

POETS AT THE ST. ANNE ALTAR:

Self-reflection in the *Coryciana*



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Scio non esse nos Vergilios
I know we're no Vergils
(Blosius Palladius)

*The early sixteenth-century Roman humanists wrote reams of occasional verse, ringing changes on themes provided by particular topics. In the *Coryciana* (1524), around 130 poets celebrated Andrea Sansovino's sculpture of St. Anne, the Virgin, and the infant Jesus on an altar commissioned by Johannes Goritz (Corycius) in the church of Sant'Agostino. They treated the numinous power of the statues, the generosity of Goritz, and the artistry of Sansovino, but also their own role as interpreters. This paper suggests that the poets present themselves as creators of the altar on a par with Goritz and Sansovino, as essential participants in the religious occasion, and as part of a divinely inspired human trinity.*

In the first quarter of the sixteenth century Rome had scores of humanists, and it was also full of sodalities, which unified them as a group and provided the focus of their emotional and intellectual life.¹ Dining together was the essential activity of the humanists in their sodalities, but they also staged special events and enjoyed annual celebrations, which often coincided with feasts of the church, memorializing these occasions and their participation in them with masses of poetry.² Their most important poetic monument is the *Coryciana*, a collection of poems written for the celebrations of Johann Goritz, who headed the largest and most famous sodality of all.

Johann Goritz arrived in Rome from his native Luxembourg in 1497 and soon rose to prominence and wealth in the papal curia.³ At some point in the

¹ Important general studies of sodalities include Gnoli 1938, 136–163; D'Amico 1983, 89–114; Bober 1977; De Caprio 1981 and De Caprio 1982

² For more on the activities of the sodalities, see Gaisser 2011, with earlier bibliography.

³ Ceresa 2002.

next decade he conceived the idea of building an altar to his patron saint, St. Anne, and a tomb for himself in the church of Sant'Agostino. In 1510 he signed a contract with the Augustinian monks that allowed him to install an altar against one of the piers in the church and to place on it – carved from a single piece of marble – a statue group of St. Anne, Mary, and the infant Jesus (*Fig. 1*). A tomb ready to receive Goritz himself was to be placed in the pavement below.⁴ The altar with its statue group, sculpted by Andrea Sansovino, was probably dedicated on St. Anne's day (July 26), 1512.⁵ Soon afterwards, if not in time for the dedication, the monument also included a work not mentioned in the contract, a fresco of the prophet Isaiah above it painted by Raphael.⁶ Modern scholars are generally agreed that the statue group and fresco were conceived as an ensemble, and that the program of the whole was inspired by the great Augustinian, Egidio da Viterbo.⁷

For many years Goritz and his altar were the center of a major annual celebration by his sodality.⁸ Every St. Anne's day the humanists gathered in Sant'Agostino. Mass was said at the altar, and poems were attached to boards (*tabellae*) nearby, perhaps originally around the other three sides of the pier itself.⁹ Then the poets and their host repaired to a feast at Goritz's nearby villa, where his garden was adorned with even more poems.¹⁰ In the heyday of the festivities, from around 1512 to 1524, scores of poets praised Goritz and his altar in many hundreds of poems. A large collection of these, the *Coryciana*, was printed in 1524.¹¹ The work is named for Goritz, whom the

⁴ Bonito 1980, 810–811; Bonito 1984, 11–13. The contract is printed in Bonito 1984, Appendix A, 342–355; *Coryciana* 2020, 437–443.

⁵ Bonito 1984, 18.

⁶ For the dating, see Perini 1997–1998, 380; Rijser 2006, 174 n 59; Rijser 2012, 197 n 52.

⁷ Bonito 1984, 100–161; Alhaique Pettinelli 1986, 42–44; Gaisser 1995, 45–47; Rijser 2006, 171–183, 190–194; Rijser 2012, 195–211.

⁸ The date of the last celebration is unknown, but it did not survive the Sack of Rome (1527), and probably ended a few years before that. Goritz himself suffered in the Sack, and perished as he was trying to return to Luxembourg. A contemporary account is given by Pierio Valeriano in *De litteratorum infelicitate* 2.60; see Gaisser 1999, 220–223.

