

Patrons and Intellectuals: Augustine's Correspondence with Women

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Augustine's theological formulations about women can be drawn from his treatises and sermons, in which he took the pessimistic view of women in general and dealt with its correlation with the teachings of original sin, in particular the narrative of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, and sexual renunciation and asceticism. Indeed, as some scholars have suggested, his rigorous attitude to women incurs blame for it,¹ while those who defend Augustine as a new voice on the spiritual equality between men and women centre on an analysis of his reading of the creation story.² Likewise, some scholars have focused on the limited status of women in his time, and others direct attention to a different version of his treatment that is observed in the correspondence of Augustine with women. For Augustine, 'notional women do not always bear strong resemblance to living women.'³

The Testimony of Augustine and Possidius

Augustine's formation as a Christian had repeatedly urged him to keep a fixed distance from

¹ For Augustine's opinions about women in general, see e.g. T. J. van Bavel, 'Augustine's View on Women', *Augustiniana*, 39 (1989), 5–53; K. Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (New York: Continuum, 1996); S. Lancel, 'Augustin et la société féminine de son temps', in *Saint Augustin, la Numidie et la société de son temps: actes du colloque SEMPAM-Ausonius, Bordeaux, 10–11 octobre 2003*, eds. S. Lancel, et al., *Scripta antiqua*, 14 (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2005), 45–54. For a select bibliography on this issue, see C. Müller, art. 'Femina', in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 2, eds. C. Mayer, et al. (Basel: Schwabe, 2002), 1266–81 at 1278–81; E. A. Matter, 'De cura feminarum: Augustine the Bishop, North African Women, and the Development of a Theology of Female Nature', in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-Reading the Canon*, ed. J. Chelius (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 203–14 at 204–05 and nn. 3–9.

² On this, see K. E. Børresen, 'In Defence of Augustine: How *Femina* is *Homo*', *Augustiniana*, 40 (1990), 411–28; D. Hunter, 'The Paradise of Patriarchy: Ambrosiaster on Women as (Not) God's Image', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 43 (1992), 447–69; K. E. Børresen, 'Patristic "Feminism": The Case of Augustine', *Augustinian Studies*, 25 (1994), 139–52; D. Hunter, 'Augustinian Pessimism? A New Look at Augustine's Teaching on Sex, Marriage, and Celibacy', *Augustinian Studies*, 25 (1994), 153–77.

³ M. A. Tilley, 'No Friendly Letters: Augustine's Correspondence with Women', in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, eds. D. B. Martin and P. C. Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 40–62 at 40.

women. Having ‘braced himself to face a life of celibacy in the garden in Milan’⁴ and decided to live out that vocation, Augustine was baptised at the Easter Vigil of 387. After received his ordination to the priesthood in Hippo in 391, his consecration as a bishop in 395 made him stand apart from the rest of his community and preoccupied with various matters of ecclesiastical concern. Possidius of Calama, the first biographer of the bishop of Hippo, recorded the everyday actions of Augustine in which he was engaged and for which he was criticised during his career.⁵ Although he, as a new bishop, was once embroiled in a scandal and accused of having seduced women,⁶ his commerce with women was indeed more controlled than the precepts of the Catholic Council of 393.⁷ ‘No woman ever frequented his house,’ Possidius praised the policy, ‘no woman ever stayed there, not even his own sister, a widow consecrated to God.’⁸ It is interesting to note that his biographer gave the account of instructive conversations between Augustine and his fellows. These had taken place in the religious community he founded together with his friends at Thagaste. ‘The truths which God revealed to his mind in meditation and prayer he communicated to, *present and absent alike*, instructing them *in his discourses and books*.’⁹ His activity of this sort continued during his episcopacy.¹⁰ Accordingly, despite the social context in which he followed ‘that vocation’, Augustine would share the same discourse with women, in this case by a sustained correspondence, over the years.

⁴ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 2nd edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 511.

⁵ See Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 19–27; A. A. R. Bastiensen, ed., in *Vite dei Santi*, 3: *Vita di Cipriano, Vita di Ambrogio, Vita di Agostino* ([Milano]: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1975), 178–202. An important analysis is found in E. T. Hermanowicz, *Possidius of Calama: A Study of the North African Episcopate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40–42.

⁶ See Aug. *Contra Cresconium* 3.80.92; *Contra litteras Petiliani* 3.16.19. See also B. D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 331–32, esp. nn. 76 and 77.

Hereafter all references to the source materials use the following abbreviations: BA = Bibliothèque Augustinienne: Œuvres de saint Augustine (Paris, 1947 and continuing); CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866 and continuing); CCSL = Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnhout, 1953 and continuing).

⁷ See Hermanowicz, *Possidius*, 35 n. 69 and 41 n. 97.

⁸ Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 26.1; ed. Bastiensen, 196: *Feminarum intra domum eius nulla umquam conversata est, nulla mansit, ne quidem germana soror, quae vidua Deo serviens*. For the English translation, see M. Pellegrino, trans., *The Life of Saint Augustine*, The Augustinian Series, 1 (Villanova, Pa.: Augustinian Press, 1988).

⁹ Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 3.2; ed. Bastiensen, 138: *Et de his quae sibi Deus cogitanti atque oranti intellecta revelabat et praesentes et absentes sermonibus ac libris docebat*. Translation modified and italics mine.

¹⁰ The possibility that these ‘conversations’ were compiled and published as *De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* is quite likely: see G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 48–49. See also M. Vessey, ‘Response to Catherine Conybeare: Women of Letters?’, in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, eds. L. Olson and K. Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 73–96 at 79.

Augustine intended to revise his letters after he did his treatises in the *Retractationes*, his plan that was nearly complete for his major works but lacked the part of his letters and sermons at the end of his life.¹¹ We cannot show the principle on which 'he would have arranged his own correspondence' in the (unfinished) *Retractationes*.¹² Another clue appended to the *Life of Augustine* of Possidius is called the *Indiculum* and composed around the mid 430s.¹³ It is the index of Augustine's writings. Since the intention of Possidius, a well-informed contemporary and his colleague, was to accompany the *Life* with the index, the *Life* can be designated a 'Reader's Guide' to the *Indiculum*.¹⁴ It is very likely that the *Indiculum* was based on a Proto-Indiculum (Augustine's list in 420s) and compiled by 'a resident of the monastery who worked in the library'.¹⁵ Thus, it might be too much to infer the 'principle' from the arrangement that the *Indiculum* applied to Augustine's books, sermons and letters, but it serves at least as a checklist of his letters.

The *Indiculum* enumerates 257 letters. There are two-fold criteria by which the corpus of his writings is arranged: the first is the adversaries towards which they were composed; pagans, Jews, Manichaeans, Pelagians and others: the second is the types of writing; books, sermons and letters.¹⁶ Some of the letters are, thus, together with books and sermons, separated by topic and the parties and others are arranged under the heading of 'Again, Various Books And Sermons And Letters Composed For The Benefit Of All Those Who Desire To Learn'.¹⁷ Most of the letters are put in a category of 'Letters' and enumerated by the addressee.¹⁸ There is no definite arrangement of these letters, except a few groupings such as 'Ad Nebridium decem' (Ten [Letters] to Nebridius, *Indiculum* X⁵, 1), 'Ad Hieronimum sex' (X⁵, 37), 'Ad Paulinum octo' (X⁵,

¹¹ See Aug. *Retractationes*, prolog. 1.

