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Augustine's *Marginalia Contra Julianum*

Catherine Conybeare

In the Philadelphia Museum of Art, an entire room, and part of its anteroom, is dedicated to the display of a renowned sequence of paintings by the American artist Cy Twombly (1928–2011). It is called “Fifty Days at Iliam”—we are assured that the “a” in “Iliam” is intentional—and it simultaneously presents and critiques the violence and sorrow of the Trojan war.

There are ten vast canvases, each minimally prepared with a white foundation. Dimensions vary, but they are roughly on a scale of 10 × 12 feet (3 × 3.5 meters). Twombly's intervention on each canvas seems provisional and partial. There are intense swirls and splotches of paint, irregular scribbled forms, names scrawled across patches of canvas with seemingly random styles and spelling conventions (though capital A is always represented as capital delta, which lends a vestigial Greekness but is constantly disorienting). There is a repeated motif, loosely drawn, which is reminiscent simultaneously of a phallus and a handgun. Large areas of each canvas simply remain blank. The overall effect is somehow both scattered and overwhelming.

I had visited this room several times and had long struggled to understand why this sequence of paintings is so renowned. Then one day I happened across a brief essay on Twombly by John Berger—and suddenly, Twombly's work began to make sense to me. Berger wrote of Cy Twombly that his paintings “touch upon something fundamental to a writer's relationship with her or his language,” and went on to elaborate:

A writer continually struggles for clarity *against* the language he's using, or, more accurately, against the common usage of that language. He doesn't see language with the readability and clarity of something printed out. He sees it, rather, as a terrain full of illegibilities, hidden paths, impasses, surprises, and obscurities... . Its obscurities, its lost senses, its self-effacements come about for many reasons—because of the way words modify each other, write themselves over each other, cancel one another out, because the unsaid always counts for as much, or more, as the said, and because language can never cover what it signifies. Language is always an abbreviation.¹

1 John Berger, *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, ed. Tom Overton (London/New York: Verso, 2015), 426.

Reading this, I was reminded in particular of another Twombly canvas that I saw a couple of years ago at the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice. This is a rather smaller work, some 4 × 5 feet (1.2 × 1.5 meters). The ground is dark grey, the color of an old-fashioned chalkboard.

This particular chalkboard seems to have suffered the intervention of a mischievous yet somehow orderly student. From top to bottom, in chalk-white crayon, there are rows of loops, repeated over each other, mimicking writing but never resolving into letters. The viewer reaches for meaning in this visual language that “can never cover what it signifies.” The effect is striking, but puzzling.

Rather to my surprise, Berger’s essay also helped me to understand something about the textual traces of the encounter between Augustine of Hippo and Julian of Eclanum, with which I had also—and more urgently—been struggling. This encounter played out through the 420s CE, and both writers pursued it with an urgency and exhaustiveness that reflected the significance of the issues at hand. For Julian of Eclanum was a proponent of the teachings of Pelagius, and Augustine thought that those teachings were not only heretical but undermined the entire structure of Christian belief. So fundamental has the Pelagian challenge remained that it is still enshrined in the ninth of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church:

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit ...

The particular episode of the encounter between Augustine and Julian that is under scrutiny here dates to 429 CE. It has come down to us as Augustine’s *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum*, and was, as its received title implies, unfinished.² It was composed too late to be included in the *Retractationes*, Augustine’s polemical “catalogue raisonné” of his own works, which seems to compound its character of incompleteness. As Augustine maps out in his preface to the work, the *Opus imperfectum* continues an escalating war of words: his own single book *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, addressed to count Valerius,³ had inspired a response in four books from Julian, to which Augustine had responded in six, Julian in eight ... and now this was the work with which Augustine hoped definitively to close out the exchange. The notion that

² Translations of all works are my own.

³ See “Valerius 3,” *PLRE* 2. 1143–4.

“language is always an abbreviation” may seem an odd way to introduce this notoriously verbose exchange; but it will prove useful, as we shall see.

