

The third chapter gets to the heart of G.'s argument. With reference to the anonymous author called Ambrosiaster, he states that his text first concretised 'the conception [...] of polytheistic cults as a theological and moral system, a singular "paganism"' (76–7). But was this unified paganism just a construct of Ambrosiaster? G. shows that 'the senators' presentation of themselves and their cults may have shaped Christian views of polytheistic religion beyond the formulation of a singular conception of "pagan" religion. [...] Thus, their [i.e. Firmicus's and Ambrosiaster's] "paganism" was not an empty polemical construct but a description, shaped by Christian vocabulary and theology, of a polytheistic piety whose devotees likewise saw the many cults of the gods as parallel, overlapping paths to a single spiritual reality' (83). This can be seen e.g. in the epitaph of Praetextatus (*CIL* VI 31929), which embeds his multiple initiations in a henotheistic theology. G. concludes: 'The senators' inscriptions and the polemicists' anti-"pagan" works adopt a basically parallel approach to traditional religion, combining interest in numerous cults of diverse social and geographic origins with a belief that all polytheistic cults ultimately lead to the same spiritual reality' (94). It follows that the term *paganus* was a Christian invention; the idea — and, crucially, the practice — of a polytheistic religion that united the worship of many gods was not' (106). Due to the limits of the evidence (which G. himself acknowledges), these conclusions can only be drawn for senatorial 'paganism'. The beliefs of other echelons of society remain obscure.

The fourth chapter treats the matter of the altar of Victory. G. argues that Symmachus not only makes a case for the utility of cult concerning the *pax deorum*, but also, '[b]y appealing to philosophical henotheism, [...] raises all cults to a theoretical equality, at once acknowledging the Christian claim to have access to God and denying its uniqueness' (124). Here, Symmachus uses pagan henotheism to persuade a Christian emperor.

The legacy of Praetextatus is the subject of the fifth chapter. Was this adherent of a pagan henotheism to be remembered especially for his civic virtues (as Symmachus argued in a climate ever more hostile to paganism) or for his pagan piety (as argued his wife Paulina)? That piety and honour were closely linked for both pagans and Christians is shown by Petronius Probus, whose epitaph presents baptism as the crown of his *cursus honorum*. For G., the debate about Praetextatus shows that the 'pagan aristocracy of the 380s did not meet imperial repudiation of their ancestral cults with simple inactivity. Neither, on the other hand, did they meet it with unanimity. [...]. [T] here was no consensus about what Praetextatus' example had meant and how (or even whether) he was to be imitated' (165–6). G. concludes that 'paganism' was in the fourth century still a vital social, practical fact of Roman society. What it meant and what its role in society should be was still subject to debate — among Christians as well as among 'pagans' themselves.

Though it is not within the direct scope of the study, it would have been interesting to have G.'s perspective on the processes that produced this senatorial pagan henotheism and to trace the influence of Christian monotheism and philosophical Neoplatonism on its development.

G.'s book is a very well written reminder that — regardless of the usefulness of modern narratological and speech-theoretical approaches and their justified popularity among contemporary scholarship of (late-)antique texts — we must always ask whether what we deem a mere rhetorical construct might have a basis in the conditions in the world.

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SUSANNA ELM and CHRISTOPHER BLUNDA (EDS), *THE LATE (WILD) AUGUSTINE*. Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh (Brill), 2021. Pp. viii + 240. Paperback. ISBN 9783506704764. €96.00.

In the last of nine differently authored essays on the late (more or less wild) Augustine, Christopher Blunda, also one of the volume's co-editors, introduces us to Gennadius of Marseilles and his cagily subversive book of bio-biblio notices on illustrious, but not always trustworthy, religious authorities. In *De viris illustribus*, Augustine rates at least a mention in five of the notices, one of which, notice 39, is devoted entirely to his legacy. It is Augustine's theological authority — particularly its

