poem. In *Aeneid* I, Venus visits her son disguised as a huntress and refuses to reveal herself to him. In his first few words with her, Aeneas immediately recognizes Venus's divinity, though she denies it. As she walks away, Aeneas's suspicions are confirmed by her rosy neck and ambrosial fragrance:

> Dixit et avertens rosea cervice refulsit,
> ambrosiaeque comae divinum vertice odorem
> spiravere; pedes vestis defluxit ad imos,
> et vera incessu patuit dea. Ille ubi matrem
> adgnovit, tali fugientem est voce secutus:
> 'quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis
> ludis imaginibus? cur dextrae iungere dextram
> non datur ac veras audire et reddere voces?'
> talibus incusat gressumque ad moenia tendit.

[3] For the history of the term *pietas* and its usage from antiquity to the early seventeenth century, see James D. Garrison, *Pietas from Vergil to Dryden* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988). For the literary usage of the concept of Christian pietas in the late medieval and early modern period, see Stefano Prandi, "Letteratura e pietà (secc. XIII-XVI)," *Lettere italiane* 55, no. 4 (2003): 494-518.

[4] Thomas Greene, *The Descent from Heaven* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 158.

> She spake, and as she turned away, her roseate neck flashed bright. From her head her ambrosial tresses breathed celestial fragrance; down to her feet fell her raiment, and in her step she was revealed, a very goddess. He knew her as his mother, and as she fled pursued her with these words: "Thou also cruel! Why mockest thou thy son so often with vain phantoms? Why am I not allowed to clasp hand in hand and hear and utter words unfeigned?" Thus he reproaches her and bends his steps towards the city.[5]

Aeneas's frustration with Venus's refusal to reveal herself as his mother is understandable. While the goddess refuses to verbally acknowledge her relationship to Aeneas, her rosy neck, celestial perfume, and garment do confirm Aeneas's suspicion. Depending on how one interprets the verb "defluxit," Venus's garment either hangs down to her feet or, adding to Aeneas's irritation, falls down to her feet, revealing the naked goddess as she departs.[6] Despite the emotional charge of this scene, Virgil does not describe the interior state of his protagonist. We can certainly infer Aeneas's vexation from his words, from Venus's refusal to reveal herself as his mother, and from her interruption of his speech. Nevertheless, despite his dissatisfaction, Aeneas follows Venus's orders and walks toward Carthage. Indeed, in line 410 Virgil elegantly fuses together Aeneas's anger toward Venus, "talibus incusat," and his obedience to the gods, "gressumque ad moenia tendit," as a demonstration of the hero's *pietas*.

Sannazaro's own correspondence reveals that he had book I of the *Aeneid* in mind while writing lines 107-09, thus mapping Mary onto the figure of Aeneas. In these lines, Sannazaro describes how Gabriel could be recognized as an angel: "[p]roclaiming his divinity by gait and garb, he stretches his mighty wings and with a remarkable fragrance suffuses the house's breadth."[7] In a letter dated March 13, 1521, Sannazaro defends these lines from Antonio Seripando's critique that "odorem" should be changed to "honorem": "La intenzione mia fu esprimere: Ambrosiaeque comae divinum vertice odorem spiravere [*Aen.*, I, 403-4]; Et mansit odor, posses scire fuisse deam [Ov., *Fast.*, V, 376]."[8] The second source that Sannazaro cites, Ovid's *Fasti*, confirms that these passages were not solely related to the poetic problem of how to portray the angel Gabriel. The odor that remains in *Fasti* V.376 is that of the Greek nymph Chloris, whose name Ovid would transform into the Roman goddess Flora.[9] Flora is important to

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[5] Virgil, *Aeneid*, I.402-10. All references to Virgil's *Aeneid* refer to *Eclogues*, *Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, ed. and trans. H. R. Fairclough, rev. ed. G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[6] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short show that the verb *defluo, defluere* is primarily used in classical Latin with reference to water, meaning "to flow down." When used with objects, it can mean "to move downwards softly or gradually," or, when used with clothing, to "hang carelessly" as in Horace, *Satira*, I.iii.31: "toga defluit male laxus." Horace's usage suggests that Virgil is describing the movement of the goddess' garment as she departs, rather than the removal of the garment itself. In my view, the ambiguity of this verb in this particular reference to Venus serves to amplify both Aeneas's and the reader's frustration in not knowing whether Venus's gown hangs down loosely or gently falls to her feet, revealing the naked goddess as she departs. See Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879); Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars poetica*, ed. and trans. H.R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[7] "[N]umenque professus / incessuque habituque, ingentes explicat alas / ac tectis late insuetum diffundit odorem." Jacopo Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, in *Jacopo Sannazaro: Latin Poetry*, ed. and trans. Michael C.J. Putnam (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), I.107-09. All citations of the poem come from this edition unless otherwise specified. All translations of the *De partu* are Putnam's unless otherwise specified.

[8] Jacopo Sannazaro, "Lettera LII," in Jacopo Sannazaro, *Opere volgari*, ed. Alfredo Mauro (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 372. The identification of Ovid and Virgil are Mauro's. Italics in original.

[9] "Chloris eram, quae Flora vocor" ("I was once Chloris, who am now called Flora"). Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. and trans. James George Frazer, rev. ed. G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), V.195.

our discussion because she was initially raped by the divine personification of the West wind, Zephyrus, who later made amends by marrying the nymph.[10] Indeed, the figure of Flora, a springtime nymph raped by a personified force of nature, recalls Claudian's *De raptu Prosperpinae*, which Francesco Tateo argues is a crucial sub-text for understanding the *De partu*.[11] As we will soon see, the motif of potential rape by a god underlies Sannazaro's representation of Mary's initial fears.

Though there is little description of Aeneas's thought process or emotional reaction in book I, Virgil is somewhat more expansive in book IV. Mercury descends to visit Aeneas and accuses him of being forgetful of his own kingdom and fortunes.[12] If appeals to his own glory do not move him, Mercury says, Aeneas should at least think of his son, Ascanius, and his heirs to whom he must bequeath the kingdom of Italy and the Roman lands.[13] Aeneas's reaction is, in Greene's careful reading, an "epiphany" as Mercury is "symbolically unsealing the eyes of a man asleep or dead."[14]

> At vero aeneas aspect obmutuit amens,
> arrectaeque horror comae et vox faucibus haesit.
> ardet abire fuga dulcisque relinquere terras,
> attonitus tanto monitu imperioque deorum.
> heu! quid agat? quo nunc reginam ambire furentem
> audeat adfatu? quae prima exordia sumat?
>
> But in truth Aeneas, aghast at the sight, was struck dumb; his hair stood up in terror and the voice clave to his throat. He burns to flee away and quit that pleasant land, awed by that warning and divine commandment. Ah, what to do? With what speech now dare he approach the frenzied queen? What opening words choose first?[15]

Here we glimpse Aeneas's inner conflict; he must go on toward Rome, but does not know how to break the news to Dido. Aeneas's emotions are a combination of awe at the divine message and a preoccupation with how to proceed. Greene is correct in noting that Aeneas's "emotional intensity is particularly striking in the quality of his religious feeling"; here again, Aeneas does not question the will of the gods. As in book I, he follows orders despite his own desires—and Virgil is very sensitive to the costs of such firm religious devotion, as the

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[10] Ibid., V. 201-02.