The *Opus imperfectum* was a work composed as Augustine confronted his own mortality. He must have known that the end of his long, full, combative life was close at hand; he had already far exceeded the regular life expectancy of his time. And mortality was, in this work, his recurring theme: the mortal state to which human flesh had been consigned at the Fall; the state of original sin that this mortality signified; the grace of God that was the only hope for release from mortality—from deathliness. Augustine was reading as if for the first time Paul’s anguished disentangling of God’s dispensation in the letter to the Romans, and he cried out with Paul: “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”⁴ Again and again, he returned to two poignant phrases from Ambrose: “*omnes in peccato nascimur*” (we are all born in sin) and “*fuit Adam et in illo fuimus omnes*” (Adam existed, and in him have we all existed).⁵ Augustine’s conversation with Paul and with Ambrose is in some ways as urgent as his conversation with Julian.

But this work is not, in fact, a conversation. It has no oral trace; it was composed purely in writing. There are interesting vestiges of an oral conceit, generally used to underscore a point of particular theological moment. For example, the simple imperative “*dic*” (tell me) occurs 84 times in the work, according to the Cetedoc database of Latin texts: “*dic mihi*,” “*dic quaeso*,” “*dic aperte*,” “*dic euidenter*.” But if the two men are in any way to be conceived of as talking, they are talking across each other. There is no real space for a response to the insistent demand of “*dic*,” and not only because Augustine died before he completed the work. The terms in which a satisfactory response might be given are never disclosed, because satisfactory will never be good enough. “*Dic*” can never be fully answered.

To what genre, then, does this work belong? As we observe the format, it appears at first glance to belong to the genre of late antique controversial dialogues. These were increasingly establishing themselves in both the eastern and western empire as a way of displaying, if not always settling, theological debate.⁶ Sometimes composed purely for the page—whether or not they can

4 Romans 7:24.

5 Despite the fact that in literal terms it hinges on only two words, the echo in “*fuit Adam ...*” of *Aeneid* 2.325–6 is almost irresistible: “*fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium et ingens gloria Teucrorum*”. The sense is of something irrevocably past. Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.234 continues: “*periit Adam et in illo omnes perierunt*.”

6 On the typology of the dialogues, proposing the category “controversial,” see Peter Lebrecht Schmidt, “Zur Typologie und Literarisierung des frühchristlichen lateinischen Dialogs,” in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l’Antiquité tardive en Occident: 23–28 août 1976: huit exposés*

fall under the designation of “literature” is a subject that needs exploration—and sometimes stenographic transcriptions of actual encounters, they have in common two clearly demarcated interlocutors (occasionally more), an obsessive attention to detail, and a tone that periodically veers into startling abuse. Augustine himself had recently been a participant in a particularly humiliating instance of the stenographic type of dialogue, which has come down to us as the *Conlatio cum Maximino*.⁷

Here in the *Opus imperfectum* we seem to have all the formal characteristics of a controversial dialogue. A glance at a page of the modern printed text shows the alternation of “speakers;” one puts forth a proposition, the other counters it. Zelzer’s edition for *CSEL* emphasizes the call-and-response nature of the exchange by giving each proposition a fresh number. The speakers are clearly noted in the text as “IUL.” and “AUG.,” personalizing the already dialogic exchange. Moving from form to content: there is persistent dogmatic citation—particularly on the part of “AUG.”—of chapter and verse. There are the requisite bursts of insults, ranging from the simple jingle of “*Iuliane/insane*” to the portrayal of Augustine as a gladiator fighting in a helmet without eyeholes to the twisting of the personal revelations in the *Confessions*—for example, when Julian retells the episode in which Monnica is accused as a *meribibula*, and introduces the additional insinuation of sexual license.⁸

So we could argue for dialogic status on purely cosmetic grounds, with some thematic support. But a dialogue, whether fictive or transcribed, always maintains the convention that the speakers are engaging each other in real time, each responding to the other sequentially as the debate unfolds. This work does not conform to that convention; the speakers are temporally dis severed from each other. This Augustine makes quite clear. He describes his compositional

suivis de discussions, *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique* 23 (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1977), 101–90. For the importance of dialogues in late antiquity, see Averil Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*, *Hellenic Studies* 65 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2014); Averil Cameron and Niels Gaul, eds., *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Late Byzantium* (London: Routledge, 2017); Charles Kuper, “The Latin Controversial Dialogues of Late Antiquity,” (PhD dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 2017).

