

## ABSTRACTS

### **The Agentive Cross: *The Dream of the Rood*, lines 35–38**

*Thomas D. Hill*

AT SEVERAL POINTS in *The Dream of the Rood*, the Cross speaks as if it had the power to strike down the enemies of Jesus, to “gefylle” (fell) them physically. The Cross thus speaks as if it had power to act, as if it had agentive power. This motif in the poem has occasioned some comment, but no parallels or analogues have been cited for it. In a number of late Anglo-Saxon devotional prayers to the Cross, however, the phrasing of the prayer implies that the speaker expects the Cross to strike down human enemies physically so that their malice and hostility will be frustrated. This motif is broadly paralleled in the distinctive prayers of the *lorica* tradition, which promise immediate physical benefits such as protection from the danger of drowning to those who recite them. If these parallels seem relevant, then the agentive power of the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* is one more example of the way in which the poet blended traditional ideas and motifs with traditional Christian Latin ideas in the new passion narrative that he or she narrates in this extraordinary poem.

### **The Wife of St. Eustace**

*Robin Norris*

ALTHOUGH THE LEGEND of St. Eustace was relatively well known in Anglo-Saxon England, the passion has not received much attention from

Anglo-Saxonists. The author of *Eustace* has blended hagiography with elements of romance, including piracy, reunions, and reversals of fortune. The text also overturns our expectations of gender roles, for while the exiled woman is one of the few well-known female figures in Old English literature, *Eustace* features an empowered wife, Theophista, who engineers her family's return from exile, capped by one of the only happy heterosexual kisses in the canon. Theophista defies expectations about the representation of women in Old English literature and is regarded as her husband's equal if not superior, in some respects. Although she is a survivor of abduction and exile, she remains respected within her family and empowered to make change. Theophista's exceptional status serves as a corrective to what we have accepted as the norm of representation, in that most Anglo-Saxon wives probably lived their lives somewhere in between the two extremes of utter abjection and extraordinary agency.

## **Health and Healing in the Anglo-Saxon World**

*Renée R. Trilling*

EARLY SCHOLARS TENDED to characterize the Anglo-Saxon medical tradition as barbaric, superstitious, and largely ineffective, citing a heavy reliance on charms and magic in their healing practices. Yet the actual percentage of charms and superstitions within the Old English medical corpus is quite small, and numerous studies have assessed the rationality and efficacy of many remedies. Dividing remedies between magical and medical, however, introduces a distinction that did not obtain for the original practitioners. Anglo-Saxon medicine must therefore be understood as having radically different notions of health and healing from the modern world.

## **The Art of Salvation: Sacramental Penance in**

***Dante's Commedia***

*Mihow P. McKenny*

DANTE COMPOSED THE *Commedia* soon after the formulation of the sacrament of penance and the foundation of the mendicant orders. In the northern Italian communes, and especially in Florence, the era was one of great penitential fervor. This study suggests that the private penance

of Dante's time not only provided inspiration for the *Commedia's* overall project, but also influenced the specific structure of its first two canticles, *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Informed by the most recent work on late medieval pastoral care, the article examines the nature and practice of penance in Dante's world and provides a new reading of the *Commedia's* first two canticles, which proposes that a medieval reader's experience of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* would have been akin to the experience of a medieval penitent undertaking sacramental penance.

### **The Chivalrous Life of Buonaccorso Pitti: Honor-Violence and the Profession of Arms in Late Medieval Florence and Italy**

*Peter W. Sposato*

BUONACCORSO DI NERI Pitti (died ca. 1430) has long been familiar to historians of late medieval Florence and Italy as a merchant, a professional gambler, and the author of the *Cronica*, a history covering both personal and public events from ca. 1374 to 1429. A close examination of the *Cronica* and Buonaccorso's life reveals, however, that this scion of a prominent Florentine family actually straddled the line between two cultural worlds: the civic-mercantile and the chivalric. In fact, despite engaging in mercantile activities at various stages of his life, Buonaccorso actively fashioned a chivalric identity for himself, which was centered on the cultivation of the profession of arms and the practice of what I term honor-violence. His desire to live the chivalric lifestyle led him far from the confines of his native Florence to the battlefields and noble and royal courts of France and Italy, where he asserted, defended, and enhanced his personal and familial honor through violence.