¹² Vessey, 'Women of Letters?', 80.

¹³ A. Wilmart, ed., *Operum S. Augustini Elenchus a Possidio eiusdem discipulo Calamensi episcopo digestus: Post Maurinorum labores novis curis editus critico apparatus numeris tabellis instructus*, in *Miscellanea Agostiniana: Testi e studi*, 2 (Rome: Tipographia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1931), 149–233. See also F. Dolbeau, art. 'Indiculum, -us', in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 3 (2006), 571–81; Hermanowicz, *Possidius*, 57–60.

¹⁴ See M. Vessey, 'From *cursus* to *ductus*: Figures of Writing in Western Late Antiquity (Augustine, Jerome, Cassiodorus, Bede)', in *European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, eds. P. Cheney and F. A. de Armas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 47–103 at 52.

¹⁵ F. Dolbeau, 'La Survie des oeuvres d'Augustin: Remarques sur l'«Indiculum» attribué à Possidius et sur la bibliothèque d'Anséglise', in *Du copiste au collectionneur: mélanges d'histoire des textes et des bibliothèques en l'honneur d'André Vernet*, eds. D. Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda and J.-F. Genest, *Bibliologia*, 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 3–22 at 11.

¹⁶ See Hermanowicz, *Possidius*, 58–59.

¹⁷ *Indiculum*, X⁵; ed. Wilmart, 174: ITEM DIVERSI LIBRI ET TRACTATUS VEL EPISTULAE AD UTILITATEM STUDIOCORUM OMNIUM CONSCRIPTAE. Unless it is otherwise stated, all translations of Augustine's writings (including the *Indiculum*) are taken from *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990 and continuing).

¹⁸ *Indiculum*, X⁵; ed. Wilmart, 182–91 in 'EPISTULAE'.

38), and ‘*Evodio episcopo tres*’ (X⁵, 43). With regard to the female correspondents, several exceptional groups are formed in the serial listing 44–47: a letter to Anicia Proba ‘*de orando Deo*’ (Ep. 130); two others to the same woman (Ep. 131 and another is now lost); a letter to Proba and her daughter-in-law, Juliana ‘*de velatione Demetriadis*’ (Ep. 150); and a letter to Juliana ‘*de sancta viduitate*’ that is identified with a treatise *De bono viduitatis*.¹⁹ It is clear that the enumeration of the corpus of his letters, including letters addressed to women, does not establish any fixed principle.

Not only during his episcopacy but from Late Antiquity through the early mediaeval period, the letters of Augustine were circulated and transmitted.²⁰ They were restored individually, in small collections without order, grouped by addressees, and gradually developed into a larger collection, which had made an advance with the publication of his ‘complete works’ from the early sixteenth century.²¹ In the late seventeenth century the outstanding edition was published by the Benedictine scholars of St. Maur, in which they finally decided to arrange and number the traditional 270 letters in chronological order,²² and the thirty-nine letters of which, from number 232 in its order, they could not establish its date were classified into the last ‘TV. Classis’ in tome II (1679). Among both these letters and the twenty-nine unknown letters, discovered and identified by Johannes Divjak in 1974 (now numbered with an asterisk as *Epp.* 1*–29*),²³ twenty-four are addressed to women, adding one from the ‘Divjak’ letters. This number includes six letters that are written to women together with their spouses or male relatives.²⁴ We should not ignore another two letters to men that are tightly connected with letters addressed to women: *Letter* 92A (addressed to Cyprian) with *Letter* 92 (to Italice); and *Letter* 125 (to Alypius) with *Letter* 124 (to Albina, Pinian and Melania). Thus, we find twenty-six letters to be a valuable source for the relationship between Augustine and women. The date range of these letters is restricted to the period after his ordination as a bishop. And all of his letters to women

¹⁹ *Indiculum*, X⁵; ed. Wilmart, 184. For the significance of this cluster and the listing of other female correspondents, see Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 80 and 93 n. 29.

²⁰ See C. Weidmann, ‘Augustine’s Works in Circulation’, in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. M. Vessey, with the assistance of S. Reid, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2012), 431–49 at 432–33.

²¹ See J. de Ghellinck, *Patristique et Moyen Age: études d’histoire littéraire et doctrinale*, 2: *Introduction et compléments à l’étude de la patristique*, Museum Lessianum: Section historique, 7 (Bruxelles: Édition universelle, 1947), 211–213 and 211 n. 5; J. Divjak, art. ‘Epistulae’, in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 2 (2002), 893–1057 at 907; Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 81 and 93 n. 30; Weidmann, ‘Augustine’s Works in Circulation’, 440.

²² See J. de Ghellinck, *Patristique et Moyen Age: études d’histoire littéraire et doctrinale*, 3: *Compléments à l’étude de la patristique*, Museum Lessianum: Section historique, 7 (Bruxelles: Édition universelle, 1948), 445.

²³ See Divjak, art. ‘Epistulae’, 1017–28; and articles by various authors in *Les lettres de saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak: Communications présentées au colloque des 20 et 21 septembre 1982* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1983).

²⁴ See K. Power, *Veiled Desire*, 109.

are standing outside of both his ongoing controversies with particular groups and significant events, except for his exchanges with Proba and Juliana in the *Indiculum* 44–47, which closely associated with the aftermath of the sack of Rome: they were refugees from the disaster of the city.²⁵ It might be admitted that his letters with women are more linked with his daily activities, thus being defined as ‘a series of texts which are as close to “real” letters as we can normally expect to come for this period’.²⁶

Augustine's Letters addressed to Women

All the correspondence between Augustine and women is dated during the years of his episcopate. He takes seriously and sincerely the female correspondents and the questions raised in these exchanges: a fair number of women from wealthy members of the upper-class families, while the rest from relatively lower-class women; and some from around his diocese, others from faraway regions.²⁷ What do his letters describe Augustine's ‘real’ interactions with women? In order to answer this question, I choose to review these letters broadly in chronological order so that these are divided into several groups.²⁸

Augustine led an epistolary conversation with Paulinus of Nola and his wife Therasia from 395/6 until 408/9. He never knew them in person beforehand, to whom Augustine informed of his consecration as coadjutor bishop (*Ep.* 31) and discussed theological questions such as the will of God (*Ep.* 80) and the resurrection of Christ (*Ep.* 95). Although he politely and always addresses them together and, in his reply to Paulinus (*Ep.* 27), admires her as a wife who does not lead ‘her husband to a life of softness, but bringing strength back into the heart of

²⁵ See n. 38 below.

²⁶ Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 81.

²⁷ For the prosopographical information of his correspondents, see F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo: Prosopographische, sozial- und ideologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Bochumer historische Studien, Alte Geschichte, 119 (Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1993). See also *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303–533): Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, 1, ed. A. Mandouze (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982); *Prosopographie chrétienne du bas-empire*, 2: *Italie (313–604)*, part 1: A–K and part 2: L–Z, eds. C. Pietri and L. Pietri (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1999–2000) (hereafter cited as *PCBE*).