7 On the *Conlatio cum Maximino*, see Neil McLynn, “From Palladius to Maximinus: Passing the Arian Torch,” *J ECS* 4, no. 4 (1996): 477–93; Catherine Conybeare, “Correcting a Heretic: Augustine’s *Conlatio cum Maximino*,” in *Fide non Ficta: Essays in Memory of Paul B. Harvey Jr.*, ed. John Muccigrosso and Celia Schultz (Como: Biblioteca di Athenaeum, 2020): 115–27.

8 Respectively *c. Iul. imp.* 2.31; 1.19; 1.68. On the insinuations about Monnica, see Mathijs Lamberigts, “The Italian Julian of Æclanum about the African Augustine of Hippo,” in *Augustinus Afer: Saint Augustin, africanité et universalité. Actes du colloque international Alger-Annaba, 1–7 avril 2001*, ed. Pierre-Yves Fux, Jean-Michel Roessli, and Otto Wermelinger (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 2003), 83–94.

technique in the preface to the *Opus imperfectum*: he will proceed “*eius uerba praeponens eisque subiungens responsionem meam ad loca singula*” (putting his words first and subjoining to them my own response at individual points). Julian’s book is already written. The conversation on one side is, in some ways at least, foreclosed. Augustine will reopen it by quoting the book verbatim and inserting his own objections and corrections and animadversions in the appropriate places. Sometimes he will even interrupt in mid-sentence, pouncing on Julian’s thought before it is syntactically complete.

It is widely recognized—for example, by Michaela Zelzer in the *Augustinus-Lexikon*—that Augustine had used this technique previously, in the works *Contra litteras Petiliani* and *Contra Faustum*, “correcting” respectively a Donatist and a Manichean. I have not, however, seen it remarked that Augustine actually glosses his own technique in the preface to another work, composed in 419, about a decade before the *Opus imperfectum*. This is the *Contra Gaudentium*, Augustine’s last anti-Donatist work, directed against the bishop of Thamagudi (Timgad):⁹

For I shall put his words first, and then subjoin my own [note again the sequence *ponere—subiungere*]: but not in the same way as I did when I responded to the writings of Petilian. There, at individual points when his words were inserted, was placed ‘Petilian said;’ and when my words were given, ‘Augustine responded.’ Because of that, I was accused of having lied, on the grounds that he never actually confronted me in debate; as if, moreover, he could not have said what he wrote, because I didn’t hear it in his words, but read it in writing [*in litteris*]; or I could not have responded, because I didn’t speak in his presence, but responded in turn, in writing, to what he had written. What are we to do with people who feel this way, or who think that those to whom they want to make their writings known feel this way? But let me give satisfaction even to such as these: when I cite the words of Gaudentius, I shan’t say, ‘Gaudentius said,’ but ‘Here are the words of the letter;’ and when I respond, I shan’t say, ‘Augustine responded,’ but ‘Here’s the response to this.’¹⁰

