

NONNUS AND BIBLICAL EPIC

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1. Introduction

Nonnus is unique among writers of biblical epic on at least two counts: his *Paraphrase* is the only epic version of the Gospel of St John and he is the only author of a biblical epic to have written a major mythological epic as well. It was once doubted whether one person could have written both the *Paraphrase* and the *Dionysiaca* without undergoing a dramatic ‘conversion’, but current scholarship stresses the cohabitation and infiltration of Christian and pagan ideas in the late-antique world,¹ while intertextual references not only authenticate Nonnus’ authorship but suggest that the poet may have worked contemporaneously on the two poems.² However, variety or variation (*poikilia*) is now identified as central to Nonnus’ approach,³ and the *Paraphrase* differs fundamentally from the *Dionysiaca* in tone. Whereas the mythological poem is humorous, mocking, self-referential, metatextual, the *Paraphrase* uses the same vocal range in a sensitive, subtle and sympathetic elaboration of the mysteries and miracles set out in simple style in the biblical text. There is no doubt that Nonnus’ choice of John’s Gospel was influenced by the completion in 428 of Cyril of Alexandria’s commentary on the

¹ Bowersock (1990) is fundamental; more recently (e.g.) McLynn (2009), Criboire (2013), Jones (2014); on Nonnus: Shorrock (2011) and (2014), Doroszewski (2014), Spanoudakis (2014b).

² Golega (1930) is the basic study of the *Paraphrase*. Vian (1997b) argued from the use of the term *μάρτυς*, that the *Paraphrase* was the earlier work, a view upheld by recent studies of specific episodes, esp. Spanoudakis (2007) 88, (2013b) 207, (2014a) 47–52. But at some points the *Dionysiaca* may have influenced the *Paraphrase*, e.g. the wedding at Cana in *Par.* 2: Gigli Piccardi (2003) 53. Cf. Livrea (1989) 30 ‘i due contemporanei poemi’; Chuvin (2014) 4. Lively discussion of the problem: Shorrock (2011) 49–52. See also Simelidis in this volume.

³ Programmatic statement, *Dion.* 1.11–33, discussed (e.g.) Hopkinson (1994c) 10 f.; for the *Paraphrase*, Shorrock (2011) 73.

same text,⁴ but John's allusive, even mystical, approach, exemplified in his first chapter on the Logos, would also have been congenial to the author of the *Dionysiaca*.⁵

Beyond what can be deduced from the poems, we have virtually no information about Nonnus,⁶ apart from the link to Alexandria suggested by his knowledge of Cyril's commentary on John. This is confirmed by an epigram alluding to the Pharos lighthouse (*AP* 9.198):

Νόννος ἐγὼ Πανὸς μὲν ἐμὴ πόλις, ἐν Φαρίῃ δέ
ἔγχεϊ φωνήεντι γονὰς ἤμησα Γιγάντων.

Nonnus am I; my city is Pan's, but in Pharos
with the lance of my voice I mowed down the Giants' stock.

The last line might naturally be taken as an allusion to the *Dionysiaca*,⁷ but the epigram is transmitted in one branch of the manuscript tradition of the *Paraphrase*, and Livrea argued that it includes an allusion to the convocation on Pharos by Ptolemy Philadelphus of the seventy translators of the Old Testament: the Giants in that context represent heretics.⁸ This poem, then, plausibly a book dedication for a combined edition, asserts the unity of Nonnus' two works, a point that must inform any analysis of his approach to biblical epic. The surviving biblical poets of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries present a range of motives for writing—educational, devotional, exegetical, literary embellishment of plain biblical language for a cultivated audience—in various combinations.⁹ But Nonnus wrote the *Paraphrase* for the same audience as the *Dionysiaca*, the

⁴ E.g. Livrea (1989) 25 and (2000) 53; De Stefani (2002) 22–24; Shorrock (2011) 59–60 with references; Accorinti (2013) 1125; and especially Spanoudakis (2014a) 18–20, suggesting a possible dating between 428 and 438 for *Par*.

⁵ Cf. Livrea (1989) 31; Livrea (2000) 54–55 discusses the model provided by Neoplatonic Lives and commentaries; De Stefani (2002) 14–26; Gigli Piccardi (2003) 82–83; Cutino (2009).

⁶ Agathias, *Hist.* 4.23.5 is not helpful. Vian (1976) ix–xviii; Hopkinson (1994c) 33 n. 1.

⁷ So Vian (1976) lvi–lvii.

⁸ Livrea (1987) 110–113, (1989) 32–35, (2000) 51–53; cf. Spanoudakis (2014a) 1.

⁹ Latin poets: Roberts (1985) 67–106; summary, with further bibliography: Whitby (2007) 199; Greek poets: Agosti (2001).

cultivated intellectuals of Alexandria,¹⁰ who would be sensitive to the scholarship that underlay his elaboration of the Gospel text and admiring of the dexterity with which Cyrilline exegesis was translated into epic compound adjectives. Composition in parallel with the *Dionysiaca* suggests a further possibility: by his use of overlapping language, Nonnus sets out to highlight the similarity between many of the Dionysiac and biblical stories—the turning of water into wine at Cana and at Lake Astacide in the *Dionysiaca*,¹¹ the raising of the dead Tylus and the dead Lazarus,¹² the entry of Dionysus into Athens and of Christ into Jerusalem,¹³ the passion of Icarius and of Jesus,¹⁴ and so on—and hence perhaps to stimulate reflection on the relationship between pagan and Christian ideology.¹⁵ In all these examples, the more familiar version is the Christian one: to what extent did Nonnus shape his Dionysian tales in the light of the miracles of Jesus?¹⁶

Why did the ever-ingenious author of the *Dionysiaca* choose to constrain his bursting versatility within the confines of the biblical text? This in itself may be a further sign of Nonnus' resourcefulness. Paraphrase had its origins in a school rhetorical exercise: ¹⁷ was Nonnus attracted by the challenge of accommodating to this demanding exercise his exuberant, yet rigorous, style?¹⁸ Here we may recall the rigidity of the metrical

¹⁰ Agosti (2001) 97–99.

¹¹ *Par.* 2.1–11 and *Dion.* 14.411–437; Livrea (2000) 76–92. See also Gerlaud (1994) 19–22; Gonnelli (2003) 60–61.

¹² *Dion.* 25.451–552; Spanoudakis (2013b).

¹³ *Dion.* 47.1–33; Accorinti (2004) 34–36.

¹⁴ *Dion.* 47.1–264; Spanoudakis (2007). See also Accorinti (2015) 67–69 for the *noli me tangere* of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, applied to the dead Bacchant of *Dion.* 35.51.

¹⁵ Gigli Piccardi (2003) 34 stresses that the *Dionysiaca* presents Dionysiac cult not as antiquarian, but as a living religion of salvation. Conversely, Liebeschuetz (1996) argues that the *Dionysiaca* is not a religious poem.

¹⁶ Gigli Piccardi (2003) 45–60 uses the epigram quoted above as the starting-point for a detailed exploration of the syncretism of Nonnus' two poems, in which she too argues that the Christian material influenced Nonnus' portrayal of Dionysus. Spanoudakis (2013b) argues similarly for the relationship between the story of Lazarus and that of Tylus; cf. id. (2009) on Lazarus and Staphylus. See further Shorrock (2011) 49–105.

¹⁷ Roberts (1985).

¹⁸ Spanoudakis (2014a) 68–69 relates Nonnus' technique to Quintilian's discussion of paraphrase.

scheme of this poet's hexameters: Nonnus practised metrical constraint in conjunction with linguistic and rhetorical virtuosity, and his paraphrase of the plain words of the Gospel text further complicates this.¹⁹ In writing the *Dionysiaca* Nonnus exploited the rich tradition of epic that stretched back to Homer. In the *Paraphrase* he began from the foundational Christian text which is melded with contemporary exegesis, as well as with elements from the synoptic Gospels,²⁰ all of which are additionally transposed from prose into verse.