[11] Francesco Tateo suggests that the "intera struttura del poemetto cristiano veniva a ricalcare quello famoso poemetto claudianeo; divino connubio del dio infernale con la delicata fanciulla veniva trasfigurato nel divino connubio del Dio cristiano con la "Vergine." Francesco Tateo, *Tradizione e realtà nell'umanesimo italiano* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1967), 97 ("the entire structure of the brief Christian poem copied Claudian's famous work; the divine marriage of the god of the underworld with the delicate girl was transformed into the divine marriage of the Christian God with the 'Virgin'").

[12] Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV.267.

[13] "Si te nulla movet tantarum Gloria rerum / nec super ipse tua moliris laude laborem, / Ascanium surgentem et spes heredes Iuli / respice" ("If the glory of such a fortune stirs thee not, and for thine own fame's sake thou shoulde rest not the burden, have regard for growing Ascanius and the promise of Iulus thy heir, to whom the kingdom of Italy and the Roman land are due"): Ibid., IV.272-75.

[14] Greene, *Descent from Heaven*, 82.

[15] Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV.279-84.

remainder of the Dido drama demonstrates.[16] The will of the gods is absolute and its tension with the individual will of characters in the *Aeneid* is the source of much of the poem's conflict and tragic beauty.

Sannazaro's Annunciation: Mary's heroic chastity

When we now turn to the Annunciation scene in the *De partu*, several striking differences emerge. The Roman value of *pietas* is not the same as Christian piety; to simply "grin and bear" God's plan is insufficient. As such, Sannazaro's portrayal of Mary in the *De partu* when a divine messenger visits her is markedly different than Virgil's portrayal of Aeneas in the scenes discussed above. These differences, moreover, do not appear to stem from the biblical source for the scene of the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-38:

> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.[17]

The *De partu* differs from this depiction in Luke with the very first image it presents of the Virgin. We first see Mary through the eyes of Gabriel; she is described as "regina" and is preoccupied with reading the sibylline prophecies.[18] Mary, who has heard that the moment would soon arrive in which the Holy Spirit would glide down and fill the womb of a saintly mother, praises this unknown blessed woman:

> Pro quanta alti reverentia coeli
> virgineo in vultu est! Oculos deiecta modestos
> suspirat matremque dei venientis adorat,
> felicemque illam humana nec lege creatam
> saepe vocat, nec dum ipsa suos iam sentit honores.

[16] Greene, *Descent from Heaven*, 87.
[17] Luke 1:26-38 (New International Version). All references to Luke in English refer to the NIV; all references in Latin refer to the Vulgate.
[18] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, I.92-93.

> Ah, what adoration of lofty heaven lies in the Virgin's glance! She sighs, her eyes lowered in modesty, and worships the mother of the god to come. She often calls her blessed and not created as subject to human law. Nor does she herself yet perceive that the honor was already hers.[19]

Mary's profound devotion is analogous to Aeneas's religious sensibility. Yet, while Virgil reveals Aeneas's devotion through the character's decisive actions and spoken prayers, Sannazaro's narrator describes Mary's interior state with a complexity not found in classical epic or the Christian Bible. He presents us with her actions—reading, glancing and sighing—while also giving us a sense of her deep veneration for this unknown woman. As William Kennedy has discussed, Sannazaro presents Mary coming to terms with her own role in the divine plan via a hermeneutic act that serves as an exemplary paradigm for the poem's audience.[20] Mary's "coming to terms," however, is represented far differently than in classical epic. While Aeneas's hesitation to follow the divine plan is conveyed through his actions—his dalliance at Carthage with Dido and the many false starts he makes—Sannazaro conveys Mary's hesitation through descriptions of her mental and emotional states. Indeed, the fact that Sannazaro represents Mary's "coming to terms" with the will of God at all is a significant departure from what we have seen in Virgil, and is a broad expansion on the biblical source text as well. As we will see, Mary's negotiation of her own role as the mother of Jesus in the *De partu* begins with fear, though she comes to triumphantly accept her role in the divine plan. Mary's heroism thus does not require the moral austerity that Aeneas's does: it instead requires faith in the reconciliation of seemingly contradictory positions, which Sannazaro dramatizes through a careful portrayal of her emotions before, during, and after the Annunciation.

Mary appears to be portrayed as heroic in her dedication to her personal vow of chastity. It is important to note that in Sannazaro's epic Mary's acceptance of her role in the divine plan does not come at the expense of her individual will and personal desires, which are the price Aeneas must ostensibly pay to found the Roman Empire. Indeed, the Incarnation does not occur until Mary has triumphantly embraced her role as the mother of God. This acknowledgement of her role is not automatic, however, and in Luke's account Mary was confused after she heard Gabriel's greeting, pondering what this visit might mean.[21] Sannazaro expands this confusion to a more complex emotion of terror that takes hold of Mary: "Straightaway the Virgin grew numb with fright. She lowered her eyes and turned pale throughout her whole being."[22] He then proceeds to give us an extended epic simile describing Mary's inner state, which confirms her fears of divine rape:

> non secus ac conchis siquando intenta legendis
> seu Micone parva scopulis seu forte Seriphi
> nuda pedem virgo, laetae nova gloria matris,
> veliferam advertit vicina ad litora puppim

[19] Ibid., I.100-04.
[20] William Kennedy, *Jacopo Sannazaro and the Uses of Pastoral* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), 195-96.
[21] Luke, 1:29.
[22] "Stupuit confestim exterrita virgo, / demisitque oculos totosque expalluit artus." Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis,* I.123-24.

adventare, timet, nec iam subducere vestem
audet nec tuto ad socias se reddere cursu,
sed trepidans silet obtutuque immobilis haeret;
illa Arabum merces et fortunata Canopi
dona ferens, nullis bellum mortalibus infert,
sed pelago innocuis circum nitet armamentis

> just as when a barefoot maiden, the fresh pride of her happy mother, is engrossed with the harvesting of pearl-oysters on tiny Micon or, should it chance, on craggy Seriphos. Noticing a full-sailed ship gain the shore nearby, she grows fearful and dares not now raise her dress or hurry herself on a course of safety to her comrades, but trembling she grows speechless, and stands fast with her gaze mesmerized. The vessel, laden with the goods of Arabia and the rich gifts of the Canopus, portends no war for humankind, but with innocent equipage shimmers on the ambient sea.[23]

For Sannazaro's anonymous contemporary—known to us only as Sinceromastix, attacker of Sincero—who composed a short censure against him, this simile seemed a "foolish and unbecoming comparison" because it portrayed the Virgin as overly fearful, "as if the blessed Mary would have fled when she were greeted by the angel."[24] In fact, as Marc Deramaix has shown, two of the three charges the anonymous censor levels against Sannazaro concern his representation of Mary.[25] Carol Kidwell has commented on the way in which this simile provides us with an image of the real terror—piracy—that was present in Sannazaro's time. She condemns the simile as "a singularly inappropriate image for the Virgin Mary's reaction to the angelic apparition, as though he were a possible rapist."[26] This simile, however, was pleasing to at least some of Sannazaro's contemporaries, as well as to some twentieth-century critics. Nearly sixty years after the publication of Sannazaro's poem Lázaro Cardona, in his 1584 commentary to the *De partu*, refers to the passage as a "beautiful comparison."[27] Greene considers the shell-gatherer simile a sophisticated elaboration of the "girlish hesitation" Mary shows in the

[23] Ibid., I.125-34.