²⁸ For the chronological line of his letters, see O. Perler and J.-L. Maier, *Les voyages de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1969); R. B. Eno, art. ‘Epistulae’, in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 298–310; P.-M. Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne*, Collection des études augustiniennes: Série Antiquité, 163 (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2000); Divjak, art. ‘Epistulae’, 1027–36. For a select bibliography on his letters, see also D. E. Doyle, *The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine*, *Patristic Studies*, 4 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); Divjak, art. ‘Epistulae’, 1046–57.

her husband,²⁹ Augustine is actually writing to Paulinus but to his wife in name only. Nothing is known about Therasia from the correspondence between Augustine and the couple.³⁰ By contrast, we can infer some information of another female addressee from his correspondence in this period, that is, the first set of letters uniquely exchanged with a woman, Italica.³¹ She was perhaps the daughter-in-law of Anicia Proba, a member of the Roman aristocracy, and recently widowed. Thus, Augustine wrote two letters of consolation to Italica for the loss of her husband: after writing the first letter to her (*Ep.* 92), he received replies from her three times and then sent another letter (*Ep.* 99). While the first contains a discussion of the vision of God in the next life, the second asks for the news of the state of affairs in Rome in his reply. Because of her replies, Augustine might arouse more interest in the threat of invasion that results in the ‘sack’ of Rome in the next year. Another point to note is that *Letter* 92 is accompanied by a letter to Cyprian (*Ep.* 92A), a presbyter serving with Augustine in Hippo.³² Augustine requests him to let him know about the opinions on the vision of God, which has been circulated in Rome.

In the period between 410 and 418, Augustine kept contact with some wealthy women who had taken refuge from Alaric’s siege of Rome. The first is Albina, a daughter of Melania the Elder who belonged to the Roman senatorial aristocracy and well known because of her close relations with Rufinus and Evagrius of Pontus and the foundation of her monastery on the Mount of Olives.³³ Albina, together with her daughter Melania the Younger and Melania’s husband, Pinianus,³⁴ fled Rome probably in the fall of 408 and arrived at the estate that they

²⁹ Aug. *Ep.* 27.2; CCSL 31, 88: *non dux ad mollitiem uiro suo sed ad fortitudinem redux in ossa uiri sui*. For the implication of Augustine’s praise of Therasia, see Power, *Veiled Desire*, 110–11; C. Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 83; and *eadem*, ‘Spaces between Letters: Augustine’s Correspondence with Women’, in *Voices in Dialogue*, eds. Olson and Kerby-Fulton, 57–72 at 58–59.

³⁰ On Therasia, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 40–41: Katalog 50; Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster*, 4 and n. 18.

³¹ See Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 89–90: Katalog 30; *PCBE* 2.1, 1162–63, s.v. ‘Italica 1’.

³² On whom see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 56: Katalog 18. For his role as courier for Augustine’s correspondence with Jerome, see Aug. *Ep.* 71.1; *Ep.* 73.1. See also E. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 166 and n. 231; *pace PCBE* 1, 257–258, s.v. ‘CYPRIANVS 3–4’. For the problem of letter-bearers in general, see P. Allen, ‘Christian Correspondences: The Secrets of Letter-Writers and Letter-Bearers’, in *The Art of Veiled Speech: Self-Censorship from Aristophanes to Hobbes*, eds. H. Baltussen and P. J. Davis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 209–32.

³³ On Melania the Elder, see N. Moine, ‘Melaniana’, *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 15 (1980), 3–79; L. C. Seelbach, art. ‘Melania’, in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 4 (2010), 1243–46. For her activities in Jerusalem, see e.g. E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312–460* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 157–79 and 199–202.

³⁴ On whom, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 74–76: Katalog 11 (Albina), 35–36 (Melania the Younger), and 42–43 (Pinianus). On Pinianus, see also C. Lepelley, *Les Cités de l’Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, 1: *La permanence d’une civilisation municipale* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1979), 385–88.

owned near Thagaste by 410. Augustine expresses his hope to visit with her family but could not do because he is unable to travel during the harshness of winter and also to leave his 'weak' congregation (*Ep.* 124). In the following two letters, first written to Alypius, bishop of Thagaste (*Ep.* 125), and second to Albina (*Ep.* 126), Augustine deals with a situation his church and the congregation had faced. He has to defend them against Albina's wrath that, while the wealthy husband and wife were attending the church in Hippo, they were trapped in and the congregation struck Pinianus so forcefully that he was almost ordained a presbyter; he was not allowed to leave until he had promised not to accept anywhere else. Albina claims that Pinianus refused to keep his sacred oath taken under duress, while openly accusing the citizens of Hippo of avarice for the incredible wealth of Pinianus, and that many of the congregation expected to benefit from the largesse he may distribute there.³⁵ Her implied accusation makes him ashamed as he writes to Alypius, 'But she all but shouted, nonetheless, what she thought about us, and not she alone but also her holy children, who said this to us on the same day in the choir.'³⁶ Thus, Augustine is so sensitive as to justify the attitude of his and the congregation in his letter to Albina (*Ep.* 126), though he was complaining against Albina and explaining the situation to Alypius (*Ep.* 125). His excuse is that 'the people, therefore, did not seek their own monetary advantage but loved in you your contempt for money.'³⁷ Augustine also attempts to persuade Pinianus to fulfil the vow. However, they do not stay there, and after a while, set off for Palestine where the couple would be devoted to an ascetic life.

The second is Anicia Faltonia Proba, another refugee forced to escape from the Vandals and came to North Africa. She belonged to the very distinguished senatorial family, the Anicii, in Rome and had been widowed for some time. She was accompanied by her daughter-in-law, Juliana.³⁸ As mentioned above, the correspondence with the household of Proba forms the exceptional group in the listing of the *Indiculum*, because of 'the status of the recipients and the

³⁵ For the ideal and reality of episcopal elections, see P. V. Nuffelen and J. Leemans, 'Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity: Structures and Perspectives', in *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity*, eds. J. Leemans, et al., *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte*, 119 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 1–19 at 18–19.

³⁶ Aug. *Ep.* 125.2; CCSL 31B, 180–81: *quid de nobis senserit, paene clamavit nec ipsa tantum uerum etiam sancti filii eius, qui hoc etiam ipsa die in abside dixerunt.*

³⁷ Aug. *Ep.* 126.7; CCSL 31B, 189: *Non ergo populus, [...] suum pecuniarium commodum quaesiuit a uobis, sed uestrum pecuniae contemptum dilexit in uobis.*

³⁸ On whom see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 80–81: Katalog 43–44 (Proba) and 32 (Juliana); *PCBE* 2.1, 1831–33, s.v. 'Anicia Faltonia Proba 2'; *PCBE* 2.1, 1169–71, s.v. 'Anicia Iuliana 3'. See also P. Laurence, 'Proba, Juliana et Démétrias: Le christianisme des femmes de la gens Anicia dans la première moitié du V^e siècle', *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 48 (2002), 131–63; J. Clair, *Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 34 n. 82.

highly charged atmosphere of the time [...] in the aftermath of the “sack” of Rome’.³⁹ In those situations, thus, Proba asks Augustine for advice on the way of spiritual life, after her reading of the passage from Romans on prayer (8:26 ‘For we do not know what to pray for as we ought’). While, as his reply to Proba, *Letter* 130 is a comprehensive treatise on petitionary prayer, *Letter* 131 addresses the problem of how the physical body is a burden to the soul in this life. Another correspondence, *Letters* 150 and 188, figures Juliana’s daughter Demetrias,⁴⁰ who ‘[a]t the age of fourteen, [...] would throw over the prospect of a politic marriage in order to become a nun’,⁴¹ thereby renounced all riches, committed herself to virginity, and astonished the Roman aristocrats. In the brief letter (*Ep.* 150) to Proba and Juliana, Augustine congratulates them on Demetrias’ vow of consecrated virginity. The second letter (*Ep.* 188), far more detailed than the first and written by Augustine and Alypius, also focuses on Demetrias. This letter is written to Juliana because Proba is dead in the meantime.