⁹ Later a fourth and fifth board were added. IJsewijn in *Coryciana* 1997, 21–22 gives the references to the relevant poems; see also Rijser 2006, 171 n. 51 and 2012, 180 n.35.

¹⁰ Blossius Palladius, Dedication 8, *Coryciana* 1997, 31. The feast in Goritz's garden is described by C. Silvanus Germanicus (*Cor.* 398); lines 1–60 are printed and translated by IJsewijn 1990, 219–221.

¹¹ For the edition see especially Ruyschaert 1972 and IJsewijn in *Coryciana* 1997, 17–28. Poems discussed in this paper will be cited from *Coryciana* 1997; poets will be given the Latin forms of their names as in the edition. Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020 prints IJsewijn's text of *Cor.* 1–372 with French translations, introduction, commentary, and prosopography. Important studies include IJsewijn 1990; Rijser 2006, 2012; Alhaique Pettinelli 1986; Perini 1997–1998; Pellegrino 2003; Sodano 2011; Wolkenhauer 2014; Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020.

humanists called by the Latin name Corycius (or Coritius), which evoked both the Corician cave of the Muses on Mount Parnassus and Vergil's old gardener in the *Fourth Georgic* (*Corycium . . . senem*, *G.* 4.127) whom they saw as Goritz's namesake.¹²

The *Coryciana* is remarkable for its size (it contains 399 poems by around 130 poets),¹³ but otherwise it is a typical product of its era since occasional poetry on set themes of contemporary interest was a favorite activity of the Roman humanists. The poets of the *Coryciana* also wrote about the Laocoon, on the famous statue of the sleeping Ariadne that everyone identified as Cleopatra, on the courtesan Imperia, and on the death of Celso Mellini.¹⁴ Some of these poems were printed, but most simply circulated among the humanists and their patrons. Manuscripts in the Vatican Library contain poems on the death of Raphael, on the hated Pope Adrian VI, on the name of Pietro Mellini (is it derived from *mel*, "honey," or *melos*, "song"?), on Angelo Colocci's cat, on the villas of various patrons – and also, alas! attacks on Johann Goritz by some of the very poets who celebrated him in the *Coryciana*.¹⁵ Whatever their subject, however, all these poems have one thing in common: they ring changes on a theme – looking for all its possibilities, and endlessly developing and embroidering them. The poets tried to outdo each other, often in the hope of rewards from their patrons. The poems on the name of Pietro Mellini, for example, were probably written for a competition at a party at Mellini's villa. And we are told repeatedly that Goritz's celebrations involved a poetry contest – a *certamen*, whose victor almost certainly would have carried off a cash reward.

The set topic in the *Coryciana*, of course, is praise of Goritz and his altar. Here is how its editor, Blossius Palladius, describes it in his preface to Goritz:

¹² Blossius Palladius spells out the connection with Vergil's gardener in the first words of his dedication: "Corycium senem tibi quadantenus cognominem, Iane Coryci, . . . Vergilius . . . collaudat" (Vergil praises the old man of Corycus, who is to some extent your namesake, Johann Goritz), Blossius Palladius, Dedication 1, *Coryciana* 1997, 29. Mariangelus Accursius treats Goritz's association with the Corician cave in *Cor.* 1.70–73.

¹³ The index in *Coryciana* 1997 includes 132 poets listed with poems in the collection.

¹⁴ Laocoon: for a very partial list with bibliography, see Gaisser 2011, 126 n. 25; see also Wolkenhauer 2014, 109–112. Ariadne/Cleopatra: for poems by Evangelista Maddalena Capodiferro and Baldassare Castiglione, see Brummer 1970, 221–222. Imperia: Vitalis 1512 includes poems by Janus Vitalis, Blossius Palladius, Silvanus Germanicus and others; see also Moncallero 1962. Celso Mellini (brother of Pierio Valeriano's friend and patron, Pietro Mellini): poems on his death were collected by Valeriano and printed in a volume entitled *In Celsi Archelai Melini funere amicorum lacrimae* (Rome 1519); see Gaisser 1999, 309–310; Benedetti 2010.