[24] "[I]nepta et indecora comparatio […] quasi beata Maria cum ab angelo salutaretur aufugerit." *Ms. Vaticano Latino* 5149, f.146v, cited in Marc Deramaix, "Inepta et indecora comparatio: sacris prophana miscere. Une Censure ecclésiastique post-tridentine de Jacopo Sannazaro," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, 2 (1991): 179-80. Giulia Calisti assumed that the censor was a contemporary critic of Sannazaro's poem in the Papal Curia (*Il De partu Virginis: saggio sul poema sacro nel Rinascimento* [Città di Castello: Il Solco, 1926], 33-35). More recently, however, Deramaix has shown that the author of this censure was writing after 1563 since he refers to a certain bishop who participated in the Council of Trent. Deramaix contextualizes this anonymous author's position as belonging to a group of theologians who were opposed to the *studia humanitatis* and to the legitimacy of fiction, a position that became increasingly isolated after the election of the humanist Pius IV in 1559, when Rome again became a center for Italian literati. See Deramaix, "Inepta et indecora comparatio," 186.

[25] Deramaix points out that the censor's greatest concerns with Sannazaro's text were in his representation of Mary, along with the poet's placing of the Old Testament patriarchs in the same part of hell where the damned are tortured (ibid., 180-81).

[26] Carol Kidwell, *Sannazaro and Arcadia* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 145.

[27] "[P]ulchra comparatione." See Lázaro Cardona, *Commentaria in tres libros de Virginis Partu a Sannazaro* (Venice: Franciscus de Franciscis Senensem, 1584), 23v.

gospels.[28] Few, if any, of these aesthetic assessments, however, take into account Sannazaro's textual sources or contemporary representations of the Annunciation.

Although this simile might seem inappropriate from the pen of an evangelist or even a historian, it actually makes great sense when considered from Mary's own perspective. She has just been reading prophecies about the birth of God and is suddenly greeted by an angel. Her fear of rape is justified as she refuses to compromise her vow of chastity. As such, she cannot initially conceive of herself as becoming an agent in the divine plan except through force. Greene comments that similes in the *De partu* "tend to function more as decorations, less as narrative devices which impose subtle colorings of feeling upon their contexts."[29] While this assessment may be true for the simile under study in Greene's book—the swan simile describing Gabriel's descent—it does not hold for the simile of the shell-gatherer in relation to Mary. Kidwell's comment on piracy and the terror it caused in Sannazaro's time can also be applied to the second term of this simile, namely the terror that a male divine being could cause when visiting a human woman who is steeped in classical culture. In other words, if the "full-sailed ship" inspires fear in the maiden gathering shells on the seashore, it is because she expects it to portend rape and plunder. Mary's expectation of the same upon seeing Gabriel thus suggests a familiarity with her own literary predecessors, such as Claudian's Proserpina or one of the myriad victims in Ovid who are carried off against their will by admiring gods. This simile not only conveys to the reader Mary's emotional reaction, but also implicitly demonstrates how a woman familiar with Greco-Roman mythology might react during the Annunciation. The threat conveyed by both the ship and the angel is the overpowering of individual will, in the first instance by pirates, and in the second by the divine.

Sannazaro's representation of Mary's fear and of her firm dedication to her vow of chastity causes the Virgin to emerge as far more powerful a figure than she does in the Gospels. In Luke's account, we only know of Mary's fear through Gabriel's words, "Do not be afraid!"[30] That Mary fears divine rape is confirmed further on in the text, once Gabriel tells her that her offspring will govern great cities and that his rule will have no end.[31] Here Mary simply responds, "How can this be since I am not with a man?"[32] In Sannazaro, however, Mary not only asks Gabriel how she could possibly conceive a child, but also challenges the angel by telling him that this will in any case be impossible because of her vow of chastity:

> Me ne attactus perferre viriles
> posse putas, cui vel nitenti matris ab alvo
> protinus inconcussum et ineluctabile votum
> virginitas fuit una, nec est cur solvere amatae
> iura pudicitiae cupiam aut haec foedera rumpam?
>
> Do you believe that I can endure the touch of a man, I, whose unshakeable, unalterable vow, even from the moment that I emerged from my mother's radiant

[28] Greene, *Descent from Heaven*, 151.
[29] Ibid., 152.
[30] "Ne timeas!" Luke: 1:30.
[31] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, I.139-54.
[32] "Quomodo fiet istud quoniam virum non cognosco," Luke 1:34.

> womb, was for virginity alone, and who have no reason to wish to annul the obligation to my beloved chastity or to break this compact? [33]

Mary's spirited response to Gabriel's announcement not only demonstrates dedication to her vow but also breaks significantly with both Virgil and Luke. Sannazaro presents Mary as a strong woman who is not willing to simply accept a role in the divine plan at the cost of sacrificing her free will: Mary is neither an Abraham who would blindly sacrifice his son, nor is she an Aeneas who would follow the plan of the gods at all costs, sacrificing individuality for the common good. Rather, Mary accepts her role in the divine plan only once she is sure that it will not conflict with her individual will and personal vow, as we will see below.

Contexts: poetic, visual, and devotional

This firm dedication to chastity and the portrayal of Mary as a heroic individual is not entirely unique to Sannazaro. Although such a heroic portrayal of Mary is not present in the Christian Bible, it does appear in the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.[34] This Latin text of the eighth or ninth century was important for medieval devotional literature, Church art, and popular piety, and would later influence both Chiara Matraini's and Lucrezia Marinella's accounts of the life of the Virgin. In Pseudo-Matthew, Mary's chastity is presented as a new and different practice of worship ushered in by Mary alone through a special covenant with God.[35] The Mary in this text is accustomed to interacting with angels. At the moment of the Annunciation, however, the angel who appears to her is in the guise of a "young man of ineffable beauty." The angel's male form causes her to be afraid. Although there is no explicit threat of rape, the gendered appearance of this angel as a young man (unlike those angels with whom Mary was accustomed to interact) suggests that this might have been the cause of her fear.[36] Mary does not argue with the angel as

[33] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, I.157-62.

