

Humanities 2

Lecture 12

REVIEW AND OVERVIEW

Augustine in Carthage: the experience of lust and desire through food imagery
inversion of the sacred rites of ingestion (Eucharist)

The creation of a self-figuralizing narrative: that is, early events in the writer's
life will prefigure later events; events in the writer's life take on spiritual
or scriptural resonance

The search for wisdom and its false byways:

Cicero and Roman rhetoric

Manichaeism and the temptations of the charismatic teacher (Faustus)
and the directness of Manichean understanding.

MONICA

Virgil's Aeneid is the narrative template for describing the emotional content
of Augustine's relationship to his mother

Dido is a literary source for Monica: YET the Psalms are the spiritual gloss
on Monica: that is, Augustine juxtaposes Virgilian narrative with Biblical
interpretation

KEY EPISODES WITH MONICA

the story of her dream (III.11, pp.68-69);

Augustine's departure from Carthage to Rome and his sorrow over leaving her (V.8, pp.100-101);

Monica's sea journey to Augustine in Milan (VI.1, p.111), and her response to Ambrose's refusal to let her practice her old sacrificial rites (VI.2, pp.112-13);

Her last days, the meaning of her life, and her death (IX.8-13, pp.192-205).

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MIDDLE BOOKS OF CONFESSIONS

KEY FIGURE: AMBROSE OF MILAN

14 years older than Augustine; Bishop of Milan; Augustine comes to study with him

“On the surface, he is the most striking representative of the Roman governing class of his age – that is, of men whose position depended less on their patrician birth, than on their ability to grasp and hold power in a ruthless society.” (Brown)

Ambrose: urban, educated, sophisticated

Augustine: provincial, still the student, relatively unsophisticated

THE KEY SCENE: BOOK VI CH. 3 (p.114)

“When he read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart explored the meaning, but his voice was silent and his tongue was still . . .”

Silent reading: as a social skill; as a rare personal ability; as a sign of spiritual engagement with the text; as a prefiguration of Augustine's own scene of reading/conversion in Book VIII.

FROM PLATO TO PAUL:

BOOK VII CHARTS AUGUSTINE'S MOVE FROM THE "BOOKS OF THE PLATONISTS" TO THE EPISTLES OF ST. PAUL.

VII.9: Augustine gets some of the Platonist's books; NOTICE:

even though this section is supposedly about Platonic texts, all the quotations are from the Psalms and the New Testament; the purpose of this section is to show some of resonances between the Platonic theories of the soul and the early Christian theories of understanding. But the goal, too, is to distinguish the Platonic from the Christian: what is NOT in Plato.

This section is an academic exercise: compare and contrast Plato and Scripture
It is an essay not in argument but in THE ART OF QUOTATION

VII: 10: "These books served to remind me to return to my old self."

VII:20: "By reading the books of the Platonists I had been prompted to look for truth as something incorporeal . . . I was conscious of what my mind was too clouded to see . . ."

The move to St. Paul:

VII:21 – “I began to read and discovered that whatever truth I had found in the Platonists was set down here as well, and with it there was praise for your grace bestowed. For Saint Paul teaches that he who sees ought not to boast as though what he sees, and even the power by which he sees, had not come to him by gift.”

St. Paul provides the epistemological framework for Augustine’s reflections on experience. Augustine will quote, at the opening of Book VIII.1, Paul’s words from I Corinthians: in our translation “a confused reflection in a mirror.” This is the “through a glass darkly” phrase in the King James translation.

SO:

READING AS A PROGRESS OF LIFE:

St Paul: spiritual truth; allegorical interpretation

Platonists: philosophy and theories of knowledge

Manichees: “eastern” religion; dualism; coterie intellectuals and university

Cicero: Latin rhetoric; textbook for teaching and arguing; reason and argument

Virgil: Latin classical epic; schoolroom exercises; emotional response and performance

THE PSALMS AS THE UNDERLYING TEXTUAL BASIS OF DEVOTION

BOOK VIII: CONVERSION THROUGH THE BOOK

VIII.1 Opening quotation from 1 Corinthians: through a glass darkly; the image of the Way

VIII.2 Augustine comes to Ambrose as a reader (I had read some of the books . . .)