¹⁵ Raphael: Shearman 2003; Perini 1997–1998. Mellini, Colocci's cat, villas: Gaisser 2011, 127 n. 30. Adrian VI: Fanelli 1979. Goritz: Gaisser 1995, 52–54; Gaisser 2011, 129–130.

All the city's poets, stirred as if by a passionate frenzy, marveling at your piety and the excellence of the work itself, have competed to extol you and have woven your generosity, the elegance of the statues, the pre-eminence of the artists into their songs.¹⁶

Goritz's piety and generosity, the elegance of the statues, the pre-eminence of the artists are indeed the subjects of the *Coryciana*, and we meet them over and over again. But there is another major theme not mentioned by Blossius: the poets themselves. In over 100 poems the poets muse on themselves musing on Goritz and his altar. Details are added, taken away, modified sometimes only a little and sometimes almost beyond recognition, and we meet them coming and going, bouncing off the pages at us and reflecting each other in dizzying profusion, as if in a hall of mirrors.

In what follows I will look at a selection of these metapoetical poems and suggest that in them the poets make themselves not just spectators but essential participants in the religious occasion. I will close with a brief epilogue speculating on the reasons for their virtual neglect of Raphael's fresco.

The poets present themselves as creators of the sanctity of the altar on a par with Goritz and Sansovino. Each has a different role that contributes to the unity of the whole. Goritz brings his piety, money, or divine understanding (sometimes all three), Sansovino his art, the poets their songs. In its simplest form, the idea is usually expressed in a couplet. Here is Petrus Mellinus:

Omnia dant statuis his laudem: carmina vatam,
Corytii pietas, Sansoviique manus. (*Cor.* 266)

Everything gives praise to these statues: the songs of the poets,
the piety of Goritz, the hand of Sansovino.

Antonius Nerlius:

Mens Coryti, manus artificis, vatam ingenium, auro
Hoc struit, arte polit, carmine laudat opus. (*Cor.* 347)

The mind of Goritz, the hand of the artist, the talent of the poets.
Builds this work with gold, polishes it with art, praises it with song.

¹⁶ “. . . poetae urbani omnes velut oestro perciti tuamque tum pietatem tum operis ipsius excellentiam admirati, te certatim extulerunt tuamque animi magnitudinem, statuarum nitorem, artificum praestantiam suis carminibus texuerunt.” Blossius Palladius, *Dedication 3, Coryciana* 1997, 30.

Bernardinus Dardanus:

Musa chely, impensa Corytus, Sansovius arte
Haec decorant studio vivida saxa pari. (*Cor.* 184)

The muse with her lyre, Goritz with expenditure, Sansovino with art
Adorn these living stones with equal zeal.

Silvius Laurelius pushes the argument in a slightly different direction in two closely related epigrams that highlight the statues. Here is the first:

Ipsa vel haec se scire negent simulacra, probandus
Sculptorne an vates, Corytiusne magis. (*Cor.* 69)

Even these images themselves would say they don't know whether
The sculptor or the poets or Goritz deserves greater approval.

In his next epigram, as if to show why the choice is so difficult, Silvius attributes the same miraculous accomplishment to all three:

Corytii mens, Sansovini ars, carmina vatum
Signa istaec adigunt vivere, muta loqui. (*Cor.* 70)

The mind of Goritz, the art of Sansovino, the songs of the poets
Make these statues live, and – though mute – speak.

Baptista Casalius presents an elegant little variation in which each clause has three elements related in order to the three elements in each of the other clauses:¹⁷

Coricius, vates, ars, aram, carmina, Divos,
Dat, ludit, fingit, sumptibus, ore, manu. (*Cor.* 42).

Goritz, the poet, art, altar, poems, divinities,
Gives, composes, shapes, with wealth, with tongue, with hand.