presumptive status as exceptional or privileged — that is up for some subtle subverting. Gennadius writes nearly fifty years after Augustine's death, and he is in no mood as heir to a moderate Massilian tradition of monastic piety to bend the theology of southern Gaul towards Augustine's dire notions of sin-wrecked sexuality, posthumous healing and the arbitrary selectiveness of divine love. There may be less dire ways to parse original sin, grace and predestination, but — to take a page from Blunda's exacting notice of Gennadius — why go there? Augustine's capacious, endlessly wordy, unruly genius is arguably as much a source of dangerous confusion as it is a well of edifying invention. But as to whether *De viris illustribus* makes such an argument, Blunda, the historian, is circumspect: 'while *De viris illustribus* certainly found a well-disposed and sufficiently erudite readership in Marseilles and its surrounding environs, its attempt to make Augustine wild by subverting his status as a theological authority was largely but not entirely (if the number and nature of textual variants in notice 39 is any indication) unsuccessful.'

None of the authors who have contributed to this handsome Brill volume (which can even boast of sporting a Cy Twombly illustration) has a vested interest in subverting Augustine's theological authority. Or, if any of them do, they are being more subtle about their business than a Gennadius. But if neither theological nor some other analogously big-picture authority is centrally at issue for the wildling of the late Augustine, what has wilding come to be about? All of the essays in *The Late (Wild) Augustine* have a genealogical connection to a 2018 conference at Berkeley, hosted by Susanna Elm and inspired by her collaboration with Mark Vessey. In minimalist terms, the conference aimed to rescue the writer of *Retractationes*, *De haeresibus*, *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* and *Speculum* from scholarly disdain and uninterest. Most students of Augustine have a passing familiarity with John Burnaby's sober assessment in *Amor Dei* of Augustine's last years: 'Nearly all that Augustine wrote after his seventieth year is the work of a man whose energy has burnt itself out, whose love has grown cold.' While more seasoned students hesitate before picking up that refrain, few would go as far as Elm does in the other direction. In her introduction to *The Late (Wild) Augustine*, she describes the septuagenarian as 'a man, conscious of the powers of his writings, fearless in his contemplation of mortality, in full control of his formidable intellect, and ready to push concepts that had excited his curiosity and that he had contemplated, rejected, fought for, pushed and pushed against, to their limits, to the edge of the conceivable.'

It is the last bit that surprises me most: the late Augustine as wildling explorer, almost giddy to push his best, most articulate sense of things to the brink of undoing. Elm further characterises him as 'an Augustine who labors for and rejoices in unpredictability and an astounding creativity.' I would love to meet this wildling old man and be reassured that the religious impulse, even at an advanced age, can be rejuvenating and open-ended and not always a call to retrenchment. But I have to wonder what has happened to the overtaxed perfectionist who has grown impatient with deep but intractable questions (e.g. the origin of the soul) and is more than ready, within the constraints of a shifting finitude, to hold on for dear life to belief — make that *correct* belief. Shades of this familiar late Augustine make an appearance in most of the essays in the volume, and there they are accorded substance and nuance, mostly in the form of some sort of historical contextualisation.

Here are some snapshots. Johannes Brachtendorf holds the *Retractationes* in high regard. It is Augustine's showcase for the development and correction of his views over a long career; it is prep for posterity. (Correction may be hypothetically endless, but for this Augustine one corrects where one can.) Brachtendorf cues his essay to Augustine's seemingly trivial correction of *Contra Iulianum* 5.14.51 (*retr.* 2.62), a passage that discusses conception, and from there he follows Augustine's retrospective trek through a grand correction: from mind-body dualism to something more like body-love. In his essay on Augustine's *De haeresibus*, Richard Flower dispels the impression that the treatise is a simple list of heresies. Augustine makes use both of previous heresiology and also ancient technical literature to stake a claim to having produced the best, if necessarily incomplete, book of heresies out there. (Still more perfectionism, albeit chastened.) Patout Burns, in his essay, carefully and concisely sets out the developmental logic of Augustine's increasingly strident insistence, against Julian primarily, on the heritability of guilt. Since the logic is historical, Augustine's position is not inevitable, but nor is it (sorry, Gennadius) wild. It has roots in a complex reading of scripture. To see how a scripturally formed perception can reshape a social and legal imaginary, look no farther than Darcy Tuttle's essay on Augustine on the rape of the Sabine women in *De civitate Dei* 3.13. She writes: 'Just as Augustine believes that all people are born enslaved to Adam's sin, so too all Roman citizens are born enslaved to Romulus's sin, bearing the state of their Sabine forebears.' Erika Hermanowicz, in a bravura piece of historical reconstruction, lends all the essays that gesture toward