2. Traditions of Biblical Epic

It has been a long-standing view that Greek biblical epic was catapulted into existence in the mid-fourth century by the Emperor Julian's so-called Schools Edict (June 362), directed against Christian schoolteachers. In response, Apollinarius of Laodicea, perhaps drawing on materials he had created with his father, converted much of the Bible into classical metres and forms (including Platonic dialogues for the Gospels).²¹ But none of this work survives, and the scope and impact of Julian's edict have very probably been seriously over-estimated.²² More modest examples of Greek biblical poetry from the mid-fourth century have now come to light in the short Christian poems of the Bodmer papyrus, which include the *Vision of Dorotheus* and paraphrases of Old Testament episodes, probably intended initially for the author's immediate Christian community, though with some indications of a wider evangelizing spirit.²³ Of the three major extant Greek writers, who cluster in the mid-fifth century, Nonnus, as we have seen, worked in Alexandria, while the anonymous author of the Psalm paraphrase was another Egyptian

¹⁹ Nonnian metrics: Keydell (1959) I, 35*-42*; Agosti-Gonnelli (1995); Whitby (1994). Sherry (1991) 79-111 argued that the metre of the *Paraphrase* is less rigorous than that of the *Dion.*, but metrical deviations are usually connected with a conscious decision to retain the biblical model; cf. Sherry (1996).

²⁰ E.g. Greco (2008) 15-28 and (2014) 308-309, 310-311; Spanoudakis (2014a) 17.

²¹ Kaster (1988) 242-243.

²² McLynn (2014), esp. 130 on the Apollinarii; doubts already expressed by Agosti (2001) 67-71.

²³ Agosti (2001) 71-74 and (2009a).

writing for a patron in Constantinople.²⁴ The Empress Eudocia may have composed both her (lost) biblical epics on the Octateuch and the prophets Zachariah and Daniel and her extant biblical centos (which redeploy Homeric lines and half-lines to narrate biblical stories)²⁵ in Constantinople, but more probably wrote them in Jerusalem in her later years.²⁶ Despite their proximity in date and significant linguistic parallels between the two poems of Nonnus and the Psalm paraphrase,²⁷ the approach of the two works to the biblical text is quite different: Nonnus greatly expands and elaborates John's Gospel, whereas the psalm paraphrase keeps close to the model, line by line.²⁸ Nonnus is distinctive too in his strict metrical refinement, which is not observed in the Psalm paraphrase or Eudocia's poem on St Cyprian.²⁹ However, recent scholarship has cogently argued for conscious choice on the part of these Christian poets, as also in the case of Gregory of Nazianzus at the end of the fourth century, to remain outside 'modern' trends in metrics.³⁰

Among Latin biblical poets, the earliest was Juvenius, a Spaniard who rendered the Gospels into hexameters in the time of Constantine,³¹ but his successors belong to an Italian or specifically Roman context. The learned Proba wrote her Virgilian

²⁴ Ps.-Ap. *proem.* 4; Agosti (2001) 87; Faulkner (2014) 195 n. 3.

²⁵ See further n. 65 below.

²⁶ Photius, *Bibl. codd.* 183–184 for the biblical epics. Eudocia also wrote a three-book poem on St Cyprian, partially extant, for which Livrea (1998b) suggested a dating of 438–439. On dating the centos, see Whitby (2007) 207–209 with bibliography there cited; Cameron (1982), esp. 254–285, remains full of insights; also Whitby (2013) 207–210.

²⁷ Identified by Golega (1960) 93–119, who argued that the Psalm paraphrast knew the work of Nonnus. Recent scholars are more equivocal, e.g. De Stefani (2008).

²⁸ However, Faulkner (2014) argues that the two were not so different in the view of late-antique commentators.

²⁹ Agosti-Gonnelli (1995). Greater awareness of Nonnian metrics is, however, discernible in Eudocia's *apologia* for her centos (ibid. 319–320).

³⁰ Agosti-Gonnelli (1995) 405–48; 'false quantities' in Gregory: Cameron (2004) 338–339; Nonnus and the Psalm paraphrase: De Stefani (2008), emphasizing the Callimachean metrics of the Psalm paraphrase by contrast with the archaizing manner of Eudocia.

³¹ Jerome, *On Famous Men* 84, quoted by Green (2006) 1. Jerome describes Juvenius' rendering as 'almost word for word' (*paene ad verbum*): discussion Green (2006) 43–47, cf. Faulkner (2014), esp. 199 f.

centos probably for a Roman senatorial audience in the mid-fourth century,³² while the more shadowy Sedulius, although associated with Greece in a biographical note transmitted with his manuscripts, more probably wrote his verse *Carmen Paschale* and its prose paraphrase, the *Opus Paschale*, in an Italian milieu in the second quarter of the fifth century.³³ And Arator recited his poem based on the Acts of the Apostles at the church of St Peter ad Vincula in Rome in 544.³⁴

These Latin writers all focus on the New Testament Gospels and Acts, although Sedulius in his first Book surveys Old Testament evidence for Christ's power,³⁵ while the centonists, Proba and Eudocia, begin from the Old Testament theme of God's plan.³⁶ Individual psalms, which were of course in verse in the Hebrew original and were central to Christian worship, also invited poetic paraphrase.³⁷ And Latin Old Testament paraphrases have fared better than Greek: we have a substantial, but nevertheless incomplete, Latin *Heptateuch*, probably dating from the first part of the fifth century and incorrectly attributed to Cyprian,³⁸ while the roughly contemporary *Alethia* of Claudius Marius Victorinus, also incomplete, dealt with the Genesis story up to the death of Abraham.³⁹ Finally Avitus of Vienne in the first decade of the sixth century composed five books in hexameters covering aspects of

³² A date between 354 and 370 has the strongest scholarly support. Extensive bibliography on Proba's identity and date is captured by Curran (2012) 328; note in particular Cameron (2011) 327–337, with Kelly (2013a) 32 n. 84. Curran (2012) 330–333 locates Proba's audience in the literary salons of Rome, analysed by Cameron (2011) 353–420. On the *Cento* of Proba and its reception see recently Schottenius Cullhed 2015.

³³ Green (2006) 135–143.

³⁴ Green (2006) 251–252, 391–392.

³⁵ 1.103–241; cf. Green (2006) 162, 167–169.

³⁶ *Homerocentones* 1–205 (Schembra (2007) 5–17; Proba 1–332 (Schenkl (1888) 569–589). The similar plan supports the view that Eudocia was aware of Proba's work: Whitby (2013) 209.

³⁷ Paulinus of Nola (353/355–431) wrote paraphrases of three Psalms (Poems 7, 8, 9 on Psalms 1, 2 and 137 respectively), as well as his *Laus Sancti Iohannis* which paraphrases Luke 1: Green (2006) 146–148.

³⁸ Ed. Peiper (1891). The work originally included all the historical books of the Old Testament: Roberts (1985) 92–96; Green (2006) 151–152.

³⁹ Roberts (1985) 96–99, 102: the fourth and last book is lost, so the work currently ends with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

the Old Testament story from Genesis to the Exodus from Egypt, envisaged as the archetype for the Christian Fall and Redemption.⁴⁰

Below, however, in order to keep Nonnus' paraphrase centre-stage, I consider the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, a favourite theme, as also in homilies,⁴¹ but for which the only biblical source is the Gospel of John, chapter 11. Four varied treatments of this episode survive in Juvencus, Sedulius, Eudocia and Nonnus.

3. John's Account of the Raising of Lazarus

John's locates this final miracle of Jesus within the context of the Jews' growing hostility: chapter 7 opens with the statement that Jesus walked in Galilee, because in Judaea the Jews sought to kill him (7:1). The next three chapters recount a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jews, whenever he appeared in Jerusalem, culminating (10:31) in the Jews taking up stones against him and Jesus' retreat beyond the Jordan (10:40).⁴²

Lazarus' illness in Bethany is reported to Jesus in a message from Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha (11:1–3). Jesus realizes that Lazarus' illness is a means to enable the Son of God to be glorified (11:4) but, despite his love for all three siblings, lingers two more days (11:5–6), before taking the decision to go, dismissing warnings from the disciples (11:7–10). His remark that Lazarus is asleep is misunderstood by the disciples to mean that he is recovering, until Jesus tells them bluntly that he is dead (11:14 *Λάζαρος ἀπέθανεν*); Jesus says he is glad for the disciples' sake that he was not there, so that they may believe, and exhorts them to go with him (11:11–15). Thomas Didymus urges them to go, so that they may die with him (11:16). On arriving, Jesus finds that Lazarus has been buried for four days (11:17). John here notes that Bethany is fifteen stades from Jerusalem, and that many of the

⁴⁰ Roberts (1985) 99–104.

