RECEPTION, GIFTS, AND DESIRE IN AUGUSTINE’S CONFESIONS
AND VERGIL’S AENEID

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation is a thematic exploration of themes of reception in Vergil’s *Aeneid* and how those themes are received by Augustine in his *Confessions*. I begin with the problem of reception in the *Aeneid*, a world which lacks a clear and consistent gauge to assess action and desire. Reception is explicated through an examination of gifts, which is exemplary of giving and reception in general. A study of gifts is also useful in illuminating the desire that guides reception. Reception is examined on three levels: reception within the *Aeneid* itself, Augustine’s reception of the *Aeneid*, and reception within the *Confessions*. The project resembles Augustine’s conversion process, in that it moves from the objects of desire in the phenomenal world, such as empire and body to the all-encompassing desire of the Christian faith for a unified and omnipotent God. The gifts from God, which are instruments of Augustine’s conversion, include rhetoric, exempla, and Continentia. By accepting and using these gifts, as God intends them, Augustine is making a proper return on them. The composition of his *Confessions* is one such return, in that it is a gift to his audience, in which he offers himself as an exemplum in return for the exempla that shaped his conversion narrative and experience. Augustine’s narrative of this conversion
transforms and appropriates the language and themes of erotic desire as represented by the *Aeneid*, so that his conversion narrative effects a conversion of the *Aeneid* itself. Augustine offers a solution to the problems of desire in the *Aeneid* by defining all problems and issues of reception in terms of a good and merciful creator.
For Grant, Ben, and Mia
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INTRODUCTION

A Problem of Reception

In the passage that closes Book 1 of the *Confessions*, Augustine summarizes the message of his composition:

quid in tali animante non mirabile atque laudabile? at ista omnia dei mei dona sunt. non mihi ego dedi haec: et bona sunt et haec omnia ego. bonus ergo est qui fecit me, et ipse est bonum meum et illi exulto bonis omnibus, quibus etiam puer eram. hoc enim peccabam, quod non in ipso, sed in creaturis eius me atque ceteris voluptates, sublimitates, veritates quaerebam, atque ita inruebam in dolores, confusiones, errores. gratias tibi, dulcedo mea et honor meus et fiducia mea, deus meus, gratias tibi de donis tuis; sed tu mihi ea serva. ita enim servabis me, et augebuntur et perficientur quae dedisti mihi, et ero ipse tecom, quia et ut sim tu dedisti mihi.

What is not admirable or praiseworthy in a living creature such as this? But all those things are gifts of my God. I did not give these things to myself: they are good and all that I am is made up of them. Therefore he, who made me, is good, and he himself is my good, and exulting, I thank him for these good gifts, from which I was made even as a boy. For in this way I was sinning – I was seeking pleasures, distinctions, and truths, not in God himself but in his creatures, and I was thus rushing headlong into pains, confusions, and errors. I give thanks to you, my sweetness, my honor, and my faith, my God, I thank you for your gifts; but preserve them for me. In this way you will preserve me, you will increase and bring to perfection your gifts to me, and I will be with you, because you gave me that too – the fact that I exist. ¹ (1.20.31)

¹ All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. The translations of the passages from the *Confessions* have been influenced by the translation of Maria Boulding, cited as Augustine (1997), whose word choice, I feel, is sympathetic with my views on gifts and desire in the *Confessions*. Like her, I often translate phrases, such as *quae dedisti*, as “God’s gifts”.

Here Augustine begins at the time of composition, confessing God as the creator of all things and giver of gifts. Then he continues by confessing the sins of his past, the root of which lay in searching for God in the wrong places and in erroneous ways. Finally he comes full circle expressing the thanksgiving that is owed for God’s gifts. This includes acknowledgment that the process of growing in his gifts, as he does in part through his composition, is accomplished fully by God. In his proper acceptance of God’s gifts, he achieves the communion with God, which he regards as the constant and fixed object of his desire and longing, even when his desires were evil or perverse. Reception of God’s gifts is guided by desire. In the *Confessions* desire is called by various terms as *concupiscentia*, *desiderium*, *cupiditas* with little distinction in usage. When I use the term desire, I intend to use it as Augustine does, which is succinctly put by Edwards’ as “will joined to an object.”

Since all things are made in accordance with God’s will and he is all-powerful, all things contain God’s desire. For Augustine, evil is the perversion of the good, therefore evil is introduced when gifts bestowed by God are misperceived or misused, in other words, when they are received in a way contrary to God’s intention in bestowing them. For example, Augustine sees his intellectual acuity as a gift from God, but he uses this gift to seek the approval of others and to serve his own vanity, rather than to please God and advance his kingdom. Because there is no evil in the gifts themselves, what Augustine must

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2 Edwards (2006) 15
turn away from in his conversion is not a matter of what he has but how he has received it. In other words, Augustine’s conversion is a matter of reception.

Before Augustine can receive God’s gifts properly, he must have knowledge of the truth, which is synonymous with God (1.5.6). “Making the truth in his heart” (veritatem . . . facere in corde meo) is also the chief goal of his Confessions (10.1.1). Truth is revealed to him through Scripture, the authority of which God willed in order to provide guidance for man, whose powers of reasoning are not enough to discover it on their own (6.5.8).

God’s Gifts

God’s gifts are given out of his perfect love and grace, yet they demand repayment. How can a gift that demands a return be unconditional? Derrida argues that pure gifts are impossible, because in order for there to be a pure gift, there must be pure generosity, which is not possible, since every gift necessarily involves a return, whether it is a reciprocation of the gift, gratitude from the recipient, or a feeling of self-satisfaction for the giver. Therefore the possibility for the existence of the gift is effaced as soon as it is given.\(^3\) Bourdieu similarly calls gifts into question, reducing gift exchange to a contract.\(^4\) Millbank, in response to Bourdieu and Derrida, proposes ‘agape as the consummation of gift-exchange’\(^5\) and ‘purified gift-exchange – and not ‘pure gift’ is what Christian

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3} Derrida (1991)}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4} Bourdieu (1977)}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5} Milbank (1995) 144}\]
He argues for a possible fulfillment of desire at a moment of pure exchange:

We have inherited a contrast between *agape*, a ‘giving’ love, and *eros*, a ‘desiring’ love, but human erotic attachments are only sustained by the incessant exchange of gifts, which are always tokens of further, future gifts, such that desire is never fulfilled as possession, for a constitutive lack in desire will always prove its own thwarting. If desire does know moments of fulfillment, then this is in the coincidence of giving and giving back . . . . Giving here is most free where it is yet most bound, most mutual and most reciprocally demanded.

Despite their difference Derrida, Bourdieu, and Millbank all agree that gifts require a return. But God’s gifts differ from human gifts, in that the realization of the gift is the return. For instance, Augustine regards his very existence as a gift from God (1.20.31), and the return on this gift is his very existence. Likewise, becoming continent is the proper return for God’s gift of Continentia, just as the return on his gift of conversion is the conversion itself.

For Augustine proper return on God’s gifts also entails proper use, and proper use leads us back to God. I will pay particular attention to the gifts in the *Confessions*, which contribute most directly to Augustine’s conversion, including Continentia, who comes only as a gift of God’s grace; Continentia, in turn uses rhetoric to offer exempla, which lead to conversion. Rhetoric, exempla, and conversion are also gifts from God. Within the *Confessions* the economy of the

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6 Milbank (1995) 131

7 Milbank (1995) 124

8 Milbank as an extension of Marion (1995) explains, “Divine giving occurs *inexorably*, and this means that a return is inevitably made, for since the creature’s very being resides in its reception of itself as a gift, the gift is, in itself, the gift of a return . . . . Not, of course, a return that God receives as need, since he is replete (Romans 11:35), but a return that constitutes the creature itself, and which God receives by grace. Milbank (1995) 135.
gift is circular and totally contained by God. Augustine acknowledges that only
God can give what he commands of us, thus Augustine’s request for God to give
what he commands:

\[
\text{da quod iubes et iube quod vis. imperas nobis continentiam. et cum}
\]
\[
\text{scirem, ait quidam, quia nemo potest esse continens, nisi deus det,}
\]
\[
\text{et hoc ipsum erat sapientiae, scire cuius esset hoc donum.}
\]

Give what you command, and then command what you will. You
order us to practice continence. A certain writer said, “I knew that
no one can be continent except when God grants it, and this itself
is already a mark of wisdom to know whose gift this is.”