Janus Vitalis constructs his couplet in the same way:

Materiam, formam, mentem, dat, sufficit, addit,
Corytus, auctor, Apollo, ingenio, arte, lyra. (*Cor.* 340)

Matter, form, meaning. Gives, supplies, imparts.
Goritz, the artist, Apollo: with intellect, with art, with the lyre.

This poem gives greatest merit to the poet (Apollo), who imparts meaning, not just matter or form, to the work.¹⁸

Goritz, the sculptor, the poets – three contributors, each of a different kind, to a single project, which of course is also threefold in nature, representing

¹⁷ The type was called a “correlative” poem by J.C. Scaliger; see IJsewijn’s note *ad loc.*, *Coryciana* 1997, 69.

¹⁸ But see also Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020, 398–399.

the three sacred personages (“gods”, as the poets like to call them) of St. Anne, Mary, and the infant Jesus, carved from a single stone. Goritz stipulated the single stone, surely not only because he wanted the work to be a technical tour de force, but also because he was thinking of its religious significance.¹⁹ The three figures of the sculpture are connected by their lineage as well as their divinity; shaped from a single piece of marble, they are shown to be literally – not just metaphysically – of a single substance. This St. Anne “trinity,” demonstrating Jesus’ human lineage, also of course evokes the great trinity, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²⁰

The poets treat the creative trinity of which they are a part as a human counterpart of the trinity of the statue.²¹ Often the idea appears in its simplest form: a single couplet that brings together the three contributors and the three gods.²² Caius Silvanus Germanicus plays with the theme in a series of three epigrams:

Tres Superos homines tres ornare: Corytus
Sculptorque et vates, aere, manu, fidibus. (*Cor.* 321)

Three men have adorned three gods: Goritz,
sculptor, and poet, with money, hand, and lyre.

In a slight variation he assimilates the men, their gifts, and the gods. Each is *summus* (“greatest”).

Et summa ars, summa et pietas, summique poetae
Summa tribus summis dona dedere Deis. (*Cor.* 322)

The greatest art, the greatest piety, the greatest poets
Have given the greatest gifts to the three greatest gods.

In the most complex version, he differentiates and ranks the two trinities.

¹⁹ I have borrowed the phrase “technical tour de force” from Bonito 1984, 60.

²⁰ Bonito 1984, 89–91, 214–215. Alhaique Pettinelli 1986, 45–46, citing Wind 1968, 253–255. Perini 1997–1998, 386. Rijser 2006, 215–220.

²¹ In general they like to draw attention to patterns of three. Thus Blossius Palladius in *Cor.* 127 speaks of one trinity of gods, another of statues, altar, and painting (presented in a single offering), and yet a third of boards (*tabulae*) of poems presented by the poets: “Dat statuas, aram et picturae munus eodem / munere, Corycius, Diis tria dona tribus. . . / . . . Quare hi permoti hac pietate et muneribus Dii / impulerunt vatem in carmina; quae et dederunt / continuo vates; dignas Diis, munere dignas / Corycio et Superis treis dederunt tabulas”. *Cor.* 127, 1–2, 5–8. See Perini 1997–1998, 382. For translation see Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020, 98.

²² Thus, *Cor.* 44 by Savoia: “Coryitus locat, Andreas facit, ornat Apollo; / Tres treis condecorant sumptibus, arte lyra”). Also *Cor.* 87 by Alexander Alexandrinus Romanus: “Numina tres Superos ornant tria, Iuno, Minerva / Cypria, divitiis, carminibus, specie”. For translations see Bonito 1984, 248 and 257; Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020, 52 and 76.

Corycius vati et fabro, illi at debet uterque; hi
Tergemini debent Tergeminis Superis. (*Cor.* 323)

Goritz is indebted to poet and sculptor, but each is indebted to him.
This set of three is indebted to the triple gods.

He also treats the theme in hendecasyllables.

Divos tergeminos Corycianos,
Compar Phidiacis opus figuris,
Aequo tergemini probant coluntque
Affectu Corytus, faber, poetae. (*Cor.* 336)

The three, Goritz, sculptor, poets,
With equal devotion praise and worship
The threefold Corycian gods,
A work equal to the statues of Phidias.