9 See “Gaudentius 2,” *PCBE* 1 (Afrique), 522–25.

10 *c. Gaud. 1.1.1*: “*Nam prius uerba eius ponam, deinde nostra subiungam: non sic quemadmodum feci, cum Petiliani litteris responderem. Ibi enim per loca singula, quando uerba ipsius inseruntur, positum est: ‘Petilianus dixit: quando autem mea uerba redduntur: ‘Augustinus respondit.’ Unde mihi, tamquam mentitus fuerim, calumniatus est, dicens quod numquam mecum comminus disputaverit: quasi propterea non dixerit quod scripsit, quia hoc non in uerbis eius audivi, sed in litteris legi; aut ego ideo non responderim, quia non eo praesente locutus sum, sed scriptis eius vicissim scribendo respondi. Quid faciamus hominibus qui tale cor habent, aut eos quibus scripta sua innotescere cupiunt, tale cor habere opinantur? Sed etiam talibus hic satisfaciamus: et quando ponimus uerba Gaudentii, non dicamus: ‘Gaudentius dixit;’ sed: ‘Verba Epistolae’: et quando respondemus, non dicamus: ‘Augustinus respondit;’ sed: ‘Ad haec responsio.’”*

This is the technique that Augustine follows in the *Opus imperfectum*. It is a technique that self-consciously refuses the oral *uerba* and hews to the written *litterae*. It inverts all ancient assumptions about the primacy of oral communication—that poetry will pretend to be sung long after it has been divorced from the lyre, for example, or historians will recreate the speech that they feel ought to have been said on such-and-such an occasion. Such apparently oral markers as “*dic tibi*” or “*dic aperte*” are here simply written indications of outrage. (We may compare the use of “*ecce*”, which does not literally suggest a pointing finger: its indexical quality has become a way of introducing a brief but emphatic pause into a text.) This is also a technique that, ironically, preserves complete the words of Augustine’s opponent, the words that support the theological structure that he wishes to erase.

Augustine is presented by Julian with a very particular problem of response. He cannot simply write an expository treatise—he has done that (many times), and it has not sufficed to close the debate. He cannot excerpt from Julian’s text and provide responses, or he opens himself to accusations of partiality and misquotation. (As it is, Julian accuses him of having earlier responded not to his full work, but to a redaction.)¹¹ Julian’s persistence forces Augustine to strive toward completeness in every aspect of his written response, including the reproduction of the work to which he is objecting.

If all pretense of orality is deliberately eschewed, what are we left with? This is writing on the written, supplementing and correcting it. Could we consider this in the genre of commentary? Might we think of it as Augustine’s exegesis of the work of Julian?—But in simply replacing the more neutral word “commentary” with the dignified and scripturally loaded “exegesis,” we can see why this won’t work.¹² First, to call it “commentary” presupposes the primacy of the originary text. This text is considered superior, in need of—and deserving of—elucidation; commentary is the result. Concomitant with this runs a respectful relationship of commentator to originary text. Where the two differ, the burden of accommodation must fall on the commentator (the tenor of Servius’s commentary on Virgil when confronted with certain impossible passages is a case in point).¹³ Certainly, the commentator will supplement the written; but

11 *c. Iul. imp.* 1.16.

12 There is a helpful discussion of medieval patterns of commentary by Rita Copeland, “Gloss and Commentary,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, ed. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 171–91.

13 See the discussion of Servius by Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988), 169–97, particularly his remarks on the Servian motifs “*dicimus*” and “*debut dicere*.”

she or he will rarely correct or challenge it. The commentator tends, moreover, to be as far as possible a neutral presence. Though inevitably their sense of what requires elucidation or elaboration will be shaped by personal perception and preference, there is also an obligation to cover the interpretative ground as evenly as possible for the sake of a range of readers. Unless, perhaps, one were Nabokov, it would be hard to write a biography of someone—even an intellectual biography, still less an affective one—from their commentary alone (though interesting to try).¹⁴

So how may we designate this writing on the written in Augustine's *Opus imperfectum*? It is not dialogue; it is not commentary. I propose that we consider it as *marginalia*—the often opinionated markings and notes in the margins of a text composed by another party¹⁵—for all that these marginalia are presented intratextually and are often well out of proportion to the source text (a point to which we shall return). Augustine has, in effect, taken his text of Julian's treatise and marked it up with comments. He challenges, corrects, expresses his disgust. The result is the unwieldy, repetitious, argumentative composite text that we have inherited.