In this period (410–18) another letter was written to the married couple Armentarius and Paulina (*Ep.* 127).⁴² Augustine exhorts them to meet the difficulty of keeping their mutual vow of continence. He points to the ‘labors, dangers, and disasters of this passing life’ and advises them to make their souls ‘be in good health’ and ‘healed of the disease of harmful desires’ by devoting themselves to God.⁴³ *Letter* 147 is also belonged to this period and often defined as a treatise because of its length.⁴⁴ This epistolary treatise is written to Paulina who puts questions about Augustine’s remarks on the beatific vision of God in the letter (*Ep.* 92) addressed to Italica.⁴⁵ Although his treatment of the subject is mostly the same as he said before in *Letter* 92, it is elaborated to give a comprehensive exposition of his thoughts on the correlation between perception and belief. Besides, this letter brings the negative response from a reader, as informed from Fortunatianus, bishop of Sicca.⁴⁶ Augustine writes in answer to Fortunatianus

³⁹ Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 80. For the chronological sequence of the exchanges between Augustine and the family, see A. Kurdock, ‘*Demetrias ancilla dei*: Anicia Demetrias and the Problem of the Missing Patron’, in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, c. 300–900 C.E.*, eds. K. Cooper and J. Hillner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 190–224 at 208 n. 76.

⁴⁰ On Demetrias, see O. Wermelinger, art. ‘Demetrias’, in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 2 (1996), 289–91; *PCBE* 2.1, 544–57: s.v. ‘Demetrias Amnia’.

⁴¹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 340.

⁴² On Armentarius, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 80: Katalog 11. On Paulina, see *PCBE* 1, 837, s.v. ‘PAVLINA’; pace Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, Katalog 40, for it is not certain that she is identified with the Paulina who received *Letter* 147 of Augustine.

⁴³ See Aug. *Ep.* 127.2 and 5.

⁴⁴ See Aug. *Retractationes* 2.41. See also Conybeare, ‘Spaces between Letters’, 70 n. 26. For the obscure distinction between letter and epistolary treatise, see Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 93 n. 28.

⁴⁵ For the possibility of the circulation of this letter and others among women, see Conybeare, ‘Spaces between Letters’, 61–62.

⁴⁶ On whom, see *PCBE* 1, 482–85, s.v. ‘FORTVNATIANVS 4’; Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 27: Katalog 26.

(*Ep.* 148) and makes further discussion in the book 22 of the *City of God*.⁴⁷

Another group of letters written around 420s is concerned about the issue of the religious life and its purity in the community of faith. In *Letter* 208 to the Felicia, a consecrated virgin and recently converted from Donatism,⁴⁸ Augustine responds to her questions about pastoral leadership in the Catholic Church.⁴⁹ Although she is upset by the corruption and scandals of church leaders, he claims, she should not follow their example. He prompts her to focus on the text of the scriptures. Since 'the Lord himself predicted them in the gospel',⁵⁰ she should conduct herself in accordance with divine wisdom and justice. Moreover, in the same period, Augustine writes two letters to nuns. The first is *Letter* 210 addressed to Felicitas, Rusticus, and the sisters with them.⁵¹ He admonishes them to cease the quarrels in the house and, in particular, to be grateful for the complainant who provoked the criticism: 'Put more effort into establishing harmony among yourselves than into rebuking one another.'⁵² The second is *Letter* 211 addressed to the nuns of the convent.⁵³ Augustine makes a brief reference to his widowed sister who had taken charge of the 'maidservants of the Lord'.⁵⁴ The monastery of women has been consumed in the disputes about authority in the community after she died.⁵⁵ This letter consists of two part: first, he worries about the internal controversy and excoriates the dissent and conflict some of the women brought (*Ep.* 211.1–4) and, second, a set of rules for monastic life is given, by which the community should be managed (*Ep.* 211.5–16).⁵⁶ Furthermore, in this

⁴⁷ On this circumstance, see Aug. *Ep.* 148.1.1. See also G. Bardy and F.-J. Thonnard, 'La Vision de Dieu', Note complémentaire, 66, BA 37, 853–57.

⁴⁸ On Felicia, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 83–84; Katalog 24; PCBE 1, 399, s.v. 'FELICIA'. For the argumentation of this letter, see J. McWilliam, 'Augustine's Letters to Women', in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Chelius, 189–202 at 193–94.

⁴⁹ This letter can be dated to the years after 411, from the assumption that her conversion could have been done immediately after 411; see Divjak, art. 'Epistulae', 1015 n. 291; pace dated to '422/early 423?' in Eno, art. 'Epistulae', 303.

⁵⁰ Aug. *Ep.* 208.2; CSEL 57, 343; *haec ipse dominus in euangelio ita praedixit*.

⁵¹ On whom, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 54; Katalog 24 (Felicitas) and 47 (Rusticus).

⁵² Aug. *Ep.* 210.2; CSEL 57, 355; *maiores date operam concordandis uobis quam redarguendis*.

⁵³ On whom, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 54–55; Katalog 54.

⁵⁴ Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 26.1; ed. Bastiensen, 196; *vidua Deo serviens*.

⁵⁵ See Aug. *Ep.* 211.4.

⁵⁶ For the latter part which was the foundation of 'The Rule of Augustine', some scholars have doubted whether this part was the original, while Luc Verheijen claims its authenticity that the rule was first written for men and adapted for women: *La Règle de saint Augustine*, i. *Tradition manuscrite*, ii. *Recherches historiques* (Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1967), summarised by Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo*, 65–72. See also Doyle, *The Bishop as Disciplinarian*, 32 n. 17 (dating of the rule for women) and 317–21.

period Augustine wrote to the Roman matron, Fabiola,⁵⁷ *Letter 20**, one of the ‘Divjak’ letters.⁵⁸ This letter tells the many crimes committed by Antoninus, an inexperienced monk⁵⁹ whom Augustine ordained as bishop of the small town, Fussala, recently converted from Donatism.⁶⁰ Antoninus chose two monks from the monastery of Augustine, and they together started to plunder the inhabitants of Fussala. After he was deposed, while assisted by the counsel and advice of Fabiola, Antoninus travelled to Rome with her and appealed the decision to Pope Boniface.