⁴¹ Baldwin (1996) 93–94, cf. Spanoudakis (2014a) 21–22, also 87–92. Caprara (2000) discusses a ninth-century epigram on Lazarus that may well draw on Nonnus; see also Spanoudakis (2014a) 26–28.

⁴² Carroll and Prickett (1997) 410–413 relate anti-Jewish polemic in John's Gospel to the period of conflict between Jews and Christians following the Roman war of 66–70 AD that destroyed Jewish power in Palestine.

Jews came to comfort Mary and Martha (11:18–19). Hearing of Jesus' arrival, Martha runs out to meet him, while Mary remains in the house (11:20). Martha tells Jesus that Lazarus would not have died had he been there, but she knows that even now God will grant whatever Jesus asks (11:21–22). Jesus tells her Lazarus will rise again, and when Martha takes this as a reference to the resurrection responds, 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11:25–26). Asked whether she believes that anyone who believes in him will not die, Martha asserts her belief that he is Christ (11:26–27). Martha then secretly informs Mary who comes to meet Jesus outside the town; the Jews who were in the house follow, thinking she is going to Lazarus' grave (11:28–31). Mary falls at Jesus' feet and reiterates Martha's point that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been there (11:32). Troubled at her weeping and that of the Jews, Jesus asks where Lazarus has been laid and they invite him to come (11:33–34). Jesus weeps (11:35 ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς). Amidst comments from the Jews on the depth of his emotion and the suggestion that he might have prevented this death (11:36–37), Jesus goes to Lazarus' tomb in a cave blocked by a stone (11:38). Jesus orders the stone to be removed, but Martha warns him that the body will stink after four days (11:39). Jesus reminds her that she must believe; the stone is taken away: Jesus lifts his eyes to heaven and gives thanks to God for hearing him and summons Lazarus from the cave (11:40–43). Lazarus emerges, his hands and feet bound with grave-cloths (κερίαις) and his face bound with a napkin (σουδαρίω); Jesus orders him to be freed (11:44). Many of the Jews who witnessed the miracle believed, but others returned and reported to the Pharisees what Jesus had done (11:45–46).

The chapter concludes with the Jews' reaction: in a council Caiaphas the high priest pronounces that Jesus must die and plans are made to kill him (11:47–53). Jesus leaves with his disciples for Ephraim, close to the desert (11:54). As the Passover approaches people from the country go to Jerusalem to purify themselves (11:55); Jesus is sought, and a command given that anyone who knows where he is should give him up (11:56–57). In chapter 12 Jesus returns to Bethany for a meal with Lazarus and his sisters; Mary anoints his feet with costly spikenard, and is criticized by Judas Iscariot for extravagance (12:1–9). On the next day Jesus enters Jerusalem on an ass, greeted by the people waving palms

and shouting ‘Hosanna’, acknowledging the miracle of Lazarus (12:12–18).

John’s narrative is remarkable for the initial and concluding emphasis on Jewish hostility, further reiterated in the course of the narrative (11:8–10, 16, 37) and for Jesus’ portentous pronouncements (4, 9–10, 25–26, 40). The narrative style is simple and direct, supplying essential information about locations (1, 6, 18, 20, 30) and identity (1), but also foreshadowing (2) Mary’s anointing Jesus’ feet and wiping them with her hair at his final meal in Bethany (12:3). In authorial comments John notes Jesus’ love for the three (5)—a point picked up in the Jews’ comment at 36—, explains the disciples’ misunderstanding (13) and notes Jesus’ distress when Mary weeps at his feet (33, cf. 38);⁴³ the simplicity of verse 35 ‘Jesus wept’ is especially effective. But the bulk of the narrative consists of direct speech: thirty of the forty-six verses of the core Lazarus-story include direct speech. The longest exchange is that between Martha and Jesus at their meeting outside the town (21–27). Jesus has the most direct speech in the form of pronouncements (4, 11) direct injunctions and questions (7, 34, 39, 43, 44), responses to the disciples (9–10, 14–15) and to the two sisters (23, 25–26, 40), and his prayer to God before he summons Lazarus from the tomb (41–42). But all the participants in the drama utter some words: the disciples (8, 12, 16), Martha (21–22, 24, 27, 28, 39), Mary (32) and the Jews who watch (31, 36–37)—except for Lazarus, who strikingly remains silent even after Jesus has given the order for the stifling grave-clothes to be removed.

4. Lazarus in the Latin Epics: Juvencus and Sedulius

Key features of Juvencus’ handling of the Lazarus story (4.306–402) have been identified by Roger Green. Juvencus based his *Evangeliorum Libri Quattuor* primarily on Matthew, together with Luke, and this is the last of only three passages which he drew from John, inserting it after Christ’s sayings in Matthew 25 and immediately before the Jewish conspiracy against Jesus (Matthew

⁴³ John uses the rare verb ἐμβριμάομαι (‘be deeply moved’, LSJ, s.v. II) in these two verses. See Spanoudakis (2014a) 248 on the text of the Gospel at this point.

26), the latter as in John.⁴⁴ Green highlights economy and avoidance of metrical inelegance as guiding principles for Juvencus:⁴⁵ the former is manifest in this passage by the omission of John's careful topographical details and some of his comments on the reactions of the Jews.⁴⁶ But although more functional direct speeches are omitted (3, 28, 34, 39), Juvencus carefully retains the conversations that reflect the warmth of Jesus' feelings towards Mary and Martha, as well as Thomas's concern about the threat from the Jews (16).⁴⁷

Juvencus, in narrating how the messenger is sent to Jesus, opens with a striking reconfiguration of his model⁴⁸ that subsumes the first two verses of John's narrative:

talia dum loquitur, scissos lacerata capillos
pro fratris morbo iustis soror anxia curis ... (306–307)

While he is speaking such words, her cropped hair rent
his sister distraught with well-founded care at her brother's sickness ...

The passionate (but unnamed) Mary leads off the narrative, her cropped and dishevelled hair manifesting her frantic anxiety for her sick brother and at the same time signalling the importance of her (presumably long) hair in her relationship with Jesus through the act anticipated by John at 11:2 when she wiped his feet with it.⁴⁹ Mary's devotion is presented as the key to Jesus' affection for the family (John 11:5):

nam fuerat mulier meritis accepta benignis,
obsequio cuius fratremque domumque merentem
amplexus pleno Christus retinebat amore. (310–312)

For she was a woman welcomed for her kindly services,
through whose devotion Christ⁵⁰ embraced her brother
and deserving household and held them in the fullness of love.

⁴⁴ Green (2006) 25–26. Edition of Juvencus: Huemer (1891).

⁴⁵ Green (2006) 31.

⁴⁶ Green (2006) 36.

⁴⁷ Green (2006) 83.

⁴⁸ Green (2006) 31.

⁴⁹ John 12:3. See Greco (2008) 46–51 on divergences between the Gospels as to the identity of the woman who performed this act.

⁵⁰ Christ is the only person named (at 309, 312, 314) in this passage.

The choice and position of *amplexus* ('embraced', 312) is particularly effective, reinforced by the framing of the last phrase with the words *pleno ... amore*. Juvencus thus changes the dynamic of the Gospel story to make Mary central.

Juvencus' messenger is more graphic than John's (1:3):

nuntius adveniens perfert, extrema iacere
dilectum Christo iuvenem per tristia morbi
et leti et vitae confinia summa tenentem (313-315)⁵¹

The messenger arriving says that the youth beloved by Christ is lying in extremity, through the harshness of disease, grasping the utmost limits of death and life.

But Jesus' speech of response at 317-320 is quite close to its model in John 11:4, as is Jesus' second exchange with the disciples (John 11:11-15) which follows immediately (321-330).⁵² Thomas's call that they should all go to die with Lazarus (John 11:16) is clarified by explicit mention of the threat from the Jews (332), a point raised earlier in the Gospel text by the disciples in general (11.8). This exemplifies Juvencus' economy,⁵³ but also his playing down of this theme, which is mentioned only here—and by the disciple with a reputation for doubt rather than the narrator.