In longer poems there is more room to elaborate. Ioannes Franciscus Philomusus uses two couplets. The second couplet presents the familiar three contributors and three-fold divinity.

Andreas artem, nos carmina, contulit aera
Corycius: trinum quis mage numen amat?

Andreas has bestowed art, we songs, Goritz money.
Who loves the threefold godhead more? (*Cor.* 138–3–4)

This couplet could stand alone as a complete epigram. Compare it, for example, with *Cor.* 321 above, the first epigram we looked at by Silvanus Germanicus. But Philomusus creates a nice variation by adding a couplet at the beginning in which he identifies the three gods and their relation to each other. Here is the whole poem.

Anna parens magnae hic Matris, virgoque supremi
Magna Parens Patris, natus et Omnipotens.
Andreas artem, nos carmina, contulit aera
Corycius: trinum quis mage numen amat?

Here is Anna the parent of the great Mother, and the virgin,
The Great Parent of the supreme Father, and the Omnipotent son.
Andreas has bestowed art, we songs, Goritz money.
Who loves the threefold godhead more? (*Cor.* 138)

In two couplets, then, the roles of both trinities can be differentiated and their component persons appropriately described. These fundamental elements are capable of almost infinite variation and expansion. Using four couplets, Ioannes Baptista Cataneus makes the argument more complex.

Quae tria de Pario cernis spirantia saxo
 Numina, Corytii sunt monumenta pii.
 Virginis Anna parens, et Virgo mater Iēsu
 Mirantur nati parvula membra Dei.
 Sansovii manus haec priscos imitata magistros
 Fecit, quam loquitur quanta tabella vides.
 Ille suae pietatis, et hic feret artis honorem,
 Amboque perpetuo carmine erunt celebres. (*Cor.* 210)

These three living deities you observe of Parian marble
 Are the monuments of pious Goritz.
 Anna, parent of the Virgin, and the Virgin, mother of Jesus,
 Marvel at the tiny limbs of God the son.
 The hand of Sansovino imitating the ancient masters made
 These things, as the votive board relates (you see how large it is).
 The one will win the prize of piety and the other of art,
 And both will be celebrated in everlasting song.

Cataneus' building blocks are the same as those of Philomusus: the trinity in the sculpture and the creative trinity of patron, sculptor, and poets. Like Philomusus, he presents an ecphrasis describing the sculpture to the reader, who is imagined as viewing the statue. Philomusus identifies his genre in the single word, "here (*hic*)": "here is Anna, etc." But Cataneus is more explicit, as if we were standing with him before the column. "You observe (*cernis*)", he says in line 1, pointing out the statues; then he turns to the board full of poems nearby, drawing our attention to its size in line 5, "you see how large it is (*quanta . . . vides*)". The statues memorialize Goritz (they are his monuments, both votive offerings and memorial, and we are to remember that the altar marks his future tomb); the contents of the board testify to Sansovino's achievement. The final memorial for both, however, is not a physical object but the gift of the poets: the "everlasting song" that will insure their fame.²³

Like Cataneus, Andreas Maro uses the trinity in the sculpture ("the three divinities", line 5), but he divides the second trinity, making Goritz and Sansovino not just creators, but also objects of the poets' praise along with the statues.

Inclyta cum Romae tot sint spectacula rerum,
 Hinc antiquae urbis, hinc monumenta novae,
 Dic age, Musa, operi cur tantum contigit uni,
 Mille argumentum vatibus unde fuit?

²³ Cataneus plays with the same elements in *Cor.* 209. For translation see Bonito 1984, 272–3; Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020, 142, 144.