The other six letters cannot be dated with confidence, and thus set apart in the last part of the corpus of Augustine’s letters by the French Benedictines, while some scholars have attempted to determine its chronology with a sufficient degree of accuracy. In *Letter 262*,⁶¹ Augustine replies to a now lost letter from Ecdicia, a wealthy matron, to himself (*Ep. 262*).⁶² This letter deals with the complaint about her husband. Ecdicia claims that her husband does not keep his vow of continence in an adulterous relationship, though they agreed to live chastely. Augustine criticises her rashness because she abandons ‘the virtues of feminine modesty’ and thereby ‘Ecdicia’s asceticism became a travesty of the Christian excellence to which it pretended’.⁶³ He argues that, by driving her husband to ascetic renunciation against his will, she is responsible for his inclination to intemperance. In *Letter 263*, Augustine writes to

⁵⁷ On whom, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 89: Katalog 23; *PCBE* 2.1, 735–36, s.v. ‘Fabiola 2’. For the positive identification of this woman with the addressee of *Letter 267*, see Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 95 n. 48.

⁵⁸ For this letter and the affair of Antoninus of Fussala, see J. E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 154–82; C. Leyser, *Authority and asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 19–26; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 396–408; N. B. McLynn, ‘Administrator: Augustine in His Diocese’, in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Vessey, 310–22 at 318–21; P. Allen and B. Neil, *Crisis Management in Late Antiquity (410–590 CE): A Survey of the Evidence from Episcopal Letters*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 184–86 and esp. 184 n. 73; P. Nehring, ‘Misbehaviour of Clergy in the Light of Augustine’s Letters’, in *Scrinium Augustini*, eds. P. Nehring, M. Stróżyński, and R. Toczko, *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia*, 76 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 79–112 at 97–107.

⁵⁹ On Antoninus, see C. Munier, art. ‘Antoninus Fussalensis episcopus’, in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1 (1988), 378–380; J. E. Merdinger, art. ‘Antoninus of Fussala’, in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Fitzgerald, 47–48; N. B. McLynn, ‘Augustine’s Black Sheep: The Case of Antoninus of Fussala’, in *Istituzioni, carismi ed esercizio del potere (IV–VI secolo d. C.)*, eds. G. Bonamente and R. Lizzi Testa (Bari: Edipuglia, 2010), 305–21; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 396 n. 190.

⁶⁰ See Aug. *Ep.* 209.2.

⁶¹ For the dating, it may be assigned to 418: see *PCBE* 1, 333 n. 2. For various interpretations of this letter, see K. Cooper, ‘Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 82 (1992), 150–64 at 158–60; Power, *Veiled Desire*, 111–13; K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 174–76 and 185–89.

⁶² On Ecdicia, see *PCBE* 1, 333–34, s.v. ‘ECDICIA’; Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 85–86: Katalog 21.

⁶³ Cooper, ‘Insinuations of Womanly Influence’, 158.

console Sapida, a woman vowed to virginity, after the death of her brother, Timothy, a deacon of the church of Hippo.⁶⁴ According to this letter, Sapida had woven a tunic for her brother, and he unfortunately lost a chance to wear. She has sent it to Augustine and hopes that by wearing he could console for her. In his reply, Augustine encourages her to think that: 'the love by which Timothy loved and loves Sapida has not perished [...] That love remains, preserved in its repository, and is hidden with Christ in the Lord (Col 3:3).'⁶⁵ Presumably around 418, Augustine writes *Letter 264* to Maxima,⁶⁶ a wealthy noblewoman, who lived outside North Africa, probably in Spain. While this letter tells the situation of her province in which some harmful errors occurred and troubled her, his attention is directed to theological treatises on the Incarnation which he does not possess at the time. In his reply to Maxima, Augustine is pleased with her eager for reading and asks her to send him any writings circulated around her. In a long letter addressed to Seleuciana around 408/409 (*Ep.* 265),⁶⁷ Augustine answers her question and deals with the problem about how and when St. Peter was baptised. In her letter (now lost), she was interested in the view of a certain Novatian who claimed that St. Peter had never been baptised. In his reply to Seleuciana, Augustine advises her to reconsider what she has written because the statement seems to contradict what she has formerly indicated about the teaching of her friend. Probably around the same period,⁶⁸ Augustine writes *Letter 266* to Florentina who is an upper-class ascetic and living with her parents.⁶⁹ Although her mother has asked him for advice on her religious education, without knowing it, Florentina directly addresses questions to Augustine. He writes that she should be free to ask any question she has: faithfully and humbly, he confirms that he himself is not an appropriate teacher for her questions: 'he who is the interior teacher of the interior human being will teach you.'⁷⁰ As he writes *Letter 20** to Fabiola in 422/423,⁷¹ Augustine also addresses *Letter 267* to the same woman, though there are no chronological indicators of the latter. This letter is written as a reply to her

⁶⁴ On Sapida, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 78; *PCBE* I, 1032, s.v. 'SAPIDA'. On Timothy, see *PCBE* I, 1113, s.v. 'TIMOTHEVS I'.

⁶⁵ Aug. *Ep.* 263.2; CSEL 57, 632: *periiit illa caritas, qua Timotheus Sapidam dilexit et diligit; manet illa seruata in thesauro suo et abscondita est cum Christo in domino*. See also Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 61–62.

⁶⁶ On Maxima, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 95–96; Katalog, 34–35. See also *PCBE* I, 717, s.v. 'MAXIMA 3' and, for the dating, *ibid.* n. 1.

⁶⁷ On Seleuciana, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 87–88; Katalog, 48. See also *PCBE* I, 1058, s.v. 'SELEVCIANA' and, for the dating, *ibid.* n. 1: *pace* J. Anoz, 'Cronología de la producción agustiniana', *Augustinus*, 47 (2002), 229–312 at 254 proposes 420 because of the similarity of the text of John 13:10 (*Ep.* 265.5) with that of *Tractatus in Iohannis euangelium* 80.3, dated to 419–20.

⁶⁸ See *PCBE* I, 468 n. 10.

⁶⁹ On Florentina, see Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner*, 83; Katalog, 25; *PCBE* I, 467–68, s.v. 'FLORENTINA'.

⁷⁰ Aug. *Ep.* 266.4; CSEL 57, 650: *ille te docebit, qui est interioris hominis magister interior*.

⁷¹ On Fabiola, see n. 57 above.

letter (now lost). He expresses entire confidence in her faith and praises her for eagerness to the heavenly homeland of the saints.

The Realities of Their Communication

Some important features emerge from Augustine's correspondence as a whole. Although his perception about women seems to be negative by virtue of the social realities in his time and the theological formulations about male and female inequality that arose from an 'androcentric' view of the world in his treatises and sermons,⁷² such texts Augustine wrote to women offer us a different, though partial, picture of his relationships with women, and giving a hint of providing a positive outlook on women, at least in the fifth century, on the contrary.

Augustine's letters to women suggest that he did not keep an unnecessary distance from the society of women, despite the testimony of his biographer Possidius that he kept a certain distance from women. After showing this evidence in the light of the male-dominant religious community Augustine settled in Hippo, Kate Cooper explains that:

In his years as a bishop, Augustine would discover a gift for friendship with women, *cultivating a network of influential women from powerful Christian families* across the empire, including the Italian circles surrounding the court and the senate, from which he had himself so dramatically withdrawn. *These women played an important role in carrying his writings to a wider readership* and ultimately in ensuring that his legacy was preserved after his own death.⁷³

There are several indicators of solicitude and consideration for women with whom he continued the correspondence. Because of his contacts with 'a network of influential women', Augustine recognises its authority and the possibilities of bringing his views to the broader public.