(10.29.40)

God also enables us to give back more than we receive, in this way himself our
debtor:

\[
\text{agens semper semper quietus, conligens et non egens, portans et}
\]
\[
\text{implens et protegens, creans et nutriens et perficiens, quaerens cum}
\]
\[
\text{nihil desit tibi. amas nec aestuas, zelas et securus es, paenitet te et}
\]
\[
\text{non doles, irasceris et tranquillus es, opera mutas nec mutas}
\]
\[
\text{consilium, recipis quod invenis et numquam amisisti. numquam}
\]
\[
\text{inops et gaudes lucris, numquam avarus et usuras exigis,}
\]
\[
\text{supererogatur tibi ut debeas: et quis habet quicquam non tuum?}
\]
\[
\text{reddis debita nulli debens, donas debita nihil perdens.}
\]

Always active, always at peace, gathering while not in need,
supporting and filling and protecting, creating and nourishing and
perfecting, seeking yet lacking nothing. You love without frenzy,
you are jealous yet secure, you grieve without pain, you become
angry but are calm, you change your works but never your plan,
you take back what you find but you never lose anything. You are
never impoverished but you rejoice in your gains, never greedy
you demand interest, you allow us to pay back in excess, so that
you owe us: who has anything that is not already yours? You make
repayment yet you owe nothing, you write off our debts yet lose
nothing. (1.4.4)

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9 Wisdom of Solomon 8:21
This passage nicely summarizes the concept of divine giving in the *Confessions*. God has desire for us, but not out of lack. Everything he gives belongs to him. The cycle of gift and return are fully contained by him, operating under divine grace, which Horner defines as follows: ‘This is the meaning of grace: that God is for the world giver, gift, and giving, a trinity of self-emptying love who is beyond all imagining, and that in this gift what seems like an impossible relationship is made possible.’ The conception of God by Augustine is frequently paradoxical. He is an unconditional giver, yet he demands repayment. He has no need but a desire greater than our own. He gives us the very thing he demands from us. The idea of a contradictory elements existing simultaneously is the idea of the existence of the impossible, and this existence of the impossible is God.  

**Reception of the Aeneid by Augustine**

Integral to Augustine’s conversion process are the literature and philosophy he studies. In addition to divine gifts, I will also look at the treatment of human gifts, as well, both within the *Aeneid* and in terms of Augustine’s reception of the *Aeneid*. The conversion of the language and themes of the *Aeneid* are so pervasive and crucial to Augustine’s conversion narrative, because the issues that lie at the heart of Augustine’s conversion are found both within the *Aeneid* and in his reading of the text. As a young boy Augustine is distracted and moved by the characters of Dido and Aeneas:

> tenere cogebam Aeneae nescio cuius errores oblitus errorum meorum et plorare Didonem mortuam, quia se occidit ab amore,

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10 Horner (2001) ix
cum interea me ipsum in his a te morientem, deus, vita mea, siccis oculis ferrem miserrimus.

I was forced to memorize the *errores* of someone named Aeneas while forgetting my own *errores* and to weep over dead Dido, because she died of love, while in the meantime, as I was dying, I wretchedly put up with myself tearlessly. (1.13.20)

Here Augustine demonstrates the perversity of his identification, as he forgets his own *errores* while remembering those of “some Aeneas”, as he bears his separation from God without tears as he mourns Dido’s separation from Aeneas, and as he dies (*morientem*) in the presence of life (*vita mea*). His identification with Dido without understanding why is an *error*, the remedy for which is the realization that he is like Dido in his misunderstanding. When he fails to see this, he interferes with the self-knowledge that leads to communion with God and embraces a false identification in place of truth. Dido too embraces an image of her desire as a substitute. By reading the *Aeneid* this way, Augustine is playing Dido. Thus his erroneous reception of the *Aeneid* is reflected by themes of reception within the *Aeneid* itself.

**Themes of Reception in the *Aeneid***

Within the *Aeneid*, there is an example of a narrative being received in the same sense that we talk about Augustine’s reception of the text of the *Aeneid*, namely Dido’s reception of Aeneas’ narrative, which comprises Books 2 and 3 of the epic. I also wish to examine reception in another sense within the *Aeneid*, that is, reception as a theme, which I will do through an examination of gifts, broadly defined, as anything given, received, and interpreted. Gifts invite the desire of

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11 O’Donnell (1992) 77 notes Augustine’s use of *nescio cuius* implies disdain.
both giver and recipient. In the *Aeneid* these would include omens, oracles, *ekphrasis* and material gifts between humans, while the *Confessions* is primarily concerned with divine gifts, because all good things are of God, even when they are given by other humans, such as a mother’s milk. Other divine gifts include dreams, signs, virtues, language, rhetoric, and exempla. I will begin with gifts in the *Aeneid*. The interpretation of gifts, omens, and other divine signs is directed by desire. For this reason an examination of Ascanius is useful, because he is the point, at which the desires of so many others intersect, including Dido, Aeneas, Andromache, and the Trojan survivors as a whole, particularly the Trojan women. In the case of Dido, he is the form assumed by Cupid, in order to inflame her with desire. In this way Ascanius is depicted as a vehicle for desire. For both Dido and Andromache he offers a site for their displaced desires for Aeneas and Hector, respectively. For Aeneas and the Trojans he is a signifier of the future and, as a symbol, promises to bear all their hope and desire into that future.

Because gifts are subject to interpretation, they are ambiguous and, as a result, often dangerous. Vergil also paints a very dark picture of gifts, often associating them with death and destruction, for example, that most well known gift of the *Aeneid* narrative, the Trojan Horse, from whose belly issues the destruction of Troy. Similarly Love (Cupid), having been presented among other gifts from the Trojans, emanates from the form of Ascanius, filling Dido with the

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12 The idea that gifts are ambiguous, beneficial, as well as destructive, has been examined by many. See Milbank (1995) 199-121 for summary on the linguistic evidence for three ambiguities of the gift. The Greek and Latin word, *dosis*, for example, demonstrates an oscillation between beneficial giving and harmful giving. Also see Horner (2001) 9-11. Mauss’ description of the potlatch among the tribes of the American Northwest, Melanesia, and Papua also demonstrate this concept of the destructive gift (1925) 5-7.
passions, which will lead to her demise. Much of the danger in gifts is due to desire, which plays a critical role in reception. The Trojans want to believe that the war is over, and, as a result, toil to bring the ruinous Greek gift within their city walls, despite the loud clanging of weapons inside the horse’s belly. For Dido, Venus literally instills desire in her. This could also be read as a trope to describe how the reception of dazzling gifts and heroic narrative of Aeneas fire desire within her. The very gifts themselves can be ominous. For example, among the Trojans’ gifts to Dido is a robe of Helen’s, reminding the audience of the early causes of the Trojan sorrows and wanderings.

Divine gifts in the *Aeneid* are seen in the form of oracles and omens, which are by nature ambiguous and require interpretation. Because this is the case, they also invite the desire of the recipient. We see oracles and omens in both positive and negative functions. Omens convince Anchises that he must accompany the exile out of Troy, but his misinterpretation of oracles also drives the Trojans to disastrous attempts at settlement. Quint attributes this to an attachment to the familiar Trojan past and an unwillingness to face an unknown future. Anchises does not become a consummate guide until after his death, when he, freed of desire, shows Aeneas his future in the form of the pageant of heroes.