Simplicianus tells Augustine the story of Victorinus

“As a result of his attentive reading, he became resolute”

Victorinus becomes a true Christian: “preferred to declare his salvation in full sight of the assembled faithful” --- a theatrical moment

The assembled crowd repeats his name “Victorinus, Victorinus”

Build up to Augustine’s own conversion; return to Gospel and Virgilian imagery: the sailors on a storm-tossed ship; food; marriage; prodigal son (VIII.3, p.162)

VIII.4: Dido’s fire becomes the flame of Christian longing: “Kindle your fire in us and carry us away”

Age, domine, fac excita et revoca nos, accende et rape . . .

Compare: rapiebant me spectacula theatra

Augustine reviews the story of Victorinus and everything else: “From my own experience I now understood what I had read” (VIII.5)

VIII.6: the beginning of the conversion:

I shall now tell “how you released me from the fetters of lust”

Alypius is with him

Finding the book: p.166: “he happened to notice a book”

ad tēdit codicem: tulit, aperuit, invenit apostolum Paulum

Then the move to the gardens

They find another book about the life of St. Antony; one friend begins to read it

More reading

More story-telling

Finally, VIII.8

My inner self was divided against itself. I turned to Alypius:

What is the matter with us? What is the meaning of this story?

Augustine goes to the “small garden” (Latin: hortulus)

I was dying a death that would bring me life

To reach this goal I needed no chariot or ship

The journey

I tore my hair . .

Augustine defers the ultimate scene of conversion
Several chapters of reflection and meditation

Finally, VIII.12:

Somehow I flung myself down beneath a fig tree
I heard singing the voice of a child in a nearby house
TAKE IT AND READ, TAKE IT AND READ
TOLLE LEGE, TOLLE LEGE

I opened my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall.

I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell:

He reads from Paul, Romans 13: 13-14

I had no wish to read more and no need to do so

CONVERSION THROUGH THE CODEX; THE PHYSICALITY OF THE BOOK
IS THE VEHICLE FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION; SILENT READING;
RANDOM READING; ST. PAUL; THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD'S GAME; THE FIG
TREE; THE FULFILLMENT OF THE SELF-FIGURALIZING LIFE; THE EMBODIED
CONVERSION – AUGUSTINE IS NOT ONLY CONVERTED IN HIS SPIRIT;
HE IS CONVERTED IN HIS BODY

POSTSCRIPT: THE DEATH OF MONICA IN BOOK IX

Augustine retells the story of his mother's life, now as hagiography (life of a saint)

IX. 8-12

“There are many things which I do not set down in this book, since I am pressed for time (p.192); But I will not omit a word . . . concerning my mother.”

Story of Monica: she becomes an alcoholic and reforms (pp.193-194)

She becomes modest and temperate (p.194)

Her husband, Augustine's father (Patricius) beats her (p.194)

Her mother-in-law dislikes her at first, but is won over to her (p.195)

Acts as peacemaker between souls in conflict (p.196)

She becomes ill

She and Augustine are alone in a garden; they have a conversation; “the flame of love burned stronger in us”

IX.10, pp.196-99: the great conversation between Augustine and his mother;

The return to spoken language; from infant to speaker; from child to teacher

Monica dies (p.200), and we realize that she is not “far from her own country” but returning to a home with God

pp.202-3:

And now, O Lord, I make you my confession in this book. Let any man read it who will. Let him understand it as he will. And if he finds that I sinned by weeping for my mother, even if only for a fraction of an hour, let him not mock me.

From Augustine to Boethius

For next week, The Consolation of Philosophy;

Key Augustinian inheritance

The temptations of the flesh

The soul as imprisoned in the body

the act of reading as an act of understanding

the relationship of poetry to prose

the relationship of the Christian present to the Classical past

the image of the narrator as prisoner

the elevation of the idealized teacher to a figure of female authority