

The philosophical and didactic mythographic prose work *De laboribus Herculis* (1406) of Renaissance humanist Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) has often been perceived by modern scholars as a response to early translations of Seneca's tragedies, particularly *Hercules furens*, largely because the first edition began as a *Seneca moralizatus* or *allegorizatus* (according to Berthold Ullman, in *The Humanism of Coluccio Salutati* [1963]). However, this learned notary and chancellor (of Todi, Lucca, and, ultimately, Florence) throughout his letters and *De laboribus* also evinced a keen understanding of medieval commentaries on Virgil's *Aeneid* (particularly that of Bernardus Silvestris), Macrobius's commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis*, and, most importantly, Boethius's *De consolazione Philosophiae*. Indeed, Salutati had studied under famed scholar Pietro da Moglio at the University of Bologna, who himself had penned a commentary on Boethius (1385). Many of Salutati's interpretations of Hercules in *De laboribus* derived from the major conduit for the medieval transmission of myths on the hero: commentaries on selected meters of *De consolazione*, particularly those of English Oxford Dominican teacher and scholar Nicholas Trevet (born 1258-68, died after 1334), who spent much of his professional life representing his order in northern Italy and who also wrote commentaries on Augustine, Livy, and Seneca.

Although the title of Salutati's *De laboribus Herculis* suggests that it will focus on the twelve labors of Hercules, in fact it is only in the third of its four books that Salutati lists and comments upon each of the labors. In the first book Salutati is more interested in the nature of poetry and (along the way) in the birth of hero Hercules as a philosophical figure for the origin of man, and in the second, on the *descensus naturalis*, the natural descent of the soul into the body and the moral and philosophical implications thereof. It is in the long, final book in which, first, Salutati treats the descents into the *infernum* and the monsters or perils encountered there by Orpheus to rescue his wife, Eurydice; by Perithous and Theseus, to rape Proserpina, wife of Pluto; and by Amphiaraus, to escape from the consequences of the betrayal by his wife, Eriphyle, during the Theban War; and then the descent of Hercules to rescue Theseus from Cerberus. While Salutati acknowledges the myth of the descent into the underworld of Amphiaraus comes from Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, the myths of underworld descents by Orpheus and Hercules spring from a long tradition of commentary on book 3 meter 12 and book 4 meter 7 of Boethius's *De consolazione*. By comparing some of Salutati's moralizations of Hercules with those of Trevet, in particular, we shall see how Salutati rescues Hercules from his ribald treatment by thirteenth-century cleric Jean de Meun at the end of *Le Roman de la Rose* as a figure for the phallus that deflowers the character of the Rose (the beloved) by recreating him as a figure for *sapientia* struggling against the monstrous excesses of the earthly underworld.