[34] Calisti cites Pseudo-Matthew as an important source for Sannazaro, since several manuscripts of the DpV contain prophecies from Abacuc and Isaiah cited in the same apocryphal gospel (*Saggio sul poema sacro*, 71-72). Eleonora Carinci has shown the importance of Pseudo-Matthew for Cornazzano's 1471 *De Sanctissima Vita di Nostra Donna* ("'Lives of the Virgin Mary' by Women Writers in Post-Tridentine Italy" [Ph.D. diss., St. Catharine's College, University of Cambridge, 2009]). Antonio V. Nazzaro has underlined the importance of the infancy gospel of James as a source for Sannazaro: Antonio V. Nazzaro, "Il *De partu Virginis* del Sannazaro come poema parafrastico," in *Iacopo Sannazaro: la cultura napoletana nell'Europa del Rinascimento—convegno internazionale di studi, Napoli 27-28 marzo 2006*, ed. Pasquale Sabbatino (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009), 182. This assessment, however, is somewhat anachronistic since, as Susan Haskins notes, the text was only translated into Latin in 1552 by Guillame Postel. See Susan Haskins, "Volume Editor's Introduction," in Vittoria Colonna, Chiara Matraini and Lucrezia Marinella, *Who is Mary? Three Early Modern Women on the Idea of the Virgin Mary*, ed. and trans. Susan Haskins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 21 n. 48. It is nevertheless possible that Sannazaro was able to read a Greek manuscript of the infancy Gospel of James, or that the poet heard about details of the text through Giles of Viterbo or other individuals with whom he was familiar and who belonged to religious orders.

[35] "When all the people had convened, Isachar the high priest rose up and climbed to the highest step so that he could be heard and seen by all the people. When there was a great silence, he spoke: 'Hear me, children of Israel, and give ear to my words. Since the day this Temple was constructed by Solomon, there have lived in it daughters of king, of prophets, of chief priests, and of high priests—women known to be both great and admirable. Nonetheless, when they reached the legal age, they have taken men in marriage, following the custom of their predecessors, and so pleased the Lord. But to Mary alone has a new arrangement appeared, since she has vowed to God to remain a virgin." *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* in *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8:1.

[36] Ibid., 9:1.

she does in Sannazaro's version, even though she is still presented as a bold woman. Although the high priest Isachar wants Mary as a wife for his son, she rejects his proposal, explaining that she has learned how virginity is dear to God.

Despite Sannazaro's representation of Mary as an outspoken woman, other poetic representations of her from the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento do not portray her in this way. Indeed, Susan Haskins mentions that Mary was often seen as a model of both holiness and female social behavior in sixteenth-century Italy due to her modesty, silence, and humility.[37] Another source certainly familiar to Sannazaro was Mantuan's *Parthenice Mariana*. This poem was incredibly popular in the late fifteenth century, enjoying over ten editions between its first printing in 1481 and the beginning of the sixteenth century.[38] In Mantuan's account, at the moment of the Annunciation the fear of rape is even more explicit than in Sannazaro's:

> ad ingressum subitae perterrita lucis
> extulit attonito titubantia lumina vultu.
> Et formam mirata, viri tabescere castum
> pectus, et insidias metuens pallescere coepit
>
> When he entered, she was greatly terrified of the sudden light; he brought forth staggering brightness onto her astonished face. Having seen his form, her chaste heart melted and she began to grow pale fearing the treachery of a man.[39]

Though also afraid of rape, Mantuan's Mary accepts her role in the divine plan without even asking how the Incarnation will come about or whether it will violate her chastity: "She responded 'we are compelled to obey the supreme power of the great thunderer,' and she nodded her assent with meek face, bending her head."[40] Sannazaro's Mary, on the other hand, triumphantly accepts her role only once she is sure that it will not conflict with her individual will and personal vow.

Paintings of the Annunciation from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, such as Botticelli's *Annunciazione di Cestello* (1489-90) and Lorenzo Lotto's *Annunciazione di Recanati* (1534-35), also portray Mary as shying away from Gabriel. In his *Trattato della pittura*, Leonardo mentions that he has recently seen one such painting—identified by Michael Baxandall as Botticelli's *Annunciazione*—in which the angel looks as if he wants to chase Mary from the room: "con movimenti che dimostravano tanta d'ingiuria quanto far si potessi a un vilissimo nimico."[41] Mary has the appearance of "una disperata" who would rather throw herself out the window than be the victim of such dishonor. Painters did not seem to heed Leonardo's distaste for this kind of painting. For instance, Lotto's *Annunciazione* depicts Mary turning away from a surprised and slightly annoyed Gabriel, whose arrival also seems to have frightened a small cat. As Baxandall has shown, the development of painting in this period happened within what he

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[37] Haskins, *Vittoria Colonna*, 32.
[38] Mario A. Di Cesare, *Vida's Christiad and Vergilian Epic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 77.
[39] Baptista Mantuanus (Mantuan), *Parthenice prima sive Mariana* (Paris: Nicolaum Savetier, 1528), II.583-86. Translations of Mantuan are mine unless otherwise indicated.
[40] Ibid., II.651-52.
[41] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 56; Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, ed. A.P. McMahon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), I.58, II.33, cited in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 165.

terms "classes of fifteenth-century emotional experience."[42] In other words, contemporary audiences of art in this period approached paintings—and evidently literature as well—with preconceived ways of imagining their subjects.

This was all the more true for depictions of sacred material. Regarding the *Annunciazione di Cestello*, Baxandall shows how Botticelli's representation of a reticent and fearful Mary was influenced by the sermons of Fra Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, a preacher active in Florence around the time of Botticelli.[43] In his sermons on the Visitation, Annunciation, and Nativity, Fra Roberto imagines the five spiritual and mental states of Mary at the moment of the Annunciation.[44] The first state, *conturbatione*, is Mary's initial reaction at hearing Gabriel's greeting. She is so humble that she is "attonita" and "stupefacta" by the angel's salutation and announcement of the role that she will play. The second state, *cogitatione*, involves Mary thinking through what the angel has just said to her. The third state described by Fra Roberto, *interrogatione*, concerns Mary's questioning of the angel over how this will happen. Mary's dedication to virginity was so great, the friar claims, that one could say she desired more to be a virgin than to lose this virginity in conceiving the son of God. Mary's fourth state, *humiliatione*, is that in which she humbly accepts God's will and says "Eccomi ancilla del signore." The fifth and final state, *meritatione*, is attained when she feels the Christ child incarnate in her womb.