Before Aeneas’ *katabasis* he too has difficulties accepting the future. His sense of *pietas*, which guides his actions, is often misdirected. *Pietas* by definition is fractured, since it is comprised of a threefold loyalty to gods, family, and

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13 Quint (1982 32
fatherland, objects which can come in conflict with one another. During the burning of Troy, Aeneas, feeling abandoned by the gods and forgetting his family, single-mindedly fights to avenge Troy. He is reminded by Hector, Venus, and Creusa to consider his family. In fact, Creusa reminds him twice, once in Anchises’ home, and a second time after her death. Appearing to him as a shade, she points to the will of the gods and their son, Ascanius, whom Aeneas temporarily forgot in the fury of defending his city. Just as Anchises does in the Underworld, Creusa, literally a shade of what Aeneas truly desires, directs his pietas. From this point Ascanius, who is so often an image of desire as well, will remain the symbol of the future that sustains the Trojans. It would seem that the moral anchor for all actions of the Aeneid is the arrival of the Trojans in Hesperia, that is, everything that achieves this is good, but it is more complicated than that. Fulfillment of pietas is the closest thing to Augustine’s God, and Aeneas’ success in Latium is part of fulfilling pietas, which is slippery and fractured and the object of which is part of the phenomenal world; whereas Augustine’s alignment with truth and God buys him eternal life.

Vergil contemplates the issue of desire through an exchange between Nisus and Euryalus. Before venturing on their dangerous mission to give Aeneas word of Turnus’ attack, Nisus poses the following question to Euryalus:

'dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt,  
Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?'

Do the gods place this passion in our minds,  
Euryalus, or does each man’s fearful desire become a god to him?  
(9.184-85)
What Vergil understands about desire is the basic and all-consuming pursuit for its fulfillment. This pursuit is so basic, in fact, that the line between desire and its source is blurred.

In the *Confessions* Augustine’s conversion depends upon his proper reception of God’s gifts and truth. Proper reception of God’s gift is aligned with morality, whereas reception in the *Aeneid*, even when it happens in line with the god’s will, such as Dido’s reception of Cupid from Venus, can be injurious.

**Themes of Reception in the *Confessions***

For Augustine the answer to Nisus’ question would be that desire can be both a god for man and given by God. For the wandering pre-conversion man his desire and attachment to worldly things are his god. This is demonstrated by Augustine’s longtime error of seeking God in his creatures and is revealed by his agony after a close friend’s death; about his soul, he writes: *verior erat et melior homo, quem carissimum amiserat, quam phantasma, in quod sperare iubebatur* (the man it had held so dear and lost was more real and more lovable than the fantasy [i.e. God] in which it was bidden to trust, 4.4.9). For the converted man, desire is the desire of God and the understanding that this is the case. Kearney distinguishes between two types of desire, onto-theological and eschatological: “The first construes desire as lack – that is, striving for fulfillment in a plenitude of presence. Here desire expresses itself as a drive to be and to know absolutely”. Eschatological desiring can be understood in the double genitive of the phrase “desire of God” – we desire God in response to his desire for us. He elaborates, “God, it seems, is the other who seeks me out before I seek him, a desire beyond my desire” and
“This desire beyond desire I call eschatological to the extent that it alludes to an alterity that already summons me yet is not yet, that is already present yet always absent (Philippians 2:12), a deus adventurus who seeks me yet is still to come, unpredictably and unexpectedly.” Eschatological desire is “no mere deficiency or privation but its own reward – positivity, excess, gift, grace.”

All desire can be reduced even further to desire for God, who made us so that we would be compelled to seek him:


tu excitas, ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.

You rouse us to delight in praising you, because you made us to be drawn to you and our heart is unquiet, until it rests in you. (1.1.1)

Augustine’s converted desire makes it possible for him to receive gifts properly, but it is only through gifts that his desire can be converted.

Given the relationship between man and the gifts of God, I conclude that Augustine’s conversion is a conversion of reception resulting from a conversion of desire, which only comes to man as a gift from God. Augustine undergoes a change in his reception of God, himself, and the world. First this allows him to receive the things of this world or human gifts, such as the text of the Aeneid correctly, that is, gleaning the truths from the Aeneid so that the process becomes constructive and self-illuminating rather than blinding and self-alienating. Secondly and more importantly, Augustine’s change in reception allows him to receive God’s ultimate gift and exemplum – the sacrifice of Christ. Augustine makes proper return on this by giving up his attachment to things of the world.

14 Kearney (1999) 114
With converted desire he returns to the *Aeneid* to appropriate its themes and language to compose the *Confessions*, a gift to his audience, within which he repays all God’s gifts, as an exemplum himself, not because he is exemplary himself but because he exemplifies object of God’s conversion of him through gifts of his grace.

**Chapter Overview**

For this study I focus primarily on the first eight books of the *Confessions*, and portions of Books 9 and 10, which constitute the biographical portion of Augustine’s work. The very trajectory of my study follows the path of a conversion, beginning with an exploration of desire’s attachment to images, substitutes, and refractions in the *Aeneid*, which represent how Augustine receives the world and God’s gifts prior to his conversion. I then move on to demonstrate how Augustine’s identification with these desires structures his journey toward conversion. I conclude with how in the course of using the *Aeneid* to narrate his conversion, Augustine effectively converts the *Aeneid* to his own ends.

Chapter 1 examines themes of reception and desire in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, explicated through a study of gifts and their association with Ascanius, who represents the desires of Dido, Andromache, Aeneas, and the rest of the Trojans. The examination of the desire that drives reception of gifts will focus on embracing images, substitutes, and false objects of desire. I also explore *pietas* as a driving force of action, which will set up the basis of my argument on reception and desire in Chapter 2. *Pieta* is a problematic means of guidance, because it so often entails duty to conflicting objects. In this way we begin with the trappings
of the phenomenal world and its objects, where characters are deceived by the pagan gods they worship and are drawn to, yet dissatisfied with, images and substitutes for what they truly want. Augustine identifies with the desires of the *Aeneid*, and by exploring them, we establish the backdrop against which we view Augustine’s conversion. The treatment of reception and desire in the *Aeneid* represents the way, in which Augustine views the world and receives its objects, including his reception of the *Aeneid*.

Chapter 2 looks at Augustine’s reception of the *Aeneid*, particularly his identification with Dido and Aeneas and how he utilizes the *Aeneid* as a model for his *errores* and earlier desires. Just as Dido embraces false objects, Augustine in his identification with her is also embracing her as a false object. In this way he is playing Dido in his response to the desires and losses he reads in the *Aeneid*. Augustine’s *errores* include intellectual studies and relationships, which Augustine pursues in an effort to find God, fulfillment, and truth. Eventually Vergil’s model becomes insufficient for Augustine’s narrative, and Augustine finds a new means to structuring his narrative in the conversion stories he hears from other Christians, but he does not abandon his pagan models altogether. Rather he appropriates and transforms the erotic language for purposes of narrating his conversion. The result is a full integration of his past into the conversion process itself.

Chapter 3 discusses God’s gifts of Continentia, rhetoric and exempla as instruments of conversion. Leading up to Augustine’s conversion he begins to receive and apply gifts as God intends them. He transforms his skill of rhetoric to
win praise for God rather than for himself. By becoming the audience of Continentia and an orator to his audience, he combines the roles of orator and audience. The models of embracing images and *errores* of the *Aeneid* are replaced by Christian exempla, but Dido and Aeneas reemerge, nonetheless, as the erotic language of the *Aeneid* is appropriated for Augustine’s narrative. His reception of the *Aeneid* finally aligns with God’s will. As God turns all transgressions, desires, and missteps to his ends, Augustine too transforms the *Aeneid* in the process of overcoming the very things the *Aeneid* represented for him. In this way his conversion involves a transformation of not just his reception but of the *Aeneid* and of rhetoric. The exempla in Book 8 not only shape Augustine’s experience and his narrative structure, but also how they are part of a rhetorical work, which effectively turns Augustine into an exemplum himself. In this way Augustine finally properly receives God’s gifts and makes the proper return on God’s gift of Christ, the ultimate gift and exemplum.
CHAPTER 1

EMBRACING IMAGES: THEMES OF RECEPTION AND DESIRE IN THE AENEID

I. INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Reception

There is a problem of reception in the Aeneid, manifested in various objects that invite interpretation: destructive gifts, the misinterpretation of oracles and omens, and divisive objects of pietas. The problem is a twofold issue of desire: it arises not only from the recipient’s desire, which guides their interpretation of received objects, but also from the inherent ambiguity of such objects. In the case of divine gifts and oracles, this ambiguity is a product of the inexplicable, unknowable, unruly desire of the gods.

