

Abstracts

- 289 **James W. Earl, *The Forbidden Beowulf: Haunted by Incest***
It is sometimes said that unlike other epics *Beowulf* does not start in medias res, but it does; *Beowulf* has a backstory, which we are deep into when the poem begins. The backstory is not told in the poem, however, so modern readers may miss it entirely. It is found in the poem's analogues and was the focus of most *Beowulf* scholarship until 1936, when J. R. R. Tolkien turned our attention to the monster fights in the foreground. Following Tolkien, today's readers focus on what the poem does say, taking little or no interest in the analogues. There is quite a difference, however, between reading *Beowulf* as complete in itself and reading it intertextually, as part of a cycle of tales. An intertextual reading yields many surprises, among them a hidden incest theme. *Beowulf* is haunted by this and other dark matters, repressed in its textual unconscious. (JWE)
- 306 **William D. Paden and Frances Freeman Paden, *Swollen Woman, Shifting Canon: A Midwife's Charm and the Birth of Secular Romance Lyric***
In "Tomida femina" ("A swollen woman"), a tenth-century charm written in Occitan, the vernacular of the south of France, a birthing woman and her helpers intone magical language during the most intense moments of childbirth. The poem permits us, with brief but uncommon intimacy, to imagine the lives of women long ago. It takes its place in a European tradition of birthing charms, including others written in Latin, German, and English. These charms, and in particular "Tomida femina," provide an image of vigorous medieval women in childbirth that precedes the images of women in other secular Romance lyrics—young girls in love in the Mozarabic *kharjas*, idealized ladies in troubadour songs, and passionate aristocratic women in the poetry of the Occitan *trobairitz*. (WDP and FFP)
- 322 **Joseph Luzzi, "As a Leaf on a Branch . . .": Dante's Neologisms**
This essay begins by showing how the criticisms of neologism that Dante inherited from ancient and medieval rhetoric, especially those that decry the supposed barbarity of invented words, provide counterintuitive insight into the motives behind Dante's lexical experimentalism in the *Commedia*. It then turns to the metaphoric link between Horace's defense of neologisms in the *Ars poetica* (*The Art of Poetry* [18 BCE]) and Adam's speech on the origin of language in *Paradiso* 26, a relation whose Homeric and Vergilian resonances inflect Dante's understanding of linguistic cycles. I argue that Dante's rewriting through Horace of the infernal, Vergilian simile of the falling leaves establishes a poetics of regeneration in *Paradiso* that joins the process of word creation to the miracle of the Resurrection and to the time-bound, cyclic nature of what Adam calls the linguistic "uso d'i mortali" 'usage of mortals.' (JL)

337 **Stephen B. Dobranski**, Clustering and Curling Locks: The Matter of Hair in *Paradise Lost*

In *Paradise Lost* Milton introduces Adam and Eve by lingering on their appearance, but instead of presenting a detailed catalog of the couple's physical attributes, he focuses on their hair. This essay challenges earlier readings of Adam and Eve's locks by examining Milton's imagery in the context of hair's cultural and spiritual value. Comparing depictions of hair in sixteenth-century sonnets and cavalier seduction poetry reveals how Milton appropriates the early modern aesthetic of *sprezzatura* to convey Adam and Eve's unique innocence. The essay shows that Milton's description is not merely superficial, nor even merely symbolic. Rather, when read in relation to early modern theories of hair's etiology and to Milton's own animist materialism, hair in *Paradise Lost* literally embodies Adam and Eve's prelapsarian love. Their clustering and curling locks enact the couple's amorous reciprocity and signify the paradoxical strength and fragility of their Edenic marriage. (SBD)

354 **Gregory Chaplin**, Beyond Sacrifice: Milton and the Atonement

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton imagines a cosmos at odds with orthodox theology, making a heretical departure that parallels his reluctance to dwell on the Crucifixion and his Arian Christology. Belief in a plurality of worlds threatens the integrity of the Trinity: it exalts the omnipotence of the creator, while it limits the significance of the redeemer. In effect, it produces a tension best resolved by Milton's position that the Father and the Son are two distinct beings—the former uncreated, infinite, and immutable and the latter created, finite, and changeable. This distinction enables Milton to fashion a theory of salvation that transforms Christ's sacrifice from a singular, traumatic event to an ethical decision that other created beings can emulate. These heterodox views constitute the theological underpinnings of his radical republicanism, which embraces an idea of human dignity and agency antithetical to the tyrannical politics of torture and blood sacrifice. (GC)