Fra Roberto's imagining of the sequence of Mary's emotional states shows that it was not only Mantuan and Sannazaro who were attempting to represent Marian interiority during this period. Although this scene in the *De partu* might not be a direct response to Fra Roberto, there is a good chance that Sannazaro was at least aware of the preacher and his sermons. Fra Roberto was in Naples five times between 1470 and 1490, and the *Sermones de laudibus sanctorum*, which contains the sermon dealing with Mary's emotional reaction to the Annunciation, was published in Naples in 1489.[45] Stefano Prandi has noted that the sequence of mental states described by Fra Roberto corresponds precisely with what occurs in Sannazaro's poem.[46] Indeed, Sannazaro does describe Mary in ways that correspond to the public imaginary of the Annunciation for the phases of *conturbatione*, *cogitatione*, and *interrogatione*. I would argue, however, that Sannazaro's representation of the last two states, *humilitatione* and *meritatione*, is markedly different from that of Fra Roberto's sermon. Fra Roberto describes Mary's fourth mental state, *humiliatione*, as follows:

> La quarta laudabile conditione si chiama humiliatione. Quale lingua poteria mai exprimere ne quale intellecto contemplare con quale gesto, con quale modo e manera pose in terra li suoi sancti ginochii e abassando la testa disse: Eccomi ancilla del signore. Non disse donna: non disse regina: o profunda humilita: o mansuetudine inaudita. Eccomi disse schiava e serva del mio signore. Et poi levando li occhi al cielo stringendo le mani con le braze in croce fece quella

[42] Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 56.
[43] Ibid., 46-51.
[44] Fra Roberto, *Robertus Caracciolus, Sermones de laudibus sanctorum* (Naples: Mathias Moravum, 1489), 65r-67r (Nativity), 152r-154r (Visitation), and 144r-152r (Annunciation). Cited in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 164-65.
[45] Zelina Zafarana, "Caracciolo, Roberto (Roberto da Lecce)," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, ed. Alberto M. Ghisalberti, vol. 19 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1976), accessed February 8, 2014, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/roberto-caracciolo_(Dizionario-Biografico)/
[46] Sannazaro, *Il parto della Vergine*, 36.

> desiderata conclusione da dio da li angeli dalli sancti padri. Sia facto in mi secondo la tua parola.[47]
>
> The fourth praiseworthy condition is called "humility." What language could ever express—and what mind could contemplate—with what gesture, with what mode and manner she placed her holy knees on the ground and, lowering her head, said: "here I am, the handmaid of the lord." She did not say 'lady;' she did not say 'queen.' Oh profound humility! Oh unprecedented meekness. "Here I am," she said, "the slave and servant of my Lord." And then, lifting her eyes to heaven, and squeezing her hands with her arms in the shape of a cross, she came to the conclusion that was desired by God, by the angels, and by the holy fathers: "Let it be done in me, according to your word."

One gets a sense of the imaginative power of Fra Roberto's sermons from these lines, which help to explain why his preaching was in such high demand. Mary's humility is described through a number of gestures; she kneels and lowers her head when accepting her role in the divine plan, and then gently raises her head towards heaven and accepts God's will with open arms. In the fifth and final mental state that Fra Roberto describes, he imagines Mary's thoughts, already pregnant with the divine child after the angel has departed. Her deep humility causes her to lower her eyes and look at her stomach, saying the following words through copious tears: "Chi son io la quale ho conceputo virgine dio in mi incarnato chi sei tu infinito bene signore del cielo e della terra il quale stai rinchiuso o vero nascosto nel mio piccolino ventre" ("who am I to have as a virgin conceived God incarnate in me? Who are you, o infinite good, Lord of heaven and earth, who are enclosed or rather hidden within my small womb?").[48]

This type of humility is not at all what characterizes Sannazaro's Mary. Earlier we examined the ways in which Sannazaro differs from both Virgil and Luke in his presentation of Mary's encounter with a divine messenger; we will now turn to her reaction, which also differs from contemporary modes of imagining the Annunciation, and in particular Fra Roberto's popular sermon. Gabriel explains to Sannazaro's Mary that she will bear God's child while maintaining her virginity. The poet's description emphasizes Mary's emotional reaction to the events that will occur: "As you marvel at the swelling of your virgin's womb, you will stand transfixed with terror. At last, with fear rejected, you will experience the unexpected joys of your chastity preserved."[49]

Once Gabriel has spoken these words, Sannazaro's narrator describes Mary's gestures as follows: "After these words the queen raised her eyes to the stars, and to the abodes of the saints above and their golden dwellings. She nodded."[50] Unlike in Fra Roberto's sermon, Mary is referred to once again as a "regina" instead of an "ancilla," "schiava," or "serva." Fra Roberto envisions Mary kneeling and lowering her eyes in humility, while Sannazaro has her raising her eyes towards the heavens and the abodes of the saints. And if Fra Roberto has Mary being deeply

[47] Cited in Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 165.
[48] Cited in ibid.
[49] "At tu, virgineum mirata tumescere ventrem, / haerebis pavitans; demum, formidine pulsa, / gaudia servati capies inopina pudoris." Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, I.167-69.
[50] "His dictis, regina oculos ad sidera tollens / coelestumque domos superas atque aurea tecta / annuit." Ibid., I.177-78.

humble, of a "mansuetudine inaudita" in her response to the angel, Sannazaro's Mary nods and boldly declaims her words of acceptance in heroic terms:

> Iam iam vince, fides, vince, obsequiosa voluntas!
> en adsum: accipio venerans tua iussa tuumque
> dulce sacrum, pater omnipotens; nec fallere vestrum est,
> coelicolae: nosco crines, nosco ora manusque
> verbaque et aligerum coeli haud variantis alumnum
>
> Now be victorious my faith, now be victorious my compliant will! See, I stand ready. In worship I accept your commands, almighty Father, and your joyous ritual. Inhabitants of heaven, deception is not your part. I recognize the locks, I recognize the features, hands, words, and the winged offspring of an unchanging heaven.[51]

Though she is also in awe of what has just occurred, Mary is not submissive and Sannazaro makes it very clear that she is accepting her role in the divine plan on her own terms. The correspondence in the sequence of mental and emotional states, and the explicit differences between Fra Roberto's and Sannazaro's respective depictions of the last two, however, suggest that Sannazaro consciously sought to portray Mary in a heroic manner, whether or not he did this in explicit polemic with Fra Roberto.

At the beginning of the Annunciation, Mary was cast as a new Aeneas in relation to a divine messenger; in the above passage, however, Sannazaro appears to be mapping Mary onto Aeneas's father, Anchises, and his prayer to Jupiter in *Aeneid* II. As Michael Putnam notes, Mary's turning her eyes to the stars ("oculos ad sidera") in line 177 is an echo of the same phrase in *Aeneid* II.687.[52] Anchises's prayer occurs during the sack of Troy. Venus has just appeared to Aeneas, and has told him to flee the burning city.[53] Aeneas arrives at his father's house only to find the old man obstinate and unwilling to keep on living, or to suffer the pains of exile. As Aeneas is preparing to go back out and fight the Greeks to the death, a small flame appears above Iulius's head. Anchises raises his eyes to the sky and asks for confirmation of this omen. A bright thunderbolt crashes across the sky, confirming that the sign was indeed sent from Jupiter. At this point Anchises stands up and declaims that he agrees to leave Troy: "Now, now there is no delay; I follow, and where you lead, there am I."[54] Mary's joyful words of acceptance in Sannazaro's poem begin with the same "iam iam" formulation, continuing the earlier echo of "oculos ad sidera" and Sannazaro's mapping of Mary onto Aeneas's father.[55] Why, however, might the poet shift from representing Mary as a new Aeneas to a new Anchises at this moment, and what might this shift signify?