There is also a problem of reception in the Confessions. If the problem of reception in the Aeneid is a twofold issue of desire, consisting of human desire on the one hand and divine desire on the other, the Confessions could be described as concerning the single problem of human reception of the divine. This means that the fulfillment of desire in the Confessions is a matter of bringing human desire in line with the desire of a unified God. Augustine writes the Confessions as a journey that led him to God, as a rhetorical work to persuade others to reach out
to God, and as a glorification of God’s gifts. Before Augustine reaches the point that he can compose such a work, he too experiences the kind of frustrated, confounding, and unknowable desires of the _Aeneid_ and its heroes, as they try to reach Rome. As a youth he identified with Dido and was distracted by the _errores_ of Aeneas and the destruction of Troy. He uses the languages and themes of the _Aeneid_ to talk about his pre-conversion desires. For this reason I shall argue that Augustine’s reinterpretation (re-reception) of the _Aeneid_ is the perfect place to begin to understand the desires that lead to the conversion (of his desire) in the *Confessions*. This chapter will explore the problem of reception through several critical factors of desire and its objects in the _Aeneid_: gifts, oracles and omens, and the question of _pietas_. Let me begin with a few introductory remarks first on desire and then on each of these areas.

**Desire and Its Objects**

In the _Aeneid_ the experience of desire, which directs reception of gifts and divine signs, can be variously described as frustrated, conflicted, and confounding. A very literal example of desire as such can be seen at the end of Book 2 when Aeneas rushes back to a flaming Troy in search of his wife, Creusa. He races through the burning ruins of the city only to find her shade: *infelix simulacrum atque ipsius umbra Creusae / visa mihi ante oculos et nota maior imago*, “an unhappy image and shade of Creusa herself / appeared to me before my eyes and a larger image than I had known” (2.772-3). After she speaks, he tries to embrace her three times but in vain: *ter frustra comprensa manus effugit imago*, “three times I tried to embrace the image, three times the image escaped from my hands”
The trope of embracing the dead\textsuperscript{2} demonstrates the vanity of trying to use images of true objects of desire to fulfill desire. This is a pervasive theme throughout the \textit{Aeneid}. Aeneas, Dido, and Andromache project their desires, find substitutes for them, and embrace them in vain. Aeneas can never have Troy nor rebuild it, as it was. He will never regain Creusa as his spouse and as a mother to Ascanius. Dido too will fail to gain her object through substitutes. Aeneas cannot fill Sychaeus’ place, nor does embracing Ascanius fulfill her desire for Aeneas. Andromache likewise cannot bring Hector or Astyanax back by embracing Ascanius. For these reasons it is essential for my argument to look closely at Ascanius. His association with gifts and desire wrap him up in issues of interpretation and reception. As the son of Aeneas, he is the symbolic carrier of the future, and therefore easily becomes an ominous figure; he is a figure of hope as the focus of attention is drawn to him during critical parts of the Trojan journey; and he is often invoked to redirect Aeneas’ the \textit{pietas} which drives Aeneas and the surviving Trojans to their new \textit{patria}. It is important to note that Ascanius per se is neither a positive nor pessimistic figure. Rather, he is ambiguously depicted by Vergil and is used as for both a positive projection of desire, such as in the form of hope for the future, but also he is also darkly portrayed as a harbinger or cause of ruin.

\textsuperscript{1} See also his attempt to embrace Anchises (6.701).

\textsuperscript{2} For more on embraces in the \textit{Aeneid}, see Belfiore (1984).
The Problem of Gifts

One particularly critical factor in the problem of reception in the *Aeneid* is the ambiguity, evil, and falsehood contained in the signs and gifts sent by the gods. Gifts exchanged by humans are similarly portrayed as ominous and dark. The *Confessions*, however, gives us a God who is good, intends good, and bestows only good things. Gifts, broadly defined for the purposes of my examination as anything given and received, are exemplary of reception in general, and an examination of gifts reveals how desire mediates this reception. This is possible, because gifts are where desire of both the giver and recipient are cast. The relationship between reception desire and gifts is illustrated very literally, for example, by Dido’s reception of Cupid in the form of Ascanius, who accompanies the Trojans’ gifts. In this scene she is infused with desire (Cupid) through the figure of Ascanius. This role as an intermediary between desire and object is a recurring one for Ascanius, who invites the desires of many, including Dido, Aeneas, Anchises, Andromache, and the Trojans as a whole.

The Problem of Omens, Oracles, and Other Divine Signs

Ascanius is also associated with omens, another form of gift from the gods. Prophecy in general, which includes omens, oracles, and dreams, pose similar problems as gifts, because prophecy is necessarily ambiguous and is comprised of communications from gods who are often deceptive, not always friendly, and frequently engaged in conflicts amongst themselves. This makes gods in the *Aeneid* an unreliable means of guidance.
O’Hara helpfully draws the following parallel between oracles in the

_Aeneid_ and rhetoric:

It is of considerable importance to recognize that many of the prophecies in the _Aeneid_ are basically pieces of rhetoric designed to persuade rather than simply inform; like the orator, the speaker of a prophecy need not hesitate to deceive.³

Divine signs are problematized by this allowance for falsehood and deception in the conception of prophecy, which is supported even by ancient critics.⁴ It calls into question the usefulness of prophecy for revealing knowledge and future events and seems to reduce oracles and omens to mere instruments of encouragement and inciting action even at the cost of truth.⁵ This sets up a critical contrast for the divine signs of Augustine’s _Confessions_. Whereas the rhetoric of the _Aeneid_ sanctions deception and falsehood, the rhetoric of the _Confessions_, as we will see, has an essential interest in not only persuading its audience of the truth but in using the power of truth to persuade.

_Pietas_

Besides forms of prophecy, Aeneas’ chief means of discernment and guide to action is his sense of _pietas_. The issues of reception, gifts, and desire mentioned above can be brought together in an examination of Aeneas’ desire to live by this virtue. In the first half of the _Aeneid_, Aeneas struggles with the _pietas_ felt toward

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³ O’Hara (1990) 117-118. In addition O’Hara also draws religious and political parallels with deception in oracles.

⁴ O’Hara (1990) 117 cites Servius Auctus ad 40 comments on Tiberinus’ lie: _nondum concesserunt, sed utiliter dissimulat._

⁵ See Eden (1975) ad 41 that argues Tiberinus conceals the truth, in order to encourage Aeneas.
his past and the pietas needed for the future. The shift in pietas roughly corresponds with his longing for former Troy and to perseverance for Hesperia. Aeneas’ attention is repeatedly guided to Ascanius, who represents the future. The katabasis marks the turning point and fixes his gaze toward the future, when his desire and his pietas become aligned. Even then, however, his pietas will betray him, as it will prove impossible to uphold. Aeneas encounters figures along the way, which will either threaten his fate or represent the opposite of what he desires to be, reminding him of what he risks becoming. Such anti-models are figures, such as Dido, Turnus, and Helenus.⁶ Although he emerges from the Underworld no longer burdened by longing for his former patria, but ready to assume the duties of the future for his son and for his men without external reinforcement from the gods, he assumes a new struggle of competing conceptions of his object of pietas, which is left unresolved even at the end of the poem, where his slaying of Turnus calls into question the reliability of pietas to guide action.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the problems surrounding reception and desire through gifts, divine signs, and pietas in order to establish the backdrop for Augustine’s appropriation of these themes in the narrative of his own problem of reception. It will be the first part of a comparison of two journeys and the role of reception and desire in those journeys. I will begin with a discussion of the desire in the Aeneid via the figure of Ascanius, who represents

⁶ See Putnam (1995) 202 for a fundamental lesson on epic: ‘pietas is antonymous to s series of negative abstractions including, ira, dolor, saevitia, and various manifestations of furor’. The figures I have listed above embody these qualities.
the desire of Aeneas and the rest of the Trojans. The desire of the characters and the way in which their desire affects their reception are revealed through gifts. Ascanius is also associated with gifts. As a recipient of gifts and a gift himself he invites the desire and interpretation of his recipients. From there I will proceed to a discussion of omens, oracles, and dreams, as well, which I construe as forms of the divine gift. Ascanius’ tie to interpretation and desire also connect him to omens and oracles. Finally I will examine pietas, that unattainable object of Aeneas’ desire, as a problematic means of guiding action. This will include a discussion of the conflict that takes place between Aeneas and Dido in a battle between pietas and furor.