There is a delightfully concise example of marginalia in the recent study by Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book*. In a seventeenth-century edition of *Paradise Lost*, at the top of a page in book 6, is written in an elegant and determined hand, "Improve Line 640. 641" and further down the page, in the margin by the as yet unimproved lines, the note "amplify this Thought."¹⁶ Augustine's mission was indeed to "improve"—and often, inevitably, also to "amplify"—every line of Julian's text. The improvements in his case were not,

14 Note the rich range of approaches to commentary in Glenn W. Most, ed., *Commentaries—Kommentare*, Aporemata 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999); and Roy K. Gibson and Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, eds., *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory*, Mnemosyne Supplements 232 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

15 For a sweeping study of more recent marginalia, and in particular their responsive nature, see H. J. Jackson, *Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2001). Mariken Teeuwen has recently performed, for marginalia in manuscripts, exactly the sort of comprehensive cataloguing as that for which Jackson calls: see her report, "Voices from the Edge: Annotating Books in the Carolingian Period," in *The Annotated Book in the Early Middle Ages: Practices of Reading and Writing*, ed. Mariken Teeuwen and Irene van Renswoude, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 38 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

16 Stephen Orgel, *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 28–9. The lines read "(For Earth hath this variety from Heav'n/ Of pleasure situate in Hill and Dale)." The call for amplification makes an amusing contrast with Wim Verbaal's recent comments on *copia verborum*, with an example from Milton, in "Reconstructing Literature. Reflections on Cosmopolitan Literatures," *Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Cultures* 1 (June 2019): 1–15.

of course, aesthetic (which I think we may assume was the concern of the Miltonian annotator)—in fact, we constantly see Julian attempting to claim the high ground in that arena, sneering at Augustine for suiting his language to the *plebicularum rurales et teatrales* rather than the *eruditus lector*.¹⁷ Instead, Augustine's marginalia dictated moral improvement, the urgent ethical correction of what he considered Julian's misbegotten views about grace and sin. These marginalia were intended to supersede the source text—but were constrained to retain that text alongside them.

My example from Orgel's work is not wholly adventitious. Scholars of early modern English texts have of late been producing particularly interesting work on marginalia which helps to make clear why this might be a useful way of thinking about the *Opus imperfectum*. Jason Scott-Warren argues that marginalia work to challenge "the precondition of modern[ist?] notions of the literary that words should float free of their material form ...;" they represent a "simultaneous attention to form and content, a faith [this is a pleasing choice of word for our purposes] that meaning and presentation might work together to transform the reception of a text."¹⁸ In a significant move, Scott-Warren goes on to relate the formal properties of marginalia to graffiti. For graffiti, he argues, are conspicuously tied both to the self, to the identity of their "author," and to place. Graffiti artists claim that their identity is not just expressed through but represented by their work. Moreover, there is no such thing as a free-floating graffito: it must, of necessity, be considered in relation to where it is situated. In the case of Scott-Warren's marginalia, this is the "quasi-public environment" of the early modern book; we may equally fittingly, I think, speak of the "quasi-public environment" of the late antique manuscript. Further—though this is not a point made by Scott-Warren—the analogy between graffiti and marginalia captures the non-linear nature of both, their logic of juxtaposition rather than direct relation, and their ability to capture a cacophony of different voices. The guiding formal principle is spatial: all that is required is that the texts be encountered in the same material place.

This analogy directs us for a moment back to the work of Cy Twombly. In a blistering refutation to reverential, hieratic interpretations of the "meaning" in

17 *c. Iul. imp.* 1.33 and 2.14 (*plebicularum*) and 2.36 (*lector*). Note also the retort: "*plebicularum quas irrides catervae noverunt catholicam fidem.*" Julian's view of himself is taken up at length by J. H. Baxter, "Notes on the Latin of Julian of Eclanum," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 21 (1949–1950): 5–54.

18 Jason Scott-Warren, "Reading Graffiti in the Early Modern Text," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, vol. 3 (September 2010): 363–81, at 364. The suggestion of "modernist" for "modern" is mine.