Viterbo.²⁷ Valerianus says that the poets are as many as “Rome and the vast circuit of the world contain” (line 6). The point is not only the number of the poets (compare the “thousand poets” in Maro’s poem above), but the diversity of their homelands. Valerianus is alluding both to the multi-national character of Goritz’s sodality and its poets, who came, if not from “the vast circuit of the world”, at least from all over northern Europe, as well as from nearly every city in Italy, and to the Isaiah fresco and its inscription, which has been interpreted to refer to the future presence of all the nations of the earth among the righteous.²⁸ The idea is consistent with the thinking of Egidio, who predicted that this gathering of the nations was coming to pass in the modern age of discovery and conquest. Valerianus’ insistence on the inspiration of Augustine also points to Egidio, for whose thinking and humanism he was an essential model.²⁹

In another important poem, Janus Vitalis takes our familiar elements in a different direction.³⁰ The two trinities and the link between them are his centerpiece (lines 3–6).

Quis neget ad priscum Romam rediisse nitorem,
Quandoquidem prisci cuncta nitoris habet?
En Phidiam, atque Numam, et praeclaros ecce Marones,
Arte, animoque pio, carminibusque piis!
Hi tribus his statuis dant omnes vivere sensus,
Tresque uno includunt corpore treis animas.
Quinetiam si cuncta, hospes, mirere, loquuntur:
Nam quicquid vates tot cecinere, canunt. (*Cor.* 63)

Who would deny that Rome has returned to its former splendor
When it has all the elements of its former splendor?
Look! Phidias and Numa, and here are brilliant Vergils!
With art and pious mind and pious songs
These give all the senses of these three statues life,
And the three enclose three souls in a single body.
Yes, traveler, if you were to marvel at every detail – they even speak.
Indeed, whatever so many poets have sung, they sing.

²⁷ Gaisser 1995, 45–47.

²⁸ Gaisser 1995, 45–47. For the contemporary interpretation of the Hebrew inscription (*Isaiah* 26.2–3), see Bonito 1984, 132–136, Alhaique Pettinelli 1986, 43–44.

²⁹ “Augustine’s thought impinged on Giles [i.e., Egidio] from every conceivable angle”; O’Malley 1968, 59; and see the whole discussion, 59–61. See Rijser 2006, 190–196; 2012, 207–214.

³⁰ The poem is also translated and discussed by Rijser 2012, 234; Keilen in *Coryciana* 2020, 64, 299.

In the line from his preface that I have used as an epigraph, Blossius Palladius says, “I know we’re no Vergils”. But Vitalis takes a different line, asserting that the poets *are* so many Vergils, and that Sansovino and Goritz are the modern counterparts of Phidias and Numa.³¹ Vitalis’ modern creative trinity – avatars or perhaps even reincarnations of their ancient models – have given the three statues life. They have also brought all their senses to life, making them able, we suppose, to see and hear their worshippers, to feel their reverent touch, and even (as we shall see in the last couplet) to speak to them.³² But more than that: they have put souls (*animas*, line 6) into them – three souls in one body, the single stone of which they are made. These three-fold, sentient, animate beings, then, can respond to and communicate with human beings – like the *hospes* or traveller, who is invited to marvel at them in line 7. If he does so, he will hear them speak. But what will they say? There are two ways to take the last line. The translation above follows the punctuation in IJsewijn’s edition: “Indeed, whatever so many poets have sung, they sing.” Rijser’s translation is similar: “For they sing what all poets have sung”.³³ Rijser continues: “[T]hey say what the poets sing, nay, what all poets and artists have ever sung: the praise of God ... [T]he statues may ... say ... as many things ... as there could be written poems about them”.³⁴ But two of our three most important sources for the text of the *Coryciana* suggest another interpretation: the manuscript of the *Coryciana* transcribed by Vitalis himself (Vat. lat. 2754) and the 1524 edition.³⁵ The punctuation of line 8 in both differs from that in IJsewijn.

IJsewijn: Nam quicquid vates tot cecinere, canunt.

Vat. lat. 2754 and the 1524 edition: Nam, quicquid vates tot, cecinere,
canunt.³⁶

With the comma between *tot* and *cecinerere* in what seems to be Vitalis’ own punctuation, the line must be construed differently: the phrase *vates tot* is not the subject of *cecinerere*, but of *canunt* at the end of the verse.