Juvencus (4.333-334) is succinct in conveying the narrative of John 11:17, that Jesus arrived to find that Lazarus had been buried for four days, but then elaborates alliteratively on the sisters' grief (John 11:19):

mersas atris de morte tenebris
germanas luctus lacrimosaque tecta tenebant (334-335)

lamentation and a tearful household

⁵¹ Huemer ad loc. suggests that the language of this line draws on Ovid, *Met.* 7.706 *quod teneat lucis, teneat confinia noctis* (of Aurora).

⁵² The first, omitted, conversation (John 11:7-10) relates to the disciples' anxiety about the hostility of the Jews. Juvencus 4.329 *cernitis absentem longe quod cuncta videre* ('you see him far away because you will see everything') seems to correspond to John's 'I am glad for your sake that I was not there, to the intent you may believe' (11:15). On the Gospel text used by Juvencus, see Green (2006) 385-390.

⁵³ So Green (2006): n. 45 above.

held the sisters submerged in black shadows of death.

They are comforted by 'leading Jews and dear relations' (*Iudaeae gentis proceres carique propinqui*, 337), modifying John's statement (11:19) which refers only to 'many of the Jews'. Martha dramatically runs to meet Jesus, abandoning the house and her sad sister (338–339) and appeals to him from afar (*procul*, 340). Her speech to Jesus slightly modifies John 11:22 by omitting explicit reference to God: *nam quicquid poscis, certum est tibi posse venire* ('for whatever you ask, it is certain that it can come to you', 342). Jesus' statement 'I am the resurrection and the life' (John 11:25) is rendered more portentous by Juvencus' introductory *Christus item sancto depromit pectore vocem* ('Christ drew forth a voice from his holy breast', 348), while the vivid *horrida non umquam continget limina mortis* ('will never touch the horrid thresholds of death', 353) renders John's straightforward 'He that believeth ... shall never die' (11:26). Martha's words to her sister Mary at home (John 11:28) are converted into indirect speech, but John's 'secretly' is extended: *admonuit tacito designans omnia nutu* ('she warned, indicating all with silent nod', 361). Again Juvencus does not report their words directly (363–364), unlike John (11:31), but direct speech is resumed with Mary's lament that Lazarus would not have died had Jesus been there (John 11:32, cf. 365–368). The narrative of Jesus asking about and being taken to the tomb (John 11:33–39) proceeds rapidly (369–371), with John's comments on the Jews (11.36–37) omitted, though Juvencus lingers over the finality of death:

quo condita nuper
membra forent animae volucris spoliata calore (370–371)

in which, his limbs were
recently laid, deprived of the warmth of the winged soul.

But Martha's voice 'lashes' the breezes (*at Marthae talis vox verberat auras*, 375) and four lines are given to her warning about the smell of the corpse after four days (376–379), with three for

Jesus' reply (381–384),⁵⁴ and a further three for his appeal to God (387–389 cf. John 11:41–42). The climactic call to Lazarus gains emphasis from a rare reference to Jesus' location, not taken from John:

tumuli mox limine in ipso
restitit adverso conplens cava saxa clamore (390–391).⁵⁵

then on the very threshold of the tomb
he stood, filling the hollow rocks with his confronting shout.

John's 'Lazarus come forth' (11:43) is also extended:

Lazare, sopitis redeuntem suscipe membris
en animam tuque ipse foras te prome sepulchro (392–393)

Lazarus, take up, lo, in your sleeping limbs your returning
soul, and you yourself bring yourself forth out from the tomb.

The narrative is then concluded rapidly (394–402), keeping close to the Gospel text up to verse 46. Here Juvencus does include John's account (11:45–46) of the reaction of the Jewish onlookers, denoting the Pharisees as 'proud' (*superbis*, 401), but not otherwise suggesting hostility.

Juvencus, while broadly following the sequence of the Gospel text, completely changes the tone of John's account. The constant menacing hostility of the Jews is replaced by a strongly emotional and dramatic version—signalled by that initial *scissos lacerata capillos*—which plays on the warmth of Jesus' relationship with the family, the terrible grief of the sisters, their vehement responses, the horror of death, the portentousness of Jesus' pronouncements. The effect is achieved by the use of evocative adjectives and forceful verbs, together with interlocking phrases that enhance the meaning by repetition of closely similar ideas.⁵⁶ However, the power of John's very simple statements—'Jesus wept', 'Lazarus, come forth'—is sacrificed.

⁵⁴ Again introduced by *depromit* ('drew forth'), 380, cf. 348.

⁵⁵ Huemer (1885) ad loc. notes the linguistic similarity to *Aen.* 3.566 *ter scopuli clamorem inter cava saxa dedere*, describing Scylla and Charybdis.

⁵⁶ Cf. Green (2006) 36–43, esp. 41–43 on Juvencus' style.

Like Juvencus, Sedulius in his *Carmen Paschale* drew on all the Gospels,⁵⁷ but his approach to the Lazarus story is altogether different. Locating it immediately after the healing of a blind man and before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, he deals with it in twenty lines (4.271–290):

Bethaniaeque solum repetens intrarat; ibique
 Lazarus occidua tumulatus sorte iacebat
 iam quarto sine luce die claususque sepulchri
 marmore corruptum tabo exalabat odorem.
 flebant germanae, flebant populatio praesens, 275
 flebat et Omnipotens, sed corpore, non deitate
 exanimos artus illa pro parte dolebat,
 qua moriturus erat; lacrimis implevit amicum,
 maiestate deum. quid credere, Martha, moraris?
 quidve, Maria, gemis? Christum dubitabis, an unum 280
 possit ab infernis hominem revocare cavernis,
 qui dabit innumeras post funera surgere turbas?
 ergo ubi clamantis Domini sonuit tuba dicens
 'Lazare, perge foras': magno concussa pavore
 Tartara dissiliunt, herebi patuere recessus, 285
 et tremuit letale chaos, mortisque profundae
 lex perit, atque anima proprias repente medullas
 cernitur ante oculos vivens adstare cadaver.
 postque sepulchralem tamquam recreatus honorem
 ipse sibi moriens et postumus extat et haeres. 290

He had entered Bethany, seeking again its soil; and there
 Lazarus was lying interred through his perishable lot
 already on the fourth day without light, and enclosed in the tomb's
 marble exhaled a smell corrupted by putrefaction.

His sisters were weeping, the people present were weeping, 275
 even the Almighty was weeping, but with his body not with his
 Godhead

was he grieving the lifeless limbs, for that part
 in which he was destined to die; with tears he satisfied his friend
 By the majesty of God. Why do you hesitate, Martha, to believe?
 And why, Mary, do you groan? Did you doubt Christ, if he could 280
 call back one man from the infernal caverns,
 he who will grant that innumerable throngs rise after death?
 Therefore when the sounding trumpet of the Lord's shout called
 'Lazarus, come forth', struck with great panic
 Tartarus leaps apart, the recesses of Erebus lay open 285

⁵⁷ Green (2006) 180–183 provides a useful summary of the miracles described in Books 3–4 and their sources in the Gospels.

and deadly Chaos trembled, and the law of deepest
death perished, and as the breath crept o'er⁵⁸ its own marrow
is seen before their eyes alive the standing cadaver.
And after the rite of burial, as it were recreated,
himself dying for himself, late-born stands he forth and heir. 290

Circumstantial detail is here minimal: the characters are reduced to Jesus, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and the unspecified mourning *populatio praesens* (275). Background details like the Jewish threat⁵⁹ and the disciples' anxiety are gone. The location is simply the tomb of Lazarus at Bethany, with no dramatic to and fro. Martha's concern that the body will smell foul is now presented as a fact (274), tangible proof that Lazarus is truly dead and decaying. Lines 276–279 on Jesus weeping (John 11:36) linger over the distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ and his passibility, a topic central to contemporary Christological disputation.⁶⁰ Jesus' conversations with Mary and Martha are replaced by a tricolon of questions that rise to a climax with the third on his power to overcome death (279–282). But the simple call to Lazarus (John 11:43), though heralded by a sonorous introduction, is retained (283–284).⁶¹ The amazing sight of Lazarus emerging in his grave-clothes (John 11:44) is replaced by classical images that dramatize the momentous conquest of death, culminating in the sight of the corpse standing alive (284–288). The final couplet (289–290) departs from the Gospel text to reflect on the significance of Lazarus' revival.

