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correct assessment that Augustine's non-dualism remains hierarchical is unlikely to persuade contemporary critics who reject Augustine as much for the latter as the former.

Clearly and persuasively written, Boersma's work offers an insightful analysis into the important topic of Augustine's theology of image. He demonstrates a good grasp of the relevant secondary literature and effectively anchors Augustine's thought within his wider intellectual milieu, carefully tracing both the points of continuity and divergence from the Latin Christian and the Plotinian philosophical traditions. In this, it is a fine model of historical theology. I highly recommend this book to those interested in Augustine's theology and his relation to the wider Latin Christian tradition.

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***Augustine: Conversions to Confessions***. By **Robin Lane Fox**. New York: Basic, 2015. xiv + 658 pp. $12.87 cloth.

Lane Fox's 563-page biographical treatment of Augustine and his environment during his first forty-three years is not a straight biography (hence not directly comparable to Peter Brown's renowned *Augustine of Hippo*, nor a prequel to *Augustine the Bishop*), but a biography of the *Confessions*. It covers the years 354–387, as well as the period up to and including the *Confessions*' composition (388–397). It does not just use the *Confessions*, but *enjoys* them. Forty-two chapters and an epilogue cover the territory of *Confessions* 1–9 (chaps. 1–26), Augustine in Rome and Thagaste (chaps. 27–29), as priest and bishop in Hippo (chaps. 30–40), the composition of the *Confessions*, the content of *Confessions* 10–13 (chap. 42), and its dating, context, and impact (Epilogue). There are thirty-three color plates with extended captions (pp. 565–571), a bibliography (pp. 572–610), endnotes with a bibliographical summary for each chapter (pp. 611–647), and an index (pp. 649–657).

This book addresses two sorts of readers. One of its audiences needs Nietzsche contextualized as a philosopher (66) and van Gogh as a painter (65). Learned references are usually eliminated from the text rendering the book best for experts (who already know where, but will still have to dig in the endnotes) or for general readers (who do not yet need to know where). There are no precise allusions to primary sources in the main text; even the

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dates in Augustine's lifeline are muted. Lane Fox avoids questions or problems in the framing register (the metadidactic level at which the questions are posed is grayed out), so it usually reads like a narrative.

Augustine's life and writings are the two main spools pursued through the *Confessions* (with help from Possidius's *Vita* and the *Retractationes*), and, where the *Confession*s leave off in 387, his other works are explored to paint the life that would generate the *Confessions* in 397. Lane Fox opens up and meditates on the *Confessions*, and adduces other historical material to explain to a more popular audience what the content of the *Confessions* signifies and what went into its making. Concepts (e.g. conversion, confession) are set out and contextualized. Lane Fox's title envisages conversions to Manichaeism, philosophy, and celibacy, and away from rhetoric, ambition, and sex.

Lane Fox constantly explores and summarizes works of Augustine's that are relevant to his intellectual biography. Fine chapters, for example on Manichaeanism (chap. 9) and on the Neoplatonists (chap. 17), explain the doctrines in question, and are not filtered exclusively through Augustine's Late Antique eyes. They explicitly address new developments in scholarship (132). Readers will be drawn in and moved by discussions of more familiar topics, such as that on friendship (141–147).

Lane Fox incorporates features and techniques that are didactic and surely originate in Oxford tutorials. There are strategies of enrichment, a sense of place and occasion, and an attempt to bring aspects of Augustine's everyday world to life for readers. This, in part, is why he has recourse to Synesius and to Libanius as *realia* controls to flesh out the background, as when, for example, conjurer-like he uses an epigraphic find to bring the great Hippodrome of Antioch to life for us. There are the virtual exam questions: "Would Jerome or Pelagius have had a better chance of putting Augustine off sex?" (172). One almost expects, "Discuss." Or a Collingwoodian re-enactment: how Augustine would have had to extricate himself from his entanglement with his second concubine and his betrothed in 386 (299). Or experiments in alternative history: a married Augustine as proconsul (540). All are valid and useful thought experiments.