### **Agostino Steuco and the Debate on the *Donation of Constantine***

*Michele Zanobini*

IN 1440, THE Renaissance scholar Lorenzo Valla completed a detailed study of the *Donation of Constantine*, widely recognized as both a landmark in the field of philology and a significant moment in the history of the Catholic Church. Valla's text undermined papal claims to political

authority and provided reformers with a cultural legitimation for their criticisms of the church. Agostino Steuco's treatise *Contra Laurentium Vallam* was the first extended attempt on the part of Catholic hierarchy to prove Valla and his reformed followers wrong. This largely neglected text can be read to show the political relevance of philology during the Counter-Reformation.

### **Conjectural Knowledge and Metaphor — Implications of Nicholas of Cusa's *De coniecturis*** *Clyde Lee Miller*

IN THIS PAPER I explain how for Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) almost all human theoretical knowing amounts to conjectural knowledge. I first examine what Nicholas means by “conjecture,” then discuss its presuppositions and implications for our knowing. His definition of *coniectura* as “a positive assertion that participates in truth as it is, but in otherness” makes it clear that Cusanus never doubts that our thought attains some measure of truth, particularly in our ordinary perceptual judgments that recognize and identify what is perceived. Nicholas does not hesitate to invoke both original and traditional proposals that he sees as conjectural when he turns to more philosophical conceptions about the natures of perceptible things and the God who transcends them, as well as about the nature of human knowledge. I propose that such theoretical conjectures are typically metaphorical no less than the notion of conjecture itself. This implies that much of our second-order conjectural knowing and speaking about what we know may well be metaphorical.

### **From Theocracy to Natural Law: Consideration on Las Casas's Intellectual Evolution** *Víctor Zorrilla*

IN THE CONTEXT of the Spanish conquest and subsequent domination of the Americas, Bartolomé de las Casas based his defense of the American Indians on the Aristotelian and Thomist view of humans as naturally social beings. This view implied that institutions such as marriage, law, and political authority, necessary for the proper sustainment of a society, are rooted in human nature and thus remain fully valid even without the

concurrence of supernatural grace. This is the theoretical foundation for Las Casas's anthropological work. However, Las Casas did not confront all the theoretical and practical consequences of his natural-law perspective until his final years. After addressing the anthropology of Las Casas, I comment on his key political writings in order to shed light on how Las Casas's anthropological views affected the evolution of his political thought toward the end of his life.

## Some Elizabethan Cryptica: Ramifications of *Willobie*

### *His Avisá*

*Anna Rist*

*WILLOBIE HIS AVISA*, in seventy-four cantos of rhyming stanzas, claims "Willobie" as author in circumstances set out in the longer of two prose prefaces signed by one "Hadrian Dorrell." First appearing in 1594, it went into two further editions before being suppressed in 1599. In 1605 it reappeared furnished with an elaborate "Apologie" and a lengthy series of verses ascribed to the author's brother, the author being claimed as deceased. Its interest lies in the prefatory material's explicit reference to William Shakespeare and a concluding episode with parts assigned to "W.S." and "H.W.," very plausibly the same William Shakespeare and his indubitable early patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton.

This identification my paper will uphold, considering first its import, with suggestions for decoding, then the major theme as interpreted by De Luna to refer to successive suitors to Queen Elizabeth I, culminating in the above episode, with considerations as to dramatic location. Extending De Luna, I focus attention on the Earl of Essex, obliquely attacked via his kinsman and lieutenant, Southampton, as urged on by his client poet, Shakespeare, in sordidly propositioning the chaste Avisá; also on the absence of Sir Walter Raleigh as at the satire's origins, as in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, connection to which is further substantiated.

*Penelope's Complaint*, another composition of the mid-1590s that refers explicitly to Avisá, I show to emanate from a contrary, pro-papist circle around Essex. The identification of Avisá with the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets is also considered.