II. DESIRE

Ascanius and Desire

Ascanius often occupies an intermediary position and is used by Vergil to transfer and inflame desire and generate and carry hope. He is received positively and constructively by the Trojans and Aeneas, but perversely and misguidedly by Andromache and Dido. By representing the hope of the Trojans (pre-Romans) and the first audience of the Aeneid (contemporary Romans), he bridges a gap in history. His alternate name, Iulus, ties him to the Julian family, thereby fusing past and present for the Roman audience, while pointing to the future for the Trojans. In this way, he is like an omen, representing the future in the present. Everything he does has bearing on their fate and the fate of the Roman audience. He is particularly suited to these functions, because he is a child, and as such, he
represents the future and propels events forward; as a child he is the universal love object, suited to absorbing displaced emotions; he is also a blank slate upon which desires can be projected and heaped up and carried into the future; and he is nearly voiceless, which allows others to speak through him easily.\(^7\) As the son of Aeneas, the leader of the Trojan exiles, Ascanius is the natural choice for bearing the desires of the Trojans and of Aeneas in particular into the future. Children, being extensions of their parents, perpetuate the desires of their parents. They do so either because the parents have desires on their behalf or because they potentially may fulfill the desires their parents have for themselves. Ascanius performs both these functions of desire. He is the one, on whose behalf Rome is sought, but he is also the symbol of the Trojans’ desire. In other words, he is the reason invoked for reaching Hesperia, but by acting as such, he is the means through which the Trojans and Aeneas try to achieve their desire. It is also as a child that Ascanius will become the substitute for Andromache and Dido’s true objects of desire, and instead of hope and consolation, their meetings with Ascanius will reveal the despair and tragedy of their desire.

**Ascanius as the Hope of the Trojans**

Attention is often drawn to Ascanius at pivotal times in the Trojan journey, because he is the hope for all the Trojans that urges them on in desperate times. In fact he is called the second hope of Rome: *magnae spes altera Romae*, “the other

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\(^7\) In fact, because of these attributes, Ascanius is sometimes read as a marginal, undeveloped character. But it is precisely his “blankness” that makes him such an important figure in the projection and interaction of desire. See M. Petrin (1997) 87 and R. Jenkyns (1998) 285 (citation thanks to Merriam).
great hope of Rome” (12.168). Their desires are directed towards Ascanius, because he is the motivation that Aeneas cannot ignore. It is clear from their reaction upon leaving Carthage, that they do not share Aeneas’ ambivalence. When Aeneas announces that they are leaving, they rejoice and gladly obey: *ocius omnes / imperio laeti parent et iussa facessunt*, “all of them quickly and happily obeyed the command and carried out their orders” (4.294-5). After Mercury visits Aeneas a second time to urge him to leave sooner, his men are eager to hurry away (4.581).

In Sicily the Trojan women are incited to burn the ships by Iris, who is disguised as Beroe and sent by Juno, who tells them to look no further for Troy: “*hic quaerite Troiam; / hic domus est*, “Seek Troy here; / your home is here” (5.637-38). Her speech leaves them torn between their two desires, one for the land where they are presently and another for the kingdom to which fate calls them (5.654-56), but a sign from Iris seals their determination. As the Trojan women are burning the ships, Ascanius himself commands them to behold him, their hope: “*non hostem inimicaque castra / Argiuum, uestras spes uritis. en, ego uester / Ascanius*”, “It is not the enemy or a hostile Argive camp that you are burning, but you are burning your hope. Look, I am your Ascanius! (5.672).

Ascanius is often given as the reason that the Trojans should continue to strive for Hesperia. When Ilioneus tells Dido of the kingdom the Trojans are journeying to, he addresses an absent Aeneas and refers to the kingdom as a hope for Iulus: “*nec spes iam restat Iuli*”, “nor does hope now remain for Iulus” (1.556). Ascanius is the reason that Mercury first offers Aeneas: “*Ascanium*
surgentem et spes heredis Iuli / respice, cui regnum Italiae Romanaque tellus / debetur”, “Look to Ascanius who is growing up and the hope Iulus, your heir / to whom the kingdom of Italy and the Roman land is owed” (4.274-76) at Zeus’ injunction: “si nulla accendit tantarum gloria rerum / nec super ipse sua molitur laude laborem, / Ascanione pater Romanas invidet arces?”, “If glory for such great things does not inflame him / will he, as a father, begrudge Ascanius the walls of Rome?” (4.234-35). It is, in turn the excuse Aeneas offers Dido when at a loss to offer any other (4.354-55), after wondering what he is to tell her (4.283-84). Like an orator, Aeneas contemplates how best to broach the topic with Dido (4.293-94). Anticipating that Dido will protest, he feels the need to frame his argument in a rhetorically sound fashion. He finds a seemingly incontrovertible excuse in his son. In one of Ascanius’ few utterances, his offhand interpretation of the harpy Celaeno’s prophecy, he inadvertently announces the Trojans’ arrival to their destination (7.116-18). His joke is quite pivotal in that it ends the first set of the Trojan’s toils. At last they have reached their future kingdom. With this, the battle for Latium is ushered in.

As the hope of the Trojans Ascanius reflects their desire in a way that positively and productively carries them through their mission of reaching Hesperia. This is not always the case, however, since Ascanius is at the same time the object of desire that is focused perversely upon him. To begin the examination of Ascanius functioning in this capacity, I will look at his encounter with Andromache at parva Troia.
Andromache at *Parva Troia*

If we define the Trojans’ reception of Ascanius as a positive, productive, and “correct” way to direct the desire, because it contributes to their goal of founding a new *patria*, then Andromache is an example of negative, perverted, and “improper” reception of Ascanius, representing a failure, to the most extreme degree, to fulfill the void left by Troy’s destruction.

When we first meet Andromache at *parva Troia*, we see a tragedy of desire played out in a pathetic scene of images and the living dead. The settlement, founded by Andromache’s husband, Helenus, at Buthrotum, is reasonably successful, but like the unsuccessful attempts of the Trojans discussed above, it has death suffused throughout. This scene has been read by scholars as a world inhabited by living dead.⁸ It is literally the image of Troy itself: *paruam Troiam simulataque magnis / Pergama*, “a little Troy which imitates the great one” (3.349-50). Other images of Troy include geographical references, such as to the new Xanthus (*arentem Xanthi cognomine rivum*, 3.350; *effigiem Xanthi*, 3.497) and the Simois (*falsi Simoentis*, 3.302). At Buthrotum there is no future. As we see from Aeneas’ words, the exiles at Buthrotum do not inhabit *parva Troia*, so much as they *see* it (*videtis*, 3.497).⁹ This emphasizes all the more *parva Troia* as an image – an object to be looked at, rather than a true fulfillment of desire. In this case, we see what Aeneas sees; the scene is described through his eyes (3.349 ff.). By recognizing it (agnosco) rather than simply seeing it, he is

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⁸ See Grimm (1967); Quint (1982); Bettini (1997)

⁹ Bettini (1997) 27
recalling the past, which he cannot seem to escape. It is easy to move on from this place, because Aeneas does not see anything to draw him, even though it is a simulacrum of the original and bears the closest resemblance to it. *Parva Troia*, for one, is characterized by what Bettini calls a “melancholy lack.” To see *parva Troia* is not to have desire for Troy fulfilled but only to be reminded of the desire and of the lack that is causing it all the more. This also suggests that Aeneas is beginning to move away from his desire for Troy. He is taking another step towards an object of desire other than Troy. Beyond kissing the Scaean gate, which is his only sentimental gesture toward *parva Troia*, Aeneas demonstrates no envy of Helenus’ situation or desire to remain. It is evident that this miniature image of Troy is a rather dissatisfying substitute for Troy itself.