Twombly's work, the art historian Rosalind Krauss points out that it is better read as graffiti:

For graffiti is a medium of marking that has precise, and unmistakable, characteristics. First, it is performative, suspending representation in favor of action: I mark you, I cancel you, I dirty you. Second, it is violent: always an invasion of a space that is not the marker's own, it takes illegitimate advantage of the surface of inscription ... Third, it converts the present tense of the performative into the past tense of the index: it is the trace of an event, torn away from the presence of the marker.¹⁹

Krauss's emphasis on dirt is subsequently developed in remarks about Twombly's proclivity for the deflationary and scatological. The latter categories do not apply to Augustine; but the desire to "dirty" his opponent should be borne in mind. As for the violence, that is indubitably relevant, as we shall see.

The consequences of proposing that we read Augustine's interventions in Julian's text as marginalia are several; and they are revealing. They are yet more revealing if we continue to bear in mind our analogy between marginalia and graffiti.

We see that Augustine is, in a sense, marking Julian's textual space as his own: he is "tagging" the originary text, as well as supplementing it. But this repossession of textual space is always perforce incomplete, for Julian's words remain, however much they may be interrupted or corrected. They function not so much as another, earlier set of graffiti on the wall, but as the wall itself. To see this more clearly, we should think about the original process of composition of the *Opus imperfectum*. We do not know how the work was originally presented: the earliest manuscript, with severe corruption that seems to indicate use of a Merovingian exemplar, dates to the first half of the ninth century, the next (in a clearer Beneventan script, but replicating some of the same types of errors) to the end of the eleventh.²⁰ We may guess that the presentation was more or less as it is published today: with each change of "speaker" marked, possibly by a dash, possibly by their names or an abbreviation of them. Probably each intervention began a new line, or at least was clearly marked. Whatever the exact mise-en-page, however, it is the actual process of composition, the moment of inscription, that bears pause. Augustine clearly had a full copy of Julian's text in his possession. He would almost certainly have been working with an amanuensis or *notarius*, to whom he would have been dictating his

19 Rosalind Krauss, "Cy was here; Cy's up," *Artforum International* 33, no. 1 (September 1994): 71–4.

20 These observations are not based on autopsy but paraphrased from Zelzer's preface to *CSEL* 85/1.

interventions. How, then, were Julian's own words encountered? Did the scribe read to Augustine from Julian's text and then record Augustine's responses on the text itself, quite literally as marginal annotations? It seems unlikely: many of the responses are too long for all but the most generous of margins.²¹ Longer responses could have been written on scraps of parchment and interleaved in the original codex, or stuck to the edges of pages—one sees examples of both techniques in later manuscripts. While the technique would save on the expense of fresh parchment, this too seems unlikely: would Augustine have allowed these crucial, salvific interventions to be recorded in a form that could easily become separated from the heretical asseverations that prompted them? No: the most likely scenario seems to be that Augustine himself would have read aloud to his amanuensis from Julian's text, and then dictated his own responses. Thus Augustine, in a succession of strange moments, would have been forced to ventriloquize Julian even as he then tried to dismantle his arguments. Even as he was attempting to erase Julian's theology and replace it with his own, Augustine was reproducing and re-materializing his opponent. Augustine's words, his "graffiti," would have had nothing to support them, no "wall," without this process of ventriloquy. Christopher Baswell once wrote, in an article on medieval textual culture, of "marginal voicings" that "at once construct authority and undermine it."²² The irony of Augustine's situation is that he was constructing authority for the very text that he wished to undermine.

The second consequence of reading Augustine's intervention as marginalia is that we see their unabashed subjectivity. Marginalia are always (initially, at least) produced in the specific hand of a specific reader. They are, as Krauss wrote, "the trace of an event, torn away from the presence of the marker."²³ This is not for a moment to propose that Augustine was doing anything other than arguing for what he felt was the truth of the Christian dispensation and the judgement and grace of God. But it goes some way to explain and contextualize the *ad hominem* attacks and the biographical interpolations that

21 Even though "A notable feature of the marginal space in medieval manuscripts is that there is so much of it": see Erik Kwakkel, "The Margin as Editorial Space: Upgrading *Dioscorides alphabeticus* in Eleventh-Century Monte Cassino," in *The Annotated Book The Annotated Book in the Early Middle Ages: Practices of Reading and Writing*, ed. Mariken Teeuwen and Irene van Renswoude, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 38 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 323–41, at 323.