In the salutation of the *Letters* 92 and 99 to Italica, Augustine praises her as the 'honorable daughter in the love of Christ' and 'truly holy and praiseworthy among the members of Christ'.⁷⁴ While these greetings follow the general formula of an opening salutation,⁷⁵ it is likely, though,

⁷² Van Bavel, 'Augustine's View on Women', 52.

⁷³ K. Cooper, 'Love and belonging, Loss and Betrayal in the *Confessions*', in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Vessey, 69–86 at 85. Italics mine.

⁷⁴ Aug. *Ep.* 92; CCSL 31A, 160: *in Christi caritate honorandae*; *Ep.* 99; CCSL 31A, 235: *in Christi membris merito sancteque laudabili*.

⁷⁵ For salutation formulae and honorifics, see C. D. Lanham, *Salutatio Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200: Syntax, Style, and Theory*, Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, 22 (München: Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1975); M. O'Brien, *Titles of Address in Christian Latin Epistolography to 543 AD*, Patristic Studies, 21 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1930).

that Augustine hopes that she could work as the 'most religious servant of God',⁷⁶ thereby serving 'as an intermediary for his teaching'.⁷⁷ Indeed, in the first letter (*Ep.* 92) Augustine is more interested in the issue to which he immediately turns his attention: the eternal life and the beatific vision of God. And, at the same time, he writes to Cyprian (*Ep.* 92A), thereby exploiting the opportunity to dispel anthropomorphic idea of the vision of God, which was spread in Rome.⁷⁸ His expectation is that, as a member of the influential family, she could, though indirectly and unconsciously, contribute to the success of his undertaking. Augustine recommends her to 'read these pages [*sc.* *Ep.* 92] to them for a while, and [...] to write back, as you can, what they reply'.⁷⁹ His hope is set on her status as a woman of influence among the Roman aristocrats, not on her active engagement in the collaborative discussion of the issues with them.⁸⁰

Augustine's contact with Anicia Proba, her daughter-in-law Juliana, and Juliana's daughter Demetrias suggests another aspect of the relationship with an important Roman family.⁸¹ They were members of the most powerful senatorial family.⁸² Their authority linked to the imperial power had allowed them to play decisive roles in the politics of the late Roman Church. Furthermore, they used their wealth to support bishops in Constantinople.⁸³ Another point to note is that the household of Proba had been long and intimately connected with Pelagius,⁸⁴ with whom and with his followers Augustine had debated for around two decades in the course of the Pelagian controversy.⁸⁵ The Anician women had supported him and attended his circle during his stay in Rome until 410. Nonetheless, Augustine communicates with the family and,

⁷⁶ Aug. *Ep.* 92; CCSL 31A, 235: *Religiosissimae [...] famulae dei*.

⁷⁷ Vessey, 'Women of Letters?', 84.

⁷⁸ See Tilley, 'No Friendly Letters', 45–46.

⁷⁹ Aug. *Ep.* 92.6; CCSL 31A, 164: *haec eis interim lege, et quid respondeant [...] rescribere ut potes*.

⁸⁰ See Vessey, 'Women of Letters?', 84.

⁸¹ For the similar case of *Letters* 124 and 126 to Albina and her family, which I have omitted due to the length of this paper and, as mentioned above, it is clear that the authority available to these women is fully recognised by Augustine as a central actor in this affair: see E. A. Clark, 'Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 5.2 (1989), 25–46 at 39–41.

⁸² See n. 38 above.

⁸³ See e.g. John Chrysostom, *Ep.* 167 to Proba and *Ep.* 171 to Juliana; P. Brown, 'The Patrons of Pelagius: The Roman Aristocracy between East and West', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 21.1 (1970), 56–72 at 61–63.

⁸⁴ See P. Brown, 'Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment', *The Journal of Theological Studies* NS, 19.1 (1968), 93–114; R. Miles, "'Let's (not) Talk about It': Augustine and the Control of Epistolary Dialogue", in *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*, ed. S. Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 135–148 at 144.

⁸⁵ For an overview of the Pelagian controversy, see e.g. A. Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones ad populum during the Pelagian Controversy: Do Different Contexts Furnish Different Insights?*, Brill's Series in Church History, 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 35–69.

after meeting them in Carthage between 411 and 413,⁸⁶ maintains its relations. Augustine never refers to their relations with Pelagius, while making replies to Proba's questions (*Epp.* 130 and 131). The circumstance does not change after Juliana and Proba inform him of Demetrias' decision to take on the ascetic life in 413/414.⁸⁷ In response to their request for advice, a short letter is first addressed to Proba and Juliana (*Ep.* 150) and then another long letter is written to Juliana by Augustine and Alypius (*Ep.* 188).⁸⁸ And between these letters, Augustine composes a treatise in the form of a letter to Juliana, *The Excellence of Widowhood*.⁸⁹

It is very likely from these letters (*Epp.* 150 and 188) that Augustine has been pressing concerns for the relations with the Anicians. He manages to achieve the object for his own sake. Despite the suspicion of the Pelagian sentiments of this household, therefore, the intention is 'not to vanquish and humiliate but to present the illusion of total agreement between close friends', thereby revealing himself as a trustworthy authority for the community of faith.⁹⁰ It is because he is fully conscious of the public nature of these letters that would be read and judged by not only the Anicians but also the broader audience in his community. Like the public debate, the prospect of attracting attention to Augustine's reply urges the necessity of cordial relations with influential women, in which, despite Pelagius' contact with them, his status as an intimate and powerful mentor should be established. First, thus, in response to the news of Demetrias' consecration, Augustine answers them with promptness as well as intimacy: they can 'enjoy in her what is lacking' in themselves, for she is 'the one outstanding in holiness'.⁹¹ The next message by Augustine, coauthored with Alypius, is sent to Juliana (*Ep.* 188).⁹² This letter seems to have reflected the shift of his concern from the ideal of asceticism to the operation of divine grace: 'we are concerned, [...] to warn you to avoid teachings opposed to the grace of God.'⁹³

⁸⁶ See Perler and Maier, *Les voyages de Saint Augustin*, 415–16.

⁸⁷ See *Ep.* 150.

⁸⁸ For the significance of their request to which both Jerome and Pelagius also responded and sent their replies, see Jerome, *Ep.* 130 and Pelagius, *Ep. ad Demetrium*. See also J. McWilliam, 'Letters to Demetrias: A Sidebar in the Pelagian Controversy', *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 16.1 (2000), 131–39; Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 160–66; Kurdock, 'Anicia Demetrias and the Missing Patron', 193–214.

⁸⁹ For another correspondence between Augustine and the Anicians (now lost), see n. 39 above.

⁹⁰ Miles, 'Augustine and the Control of Epistolary Dialogue', 142. For the context and significance of these letters, the following description is based upon insights from Miles, 'Augustine and the Control of Epistolary Dialogue', 141–46.

⁹¹ *Aug. Ep.* 150; CSEL 47, 381–82: *perfruamini in illa, quod defuit [...] ipsam sanctitate praecipuam*. Translation modified.

⁹² This letter was probably written by Augustine himself: see McWilliam, 'Augustine's Letters to Women', 200.