The writings of another Spaniard, Prudentius, who was born in 348 and lived on into the fifth century, are a clear influence on Sedulius.⁶² There are some striking linguistic parallels with Prudentius' account of the Lazarus miracle in his *Apotheosis* (742–

⁵⁸ *Repenite*, from *repo* ('I creep') is not usually transitive and the correction *repetente* is found in several manuscripts. van der Laan (1993) 146–147 notes the parallel with Lucan 6.753 *et nova desuetis subrepens vita medullis* ('and new life stealing over the unaccustomed marrow'), also in the context of revival of a corpse: see further below.

⁵⁹ Sedulius reserves his attacks on the Jews for Book 5, which describes Christ's passion and resurrection: Green (2006) 203.

⁶⁰ Green (2006) 239–244 argues for a specifically anti-Nestorian stance.

⁶¹ Green (2006) 190–191 notes reduction in direct speech as a general characteristic of Sedulius.

⁶² Cf. Green (2006) 148–150.

781), a didactic hexameter poem that drew on the Gospel stories in arguing against heretical sects and other opponents of the divinity of Christ. Prudentius opens his version with Jesus' words *procede sepulcro | Lazare* ('Come forth from the tomb, Lazarus', 742–743) and proceeds to enquire of Lazarus what voice it was that stirred him from the dead. Sedulius stays closer to the Gospel text in rendering Jesus' words to Lazarus (4.284), but at 288 his vivid language at the line-end unmistakably draws on Prudentius, *Apotheosis* 755–756:

nec mora, funereus revolutis rupibus horror
 evomit exequias gradiente cadavere vivas.

Straightway the stones roll back and the fearsome grave
 sends forth a living corpse, the dead man walking.⁶³

Sedulius' choice of the classical terms Tartarus, Erebus and Chaos (285–286) is also paralleled in Prudentius, both in the *Apotheosis* where he refers to Charybdis (747) and Taenarum (749), but also more closely in his lyric *Liber Cathemerinon* 9, where, in describing Christ's miracles, he speaks of his entering Tartarus (71, cf. Sedulius 285) and the law being reversed (*lege versa*, 75), which seems to be rephrased by Sedulius in lines 286–287. In the *Apotheosis* 743–751 Lazarus is questioned, in a similar manner to Sedulius' questioning of Mary and Martha (279–282). Finally the issue of fragrance and stench is elaborated by Prudentius who, in contrast to Sedulius (274), urges the sisters to undo Lazarus' sweetly spiced gravebands, asserting that there is no stench of bodily corruption (*Apoth.* 757–759). Sedulius draws on Prudentius' polemical and rhetorical style as well as his language.

Attention has been drawn by van der Laan to linguistic similarities between Sedulius' Lazarus narrative and Lucan's account of Erichtho's revivification of a corpse (6.642–776).⁶⁴ Sedulius picks up phrases from various parts of Lucan's long account, and Lucan's cadence (6.727) *vivo serpente cadaver* is linguistically and rhythmically closer to Sedulius 4.288 *vivens adstare cadaver* than is Prudentius, although the context in Lucan

⁶³ Trans. Thomson (1949).

⁶⁴ van der Laan (1993) 145–147.

is different. By using language derived from a grisly pagan ritual, Sedulius highlights by contrast the sublimity of the Christian resurrection.

5. Cento Writers: Proba and Eudocia

Faltonia Betitia Proba did not include John's Lazarus miracle in her rendition of the Bible in Virgilian centos.⁶⁵ Only the last 360 lines of her 694-line poem deal with material from the Gospels,⁶⁶ and she does not much draw on John's Gospel.⁶⁷ But Proba's writing may have inspired the Empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II, who undertook a similar project in Greek in the mid fifth century.⁶⁸ Both were highly-connected women and both use the cento form, previously more often deployed for frivolous poetry,⁶⁹ for the serious purpose of elevating the biblical story by relating it to the foundational texts of classical literature and education.⁷⁰ But a more tangible link is that a prefatory dedication to Proba's poem indicates that a fine calligraphic version of it was sent to the eastern emperor Arcadius at some point after his marriage in 395;⁷¹ hence we know that Proba's poem was available at the eastern court around the beginning of the fifth century. And Eudocia's centos follow the same plan as Proba's in setting

⁶⁵ On Proba, see n. 32 above. On the technique of cento-writing, which reconfigures lines and half-lines from Virgil or Homer, see Schnapp (1992); Curran (2012) 325–327; Kelly (2013a) 31–34.

⁶⁶ Introduced at 334 by the phrase *maius opus moveo* ('This is a greater work I set in motion', trans. West, D. (2003)), Virgil's tag that marks his embarkation on the second, Iliadic part of the *Aeneid* (7.45): noted by Schnapp (1992) 111 and Curran (2012) 334.

⁶⁷ Schenkl's *CSEL* edition gives source citations. Schnapp (1992) 18 suggested that Proba's main source is Matthew, cf. Curran (2012) 333.

⁶⁸ Schnapp (1992) 119 accepts the dependence of Eudocia on Proba, though he muddles Eudocia with the earlier Eudoxia, who married the Emperor Arcadius in 395 (*PLRE* 2.410). See further Agosti (2001) 74–85.

⁶⁹ On late antique secular centos, see McGill (2005).

⁷⁰ Schnapp (1992) explores the dynamics of this relationship; also McGill (2007), Curran (2012) 333–339, Kelly (2013a) 31–34.

⁷¹ Discussion: McGill (2007) with earlier bibliography; Curran (2012) 328–329; Kelly (2013a) 34–35 with n. 95; I now revoke my suggestion ((2007) 216) that the Arcadius in question was a son of Theodosius II and Eudocia.

material from the Gospels against the background of an Old Testament sequence delineating God's plan for man's salvation.⁷²

Three distinct versions of the Homeric centos survive, respectively 2354 lines, 1948 lines and finally 622, 653 and 738 lines for the third and shortest recension, which itself falls into three distinct 'redactional states' in the view of Rocco Schembra, whose 2007 *Corpus Christianorum* edition is the first full publication of all three recensions.⁷³ The current scholarly view is that the longest version is Eudocia's, while all the later ones were written with knowledge of the earlier versions,⁷⁴ and the three versions of the third redaction by the same hand.⁷⁵ Accordingly I here consider the long version, 70 lines in Schembra's edition (1236–1306).⁷⁶

The miracle of Lazarus is placed between the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:5–14) and the anointing of Jesus in Bethany by Mary, which immediately follows in John's Gospel too (12:1–9).⁷⁷ As Schembra notes,⁷⁸ the centonist, who is of course constrained by the resources at her disposal in the two Homeric poems, omits two significant elements of John's version, the opening sequence

⁷² Whitby (2007) 216–217. On the symmetry of the two parts of Proba's poem, see Schnapp (1992) 110–112; Curran (2012) 333–334.

⁷³ Schembra (2007a), reviewed at Whitby (2009). Schembra (2006) is an Italian translation and commentary on the longest version, Schembra (2007b) Italian translation and commentary on the middle version. Earlier editions: Rey (1998) middle version, with French translation; Usher (1999) long version; also Usher (1998). I cite total lengths from Schembra's 2007 edition; those of Rey and Usher vary slightly.

⁷⁴ Schembra (2007a) cxxxvii, Usher (1999) v, cf. Whitby (2007) 219 and (2009) 813.

⁷⁵ Schembra (2007a) clxxxi.

⁷⁶ Lines 1228–1299 in Usher's edition. The middle version is of similar length (64 lines) but differs significantly: see Rey (1998) 372–381, Schembra (2007a) 233–237 with (2007b) 180–185. Christ is presented as Theoclymenus, the mysterious figure who foresees the bloodbath of the suitors in the second half of the *Odyssey*, cf. Rey (1998) 197 n. 11 and his index (540); also Usher (1998) 46. Schembra (2007a) 233 (line 1166) treats this as an epithet rather than a proper name. The three versions of the short recension can be found at Schembra (2007a) 318–321 (50 lines), 366–369 (44 lines) and 417–420 (46 lines).

⁷⁷ Lazarus follows the feeding of the five thousand in the middle recension as well, but is followed by Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The short versions have different arrangements.

⁷⁸ Schembra (2006) 344.