³¹ This contention runs through many of the poems; it is a familiar element in the cultural and political claims of a new golden age dear to contemporary Roman humanist ideology. For the general intellectual climate, see Stinger 1985, 235–291. For the its use in the *Coryciana*, see Alhaique Pettinelli 1986, 47–49; Pellegrino 2003, 225–228; Rijser 2006, 190–202; Rijser 2012, 207–221.

³² For the theme of living statues, see Wolkenhauer 2014; Pellegrino 2003, 221–224; Rijser 2006, 202–215; Rijser 2012, 221–231.

³³ Rijser 2012, 234.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ For the textual tradition, see IJsewijn in *Coryciana* 1997, 17–21. I have not been able to see the third source: Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana Niccolò Rossi 207.

³⁶ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat lat. 2754, fol. 18v; *Coryciana* 1524, G3v.

For whatever so many poets sing, they have sung.

Compare the translation using IJsewijn's punctuation. The question is, who originates the song? The poets or the gods in the statues? I think it is the latter. The message or song of the statues is timeless and eternal, and what the poets sing as they gaze at them simply repeats the strain.

Both Vitalis and Valerianus have built on the theme of the two trinities, and each has developed a complex religious conception of the relation between them. Vitalis conceives it in terms of time: the human trinity are avatars of the classical past (Phidias, Numa, Vergil); and, inspired by the statues, the poets are able to sing the strains of an eternal truth. For Valerianus, the relation is between heaven and earth: the divine has descended into both the statues and the poets celebrating them. Both Vitalis and Valerianus privilege the poets over the others in the human trinity, giving them not only understanding of the statues but also the power to interpret them to others.

Poems like these are both reverent and inspire reverence. But in many others the poets present themselves as both worshippers and celebrants – almost priests – issuing an explicit call to prayer. Here is Petrus Cursius:

Alloquere, et castis precibus tria numina adora.
Audit opus: facient, si pia vota facis. (*Cor.* 13)

Call on them, and worship the three divinities with chaste prayers;
The work hears: They will do it, if you make pious vows.³⁷

Today we read these calls to prayer, epigrams on the two trinities, and all the other poems in the *Coryciana*, in the authoritative modern edition of Jozef IJsewijn, or in the 1524 edition, or even in the manuscripts. But they started life as separate scraps of paper, affixed to, and surrounding Goritz's altar. The boards to which they were attached were called *tabellae*, the classical term for votive plaques to the gods placed in temples by grateful worshippers. Whether we call them "poetic altarpieces" with David Rijser or think of them as "ex-votos" with Virginia Bonito, the *tabellae* and their contents were – quite literally – part of the altar that they celebrated, and they increased its religious power.³⁸ The poets had just title to be considered its creators along with Goritz and Sansovino.

But I promised an epilogue on the poets' neglect of Raphael's fresco. Today we admire the fresco far more than the statues, and most scholars writing on the program of the altar focus their attention on Raphael's Isaiah

³⁷ Other examples include *Cor.* 15, 47, 55, 88, 95, 103, 212, 356, 362.

³⁸ See Rijser 2012, 189; Bonito, 1984, 184–185.

more than on Sansovino's St. Anne.³⁹ But only thirteen to fifteen of the nearly 400 poems refer to the fresco at all.⁴⁰ Not one mentions the name Raphael or says anything specific about the subject of the painting or its meaning. The closest to anything one could call interpretation is this couplet by Marcus Antonius Casanova, in which the painted Isaiah is asked to comment on the sculpture group below.

Si vivis, nec nos delusit dextera Apellis,
Quid sentis, vates, de Superis? Loquere! (*Cor.* 110)

If you live, and the right hand of Apelles has not deceived us,
What do you think, prophet, about the Gods? Speak!⁴¹

Scholars have advanced various explanations for the omission.⁴² Perhaps Goritz fell out with Raphael, and the poets thought it politic not to mention the fresco. By 1524, Raphael was dead, and perhaps the poets preferred to celebrate a living artist. Since Protestants had started to lay claim to ideas and figures from the Old Testament, perhaps it seemed better not to make too much fuss over Isaiah. The favorite explanation, however, is that perhaps other collections of the *Coryciana* now lost included poems on the fresco.⁴³

These explanations all have their starting point in the modern preference for the fresco; and they are all what we might call external and historical – personal and theological disputes on the one hand and accidents of textual transmission on the other. I want to look at the matter from a different perspective. My starting point is not the fresco but the sculptures, and I suggest that we keep our focus internal and literary – looking at Goritz, the poets, and the religious ideas conveyed by the statues. My question, then, is not why the poets neglected the fresco, but what they saw in the statues.