It is this image of Troy that serves as the backdrop for Andromache’s encounter with Ascanius. Like the Trojans, Ascanius too serves as a place to direct her desire, but there is no sense of fulfillment. She directs her desire toward Ascanius, because he resembles Astyanax with respect to age and movements and facial expressions, and Astyanax resembles his father, Hector, as a son does. Each time Andromache reaches out, she ends up further from where she wants to be, and her lack of fulfillment is imminent. Andromache was taken by the image (*imago*) of Astyanax in Ascanius. Moreover, Andromache, having lost her family twice and having been relocated three times, is a figure of repeated displacement and mourning. Andromache’s removal from Troy is actually the second time in her life she is displaced. We know from the *Iliad* that she became the bride of

\[10\] Bettini (1997) 20
Hector after Cilician Thebes was sacked and her father and brothers were killed by Achilles. Coincidentally Achilles causes her second displacement, by making her a widow and prisoner of war. Following the destruction of Troy, Andromache is awarded to Achilles’ son, Pyrrhus, as a war prize. Upon his marriage to Hermione, he hands her over to Helenus in marriage. She regards Hector as a replacement for all the family she lost to Achilles’ savage hands. Now she has lost him, as well. In spite of having been relieved of an oppressive marriage to the enemy and being subsequently married to a Trojan, who also happens to be her husband’s brother, Andromache, nevertheless, longs for Hector. When we first meet Andromache in the Aeneid, she is seen weeping and making offerings over the grave of Hector:

sollemnis cum forte dapes et tristia dona
ante urbem in luco falsi Simoentis ad undam
libabat cineri Andromache manisque vocabat
Hectoreum ad tumulum, viridi quem caespite inanem
et geminas, causam lacrimis, sacraverat aras.

Andromache was offering a solemn feast and sad gifts before the city in a grove beside the waves of a false Simois to the ashes and calls upon the shade of Hector at his empty tomb, which she built from the green turf and had consecrated twin altars as a cause for tears. (3.301-5)

The pathos of Andromache’s mourning is heightened by the pathetic image of Troy as the backdrop. Andromache’s fixed object of desire is Hector, and everything and everyone around her serve to remind her of Hector or act as inferior substitutes for him. Moreover we are reminded of her attachment to her

11 Iliad, 6.410ff.
12 Iliad, 6.429–430
past when Aeneas, who is aware of her marriage to Pyrrhus, still addresses her as Hector’s Andromache (*Hectoris Andromache*, 3.319), just as she too still calls herself the wife of Hector (*coniugis Hectoreae*, 3.488). Here at *parva Troia* Andromache’s obsessive and all-consuming love for Hector turns her every thought to him. Not surprisingly, when she first spies Aeneas, all her questions eventually lead to one about Hector:

> “sed tibi qui cursum venti, quae fata dedere?  
> aut quisnam ignarum nostris deus appulit oris?  
> quid puer Ascanius? superatne et vescitur aura?  
> quem tibi iam Troia—  
> ecqua tamen puero est amissae cura parentis?  
> ecquid in antiquam uirtutem animosque virilis  
> et pater Aeneas et avunculus excitat Hector?”

> “But what wind, what fate has given you a course?  
> Or what gods has driven you unknowing to our shores?  
> What about the boy Ascanius? Does he survive and feed on the air? Whom when Troy still for you . . .  
> Does he have any care for his lost mother?  
> Do both his father Aeneas and his uncle Hector incite him to manly courage?” (3.337-43)

She asks if Hector has inspired Ascanius to acts of valor. In other words, she asks if Hector has been an exemplum for Ascanius, which would, in a sense, make Ascanius an imitation or at least imitator of Hector. Her obsession with her dead husband causes her to read his presence, association, and influence in everyone. She is seeking out and clinging to the images of shadows of Hector that still exist

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13 Bettini (1997) 15
14 Bettini comments that Creusa is Hector’s cousin and would therefore remind Andromache of Hector (1997) 15. Feldman comments: “Andromache has been reminded of the reversal of roles played by Creusa and herself. She has lived, her husband and son have been killed; Creusa has died, her husband and son have lived. She wonders if Ascanius has any love for his lost mother comparable to the love which she feels for Astyanax” (1957-8, 362).
even after his death and, in this way, she commits herself to a deathly existence. She is even willing to believe that the world she inhabits is one of death, in order to make sense of Aeneas’ presence and regain Hector, asking Aeneas, “si lux alma recessit, Hector ubi est?”, “If you are dead, where is Hector?” (3.311-12). About this scene Grimm writes, “Andromache seems immediately ready to assume . . . that Aeneas is indeed a real shade, representing a more vivid projection of her world than any she has thus far known – and she steps readily into that domain of death to ask Aeneas where her dead Hector is, as though Aeneas could immediately point him out.”\textsuperscript{15} We see her desire lead her into every sort of self-deception and illusion, as she desperately tries to seize an object of fulfillment.

For Andromache, as we will see is the case for Dido, the son is a substitute for the father. In Andromache’s case, Ascanius removes Andromache even further from her true object of desire, by adding another degree of separation between her and Astyanax, who, in turn, reminds her of Hector. Her presentation of gifts, which I shall discuss further below, reveals her desire. First she offers memorials of her love for Hector, and then she notes Ascanius’ resemblance to Astyanax. Taken in reverse, the image before her reminds her of her son, who in turn reminds her of her husband. Moreover, Helenus, who is the brother of Hector is an image or shadow of his brother. Bettini describes Andromache’s world as one “inhabited by ‘doubles’ and stand-ins”\textsuperscript{16}. Andromache is able to embrace nothing

\textsuperscript{15} Grimm (1967) 155

\textsuperscript{16} Bettini (1997) 14
that she truly wants, because the true objects of her desire are unattainable. She has recourse only to substitutes for Hector, Astyanax, and Troy, so she will find herself always engaged in perpetual mourning and disappointment. She attempts to find some satisfaction in Ascanius, but he will fail to fulfill her desires for Astyanax and Hector, just as the doubles she has surrounded herself with have failed her. This is similar to the way Ascanius reminds Dido of Aeneas and how Dido longs for a little Aeneas to fulfill her longing for the father. One reason for this is that the child is an image of the father and in part of his father. The phenomenon, therefore, of transferring affections from father to son is reasonable. We will see below that lovers and wives are not the only subjects to do this. The Trojan men also project their desires onto Ascanius.

To some degree all the characters of the *Aeneid* exhibit these same vain attempts to fulfill their desire as Andromache. Aeneas, Dido, and Anchises will also make attempts to grasp the impossible objects of their desire. Andromache represents a failure of reception, a failure to fulfill desire, and an attachment to the transient things of the world that grip all of them and that leave Andromache, specifically, in a perpetually dissatisfying and perverse state of living dead. It is with this same paradox, dying in the presence of life, that Augustine will repeatedly describe his pre-conversion state.\(^{17}\) It is important to note that for Augustine false desire is ontological, whereas in the *Aeneid* false desire is determined by history and chronology. In other words Augustine embraces

\(^{17}\) See 1.13.20 in which he calls himself dying (*morientem*) in the presence of God, his life (*mea vita*); 3.11.19 where he describes Monica as regarding him as dead.
substitutes for a God who is very much present but whom he cannot yet perceive due to improper reception among other weaknesses, while Andromache and Aeneas struggle with relinquishing their grip on a past that is dead and gone. In the next chapter I will examine the solution he offers through his conception of an attainable and all-fulfilling God, whose gifts and grace assure fruition, if only they are sought and received properly. Let me first turn to gifts and their reception in the *Aeneid* and how the desire as represented by Andromache guides the reception of gifts and what the gifts, in turn, bring about or foretell.