We might assume that just as the omen of Iulius' destiny prompts Anchises and his family to leave Troy, so too does the glorious destiny of Jesus prompt Mary to accept her role in the divine plan. Indeed, David Quint has convincingly argued that John Milton's Eve echoes the same lines

[51] Ibid., I.180-84.
[52] Michael Putnam, note I.177, in ibid., p. 388.
[53] Ibid., II.594-620.
[54] "Iam iam nulla mora est; sequor et, qua ducitis, adsum." Virgil, *Aeneid*, II.701.
[55] This mapping finds further support in Mary's words "nosco crines," which, as Putnam notes, also occurs in Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI.809, when Anchises recognizes the figure of Numa Pompilius.

from Virgil, and the same consolatory reasoning, when she accepts to leave Eden and to follow Adam in book 12 of *Paradise Lost*: "By me the promised seed shall all restore."[56] Yet close attention to the Annunciation scene in the *De partu* shows that Mary does not accept her role based on the prophecy of her future son's greatness. As discussed above, Mary's response to Gabriel's prophecy is one of incredulity and near-refusal. She only accepts Gabriel's assurances once she is certain that her personal vow of chastity will not be violated. Nevertheless, the association of Mary with Anchises transforms her into a figure that commands filial *pietas* and commemoration. Anchises's acceptance of the will of the gods and his decision to leave Troy prompts both the wanderings of Aeneas in Virgil's poem and the *translatio imperii* it describes. Mary's acceptance of her role in the divine plan prompts the subject of Sannazaro's poem and enables the transcendental movement of the Incarnation that it describes.

Marian emotion as devotional practice in the *De partu Virginis*

As we saw earlier with Fra Roberto's sermon, Sannazaro's contemporaries considered the imagining of Mary's emotional states during the Annunciation as a devotional practice, and the *De partu Virginis* appears to stage just such a practice. The poem opens with an invocation to Mary as the poet's muse who is asked to aid the poet/prophet's memory in this new undertaking. Mary's aid, furthermore, is invoked in response to the poet's own devotion and dedication to the Virgin:

> niveis tibi si solennia templis
> serta damus, si mansuras tibi ponimus aras
> exciso in scopulo, fluctus unde aurea canos
> despiciens celso se culmine Mergilline
> attollit nautisque procul venientibus offert,
> si laudes de more tuas, si sacra diemque
> ac coetus late insignes ritusque dicamus,
> annua felicis colimus dum gaudia partus:
> tu vatem ignarumque viae insuetumque labori,
> diva, mone, et pavidis iam laeta adlabere coeptis.
>
> if we offer to you ceremonial garlands in gleaming shrines, if we dedicate to you enduring altars in the rock we have hollowed out, from which golden Mergellina, gazing from above on the whitening waves, rises with lofty peak and is visible to sailors approaching from afar, if we duly sing your praises, sing your worship and holy day, your gatherings and rites widely renowned, when we observe the annual rejoicing at the blessed moment when you gave birth: do you, goddess, aid the memory of your bard who is both unsure of the path, and unused to the toil. Already joyous, abet his anxious undertaking.[57]

[56] David Quint, *Inside "Paradise Lost": Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 222. The line in question occurs in John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 12.623 (cited in Quint).
[57] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, I.23-32.

In a circular dynamic, Mary thus functions simultaneously as the poet's muse and his subject. The writing of the poem is enabled by the Virgin's aid and inspiration, while it also functions as a continuous devotional exercise in which the poet seeks emotional identification with his subject. As discussed above, the poet gives a new emphasis to Mary's emotions at the moment of the Annunciation, both in the extended description of her reaction to the divine messenger and in Gabriel's prophecy. This emphasis on Mary's emotions continues throughout the poem. After Mary becomes pregnant and Gabriel flies off, Sannazaro describes the Virgin's thoughts as a mixture of awe and worry: "Then she turns her eyes elsewhere and, with no delay, runs her worried glance along the mountains, and ponders in her mind her cousin and the child that she had conceived. In thought after thought she marvels at the honor come late to her womb."[58] This scene is immediately followed by the poem's *katabasis*, in which it is not the hero who descends to the underworld, but rather the figure of Rumor, transitioning from the narrator/poet to the figure of David for whom, in the words of Stewart Baker, "poetry and prophecy are synonymous."[59]

David's prophecy recounts the life of Jesus, allowing Sannazaro to interpolate a moving and tragic description of Mary's reaction to the crucifixion, including her lamentation at the foot of the cross.[60] As Antonio Nazzaro has commented, Sannazaro's version of this lament is based on the medieval tradition of the *planctus mariae*—a lament where Mary directly communicates her pain and sorrow at the crucifixion—while also strongly echoing the lament of Euryalus's mother in *Aeneid* IX.481-97.[61] For the purposes of our analysis, Sannazaro's inclusion of the *planctus* demonstrates a continued devotional practice in the poem of imagining Mary's emotions. It is, in fact, probable that these lines were written separately as an early version of the poem, independently circulated and only included in the poem at a later date, as the careful philological analysis of Charles Fantazzi and Alessandro Perosa has shown.[62] Both this passage and its potentially independent textual tradition lend further support to the argument that the poetic imagining of Mary's emotional state served a devotional purpose for the poet.

Mary's emotions are once again highlighted in book II of the poem, in which Sannazaro expands upon the *magnificat* from Luke 1:46-55. Mary's words to Elizabeth in 2:49-75 are, as we might expect, an elaboration of the passage from Luke, if nevertheless rephrased in a classical epic mode. In lines 88-97, however, Sannazaro provides a description of Mary's internal reaction and awe at the recognition that she will play a role in the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, as Zachariah has just indicated to her:

> Quae dum cuncta gravi, venturi haud inscia, visu
> percurrit relegens, alto cum corde volutat
> conceptus virgo insolitos et ab aethere lapsam
> progeniem pluviae in morem, quae vellere molli

[58] Ibid., I.221-24.
[59] Stewart A. Baker, "Sannazaro and Milton's Brief Epic," *Comparative Literature* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1968): 119.
[60] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, I.333-68.
[61] Nazzaro, "Il *De partu Virginis*," 180. Sandro Sticca has provided an excellent overview of the tradition of the *Planctus Mariae* in the Middle Ages, distinguishing between two separate genres, the *planctus* proper, in which the Virgin directly communicates her emotions, and the *de compassione Beatae Mariae*, a prayer to the Virgin that aims to "establish intimate correspondences of commiseration" between her and the one who prays. See Sandro Sticca, *The "Planctus Mariae" in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. Joseph R. Berrigan (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 85.
[62] Fantazzi and Perosa, *De partu Virginis*, lxxiv-lxxvi.

excepta haud ullos sonitus nec murmura reddit,
seque rubum virgamque, alto se denique missam
sidus grande mari prorsum agnoscitque videtque:
non tamen ausa loqui tanto aut se ducere dignam
munere, sed tacito affect tibi, maxime divum,
grates, rector, agit mentemque ad sidera tollit.