(John 11:1–16) in which Jesus debates with the disciples whether to go into Judaea in view of the hostility of the Jews, and the distinction between the two sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, who are combined in a single anonymous female, who speaks ten lines (1243–53),⁷⁹ to which Jesus replies at greater length (1257–1272). The narrative is thus greatly simplified, both in terms of the location of events and of the personalities involved: the disciples, as well as the sisters, are entirely eliminated.⁸⁰ Not only is the context of Jewish hostility removed, as in Sedulius, but also John’s subtle delineation of the warm relationship between Jesus and the two sisters of Lazarus, stated explicitly in the Gospel at 11:5 and depicted through their conversations, which is also central to Juvencus.

The introductory lines (1236–1240) first link this story to the previous miracle by saying that Jesus remained ‘there’ (ἐνθα),⁸¹ eager though he was to move on, but when the sun rose:

οἶον καὶ τόδ’ ἔρεξε καὶ ἔτλη καρτερὸς ἀνὴρ·
 ἄνδρα θνητὸν ἔόντα περ εἰς Ἄδός κεν ἰόντα
 αὔθις ἀνεστήσαντο ὑπὸ ζόφου ἠερόεντος. (1239–1240)⁸²

Here is the way that strong man acted and the way he endured⁸³
 a man even though he was mortal, going to Hades,
 he raised up again from under the murky gloom.

The climactic surprise of the Gospel miracle is lost, but the lines indicate the next theme, since the story is told without using biblical proper names, which are of course problematical for a cento-writer. The second section of the narrative (1241–1254)

⁷⁹ In the middle version the female speaker is replaced by a male (ἐταῖρος ἀνὴρ, 1157).

⁸⁰ Schembra (2006) 343–344.

⁸¹ Schembra (2006) 345–346 discusses the significance of ἐνθα, drawing on material in John’s account. But to my mind the most natural interpretation is to link lines 1236–1237 with the end of the preceding narrative of the feeding of the five thousand where the crowd sleeps when darkness falls (1233–1235). Homeric narrative is regularly punctuated by the alternation of night and day.

⁸² See Schembra (2006) 346–347 on textual problems; his text differs from that of Usher, who used only one late manuscript as the basis of his edition.

⁸³ Here and elsewhere my translations draw on Richmond Lattimore’s translations of the Homeric poems (Lattimore (1951) and (1965)), in this case *Od.* 4.271.

contains the eleven-line speech of ‘one of the women, who knew him well’ (τις ἔειπε γυναικῶν, ἧ σάφα ἦδη, 1241). Weeping, she reports that Jesus’ friend is dead (σοι φίλος ὤλεθ’ ἔταϊ ρος, 1244).⁸⁴ She expatiates further on her own grief before clarifying:

καὶ γὰρ ἐμὸς τέθνηκεν ἀδελφός, οὐ τι κάκιστος,
τέτρατον ἡμᾶρ ἔην, καὶ τῷτετέλεστο ἅπαντα,
τύμβος τε στήλη τε· τὸ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων. (1247–1249)

For my brother is dead, who was not in any way wicked,
it was the fourth day, and all was accomplished for him,
the tomb and gravestone: for it is the privilege of the dead.

Lazarus’ sister herself, then, brings the news, and the biblical story is further telescoped since Jesus learns that Lazarus is already dead, whereas in John he is first told that Lazarus is sick (11:3), and only on reaching Bethany discovers that he has been dead for four days (11:17). This information, given in authorial narrative by John, becomes more emotional in the mouth of the grieving sister. In the concluding section of her speech (1250–1254), she directly urges Jesus to raise Lazarus (ὄρνυθι τοῦτον, 1251), asking for pity and pronouncing herself Jesus’ suppliant (1252). In John’s version it is Mary who falls at Jesus’ feet (11:32), while this direct appeal goes far beyond the words of Martha to Jesus at John 11:22 ‘For I know, that even now, whatever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.’⁸⁵

In the next section (1255–1273), Jesus, struck by grief (1255), makes a long speech (1257–1272) in which he urges the sister not to grieve and promises to help. At 1265, with the Homeric formula ὦδε γὰρ ἐξερῶ, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται (‘and this also will I tell you and it will be a thing accomplished’, *Il.* 1.212, etc.), Jesus bids her stop weeping and declares explicitly that he will save Lazarus from death (ἐκ θανάτοιο σαώσω, 1272). This presentation differs significantly from that of John who reports the sisters’ grief

⁸⁴ The whole line is taken from *Iliad* 17.642, describing the death of Patroclus, also in a speech (by Ajax). Schembra (2006) 348 notes that Jesus’ affection for Lazarus is mentioned by John only in authorial narrative, though four times reiterated (11:3, 5, 11, 36).

⁸⁵ Cf. Schembra (2006) 347–349 on the fusion of the characters of Mary and Martha in the Gospel story: it is Mary who is especially close to Jesus, while Martha appeals to Jesus for help.

indirectly, by mentioning that Jews came to comfort them (11:19, 31, 33), while their exchanges with Jesus reflect their simple faith (11:21–27, 32), and Jesus himself does not show his grief until he is being taken to Lazarus' tomb (11:35–36).

The fourth section (1274–1291) narrates the raising of Lazarus, corresponding to John 11:33–44. Jesus leads on to the tomb and the crowd follow in myriads, 'as many as are the leaves and flowers in season' (1275, based on *Il.* 2.468 describing the assembled Achaean army). A subtle adaptation of *Odyssey* 5.194 (describing Odysseus and Calypso) introduces an allusion to Christ's dual nature at a key moment: 1277 Ἴ ξέν γ' ἐς σπέος γλαφυρὸν θεὸς ἠδὲ καὶ ἄνθρωπος ('he came to the hollow cavern, God and man').⁸⁶ The only two lines of direct speech are given to Jesus (1281–1282), his command, here spoken from a position close to Lazarus' head like a Homeric ghost (1280) that Lazarus rise (1281 ὄρνυθι, μηδ' ἔτι κεῖ σο, cf. John 11:43), strengthened by a parenthetical hemistich describing the onlookers' awe (σέβας δ' ἔχεν εἰ σορόωντας, 1281). Martha's concern about the stench of the corpse (John 11:39–40) is omitted and Lazarus does not appear in his grave wrappings (John 11:44). Instead attention is focused on the speculation and amazement of the onlookers (1278, 1281, 1290) and the details of Lazarus' physical metamorphosis from a corpse to a living being, which culminate in his leaping across the stone threshold of the tomb to stand in their midst, before at once turning to follow Jesus (1285–1291).

The final section (1291–1306) is entirely devoted to the response of the onlookers, which in contrast to the Gospel version (John 11:45–46) is purely positive—young and old pray with arms outstretched until the sun goes down (1303–1305), thus framing the miracle within the span of a day (cf. 1237). The central passage is a long speech (1295–1303) that typifies what each onlooker said to his neighbour (ὄδὲ δέ τις εἴπεσκεν ἰδὼν ἐς πλήσιον ἄλλον, 1295), marvelling at the miracle and the divine love that produced it: Schembra observes that the depiction of the amazement of a 'chorus' of onlookers is typical of the centonist's technique in other miracles.⁸⁷ Homer often reports the reaction of an unnamed observer in this way, but then the practice is rare in epic until

⁸⁶ Homer's initial verb is simply changed from plural to singular, Schembra (2006) 352.

⁸⁷ Schembra (2006) 354–355.

Nonnus, who employs it repeatedly.⁸⁸ Eudocia is, of course, drawing directly on Homer, but it is noteworthy that she too chooses this type of speech favoured by Nonnus.

To sum up: the centos make fundamental changes to the Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus. John's short exchanges are replaced by three longer speeches, by Lazarus' unnamed sister, by Jesus, who also has two lines of direct speech when he commands Lazarus to rise up, and by the amazed onlookers. The understated nuances of the Gospel exchanges are replaced by explicit pronouncements of what will happen and material that is narrated authorially in the Gospel is incorporated into the speeches, which dominate the cento narrative. The grief of the sister and of Jesus, as well as the amazement created in the onlookers, are described much more fully than by John.

