

INTRODUCTION

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The present issue opens with an article on the moral complexities surrounding the practice of usury in the context of medieval Europe's growing monetary economy. In "Discovering the Moral Value of Money: Usurious Money and Medieval Academic Discourse in Parisian Quodlibets," Ian Wei explains that even after usurious money left the hands of the usurers, it might still be considered usurious and sinful. This money could therefore endanger the spiritual well-being of many others besides the usurer himself, including his otherwise innocent family members, employees, and business associates, as well as the recipients of any religious alms that may have originated in usurious profits. Thus, in a monetary economy, the practice of usury by some might—at least potentially—pose a threat to the entire community. And yet, the academic masters actually found certain moral and spiritual advantages to using money for business transactions. Wei offers a fascinating analysis of the moral problems posed by usury and money and how these problems were addressed in unexpected and even surprising ways in spiritual and academic discourse.

Discussions of demons who express regret and distress over their actions and their separation from God form the basis of the inquiry in the next article, "The Quest for Redemption: Penitent Demons Leading Christians to Salvation in Medieval Christian *Exempla* Literature," by Coree Newman. Writers of exempla literature recounted stories about such demons, and raised questions regarding whether or not there was any hope at all for them—that is, if there was anything these demons could possibly do in order to be one day reunited with God. Newman points out that while modern scholarship has tended to focus on demons as thoroughly evil beings, utterly beyond salvation, medieval depictions of demons were often much more complex and problematic. Newman finds that discussions of these "passive," "penitent," and "less evil" demons in exempla literature have much to tell us regarding medieval attitudes

about the limits of God's forgiveness, and anxieties over the poles of salvation and damnation (and good and evil), as well as the possibilities of an area in between—not just for demons, but for humans as well.

Federica Anichini's article "*Inferno* IX: Passing within City Walls and beneath the 'velame de li versi strani'" focuses on the topic of the medieval city and its walls as rhetorical tools that function in Dante's journey on multiple levels. Examining symbolic aspects of the urban landscape employed by Dante, Anichini offers a new reading of the passage in the fifth circle of the *Inferno* where the pilgrim and Virgil are temporarily stuck outside of the walls that encircle the infernal city, a moment that not only stops the forward motion of the pilgrim's physical/spiritual journey but that also openly challenges the readers' journey of interpretation. Anichini considers Dante's engagement with urban practices related to the city walls as well as (and in conjunction with) cultural and textual notions of margins, and she finds that the transformative power associated with passing through such boundaries has significant implications for Dante's poetry, for his relationship to his own exile, and for the pilgrim's and the readers' spiritual progress.

In "Boccaccio's Hellenism and the Foundations of Modernity," David Lummus examines Boccaccio's *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* to delineate what is distinctively modern about the author—particularly regarding his approach to the past. Challenging the critical clichés of Petrarch as the first of the "moderns" and of "Boccaccio medievale" (as the author was famously and influentially characterized in a fundamental book by Vittore Branca), Lummus proposes a Boccaccio who despite devoting a great deal of attention to the past refuses to monumentalize it. Lummus shows that Boccaccio's Hellenism not only distinguishes him from the Latinity of Petrarch, but signals a new approach to both past and present culture.

Charles Carman's article "Alberti's Narcissus: 'Tutta la Storia'" assesses the importance of both Minerva and Narcissus in Alberti's discussions of single-point perspective in his 1435 treatise *On Painting*. Noting that in this work Alberti actually calls Narcissus "the inventor of painting," Carman shows how previous attempts to interpret this claim have fallen short in one way or another. Carman turns to Nicholas Cusanus, finding in the philosopher's work an approach to vision that closely resembles Alberti's on various levels, including the way it conceives of the connection between the material

and spiritual realms, and between physical and intellectual seeing. Carman's analysis explores Alberti's use of these distinctions and connections in conjunction with the story of Narcissus in order to posit the painter's ability for seeing—and for intellectual and spiritual understanding—as God-like.

In "The Politics of a Theatrical Event: The 1509 Performance of Ariosto's *I suppositi*," Sergio Costola offers a new consideration of Ariosto's comedy, taking into account its actual staging, particularly in the context of several historical events preceding the writing and debut of the play at the Ferrarese court. Analyzing the architecture of the theater, including the somewhat unorthodox seating plan for the audience members, and the interplay among the text itself, the theater design, and recent historical/political developments at and around the court, Costola finds that Ariosto used the performance in multiple, complex ways to comment on and challenge prevailing gender and class distinctions—in the audience, at court, and in society at large.

In "*Omnia Vincit Amor*: The Sovereignty of Love in Tuscan Poetry and Michelangelo's *Venus and Cupid*," Rebekah Compton provides a compelling new interpretation of the highly popular, often-replicated painting, which was designed by Michelangelo and painted by Jacopo Pontormo for the private residence of a Florentine merchant banker. Noting that the painting was originally to be hung alongside portraits of various Tuscan love poets, including Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, Compton points out that scholars have missed the mark by failing to discuss the painting in the context of the themes and ideals of Tuscan love poetry. While past interpretations of the painting have focused on a "moralized, binary reading of Neoplatonic love" (seeing the painting as an allegory of the struggle between spiritual and carnal love), Compton shows why we must instead view the work against the background of Tuscan poetic portrayals of erotic love as a power that is much more complex, one that can indeed torment the lover but can also inspire an ecstatic ascent to heaven.