While the Virgin reads anew, scanning these matters with serious countenance in full awareness of the future, in the depths of her heart she ponders her novel conceiving, and her offspring gliding from heaven like a rain-shower which gives back no sound or noise at all as it lands on a soft fleece. She sees and recognizes that she is the bush and the branch, and, finally, that she has been sent from on high exactly like a stately star upon the sea. Nevertheless she dared not utter a word or consider herself worthy of such a gift but, keeping her feelings to herself, she offers thanks to you, our Ruler, greatest among the divine, and raises her thoughts to the stars.[63]

At the center of the poem, where the main action occurs, however, the poet becomes unable to imagine Mary's emotions. Immediately prior to the birth of Jesus, Sannazaro interrupts his poem with what Matteo Soranzo has called an "internal prologue," beseeching Mary to accept him as her *vatem*, as her bard or prophet.[64] When he returns to the poem, he provides what appears to be the last description of Mary's internal state in the poem: "Happy now in her birth-struggle, now stricken by no fear, the queen of the age to come still stood there, meditating within her heart on nothing fleeting, nothing mortal."[65] Once the Christ-child is born, however, as Kennedy writes, "despite the proximity that [Sannazaro] wishes for and even feels, he cannot fully fathom the Virgin's emotions."[66] Indeed, in lines 396-407 of book II, the poet addresses a series of direct questions to Mary as well as to the animals that attended the birth and paid reverence to the Christ child. These questions evoke the mysterious and impenetrable nature of these emotions, while also making clear the poet's continued desire to convey these emotions as a form of devotional practice:

Quis tibi tunc animus, quae sancto in corde voluptas ,
o genetrix, cum muta tuis famulantia cunis
ac circum de more sacros referentia ritus
aspiceres domino genua inclinare potenti,
et sua commotum trahere ad spectacula coelum?
Magne pater, quae tanta rudes prudentia sensus
leniit?

What were your thoughts, mother, what pleasure was in your holy heart, at the moment when you beheld dumb creatures offering adoration at your cradle?

[63] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, II.88-97.
[64] Matteo Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples* (Farnham, Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 134; Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, II.342-47.
[65] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, II.347-50.
[66] Kennedy, *Uses of Pastoral*, 207.

> Carrying out the blessed ritual nearby, they bent their knees to their almighty Lord and drew astonished heaven to see them. Great Father, what grand instinct tamed their rough emotions?[67]

The reverence and awe experienced by both Mary and the animals at the Nativity are the climax of the devotional sentiments to which the poet aspires, but cannot access, as Kennedy claims, due to his limited human capacity. Within the itinerary we have been tracing, however, this description through negation lends further support to the notion of a devotional practice in imagining Marian emotion throughout the poem. Moreover, it signals an important shift from a devotional practice centered on the rehearsal of Marian emotion to an ineffable awe when contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation.

Dante's *Divina Commedia* as a poetic model of Marian devotion

Sannazaro's complex representation of Mary as a bold heroine of classical epic seems, on the surface, to clash with the elegant simplicity of the Biblical account. We have already seen that Mary is referred to as a "regina" in the poem (a total of nine times), and in three instances she is called "diva." This is fully in line with classical sensibilities, but rather dissonant when considered from the perspective of the Gospels. In his letter of April 15, 1521 to Antonio Seripando, Sannazaro responds to a number of criticisms concerning the manuscript of the *De partu,* which he had previously circulated among literati at the papal curia. In this letter, he defends his use of the term "regina" to describe Mary: "Faccio la Vergine regina: non mi piaceno quelle miserie di farla filare od altro, come han fatto alcuni; ognun va con suo senno a mercato."[68] Nazzaro has noted how Sannazaro's refusal to represent the Virgin as a humble maid who spins is most likely a reference to Mantuan's *Parthenice prima sive Mariana*, while the position of the word "Regina" at the beginning of the second book of the *De partu* strangely echoes the beginning of *Aeneid* IV.[69] There is, however, another source that authorizes Sannazaro's use of classical titles to describe his devotion to Mary: Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Both Luigi Scorrano and Monica Scattolin have demonstrated the strong influence of Dante's *Vita Nova* and *Divina Commedia* on Sannazaro's vernacular lyrics as well as on the *Arcadia*.[70] Few critics, however, have thought to posit Dante as a potential source for the *De partu*, despite the fact that Sannazaro's contemporaries recognized Dantean elements in the poem. For example, the anonymous censor mentioned earlier commented that Sannazaro imitates Dante by placing the patriarchs of the Old Testament in the same part of hell where souls are eternally tortured.[71]

The *Commedia* features what Stephen Botterill has termed a "paradoxical combination of

[67] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, II.397-403.
[68] Sannazaro, "Lettera LIII," in *Opere volgari*, 385.
[69] Nazzaro, "Il *De partu Virginis*," 196 n. 98. The passage in question from Mantuan occurs in *Parthenice Prima*, I.656-60.
[70] Luigi Scorrano, "'Se quel soave stil…': Sannazaro in traccia di Dante," in *Iacopo Sannazaro: la cultura napoletana nell'Europa del Rinascimento—convegno internazionale di studi, Napoli 27-28 marzo 2006*, ed. Pasquale Sabbatino (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009), 119-147; Monica Scattolin, "Dante in Arcadia: presenze di Dante volgare nell'*Arcadia* di Jacopo Sannazaro," in *La Serenissima e il Regno*: *nel V centenario dell'*Arcadia *di Jacopo Sannazaro—atti del convegno di studi (Bari-Venezia, 4-8 ottobre 2004)*, ed. Davide Canfora and Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Bari: Cacucci Editore, 2006), 633-59.
[71] Deramaix, "Inepta et indecora comparatio," 179-81.

[Mary's] humility with outstanding merit and divine election."[72] As Botterill convincingly demonstrates, the *Commedia* is framed by Mary's intervention: it is Mary's compassion for the pilgrim that rescues him from the "selva oscura" via the intervention of St. Lucy, Beatrice, and Virgil. Mary is often invoked and recalled along Dante's journey, and is finally encountered in the last canto of *Paradiso*. The canticles of the *Commedia* provide Dante with the ability to combine a representation of Mary as a spiritually and morally exemplary human woman in the *Purgatorio* with an abstract, metaphorical representation of her as the Queen of heaven in *Paradiso* XXXIII.[73] Indeed, Mary is referred to as "regina" once in *Purgatorio* and a full five times in *Paradiso*.[74] Dante, moreover, is more brazen than Sannazaro in his fusion of classical and biblical styles, referring to Mary as "augusta" in the penultimate canto of the poem.[75] The correspondence between the *De partu Virginis* and the *Divina Commedia* operates on more than a linguistic level; both poems have Mary as their motivating force and both trace out a devotional itinerary for the poet and for the reader. In Dante, this itinerary is made manifest by the moral and spiritual growth of the pilgrim as the poem progresses, best exemplified by the seven "P"s that are progressively removed from his forehead as he ascends the purgatorial mountain. In Sannazaro's poem, the poet's devotional itinerary becomes evident when contextualized within the contemporary practice of imagining Marian emotion. Both poems, furthermore, have the mystery of the Incarnation as their horizon of ineffability. As we saw above, Sannazaro is not able to describe Mary's awe at the significance of the newly born Christ child. So, too, in Dante's *Commedia* the divine vision contains "la nostra effige" at its center but the poet is unable to fully describe God's ways, although he sees "l'imago al cerchio e come vi s'indova."[76] After this point, of course, Dante's poem ends, while Sannazaro's continues.