22 Christopher Baswell, "Talking Back to the Text: Marginal Voices in Medieval Secular Literature," in *The Uses of Manuscripts in Literary Studies: Essays in Memory of Judson Boyce Allen*, ed. Charlotte Cook Morse, Penelope Reed Doob, and Marjorie Curry Woods, *Studies in Medieval Culture* XXXI (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 121–60, at 130.

23 Krauss, "Cy was here."

surround that argument. Augustine has not laid aside his personal identity to intervene in this debate—any more than Julian has done so: they each bring their history, their loyalties, their specific locations to the page. Julian casts Augustine's Manichean past repeatedly in his teeth; Augustine says that he is glad that Julian's parents (whom he knew)²⁴ had died before discovering that their son was a heretic. Augustine cites Ambrose, who baptized him, and Cyprian, whom he proudly claims as a fellow-African, more often than anyone else except Paul. The Africanness of Cyprian is particularly important to this encounter for the way in which it protects, and even redeems, Augustine's own African origins. Near the beginning of his text, Julian refers to Augustine dismissively as "*tractator poenus*" (he also calls him "*poenus orator*" and "*poenus scriptor*," neatly covering every stage of communication; "*poenus*" is clearly being taken generically as African, not just Punic).²⁵ Augustine retorts, punning on the near-homonyms *poena* and *Poenus*, "*Magna tibi poena est disputator hic Poenus, et longe antequam nasceremini, magna poena haeresis uestrae Poenus praeparatus est Cyprianus*" (this Punic debater is a great pain for you, and long before you were born, the Punic Cyprian was equipped as a great pain for your heresy).²⁶ The space in which Augustine is writing back to Julian is his own space: anchored securely in Hippo, he makes sure that Julian is aware of his opponent as African—that the "wall" which Julian has provided is scored over with Africanness. The geopolitics of this encounter are finally literalized towards the end—by which I mean the place where the text stops:

IUL... . *Quid enim tam prodigiale quam quod Poenus eloquitur?...*

AUG... . *Noli istum Poenum monentem uel admonentem terrena inflatus propagine spernere. Non enim quia te Apulia genuit, ideo Poenos uincendos existimes gente, quos non potes mente.*²⁷

Julian: What is so outrageous as what the Punic man says?

Augustine: Don't be so puffed up with the spawn of this world that you despise the advice, or rather the warnings, of that Punic man. Just because Apulia [on the Italian mainland] gave birth to you, don't think that you can beat Africans with your breeding when you can't with your intellect.

24 *ep.* 101, which accompanies the text of Augustine's *De musica*, is addressed to Julian's father Memor. There, Augustine writes of Julian, "*Quem quidem non audeo dicere plus amo quam te, quia nec ueraciter dico, sed tamen audeo dicere plus desidero quam te.*"

25 "*Poenus*" as an abusive adjective at *c. Iul. imp.* 1.7, 1.48, and 1.73 respectively; also *tout court* at *c. Iul. imp.* 2.19 and 6.18 (on which, see below).

26 *c. Iul. imp.* 1.7.

27 *c. Iul. imp.* 6.18.

The exchange pits Italian against African, Apulian against Numidian (Augustine's provincial origin was Numidia). The subjective space of the graffiti-like marginalia is not just the space of the page; it is also the indebtedness to the space, the location, in which they are produced.