There is much of the author in this book, for example, analogies to gardens and gardening, but also, no doubt, hidden interests too that play peek-a-boo with the initiate. Its intermittent jolliness, breeziness, and lack of inhibition may raise the hackles of German-speaking scholars. "Journalism," my colleagues might sniff. One Anglophone commented informally, "too long, too self-indulgent, too everything." But this reviewer is an outspoken fan who regularly felt the tug of a grin, a sudden snort (Helvidius's [largely lost] tractate against Mary's post-partum virginity: a "sound little text" [169]), and at times an audible laugh when she encountered some modernism or

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colloquialism (not necessarily in scare-quotes). Some of this targets modern audiences (Manichaeism is like "Star Wars," its mythology like Thetans, its Elect "heroic munchers" [122]). But most of it has a didactic point, a jolt of *Verfremdung* to make the modern reader think twice. The "ultimate seeded loaf" (505) and Augustine's hemorrhoids that "tested him from the bottom up" (519) attest Lane Fox's verve and high spirits. This is how engaged readers of ancient texts ought to read. Augustine would not have been amused to read that his light particles were fortunate not to have fathered a child for nine years (119), given that he and the Manichees were misinformed about the monthly Safe Period. But then—after *Confessions* 3.18—he had it coming; he only had himself to blame.

In other places, however, Lane Fox momentarily focalizes through other parties, as when the Manichaeans remember the Christian Crucifixion on a "footling little hillside called Golgotha," or when worldly people think of the three lusts as "monastic piffle" (404). All of this makes for a rich and complex and racy texture, unparalleled in previous biographies or scholarship on Augustine. The historiography is nonetheless impeccably responsible. The critical reader is not deceived about what is paraphrased, what is dependent on previous scholarship, and what is Lane Fox's own speculation or conclusion (through the use of phrases like "surely," "in my view," "I believe," and "the neatest guess").

Popular fancy dress notwithstanding, this is very much a work of serious scholarship that argues larger theses as well as smaller, local ones. Despite its predominantly historical character, it experiments with more emotional historiographical techniques, such as a seven-step ascent to the composition of the *Confessions* (457–467), and intones a striking literary credo: that Augustine composed his *Confessions* as a dictated oral prayer, while confined with said hemorrhoids, in Lent 397, in the shortest time humanly possible, an anti-analyst thesis that runs against the scholarly grain. Lane Fox lays the groundwork against possible objections to his oral thesis by, for example, asserting that Augustine had not composed the *Confessions* with "hidden patterns and cross-correspondences" (53), he had memorized the books of the Platonists (357). This is not the occasion to discuss this intriguing question, but this literary reviewer finds it hard to believe in an oral composition for all of the *Confessions*.

Lane Fox sometimes evinces discomfort with literary evidence, overtones, and symbolism, as in, for example, the repeated insistence on the "factual presence" of the garden in Augustine's conversion-scene (282). He also could have made use of concepts from the literary critical toolbox, such as *oppositio in imitando* ("Kontrastimitation"). There can be no general arguments about who wrote what before whom and who is dependent on

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whom: these matters have to be thrashed out in the original language with attendant technicalities and grubby mechanics (523).

These are, however, but petty quibbles about a remarkable volume that never falls short of being interesting and stimulating. The *Confessions* are an intensely personal book. They inspired their author's understanding and love of God, both when he wrote them and when he reread them half a lifetime later. One cannot read them without engagement, for in their chemical interaction with their readers lies their lasting magic. Voice calls forth voice. Deep calls to deep (Ps. 43:7). Many readers find themselves mirrored in Augustine. The right readers who chance upon *Conversions to Confessions* at the right moment will pick up and read the *Confessions* next.

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***A Companion to Medieval Christian Humanism: Essays on Principal Thinkers***. Edited by **John P Bequette**. Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition 69. Leiden: Brill, 2016. viii + 354 pp. $258.00 hardcover.

Two approaches currently dominate our understanding of medieval Christian humanism: the first envisages medieval humanism as consisting of a combination of Christian and classical elements focused on defining the natural man and his powers independent of divine grace. The second, best formulated by Richard Southern, requires integration of the supernatural with the natural in order to understand the potentiality for human knowledge and activity. Southern, however, recognizes the contribution of ancient pagan culture to the development of Christian humanism. These essays offer a third conception of humanism rooted solely in Christian theology, essentially in Christ's double nature as divine and human.

The one exception is Nancy Enright's "Dante and the Human Identity: A Transformation from Grace to Grace," wherein the primary issue is the role of classical culture in the salvation of the human soul. Her study of Dante's *Divine comedy* traces Dante's allusions to parallel images and concepts taken from ancient writings and art that are the best that unregenerate human nature can do in understanding the Divine. While recognizing the value of ancient education and wisdom, Dante stresses their limitation when not joined to God's grace.

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