an historicised late Augustine a thickened context. Specifically, she makes a case for thinking that the Council of Hippo, called by Augustine in 427, had everything to do with the messy, unfinished business of Catholic and Donatist reunification. (The late Augustine had too much social fabric to repair to be fully Burnaby's burnt-out, cold-hearted theologian.)

By my count, four of the nine essays in *The Late (Wild) Augustine*, including Elm's introduction, explicitly take on the problematic of wilding Augustine. I have already mentioned Blunda, who helpfully historicises the notion. That leaves Mark Vessey's meditation on the death scene in Possidius's *Vita Augustini* and Catherine Conybeare's attempt, by way of Cy Twombly and graffiti, to fathom a question of genre; if the *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* is not dialogue or commentary, then what is it? Those two essays are frightfully hard to encapsulate, and I will not try to do so here. The key take-away is that both speak to a wildness that Augustine evokes more than he possesses. I am not as sceptical about this kind of wildness, in that it emerges less out of projection than the intensification of readerly attention. In that regard, the wildness is generous. One need not have a wildling Augustine of one's own in order to play.

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JULIA KELTO LILLIS, *VIRGIN TERRITORY: CONFIGURING FEMALE VIRGINITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY* (Christianity in late antiquity 13). Oakland: University of California Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 273. ISBN 97805203890149. £80.00/US\$95.00.

In this thoughtful meander of six chapters plus introduction and conclusion, Julia Kelto Lillis in *Virgin Territory* synthesises ideas about female virginity mainly in Christian Late Antiquity. Drawing on religion theorist Jonathan Z. Smith's 1978 promotion of Alfred Korzybski's 1958 dictum of general semantics, 'the map is not the territory', Lillis presents virginity as a discursive concept to be mapped. By this view, humans as linguistic beings cannot know and communicate an unmediated reality or territory, only maps about the territory through linguistic and other expressions. Hence, we should remain mindful that 'the map is not the territory'. This view is debatable, not least because not all human experience, interaction and knowledge are necessarily mediated through language. Further, persons inclined toward idealism or realism have long differed on the ability of human inquiry and expressions to approximate and communicate a grasp of reality. L., however, treats it as incontrovertible that 'maps are all we possess', not territory itself (18). Yet she paradoxically titles her book *Virgin Territory*, which seems inconsistent with this perspective. The title should accordingly be understood as [*Mapping*] *Virgin Territory*, for L. 'seeks to describe the "maps" that early Christians drew to represent ... the "territory" or reality of virginity' (17).

Patristic advocates of female virginity, however, idealist Christian Platonists included, were in their view disclosing and extolling the divine reality of virginity in their writings. L.'s approach detaches her work from this real-life patristic stance. For dedicated virginal girls and women like Ambrose's vindicated friend Indicia, to preserve their sexual potential for the return of Jesus Christ was not just a construct to map, as it is for L. It was an anticipated experience that purportedly would surpass the best sexual climax ever. Little of this ascetic tension, thrill and obsession is discernible in L.'s mapping of Christian virginity. She also presents her approach as a corrective to the patristics being naïve realists about virginity, for she maintains that the church fathers could only be mapmakers about this topic too (17). Yet, believe them or not, the patristics positioned their views as shaping and conveying virginity itself—the territory, not the map.

L. utilises an open-ended approach of conceptual analysis to explore and map female virginity. She seeks to show that 'concepts like virginity are human-made and are produced on an ongoing basis through human thoughts, words, acts, relationships, and systems' (4), mainly in early Christianity. The conclusions in her book are as broad as her thesis and would benefit from more specific substance beyond reiterating virginity's variety and malleability: Early Christian 'virginity was ... a mutable and multifold concept that thinkers could build from existing discourses in various