³⁹ E.g., Rijser 2006, 171–181; Rijser 2012, 195–207; Alhaique Pettinelli 1986.

⁴⁰ Rijser 2006, 213; 445–452 (the list, with translation and discussion). The number is given as 15 by Perini 1997–1998, 368–407, who discusses a few examples (381–385). Valeriano's poem (*Cor.* 197), discussed above, does not appear on Rijser's list. Perini includes it (p. 385), pointing to the word *colores* in line 2 as “un fugace cenno” to the painting, but regards the rest of the epigram as “escludendo affatto Raffaello”.

⁴¹ Translated and discussed by Rijser 2006, 448–449; Rijser, 2012, 228. See also Perini 1997–1998, 383.

⁴² E.g. Perini 1997–1998, esp. 387–388; Rijser 2006, 213, 452; Rijser 2012, 197 n. 52, 227–230.

⁴³ There were other collections (there were poems in Greek, for example). See Ruyschaert 1972; IJsewijn in *Coryciana* 1997, 17–22. But 12 of the poems that refer to the fresco are all by two poets: Blossius Palladius and Marcus Antonius Casanova. Blossius was the editor of our collection, and if he had written additional poems on Raphael, he surely would have included them. And much of Casanova's poetry is extant (Ballistreri 1978); one would expect IJsewijn to have included any on the fresco in *Coryciana* 1997.

The poets were influenced by several considerations. The first is obvious: Goritz's special devotion to St. Anne. His celebration was for St. Anne's day, and the cult statue was necessarily the main focus of attention.⁴⁴ Moreover, while the message of Raphael's Isaiah is primarily intellectual, in tune with the complex and multi-layered theology of Egidio da Viterbo, that of the sculpture is both simple and profound. The statue group speaks to universal human emotions – the three generations of grandmother, daughter, and child – figures literally attached to each other and joined by a bond of human love. The three-fold work provided the poets with a ready-made symbolism full of artistic possibilities, including the idea of setting what I have called the creative trinity against the sacred trinity of the statues – a theme they embroidered in countless ways, as we have seen. Most important, however, was the religious significance of the statues – not only in the figures they represented, but in the fact that they were made – by Goritz's stipulation – from a single piece of stone.⁴⁵ This technical feat (which is great enough that one could almost call it miraculous) is a reflection on the human level of the religious miracles associated with the relationship of the three figures. Here is Aulus Orpheus Pellatus:

Anna vetus sterilis Mariam, ast haec virgo Tonantem
Gignit, et hinc natus, pró! puer iste Deus. (*Cor.* 258)

Aged Anna, barren, gave birth to Mary, but she, a Virgin, gave birth
to the Thunderer, and from him – behold! was born this boy, God!⁴⁶

The St. Anne trinity, in this light, then, embodies miracles: the barren grandmother, the virgin mother, the child who is both son and father. A trinity itself, it reveals both the mystery of the Incarnation and that of the holy Trinity.⁴⁷ With competition like this, Isaiah – great as he is – never had a chance.

⁴⁴ See Perini 1997–1998, 386; Rijser 2006, 213; Rijser 2012, 228.

⁴⁵ Goritz's use of this symbolism may be what the poets mean when they refer to the "mind" (*mens*) of Goritz as an essential component of the statues.

⁴⁶ Other examples include *Cor.* 138, 218, 256, 259, 287, 325.

⁴⁷ See Perini 1997–1998, 386. The theme is clearly announced in *Cor.* 1.70–81, discussed by Rijser 2006, 217–218.

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Fig. 1.

Andrea Sansovino, *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, Sant'Agostino Rome.
Photograph by Thomas Gaiser.