⁹³ *Aug. Ep.* 188.1.2; CSEL 57, 120: *in uobis admonendis ut contraria gratiae dei dogmata deuitetis*. For the analysis of *De bono uiduitatis* that was submitted to Juliana in the period following the veiling of Demetrias, see Kurdock, 'Anicia Demetrias and the Missing Patron', 209–10.

Indeed, Augustine (and Alypius) are suspicious of their sympathies for Pelagius. They claim that Demetrias' continence was not from herself but a gift from God.⁹⁴ But, while behaving as one might expect a spiritual mentor to do, exhorting to her calling, and issuing a precept to a devoted disciple, Augustine anticipates the reaction he is likely to elicit. He provides the answer in advance to Demetrias and reiterates his agreement with the family: 'we know one thing very well, that you and all your household are and have been worshippers of the undivided Trinity.'⁹⁵ His focus is, indeed, on 'putting the Anicii under intense pressure not to contradict him' rather than going negative in her favourable attitude towards Pelagius.⁹⁶ In dealing with the controversial issue in these letters, Augustine exercises effective authority to safeguard the formation of a consensus that should be reached whilst considering the influence of women within the exchanges exposed to the audience of his community.⁹⁷

It is clearly admitted that Augustine's letters to women point to the intellectual skills of his correspondents and a recognition of their willingness to participate in matters of the faith and the activities of a Christian community.⁹⁸ As have mentioned above, a fair number of women with whom he exchanged letters belongs to the aristocratic family. And the upper-class girls 'received home-tuition instead of going to school, and [...] continued their studies until the day of their marriage'.⁹⁹ They were being educated enough to read for themselves, for instance, texts dealing with difficult and complicated issues in the exchange with intellectuals.¹⁰⁰ Thus, it is natural that some of his letters reach a considerable length to be read, as shown in the cases of *Letter 130* to Proba and *Letter 147* to Paulina. In addition to these exchanges just mentioned, one may refer to the significant features and functions that distinguish some of the letters as special and valuable.

Letter 20* to Fabiola tells the tale of the scandals caused by a young bishop.¹⁰¹ While in another letter (*Ep. 209*) Augustine explains to Pope Celestine how the bishop Antonius was

⁹⁴ See *Aug. Ep.* 188.2.6; CSEL 57, 123: *non sibi sit ex se ipsa, sed sit dei donum quamuis credenti uolentique conlatum.*

⁹⁵ *Aug. Ep.* 188.3.10; CSEL 57, 127: *illud optime nouimus cum omnibus uestris cultores uos esse et fuisse indiuiduae trinitatis.*

⁹⁶ Miles, 'Augustine and the Control of Epistolary Dialogue', 146.

⁹⁷ On this, with a rather different viewpoint, Anne Kurdock directs attention to the vulnerability of Augustine's position on the relations with the Anicii: see 'Anicia Demetrias and the Missing Patron', 211–12.

⁹⁸ On this, in particular the focus on the intellectual abilities of women in his letters, I owe these observations to J. Truax, 'Augustine of Hippo: Defender of Women's Equality?', *Journal of Medieval History*, 16.4 (1990), 279–99; Conybeare, 'Spaces between Letters', 59–62; and Vessey, 'Women of Letters?', 81–85.

⁹⁹ E. A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona docta: Educated Women in the Roman elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*, Routledge Classical Monographs (London: Routledge, 1999), 27.

¹⁰⁰ For the literacy in late antiquity and its relation with a formation of Christian culture, see W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 298–322. For a criticism of his work and further references, see Vessey, 'Women of Letters?', 92 n. 20.

¹⁰¹ See nn. 58 and 59 above.

accused of crimes by the inhabitants of Fussala,¹⁰² this letter (*Ep.* 20*) sheds some light on the role of Fabiola in facing the situation that the inexperienced monk provoked in the diocese of Hippo. It is clear that Augustine gives Fabiola his full endorsement of the mandate to deal with the crimes of Antoninus, along with the exhortation to provide him with spiritual advice and support.

You will, of course, do much better to give the poor fellow counsel for eternal life than sustenance for the present life. For he lacks much more dangerously the former alms, for want of which the heart dies [...] Let him hear this from you, I beg, and do not keep from him whatever the Lord gives you to say to the man over whose soundness of heart I desire to rejoice. After all, you have in relation to him such an age that you can properly show him the affection of a parent.¹⁰³

By expressing entire confidence in her, and when closing the letter, Augustine leaves it on Fabiola how to handle the situation and respond to the request for help from himself: 'you would look after him in a true and spiritual fashion, to the extent that the Lord chooses to give you the ability.'¹⁰⁴ His assertion that she should take the initiative in resolving the problems that now arise is certainly due to the authority she has had over the conflicts within their society, and also depends on the close relationship that Augustine has maintained with the woman. In the exchanges between them (*Ep.* 267 and her letter, now lost), Fabiola is considered to be a close confidante of Augustine. With firm conviction, Augustine sets forth the intimacy with this matron in the viewpoint of friendship.¹⁰⁵ After he expresses the hope for spiritual communion that, though separated by physical distance, enables them to be together to one another in their thoughts, he asks a question: 'How great, then, is our life itself, which we so highly value?'¹⁰⁶ Thus, despite his present crisis, Augustine does not hesitate to submit this letter (*Ep.* 20*): 'I know that a letter from me is never a burden but rather a joy for you.'¹⁰⁷

Another characteristic of this letter is that there exists a situation in which, not only formal hearings to examine the charges against Antoninus but also letters from a wealthy

¹⁰² For the chronology of these events, see Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 397 n. 191.

¹⁰³ Aug. *Ep.* 20*.27–28; BA 46B, 332–34: *Multo quippe consilium uitae aeternae quam praesentis sustentaculum tali inopi melius erogabis; illa namque elemosyna periculosius indiget cuius egestate [...] Audiat a te ista obsecro te et quanta tibi dominus dicenda donauerit non taceas homini, de cuius mentis cupio sanitate laetari. Hanc enim prae illo aetatem geris, ut ei decenter exhibeas parentis affectum.* Translation slightly modified.

¹⁰⁴ Aug. *Ep.* 20*.33; BA 46B, 342: *ei ueraciter et spiritualiter consulas quantum te dominus posse uoluerit.*

¹⁰⁵ On this, see Conybeare, 'Spaces between Letters', 60 and n. 23; Vessey, 'Women of Letters?', 87–88; *pace* on the language of *amicitia*, see Power, *Veiled Desire*, 110.

¹⁰⁶ Aug. *Ep.* 267; CSEL 57, 651: *quanta est igitur etiam uita, quae pro magno habetur nostra!* For this classical expression of friendship, see C. White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 209–10.

¹⁰⁷ Aug. *Ep.* 20*.1; BA 46B, 292: *Numquam enim tibi oneri litteras meas sed potius iucunditati scio.*

woman has played a decisive role.¹⁰⁸ Although we do not know the final outcome of the ecclesial politics with this case, the Fussalans were asking Aurelius, the Primate of Numidia, for a new bishop. The Primate tried to be conciliatory in the episcopal status of Antoninus, and the juvenile bishop demanded another *fundus*, Thogonoetum, that directly bordered with Fussala, to be subjected to his control. Meanwhile, a meeting was convened at Tegulata, near Fussala, to examine the case under the decree of Pope Boniface. Augustine 'received en route [to the meeting] a letter of the illustrious lady who owns the estate of Thogonoetus',¹⁰⁹ in which she informs him of an appeal from her *coloni* and does not agree to the jurisdiction of Antoninus over the estate. Thus, Augustine brings the letter to the meeting as evidence of the proceedings,¹¹⁰ and by another letter that she writes as a reply to Augustine's letter, 'the order in which events had taken place' was made clear at the trial.¹¹¹ The impact of her letters on the investigation was considerable. Things did not work out the way Antoninus expected.