III. GIFTS: A PROBLEM OF PROJECTION

Ascanius and Gifts

As we saw, the Trojans and Aeneas receive Ascanius as a hope and symbol of the future, whereas Andromache receives him as a substitute for her true desire, and we shall see that Dido does the same. In this capacity he can function both positively and negatively depending upon how desire is projected on him. Through him it is demonstrated how gift giving exemplifies reception of all kinds, from the way Dido and Andromache regard him to how the Trojans and Roman audience anticipate their fate. He is the place between, where negotiations take place, the one through whom passion is ignited, consolation is sought, and hope is kept alive. He does this as a recipient of gifts and as a gift himself. For example,

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18 There is one scene in which Ascanius acts as a giver of gifts, which has Ascanius prematurely adopting a man’s role in his father’s absence. Ascanius offers gifts to Euryalus and Nisus before their expedition, with the cares and a mind of a man beyond his years: *ante annos animumque gerens curamque virilem* (10.311). The gesture is nullified, however, by Euryalus’ refusal of the gifts and his request instead that Ascanius care for his mother. If a subject’s desire is revealed in
Andromache bestows gifts upon him, because he is the only living reminder of her dead son. Dido gives him a horse, a pledge of her love for Aeneas. Although generally treated as an incidental player, Ascanius, because of his association with gifts, is actually a very critical focus of desire. This is the case, because the gift is the place where desire is displaced and passed on, by both giver and recipient; it is the place of commerce in desire; it is the screen where desire of the giver and recipient is projected. As such, Ascanius not only facilitates the desires of Dido, Andromache, Aeneas and Venus, but the desire of the Trojans for Rome, as well. Given Ascanius’ unrecognized role in facilitating passion and bearing the desires of others, he is a highly appropriate choice made by Venus as the form Cupid should take when, as a gift, he inflames Dido with desire for Aeneas. During the banquet scene, in which Dido is presented with the gifts and introduced to Ascanius, she is described as “equally moved by both Ascanius and the gifts”: *et pariter puero donisque movetur* (1.714). Clearly they are meant to be paired together with their presentation producing similar effects. The Tyrians marvel at the gifts and Ascanius’ face, which, of course, is not his own entirely his own, but illuminated by Cupid’s underneath: *mirantur dona Aeneae, mirantur Iulum / flagrantisque dei voltus simulataque verba*, “They marvel at the gifts of Aeneas, they marvel at Iulus / and the face that is lit up and the words that he is imitating” (1.709-710). In this way, Cupid/Ascanius is meant to be included among these their presentation of gifts, as in the case of Dido and Andromache, then Ascanius’ subjectivity is further effaced by Euryalus’ refusal of his gifts.
gifts, that is, he is also a gift himself, and he is meant to convey the essence of Amor.

Venus’ sending of Cupid via Ascanius is a critical example of human reception of a divine gift and desire’s role in that transaction. In addition to this divine gift I will also discuss oracles, omens, and dreams, as well as human gifts in the *Aeneid*. The latter include the Trojan Horse, the material gifts exchanged between guest and host, and even the Aeneas’ narrative to Dido. Both human and divine gifts demonstrate reveals the projection of their desire and the way desire guides reception. This is because gifts invite the recipient (and giver) to project their desire onto the gift, and this desire determines how the gift is accepted. Because gift-giving is exemplary of reception, it is useful to examine scenes of gift exchange in uncovering the problem of reception and how desire lies at the heart of this problem. Because the intention with which gifts are given and the viewpoint from which they are received always differ to some extent, gifts are dangerously ambiguous. In the act of transferring the gift, at least part of the meaning is lost.

Gifts create a bond, because they are inalienable by the giver and require a return. Mauss writes, “What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him.” He elaborates that the “something” is part of oneself. Gifts, having taken on some part of the

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19 Mauss (1925) 11-12 for the inalienability of a gift, also see Godelier (1999) and Weiner (1992).

20 Mauss (1925) 12
person, establish ties of hospitality between strangers; they are used to gain the favor of those to whom they are presented; they are bestowed as peace offerings or apologies. In every case they establish a bond between giver and recipient, because they demand a return. A gift can do this, because, as a gift, it has the power to ingratiate, persuade, appease, or delight, in carrying with it the desire of the giver or the recipient or both. It is important to remember, however, that regardless of the intention of the giver, the interpretation of the gift and its intent is dependant upon the recipient. Even a gift presented in a favorable way can be met with disdain. In fact we shall see the misuse and perversion of gifts in the Dido scene that comes about due to a projection of desire on the gift that does not align with the giver’s intentions. For a consideration of Ascanius as gift, a closer inspection of the Dido episode is required.

**Dido and Cupid/Ascanius**

Ascanius, as a gift and as a focus of desire, can be positive, such as a hope for the Trojans, but he can also be dark and ominous. Ascanius/Cupid is the gift, which precedes death and turmoil for those in the *Aeneid* and brings about the curse which determines the fate of future Romans (the audience) and Carthage. He does all this by functioning as a gift. This is evident, when Venus has Cupid assume his form in order to inflame Dido with desire for Aeneas, and his borrowed form accompanies the gifts, which Aeneas presents to Dido.

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Aeneas longs to ingratiate himself with this beautiful, powerful, and sympathetic queen. In order to facilitate this, Aeneas has Achates bring splendid gifts along with Ascanius (1.647 ff.). The presentation of him is a gesture that Aeneas is making with an expected result identical to that when presenting a gift. Aeneas’ as a father displaying his paternal care would fire the desire of Dido, who wants a child. After Cupid has assumed Ascanius’ form, he appears with the gifts again when he is presented to Dido, and as far as Dido and her court are concerned, it is Ascanius they are seeing:

mirantur dona Aeneae, mirantur Iulum,
expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo
Phoenissa, et partiter puero donisque movetur.
flagrantisque dei vultus simulataque verba,
pallamque et pictum croceo velamen acantho.
praecipue infelix, pesti devota futurae,
ille ubi complexu Aeneae colloque pependit
et magnum falsi implevit genitoris amorem,
reginam petit. haec oculis, haec pectore toto
haeret et interdum gremio fovet inscia Dido
insidat quantus miserae deus. at memor ille
matris Acidaliae paulatim abolere Sychaeum
incipit et vivo temptat praevertere amore
iam pridem residues animos desuetaque corda.

They marvel at the gifts of Aeneas, they marvel at Iulus,
at the face of the god enflamed and his imitated words,
and at the robe and veil embroidered with saffron acanthus. Especially unfortunate Phoenissa, who is cursed to destruction to come, cannot fill her mind and she burns as she looks, and is moved equally by the boy and gifts. Cupid, as he hangs with an embrace on Aeneas’ neck and fulfills the great love of a father who is not his own, seeks out the queen. She clings to these images with her eyes, with her whole heart and in the meantime Dido fondles him on her lap unaware of how great a god is creeps into her wretched self. But Cupid mindful of his mother begins to erase Sychaeus gradually and tries to turn with living love her passions, which have long been idle, and her unused heart. (1.709-722)
There is metaphorical significance in Cupid \((Amor)\) inhabiting the form of Ascanius. Ascanius’ form here is the vehicle, by which Cupid/Amor gains access to Dido, but Ascanius himself is a vehicle for desire throughout the epic. There are three possibilities for how the trope of Cupid works: First Aeneas displays and transfers his attraction to Dido through his son. The gifts here serve to ingratiate him with Dido and to establish friendly ties with her. We could say that Aeneas’ intention, with which his gifts are infused, is represented by Venus’ commands to Amor to inflame the heart of the queen: \(pro\ dulci\ Ascanio\ veniat,\ donisque furentem\ /\ incendat\ reginam,\ atque\ ossibus\ implicet\ ignem\), “[Love] comes in the place of sweet Ascanius, and inflames the mad queen with gifts, and weaves fire through her bones” (1.659-660). In other words, Aeneas means to attract Dido, and Venus’ substitution of Cupid for Ascanius represents Aeneas’ use of Ascanius to attract Dido. The second possibility is that the gifts and Aeneas’ love of Ascanius attracts Dido and is part of what inflames her desire for Aeneas. Therefore Cupid, assuming the form of Ascanius in order to make Dido fall in love with Aeneas is a trope for Dido being drawn to Aeneas’ paternal concern. The third possibility is that Venus’ interference here represents mutual attraction.

