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978-1-107-02795-4 - Angels and the Order of Heaven in Medieval and Renaissance Italy
Meredith J. Gill
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ANGELS AND THE ORDER OF HEAVEN IN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ITALY

From earliest times, angels have been seen as instruments of salvation and retribution, agents of revelation, and harbingers of hope. In effect, angels are situated at the intersections of diverse belief structures and philosophical systems. In this book, Meredith J. Gill examines the role of angels in medieval and Renaissance conceptions of heaven. She considers the character of Renaissance angelology as distinct from the medieval theological traditions that informed it and from which it emerged. Tracing the iconography of angels in text and in visual form, she also uncovers the philosophical underpinnings of medieval and Renaissance definitions of angels and their nature. From Dante through Pico della Mirandola, from the images of angels depicted by Fra Angelico to those painted by Raphael and his followers, angels, Gill argues, are the touchstones and markers of the era's intellectual self-understanding, and its classical revival, theological doctrines, and artistic imagination.

Meredith J. Gill is Professor of Italian Renaissance Art in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is the author of *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance: Art and Philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and coeditor, with Karla Pollmann, of *Augustine Beyond the Book: Intermediality, Transmediality and Reception*. Among her other publications are articles in *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Storia dell'Arte*, and *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* and essays in *Rethinking the High Renaissance: The Culture of the Visual Arts in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome*; *The Possessions of a Cardinal: Politics, Piety, and Art, 1450–1700*; *The Renaissance World*; and *Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). She has been a Fellow at Villa I Tatti (The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies) and the National Humanities Center and the recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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For Eric Denker

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MEREDITH J. GILL
University of Maryland

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107027954

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First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Gill, Meredith Jane.
Angels and the order of heaven in medieval and Renaissance Italy / Meredith J. Gill, University of Maryland.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-02795-4 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. Angels – History. 2. Italy – Religion. I. Title.
BL477.G53 2014
235′.3–dc23 2014015033

ISBN 978-1-107-02795-4 Hardback

Publication of this book has been made possible in part by the Lila Acheson Wallace – Reader's Digest Publications Subsidy at Villa I Tatti.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has its origins in my study of the Late Antique Church Father, Augustine (354–430 C.E.), whose ideas about angels, their substance, and their nature were often novel and certainly far-reaching. As I began this project, angels rushed in, to invert Alexander Pope's famous statement, for I found that I was by no means alone in turning to the subject of the spirit worlds of the past. Augustine's perspective remains central to my understanding of these worlds, as it must to our understanding of the religious cultures of the West.

I have shared portions of these chapters with diverse audiences, beginning with a presentation in fall 2007 at the Center for Renaissance and Baroque Studies at the University of Maryland, my home institution. At the invitation of Paul V. Murphy, I gave a lecture at the Institute for Catholic Studies at John Carroll University on Augustine, his heaven, and angels, and at Indiana University, Bloomington, I had the opportunity to speak to members of the Program in Renaissance Studies, thanks to the kindness of Constance Furey. At Princeton University, for the Renaissance and Early Modern Colloquium, I first probed the subject of Lucifer and the fallen angels, a topic that I later pursued as a Fellow of the Yale Initiative for the Study of Material and Religious Cultures of Religion. The Yale Initiative underwrote my visit to Siena in fall 2011. I owe Sally M. Promey, codirector of the Initiative, a special debt of thanks for suggesting that I also speak about my angels for the Colloquium of the Institute of Sacred Music of the Yale Divinity School.

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At the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in 2009, W. David Myers, Steven F. Ostrow, and Blake Wilson presented inspiring papers in our session on "Angels: Harmonies, Bodies, and Intelligences in Early Modern Europe." More recently, at the conference "Reading Comparatively: Theories, Practices, Communities," hosted by the Center for Literary and Comparative Studies and the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Maryland, I explored my hypotheses on angelic language and the Annunciation.

An award from the University of Maryland's General Research Board permitted me a semester's leave of writing and a Samuel H. Kress Fellowship in Renaissance Art History from the Renaissance Society of America funded my research in Rome, Riofreddo, and Venice. I am profoundly grateful for a Lila Acheson Wallace – Reader's Digest Publications Subsidy from Villa I Tatti (The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies), which made possible the publication of an extensive list of illustrations, including the color reproductions.

It is in the nature of angels, whose appeal is universal, that friends, colleagues, and students have offered a wealth of references, often along with a welcome leavening of humor. Among these are Paul Barolsky, Franco and Maria Ferrari, Kenneth Gouwens, W. David Myers, William L. Pressly, Karen Schneider, and Marjorie S. Venit. My students, among them Sarah Cadagin, Steven J. Cody, and Nicole Riesenberger, have offered enthusiastic and thoughtful insights. My colleague and friend from my days at Villa I Tatti, Victor Coelho, illuminated the meaning of Rosso's lute-playing angel in the artist's famous painted fragment. On a memorable morning in Rome, William E. Wallace led us to SS. Apostoli where we looked at the Nine Orders in Cardinal Bessarion's newly reopened funerary chapel. Above all, I owe a very special debt of thanks to Paul Barolsky and William L. Pressly, both of whom read the completed manuscript as well as versions in between, offering encouragement and advice that were more valuable than they can imagine. Paul Barolsky has always been an especially inspiriting interlocutor; in this, I have been exceptionally blessed. Once again, my far-seeing guide at Cambridge University Press, Beatrice Rehl, along with Assistant Editor Anastasia Graf, looked after my manuscript from beginning to end. My parents, Margaret and Peter Gill, who introduced me to Fra Angelico at San Marco at a very young age, have my love and appreciation.

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This book is dedicated to Eric Denker, who never tires of noticing angels. Eric gave me Billy Collins's collection of poems, *Questions About Angels* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991/1999). The medieval theologians whom Collins gently critiques turn out to have been quite curious after all about subjects other than "the little dance floor on the head of a pin." This book is also dedicated to the memory of these indefatigable angelologists and their peers in the arts who, with at least as much imagination, also worried about the clothes of angels, the impact of angels' words, and their breathtaking bodily transformations.

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