After considering textual space and subjective space, the third advantage of thinking of Augustine's interventions as marginalia is that we recuperate this blazing encounter from the orderly pages of our printed editions and resituate it in the time of its generation. Marginalia are not only created by specific readers; they are created at specific moments. Augustine's identity was profoundly tied up in this debate in so many ways. The issue, in 429 CE, was not just that his entire painfully-accrued reputation as a guide to, and beacon of, Christian orthodoxy was under attack. It was not just that an old man from Numidia was being challenged by an Italian man the age of his long-dead son. It was that, as I mentioned earlier, the specific moment for this old man was the confrontation of his mortality. Again and again he returns to Romans 5:12, "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." The reversal of that death came through the gift of Christ. Without original sin, Christ's death would be meaningless. Julian focused his argument on the state of *paruuli*, the little children who died unbaptized. But the fearlessness with which Augustine gazes at—indeed, insists on, with the repetitiousness afforded by marginalia—the mystery of the bestowal of God's grace and the possibility of it being withheld is remarkable. Reading his interventions as marginalia, with all their unvarnished subjection to temporality, restores to us a sense of this unblinking gaze.

To claim that Augustine's interventions in the incomplete encounter with Julian of Eclanum should be read as marginalia is essentially to make a literary point about genre, or in this case about a sort of sub-generic textual trace. The associated notions of space and time and identity in written intervention are significant. But John Berger's essay on Cy Twombly helped me to range beyond the literary and to see that there was a wider philosophical point to be made.

I have described marginalia as "writing on the written." Literally, of course, they are writing in the margins, on the edges of texts. But another way of describing them would be writing at the limits of the textual. This is not just a point about space: the edges or limits are not only those of a page. In Orgel's example from the text of Milton, the marginal comment reads, "amplify this Thought." But the irony is that the thought can never be sufficiently amplified, the lines never sufficiently improved. All the striving for correction only puts the gaps ever further on display. And this is what seems to be happening in the *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum*. By its very nature, it could never have become the *opus perfectum*, the "completed work," however long Augustine had lived. In the very striving for completeness, it becomes more and more apparent how incomplete the responses must be. Augustine had spent his

entire life—or at least, his life from 387 CE onwards—reflecting on the imperfections and inadequacies of human communication. He saw the fall from paradise as in part a fall into language. As Berger wrote, and as Augustine was constantly aware, “A writer continually struggles for clarity *against* the language he’s using.” Perhaps it is fitting that his final work should not only be formally incomplete but should put these imperfections and inadequacies so vividly on display. This was, in every sense, writing at the limits of writing.

While I was writing this paper I went back to the Philadelphia Museum of Art to look afresh at the canvases of “Fifty Days at Iliam.” And I realized that this was visual expression—sometimes writing, sometimes not—under erasure. Twombly had found a way to put that erasure on display in the scrawls, the errors, whole areas visibly painted out or written over. But what draws attention above all to the erasures is all that white space of canvas: what is not there? what could have been there?

This is, in effect, what Augustine is doing in his *Opus imperfectum*. It is not just that he is operating in such a way that Julian’s words are put under erasure: simultaneously occluded by Augustine’s own words, and yet their necessary foundation. It is that in the tenacious endlessness of his project he is, as it were, putting an ever-increasing expanse of white canvas on display. There is more and more space around and between the words. The issue is no longer erasure. It is writing at the limits of writing—and it is the receding horizon beyond the limits of writing. In happier times, Augustine had presented an image of heaven in which the angels eternally read and loved the word of God in a book that would never close.²⁸ But that was the perfect completeness of the divine word, not the pathetic, messy, limited array of words with which humans have to make do.

John Berger concludes his essay on Twombly with the observation: “I know of no other visual Western artist who has created an oeuvre that visualizes with living colors the silent space that exists between and around words.” By his very attempt to be exhaustive, Augustine ends up emphasizing “the silent space that exists between and around words.” As Berger wrote, “the unsaid always counts for as much, or more, as the said.” By highlighting through his marginal method the unsaid, the inexpressible, was Augustine not also inadvertently casting a light on the inexpressible, unfathomable operation of grace?²⁹

28 *conf.* 13.15,18.

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