

An incunable edition of Mantuan poems praising virtuous women, bound in an early German printed leaf.

Baptista Mantuanus. *Parthenice prima sive Mariana*. Venice: Jacobus Pentius, de Leuco, 16 July 1[4]99. 7 7/8 inches x 6 inches (200 mm x 152 mm), [140] pp.

Today, as in antiquity, Virgil is the great Mantuan poet. As late as Shakespeare's day, however, he was obliged to share his fame with a later fellow-citizen, Battista Spagnoli (1447–1516), or in Latin Baptista Mantuanus, known throughout continental Europe as Mantovano, and in Britain as Mantuan. In the fourth act of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the schoolmaster Holofernes quotes some lines of Latin and exclaims,

Ah, good old Mantuan! I may speak of thee as the traveller doth of Venice:

Venetia, Venetia,

Chi non ti vede non ti pretia.

Old Mantuan, old Mantuan! who understandeth thee not, loves thee not.

Mantuan was of course a toponym, as was his original surname, Spagnoli, an allusion to the poet's Spanish heritage: his father was a nobleman of Cordova. In a letter of 1496, Erasmus declared Mantuan to be a second Virgil, a *Christianus Maro*—Publius Vergilius Maro was Virgil's full name.

Mantuan became a Carmelite in 1464, eventually rising to be chief executive of the entire order in 1513. "Blessed" since 1885, he has not yet advanced to full sainthood, and even his beatification now seems perhaps no more than an afterglow of the nineteenth centenary of Virgil's death, celebrated with much patriotic pomp in 1882. Mantuan was a prolific and diffuse poet, famous for his coarse invectives (in the best tradition of the Church Fathers) against women and their dissolute manners. On the other hand, the poet approved of the sex when it behaved itself. His keen poetical appreciation of chastity bore fruit in several poems in praise of virginity, composed throughout his career.

Seven of these *Parthenicae* were published between 1468 and 1507, the first (reproduced here) honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary. The other six poems in the series glorified the several virginites

of Saints Margaret, Agatha, Lucy, Apollonia, and Cecilia. Mantuan claimed to have written the 2,900 lines of the poem to the Virgin Mary in two years— “*duorum annorum lucubratio.*” (By contrast, his 2,100 lines on Saint Catherine of Alexandria took only forty days of summer vacation). The text was first published in Bologna in 1488. Fourteen further editions appeared elsewhere during the incunable period (i.e., before 1501). This is a copy of one of three editions printed in 1499. The printer’s name, Iacobum de Leucho, i.e., Jacopo Pencio (or Jacobus Pentius) of Leuco, and the date of production (16th July, 1499) are indicated at the foot of the last page of printed text with instructions to the binder in the *Registrum* as to just how the pages of text were to be assembled.

The boards of the (recent) binding are covered with an attractive specimen of early German typography, with rubrication. There are occasional blank spaces in the text left for the addition of majuscule initials by hand, the correct letter being indicated in unobtrusive minuscule that could be painted over. Although the initials have not been supplied by a scribe, the text has not been entirely neglected. There are extensive annotations in a contemporary hand, both in the margins and between the lines. Mantuan’s works, after all, were pedagogical favorites long before Shakespeare’s *Holofernes*, especially the *Eclogues*, and few copies escaped some sort of added commentary.

This copy of Mantuan’s poems is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries’ 8.5 million volumes. The Green Library houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes. Among the rarities are an extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.