

Poems question Mary's decisions

By **AILEEN JACOBSON**, *Newsday*

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What if Mary wasn't who we've all always thought her to be? That's the question Anna Rabinowitz poses in this thought-provoking, linguistically daring, sometimes shocking collection. In *The Wanton Sublime*, she treats Mary as an unwilling (unwitting?) participant in the conception of her son - was she raped, did she invite it, did she have a choice? To Rabinowitz, Mary isn't symbolic, she is flesh and blood, with feelings, perceptions, expectations, and disappointments. She is also unknowable, and so rather than make Mary a particular person, much of this book contemplates who she might have been, how she might have reacted to both *The Annunciation*, and then losing her son to world at large, and finally, to death.

Mary was, of course, a Jewish mother, so it's not so strange for Rabinowitz, whose previous book, *Darkling*, dealt primarily with a Jewish (i.e. Holocaust) theme to be tackling this issue. What is strange and uniquely wonderful is her voice: unafraid to question, unabashedly intelligent, and ranging from fiercely combative to remarkably tender, from anger to joy, terror to sorrow. It's a fascinating take on an under-examined topic.

This is not poetry for the "contemplating my navel" set, but for those who wish to see the world - and their own place in it - with new, daring eyes. Rabinowitz's eyes are so keenly observant, she makes it seem easy. But challenging the status quo never is. This book challenges, questions, and entertains. A tour de force. A must for any serious reader of poetry, or serious student of *The Annunciation*.