The third book of the *De partu Virginis,* however, is markedly different from the first two insofar as it shifts from an intimate and personal focus on Mary to descriptions of the effects of the Incarnation on the world, often employing allegorical descriptions. The third book is also characterized by metapoetic concerns. As Soranzo has elegantly argued, this final book functions as a kind of "*mise en abyme* of the poem as a whole" in which Sannazaro reinterprets the adoration of the shepherds, using his skill as a pastoral poet to "adjust the obscure verses of Virgil's *Eclogue* IV […] to the scriptural account of the Nativity."[77] Such alignment, as Soranzo and Deramaix have demonstrated, plays an important role for the poet's intellectual self-positioning.[78] In his analysis of the personified river Jordan and Proteus's indirect prophecy in book III, Quint has claimed that this passage serves to "reinvest [Sannazaro's] epic with a

[72] Stephen Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the* Commedia (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 152. Kennedy, *Uses of Pastoral*, 219, has suggested that Proteus describes his own poetic craft in book III in terms that resemble Dante's "navicella."

[73] Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 153-60.

[74] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia,* ed. C.H. Grandgent, rev. ed. Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), *Purgatorio* VII.82; *Paradiso* XXIII.128, XXXI.100 and 116, XXXII.104, XXXIII.34. All references to the *Commedia* refer to this edition.

[75] Dante, *Paradiso,* XXXII.19.

[76] Ibid., XXXIII.138.

[77] Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity*, 137.

[78] Ibid., 138. Deramaix convincingly argues for marked similarities between Giles of Viterbo's eclogues and Sannazaro's *De partu Virginis*, showing how Aegon and Lycidas—the two shepherds who come to pay tribute to the Christ-child in book III of Sannazaro's poem—can be read as figures for Giles and Sannazaro, respectively. See Marc Deramaix, "La Genèse du *De partu Virginis* de Jacopo Sannazaro et trois égloges inédites de Giles de Viterbe," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome: Moyen Âge* 102, no. 1 (1990): 212-76.

transcendent source of literary authority."[79] Thus the devotional itinerary we have been tracing appears to have vanished after the moment of the Incarnation, as there is no further description of Mary's emotions. The path may have disappeared in the poem, but it is not entirely lost. Kennedy has shown how the poem's three interlocking conclusions—from the Jordan, Proteus, and Sannazaro himself—effect a movement from the scriptural and classical past to the intensely personal immediacy of the poet at Mergellina.[80] When we read this return to Mergellina within the context of the devotional itinerary we have been tracing, the poem folds back on itself, returning to the image of the devout poet who, in book I, prayed to Mary for inspiration. Mergellina, he writes, bestows "pleasant leisure" ("grata […] / ocia") to him and the "Muses's lairs hollowed amid the rocks" ("Musarumque cavas per saxa latebras").[81] The poet's initial invocation to Mary at the beginning of the poem cites the "enduring altars in the rock we have hollowed out, from which golden Mergellina, gazing from above on whitening waves, rises with lofty peak" as a symbol of his dedication to the Virgin.[82] The poem thus appears to be framed by Sannazaro's devotional practice to Mary. Although the description of Mary's emotional states ceases after the moment of the Incarnation, giving way to the poet's daring fusion of classical and biblical sources while rendering him, in Quint's words, a "mere vessel of divine meaning," this charged reference to the hiding places of the Muses at the end of the poem suggests that the poet's devotional itinerary was not abandoned at the moment of the Incarnation.[83] Instead, as we have seen, the poem comes as close as possible to describing Mary's emotional experience, but fails to communicate her overwhelming awe at the moment of the Incarnation. What follows in book III is thus staged as a divinely inspired vision, the path to which was prepared by the devotional itinerary we have traced in books I and II.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let us briefly return to Sannazaro's Mary as a new kind of hero for Christian epic. The strong Virgilian echoes throughout the *De partu* stage a contrast between the classical pantheon and the Christian God. If on the one hand Sannazaro attempts to show how different the Christian God is from those deities worshipped by the Romans, on the other hand he demonstrates that Christian epic requires models of heroism that differ from their classical predecessors. As we have seen, Mary and Aeneas react to divine messengers in very different ways. Aeneas obeys both Venus in book I and Mercury in book IV—rushing headlong into the founding of empire, even at the cost of sacrificing his own desires for the greater good of Rome; Mary instead accepts her role as the mother of God on her own terms, only once she is certain that her vow of chastity will not be violated. Her acceptance of her role in the divine plan is presented in words that echo those uttered by Anchises during the fall of Troy, thus launching not a *translatio imperii* but rather the most important *translatio* and new beginning in Christian history: the Incarnation. Sannazaro's fusion of Virgilian style and Marian devotion may appear incongruous, but it is also echoed by his designs for Santa Maria del Parto. Soranzo describes the public performance of the *De partu* as follows:

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[79] David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 69-80. For the Jordan, see Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, III.331-497; for Proteus's prophecy, III.338-485.
[80] Kennedy, *Uses of Pastoral*, 218-22.
[81] Sannazaro, *De partu Virginis*, III.509-510.
[82] Ibid., I.25-27.
[83] Quint, *Origin and Originality*, 77.

> On Christmas Eve 1529, less than a year before his death, Sannazaro […] performed his masterpiece *De partu Virginis* to a group of admirers convened at the foot of Posillipo hill. The public reading of the poem—which was published, after almost forty years of work, in 1526 and dedicated to Pope Clement VII—was meant to accompany Sannazaro's donation of his land and belongings to a local congregation of Servite friars—a donation that resulted in the construction of the Church of Santa Maria del Parto.[84]

We should note that the public performance of the poem occurs at Mergellina, the same space invoked at both the beginning and the end of the poem as a site of Marian devotion. As Marc Deramaix, Birgit Laschke, and Aude Virey-Wallon have shown, Sannazaro's designs for Santa Maria del Parto, and for his tomb in that church, were intended to evoke the tomb of Virgil, as it was believed that the poet of the *Aeneid* was interred in a Roman mausoleum atop a cave on the slopes of Posillipo.[85] Thus Virgilian imitation and Marian devotion fuse together in Sannazaro's individual worship, both within the *De partu Virginis* and in his designs for Santa Maria del Parto. It is for this reason that Mary is a new Aeneas in the *De partu*—an epic heroine characterized by religious piety; a new Anchises—a parental figure that signals a transition from an old to a new order; and, finally, a character whose emotions are described in greater detail and with more nuanced complexity than either Virgil or the Gospels portray. The emphasis on Marian emotion we have discussed therefore does not appear to be simply a literary exercise, but rather an integral part of the devotional itinerary staged by the poem.

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[84] Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity*, 132.

[85] Marc Deramaix, Birgit Laschke, and Aude Virey-Wallon, "'Maroni musa proxima ut tumolo:' L'Église et le tombeau de Jacques Sannazar," *Revue de l'art* 95, no. 1 (1992): 30. I am grateful to Matteo Soranzo for having brought this source to my attention.

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