The importance of the act of reading is made clear when we direct attention to two of his letters: one is *Letter 147* to Paulina and the other is *Letter 211* to the nuns of the convent in Hippo. In the former letter, Augustine begins by pointing out the function of words by which we read and hear what is important to deal with the subject. He then claims for the equality of man and woman from the intellectual viewpoint:

Lift up, then, the spirit of your mind, which is renewed in the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created it, where Christ dwells in you through faith, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female, where you will not die when you begin to be released from the body, [...].¹¹²

Besides, Augustine wrote a letter to Fortunatianus (*Ep. 148*) as the reply to a reader. According to his remark on *Letter 147* in *Retractationes*, these letters, that is, *Letters 147* and *148* were existing together 'in a certain codex of ours' at the library of Hippo.¹¹³ As a result, we find here both his treatise on the vision of God (*Ep. 147*) and 'a certain memorandum on this subject' (*Ep.*

¹⁰⁸ For the official trial held at Hippo and the subsequent events, see e.g. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 399–404; Nehring, 'Misbehaviour of Clergy', 98–102.

¹⁰⁹ Aug. *Ep.* 20*.17; BA 46B, 318: *in itinere litteras clarissimae feminae cuius est Thogonoetensis fundus accepi*. For the sequence of events, see Aug. *Ep.* 20*.17–20.

¹¹⁰ See Aug. *Ep.* 20*.14; BA 46B, 314: *Denique illis gestis promisit quidem senex, sicut rogatus erat, Fussalam se esse uenturum, plebem uero Thogonoetensem illis ei gestis nemo promisit*.

¹¹¹ Aug. *Ep.* 20*.19; BA 46B, 322: *ex ordine ibi [...] quemadmodum res gesta fuerit*.

¹¹² Aug. *Ep.* 147.1.2; CSEL 44, 276: *erige itaque spiritum mentis tuae, qui renouatur in agnitione secundum imaginem eius, qui creauit eum, ubi per fidem in te habitat Christus, ubi non est Iudaeus et Graecus, seruius liber, masculus femina, ubi non morieris, cum solui corpore coeperis, [...]*.

¹¹³ Aug. *Retr.* 2.41; CCSL 57, 123: *in quodam nostro codice*.

148) chronologically in the same period,¹¹⁴ one was addressed to a woman and the other to a man. After showing this fact in the light of the transformative potential of Christian literacy by which Augustine is able to confide in the ability of women, Mark Vessey agrees with the observation made by Catherine Conybeare and confirms that:

If concessions were to be made to a less capable female readership, one might expect to notice them here [*sc. Ep. 147*]. Does Augustine condescend? [...] the conversation in Letter 147 is as serious and demanding as ever. [...] Augustine lays out a brief for the Christian reader as detailed and insistent as any he gave. If not as a woman, then certainly as a reader, and above all as a Christian reader looking faithfully forward to the vision of God, this female addressee carried a heavy burden of his hopes.¹¹⁵

In the latter case, that is, *Letter 211*, Augustine refers to the various norms that are supposed to be written for his female convent.¹¹⁶ In particular, he explains in detail about the availability of the codices for the nuns.

But those placed in charge of the storeroom or clothing or books should serve their sisters without complaint. Books should be asked for at a certain hour each day; those who ask for them outside that hour should not receive them.¹¹⁷

This letter informs us that, while there might be a female librarian who was in charge of books lent out daily at a given time,¹¹⁸ these rules applied to the behaviour of nuns include a restriction that books should be available to them ‘at a certain hour each day’. It is thus clear that their proficiency in reading is presumed and that the nuns have a habit of reading books for themselves. Furthermore, since there exists the additional regulation of overtime reading, they seem to be eager for reading texts.

Conclusion

Augustine’s letters addressed to women show us the solicitude and respect for their concern and the societal circumstances, which have been sustained from the earlier to the final years of his episcopacy. His preoccupations with pastoral, ecclesiastical and theological issues allow him to distinguish these exchanges and the enquiries from his correspondents as intimate and valuable.

¹¹⁴ Aug. *Retr.* 2.41; CCSL 57, 123; *quoddam commonitorium [...] de hac re.*

¹¹⁵ Vessey, ‘Women of Letters?’, 85–86. See Conybeare, ‘Spaces between Letters’, 61.

¹¹⁶ On this, see n. 56 above.

¹¹⁷ Aug. *Ep.* 211.13; CSEL 57, 368: *siue autem quae cellario siue quae uestibus siue quae codicibus praeponuntur, sine murmure seruiant sororibus suis. codices certa hora singulis diebus petantur; extra horam quae petierint, non accipiant.*

¹¹⁸ See A. E. J. Grote, ‘No *scriptorium* in the Monastery of Carthage?: Observations on Writing and Manual Labour in Augustine’s *De opere monachorum*’, in *Studia Patristica*, 45, eds. A. Cameron, et al. (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 55–60 at 59.

Although most of them do not directly connect with the major events occurred in his long bishopric over a period of about forty years, these letters often provide him with the information of the embarrassing business and the events within his diocese. It is clearly admitted that at least some of his correspondents belong to the upper-class families in late Roman society, and several of them are members of the highly influential household, thus sometimes and inevitably entangled in the ecclesial and social situations. Besides, the responsibility and authority imputed to them are recognised enough by the bishop of Hippo who has been actively interested in the circulation of texts and public sentiment through the network of their society. Thus, as mutually guaranteed presences in literate skills and authoritative voices, but intentionally and deliberately at a physical distance, Augustine and these women would be engaged in the conversation, stimulated by their common hope for actual transformation and the improvement of the realities that needed to be rectified.

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Letter	Date	Addressee(s)
31	395/396	Paulinus and Therasia
42	397	Paulinus and Therasia
80	405	Paulinus and Therasia
92	408/409	Italica
[92A	408/409	Cyprian]
95	408/409	Paulinus and Therasia
99	408/409	Italica
124	410/411	Albina, Pinian, Melania
[125	411	Alypius]
126	411	Albina
127	410	Armentarius and Paulina
130	411/412 ¹¹⁹	Proba
131	411/412	Proba
147	413 ¹²⁰	Paulina
150	413	Proba and Juliana
188	418 ¹²¹	Juliana
208	Towards 411	Felicia, Virgin
210	411-430	Felicitas and Rusticus
211	411-430	Nuns of Hippo
262	418?	Ecdicia
263	395-430	Sapida
264	418?	Maxima
265	408/409	Seleuciana
266	408/409	Florentina
267	?	Fabiola
20*	422/423	Fabiola

¹¹⁹ See Hombert, *Nouvelles recherches*, 250 n. 13.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 184 n. 368.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 227 n. 55.

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