6. Nonnus

At 188 lines Nonnus' version in *Paraphrase* 11 of the Lazarus story of John 11:1–46 is nearly twice as long as its nearest competitor, Juvenecus (97 lines).⁸⁹ Unlike Juvenecus, Nonnus adheres closely to the Gospel text, keeping all the direct speech and systematically rendering it verse by verse, although John's verses 30 and 31 are reversed at *Par.* 11.98–108, probably to render the narrative more coherent.⁹⁰ Nonnus also retains the biblical names and even the Hebrew term 'Rabbi', used by the disciples in addressing Jesus at John 11:8 (*Par.* 11.28). But he freely inserts adjectives and prepositional phrases to enhance vividness and emotion, elaborating, for example, on the grief brought by Lazarus' death.⁹¹ Nevertheless the simplicity of the Gospel narrative is retained at

⁸⁸ Wifstrand (1933) 144–149; Agosti (2005b) esp. 45–60 (noting its incidence in ps.-Oppian and in Latin biblical epic); recent study with intervening bibliography Verhelst (2014) 37–39, 227–275.

⁸⁹ Spanoudakis (2014a) offers a rich commentary on this book of the *Par.*

⁹⁰ Spanoudakis (2014a) 69, rejecting the view that this reflects a difference in Nonnus' text of the Gospel. Janssen (1903) attempted to establish the Gospel text used by Nonnus, but recent critics question whether this is possible, though Nonnus' version has affinities with the Syriac recension preserved in *Syrus Lewitanus* (4th c.): Agosti (2003) 229–239; Spanoudakis (2014a) 96–100.

⁹¹ E.g. *Par.* 11.64–70, elaborating on John 11:19 on the Jews' efforts to comfort the grieving sisters. See also below.

key moments, particularly in direct speech. Consequently the narrative pace varies, with the pronouncements at John 11:12, 23 and 25 each rendered in 1 line,⁹² and likewise Jesus' powerful 'Lazarus, come forth' (Λάζαρε, δεῦρο ἔξω, John 11:43, cf. *Par.* 11.158 ἔξιθι, Λάζαρε, δεῦρο). But the climax of the story, the emergence of Lazarus from the tomb (John 11:44) is expanded to more than twenty lines (*Par.* 11.158–180).⁹³

Like Iuvencus, Nonnus develops the theme of Mary's close relationship with Jesus and her act of wiping his feet with her hair (John 11:2):

Μαρίη δ' ἔφατιζετο κείνη
 Χριστοῦ καλλιέθειρα θεήδοκος, ἧ πόδας αὐτοῦ
 ἀμφοτέρους ἤλειψε μύρου θυόεντος ἔέρση 5
 καὶ πλοκάμοις ἀπέμαξε καὶ ἀμβροσίῳ ἀπὸ ταρσῶν
 ἀκροφάνης ἐδίγηε διάβροχον ἰ κμάδι χαίτην,
 Χριστοῦ καλλιέθειρα θεήδοκος, ἧς τότε θερμῶ
 νουσαλέωβαρυγούνος ἰ μάσσετο σύγγονος ἀτμῶ (*Par.* 11.3–9)

That Mary was called
 God-receiver of Christ, she of the lovely hair, who anointed
 both his feet with the dew of fragrant myrrh 5
 and wiped it off with her locks and from his immortal toes
 her curls protruding⁹⁴ she wetted her mane with its moisture until it
 was soaked,
 God-receiver of Christ, she of the lovely hair; at that time with hot
 steam of sickness was her kinsman lashed, making him heavy-kneed.

Amidst Nonnus' abundant adjectives,⁹⁵ the two key ones describing Mary's lovely hair and her receptivity to Jesus are repeated in the half-line that artfully frames the description of her

⁹² John 11:12 κύριε, εἰ κεκοίμηται σωθήσεται ~ *Par.* 11.43 Λάζαρος εἰ κνώσει, σόος ἔσεται; 11:23 ἀναστήσεται ὁ ἀδελφός σου ~ *Par.* 11.79 γνωτὸς σὸς παλίνορσος ἐγείρεται; John 11:25 ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ~ *Par.* 11.84 ζωὴ ἐγὼ γενόμην καὶ ἀνάστασις. But Jesus' statement to the disciples 'Lazarus is dead' (John 11:14) is considerably expanded: *Par.* 11.49–50 Λάζαρον εὔνασε πότμος ὁμοίος, ἄγριον ἄλλον | ὕπνον ἄγων ('a common fate has put Lazarus to rest, bringing another savage sleep').

⁹³ Cf. De Stefani (2002) 10 for expansion at crucial moments such as this triumph over death.

⁹⁴ See Spanoudakis (2014a) 153–154 for this interpretation of ἀκροφάνης.

⁹⁵ There are no adjectives in John's account in 11:2.

act (4, 8).⁹⁶ The extravagance of her gesture is suggested by her anointing of both Jesus' feet (5), which are immortal (6), while by her act of obeisance in wiping off the ointment with her hair until it was soaked (7) she literally 'receives God' by taking up the myrrh which had touched his body. This view is expressed in Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on John, which Nonnus certainly knew:⁹⁷ Cyril suggests that Mary was 'seeking to fasten to herself more really the spiritual blessing which comes from his holy Flesh'.⁹⁸ Mary's prostration and the language of anointing have baptismal connotations, even though free-flowing female hair is in other contexts associated with Maenadic fury and wantonness.⁹⁹

In rendering verse 5 of John, describing Jesus' love for the family, Nonnus introduces an idea not in the Gospel, that Jesus also appreciated their hospitality,¹⁰⁰ calling the sisters hospitable (φιλοξίνους, 19; also 66). Later Jesus calls Lazarus φίλτατος ἡμείων ξεινηδόκος ('our beloved receiver of strangers', 40) and ξεινοδόκον Χριστοῦ τὸ δεύτερον ('guest-receiver of Christ for the second time', 54), the latter in an expansion of John 11:15 in which Nonnus explicitly states that the disciples will have faith by seeing the dead Lazarus again touching the table and welcoming Christ.

A similar patterning of cognate compound adjectives reinforces the effect of Mary's grief in Nonnus' expansive rendering of John 11:31–32 (*Par.* 11.98–117): Mary is said to be 'fond of weeping' (φιλοδάκρυον, 103) and 'deeply tearful' (βαρύδακρυς, 109). But her act of obeisance in falling at Jesus' feet (John 11:32) is expanded by

⁹⁶ A different effect, of emotion and urgency, is achieved by the repetition of 'whom you love' (ὃν φιλέεις) at *Par.* 11.13, 14 from the message of the sisters to Jesus at John 11:3 'he whom thou lovest (ὃν φιλεῖς) is sick'.

⁹⁷ See n. 4 above. Spanoudakis (2014a) 18–19 notes that Cyril's commentary on John 11 is lost, but reconstructed from citations elsewhere.

⁹⁸ Trans. Randell (1885) 110; Cyr. *In Jo.* II, 263.24–25 Pusey (1872) ζητοῦσα τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἀγίας σαρκὸς πνευματικὴν εὐλογίαν προσηλῶσαι πρὸς ἑαυτὴν γνησιώτερον (corrected from γνησιέστερον, which I take to be a mistake in Pusey's edition)..

⁹⁹ Spanoudakis (2014a) 74, 150–151, following Greco 2008. Nonnus' ἀκροφανής ('her curls protruding', 7) interpolates a more modest picture.

¹⁰⁰ For this theme, see Spanoudakis (2014a) 167. It links the Lazarus story with Callimachus' *Hecale*: id. (2009).

Nonnus to echo his rendering of verse 2 (Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet):

καὶ Μαρίη βαρύδακρυς ὅτε σχεδὸν ἴκετο χώρου,
ἦχι μένων ποδὸς ἴχνος ἀκαμπέος εἴ χεν Ἰησοῦς, 110
αὐτὸν ὅπως ἐνόησεν, ἰ μασσομένη φρένα κέντρῳ
πρηγῆς αὐτοκύλιστος ὑπὲρ δαπέδοιο πεσοῦσα
πᾶρ ποσὶ ν ἄμβροσίοις ἐπεκέκλιτο. μυρομένη δέ
ἰ κμάδι πενθαλέη ζαθέους ἐδιήνατο ταρσοῦς
μῦθον ἐρευγομένη βεβημένον· (Par. 11.109–115)

And Mary deeply tearful, when she came near the place
where Jesus remained keeping the step of his foot unmoved¹¹⁰
when she saw him, her mind lashed by a goad,
face down rolling herself over falling on the ground
she rested at his immortal feet. And melting into tears,
with the moisture of grief she wetted his holy toes
blurting out a forced word.

The overlap of vocabulary between lines 113–114 and 6–7 is surely deliberate,¹⁰¹ while the verb ‘lash’ (ἰ μάζομαι), at the same position in the line, denotes first Lazarus’ violent pain (9) then Mary’s violent emotion (111). But the decorous ‘with curls protruding’ (ἀκροφάνης, 7) is in this passage replaced by the passionate ‘face down, rolling herself over’ (πρηγῆς αὐτοκύλιστος, 112). Cyril comments here that Jesus did not talk with Mary as he had with Martha (John 11:23–27), not wishing to reprove one ‘in an agony of mourning’ and ‘intoxicated by grief’, but was himself moved and succumbed to tears.¹⁰² Nonnus’ vivid account of Mary’s anguish similarly anticipates Jesus’ emotional response.

In his account of the moment when Lazarus emerges from the tomb (John 11:44 ~ Par. 11.158–180), Nonnus first dwells (158–165) on the impact of Christ’s call on the dead man:

ἔξιθι, Λάζαρε, δεῦρο. λιποφθόγγοιο δέ νεκροῦ
ἄπνοον ἐψύχωσε δέμας νεκροσσοῦς ἤχῳ·

¹⁰¹ 6 ἄμβροσίων ἀπὸ ταρσῶν, cf. 113 πᾶρ ποσὶ ν ἄμβροσίοις; 7 ἐδίγηε, cf. 114 ζαθέους ἐδιήνατο ταρσοῦς; ἰ κμάδι 7, 114.

¹⁰² Randell (1885) 121. Shorrock (2011) 98–105 discusses resonances between this passage and Dionysus weeping at the death of Ampelus: note especially *Dion.* 12.171 with Accorinti (2013) 1120; Spanoudakis (2014a) 250–251.

ἄπνοον ἄνδρα κάλεσσε, καὶ ἔτρεχε νεκρὸς ὀδίτης 160
 στείχων αὐτοκέλευθος ὁμοπλέκτωχθόνα ταρσῶ
 ἄπνοον ἄνδρα κάλεσσε, καὶ ἐν φθιμένοισιν ἀκούσας
 ἐξ Ἶδος νόστησε φυγὰς νέκυς ὄψιμον ἄλλην
 ἀθρήσας μετὰ τέρμα βίου παλινάγρετον ἀρχὴν
 θαμβαλέην. (Par. 11.158–165)

‘Come forth, Lazarus, hither’. The corpse-saving sound revitalized the unbreathing body of the voiceless corpse; the unbreathing man he called, and the wayfaring corpse ran 160 treading the earth travelling his own path with foot together bound; the unbreathing man he called and hearing among the dead from Hades came home the fugitive corpse, seeing after the term of life another late beginning, taken back, wonderful.

With characteristic adjectival accumulation, Nonnus dwells on the way in which Christ’s voice reaches Lazarus’ voiceless and lifeless body (captured in thrice-reiterated ‘unbreathing’, ἄπνοον, 159, 160, 162) enabling it to run, even with his feet still bound by grave-cloths, the compound αὐτοκέλευθος (‘travelling his own path’, 161) recalling αὐτοκύλιστος (‘rolling herself over’, 112) of Mary’s collapse at Christ’s feet. And as in the passage describing Mary’s anointing of Christ, an initial half-line is repeated (160, 162, cf. 4, 8), in this case to highlight the miracle (θαμβαλέην, 165) of a corpse in Hades returning for a second term of life. Cyril too, commenting on this verse, describes Lazarus as running, ‘without any hindrance to running being caused by the bonds’.¹⁰³

Nonnus next describes all-conquering Hades vainly seeking the unconquered corpse by the waters of Lethe, with a powerful juxtaposition of cognate compound adjectives to capture the significance of this defeat of undefeatable death:

Ἴδης δὲ μάτην παρὰ γείτοσι Λήθη
 πανδαμάτωρ ἀδάμαστον ἐδίξετο νεκρὸν ἀλήτην. (Par. 11.165–166)

Hades in vain beside neighbouring Lethe,
 all-conquering one, the unconquered vagabond corpse he sought.

Several lines (167–173) expansively depict the corpse rushing forward tightly bound and blinded by grave clothes, sweating. But

¹⁰³ Randell (1885) 130. John 11:44 has plain ἐξῆλθεν (‘came out’).

Nonnus retains John's two terms for the grave-wrappings, and even glosses the second as a Syriac word.¹⁰⁴ Jesus then commands that Lazarus be freed:

λύσατέ μοι καὶ κοῦφον ἔάσατε νεκρὸν ὀδεύειν. (*Par.* 11.175)

Loose him, I say, and let the corpse travel nimbly.

where the verb λύσατε ('loose him') is taken from John 11:44. Nonnus' adherence to the Gospel account and retention of key words and phrases from the simple language of the Gospel in combination with his own virtuosic linguistic ingenuity are his distinctive contribution to biblical paraphrase.¹⁰⁵ As Livrea remarked, adjectives (often proleptic) and adjectival phrases, sometimes reiterated in parallel expressions or repeated in slightly variant form, are 'the load-bearing structure of Nonnus' discourse'.¹⁰⁶

7. Conclusions

By focusing on a single episode I offer an impressionistic rather than a complete account of Nonnus' relationship to other biblical epics, but this approach illustrates the range of possible interfaces with a single biblical episode. Sedulius and Eudocia move furthest from the biblical prototype, each for their own reasons greatly simplifying. Sedulius has no interest in the intricacies of the biblical narrative, nor in its conversations, retaining only Christ's

¹⁰⁴ John 11:44 κειρίαις ('grave-clothes'), cf. *Par.* 11.170 κερείαις, repeated at 177 δεσμὰ κερείης, but only here in Nonnus, and in general rare and found only in late texts (see LSJ s.v.). And John 11:44 σουδαρίῳ ('napkin'), cf. *Par.* 11.173 σουδάριον. The latter, a loan-word in Greek through Aramaic, derives from the Latin *sudo* ('I sweat'), and Nonnus (11.171) indeed describes the warm sweat on Lazarus' hidden face: see further Spanoudakis (2014a) 303. The term, and the derivation are repeated at *Par.* 20.30, again taken from the biblical text (John. 20:7), where it describes the grave-clothes that had wrapped Christ's body found by the disciples lying in his empty tomb.

¹⁰⁵ The conversations of the *Paraphrase* contrast starkly with the long monologues of the *Dionysiaca*. On exegesis, see Cutino (2009).

¹⁰⁶ 'la struttura portante del discorso nonniano' (Livrea (2000) 100). Livrea (2000) 97 considers adjectives the most prominent feature of Nonnus' paraphrastic style.

call to Lazarus to emerge; the theme of weeping prompts allusion to the two natures of Christ and apostrophe of the two sisters for their doubt, but the poet is chiefly concerned to evoke the final magnificence and drama of Hell bursting open and the dead Lazarus standing alive. Eudocia by contrast opens with a plain statement of the miracle, replaces conversational interaction with longer speeches and centres much of her narrative on the response of onlookers, although she too dwells on the moment and process of Lazarus' revivification.

Juvencus and Nonnus are much closer to John: both emphasize the emotional bonds between Jesus and Lazarus' family, both in different ways play on the motif of Mary's hair and the vehemence of the sisters' grief, both follow the structure of the Gospel narrative. But Nonnus is both fuller and truer to the Gospel text, in particular retaining its simplicity at crucial moments, while at the same time reinforcing key points and emotions by verbal patterning and repetition, often involving neologisms, in a characteristically inventive use of language.¹⁰⁷ And Nonnus' rendering is complicated by its resonances with Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on John's Gospel, as well as with the Tylus episode in *Dionysiaca* 25, the latter apparently drawing on his Lazarus narrative, for example in the two sisters of Tylus, one of them called Morie, a name close to the Maria of the Gospel.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hilhorst (1993), who, however, argues that Juvencus is more subtle and more visual than Nonnus.

¹⁰⁸ Spanoudakis (2013b); Shorrock (2011) 97–105. Accorinti (2015) discusses the centrality of themes of death and resurrection in Nonnus and contemporaries such as Theodoret of Cyrus.