Here Dido is unaware (\textit{inscia}) that desire is insinuating itself. Moreover, desire seeks her out (\textit{petit}), in order to rekindle the love in her heart that has long gone unused. The implication here too is that love and desire are free-floating and can be turned toward different objects. From Anna’s speech, we know Dido has many desires for herself and for her kingdom. Once Sychaeus is gone, her desire for a man awaits fulfillment and is reawakened by Venus via Cupid. To return to
and answer Nisus’ question: “dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt, / Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?”, “Do the gods instill this passion in our minds, or does each man’s fearsome desire become a god for him?” (9.184-85), it would appear in this passage that the gods instill desire in mortals, but that desire in the world of the Aeneid is a god that poses the danger of being worshipped obsessively. We see this happen to Dido, who tends only to her desire for Aeneas, as care for her kingdom and faithfulness to her oath to Sychaeus fall aside.

In his way Ascanius/Cupid is a dark and ominous gift, foreshadowing and bringing about the love that ruins Dido. The presentation of Ascanius/Cupid here has been likened to the Trojan Horse episode in Book 2 (2.13 ff.). From the Trojan Horse issues the very source of Troy’s destruction, just as the source of Dido’s demise (i.e. amando Aenean), namely Amor, emanates from Ascanius’ form. Moreover, just as the Trojans are blinded by their desire for the war to be over, which causes them to believe that a gift of destruction is a gift of protection, Dido too fails to perceive the ruin that Cupid/Ascanius bears.

Andromache calls her gifts to Ascanius monimenta. This is the same term applied to the horse Ascanius receives from Dido, who, like Andromache, bestows a gift upon him, out of love for someone else. Monimenta are primarily articles of remembrance, but monimentum, which contains the root mon-, also

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23 See Frangoulidis (1992) on the Trojan Horse and the duplicity of gifts. I will discuss the Trojan Horse further in Chapter 3.

24 The deceptive rhetoric of Sinon is especially appealing because it promises an end to war for the Trojans, who work hard to bring the horse into Troy despite the stalling of the horse and clanking of weapons within its belly (2.234 ff.).
connotes a warning. In *Aeneid* 5, during the funeral games for Anchises, Ascanius is seen leading the young men on a horse given to him by Dido, as a pledge of love, most likely love for Aeneas and not Ascanius: *quem candida Dido / esse sui dederat monimentum et pignus amoris*, “which fair Dido had given as a reminder of herself and pledge of her love” (5.571-2). The horse is a *monimentum* of Dido herself, as must be the bowl, which Dido gives to Ascanius, which appears among the things Ascanius offers Nisus (9.266). This gift of Dido’s precedes the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus. It invokes memories of fleeing Carthage, which they had eagerly prepared to leave once Aeneas gave word. In this way the gift has been interpreted quite differently from how it was intended. A gift that is supposed to invoke love and, as we should assume, favorable memories of a generous queen, instead conjure the relief of a close escape. Among other gifts presented to Dido by Aeneas, is the cloak of Helen, which foreshadows a disastrous marriage and tragic outcome of their love affair. As Helen’s abduction leads to a great war, the appearance of her cloak here foreshadows the war caused by the curse Dido invokes on Rome during Aeneas’ (6.628-9). The gifts from Dido, which Aeneas takes with him, also possess an ominous quality. Among them are two tunics, one of which Aeneas uses to wrap a deceased Pallas.

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25 See 9.245 in which Pallas’ belt is called *saeui monimenta doloris*. It is a remembrance of the vengeance of Danaus but it should also serve as a warning to Aeneas, who is about to commit an act of revenge similar to the one depicted.

26 Otis (1964) 67; Gross (2003/4) 140-41.
tum geminas vestis auroque ostroque rigentis
extulit Aeneas, quas illi laeta laborum
ipsa suis quondam manibus Sidonia Dido
fecerat et tenui telas discreverat auro.

Then Aeneas brought forth twin coverlets stiff with gold and purple
embroidery, which Sidonian Dido, happy in her work,
herself had once made for him with her own hands,
and she had interwoven the web with fine gold. (11.72-5)

There is a sense of foreboding, as we wonder when the other tunic will appear and
what tragedy will accompany that gift.28

Andromache’s gifts are warnings indeed and should function as a
cautionary tale for Dido, whose failure to learn from Andromache’s demonstrates
how the characters of the Aeneid, trapped in their world of phenomenal objects,
are doomed to a frustration of desire as long as they continue to embrace the
images of dead of objects of the past. Like Dido, Andromache at the departure of
the Trojans calls upon Ascanius to bear witness to her love for Hector:

“accipe et haec, manuum tibi quae monimenta mearum
sint, puer, et longum Andromachae testentur amorem,
coniugis Hectorae. cape dona extrema tuorum,
o mihi sola mei super Astyanactis imago.
sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat;
et nunc aequali tecum pubesceret aevo.”

“Also, receive these, which are memorials of my handiwork
for you, child, and bear witness to the long love of Andromache,
wife of Hector. Take these last gifts of yours,
O the only image for me of my Astyanax.
Thus he used to bear his eyes, his hands, his face;
and now he would be the same age as you.” (3.486-491)

27 For more on the connection between the Dido and Pallas via the mantle see Gross (2003/4) 143-
144. Gross also argues that Pallas is for Aeneas a “would-be heir, friend, brother, and son as well
as a reference point for the loss of Troy, Creusa, Dido, and Anchises – the quintessence of the cost
of his mission” Gross (2003/4) 146.

28 I owe this observation to my adviser, Will Batstone.
She addresses Ascanius in terms of her own son, Astyanax. She has focused her love for Asytanax on Ascanius, who is an image she has before herself. Also like Dido, Andromache shows affection to Ascanius and honors him with gifts, because he reminds her of her son and seems to provide an outlet for her excessive longing. What she wants to do is to lavish love upon her lost son and husband. Since she is unable to, she has an excess of passion, which she displaces and misplaces by giving gifts to Ascanius. These gifts take on part of her. What she expects in return is reprieve from her grief, and she gives gifts to Ascanius, in an attempt to unburden herself of her desire for her son and husband. Grimm remarks on this gift offering, “While the former dona, being offerings to the dead Hector, symbolized Andromache’s devotion to the past, the present dona, though given to a living Ascanius, are also woven from the fabric of past history; they are a Phrygian chlamys that is a material embodiment of that bygone time with which she literally wishes to clothe Ascanius.”

In bestowing gifts upon Ascanius, Andromache is misusing him as gift, because he is the image of those she loves.

Dido does the same, when she uses Ascanius, who is the very image of his father, in an attempt to deceive her passion. She literally embraces the image of what she desires:

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29 Andromache has embroidered in gold the cloak she bestows upon Ascanius. In making the gifts herself, she has infused them with something of herself. The physical investment she puts into them reflects the investment of her desire. Gifts that Dido bestows upon Aeneas are also her handiwork, including the cloak he wears when Mercury observes him in the city (Tyrioque ardebit murice laena / demissa ex umeris, dives quae munera Dido, 4.262-3). This, along with a bejeweled sword, is, in Dido’s view, a gift from a wife to a husband.

30 Grimm (1967) 160
Absent she hears him absent and sees him, or she keeps Ascanius in her lap seized by the image of his father, to see if she can deceive her unspeakable love. (4.83-5)

Dido sees and hears Aeneas despite their mutual absence. Absence and presence are indistinguishable. Her form of self-deception and attempt at consolation is heavily reliant upon sight and image. Like Andromache she sees what she wants in Ascanius’ image. She continues to believe in this form of consolation, when she later thinks if only Aeneas had left a son for her, that she would be less grieved. Here again she is relying on an image of Aeneas to satisfy her desire.

As we saw with Ascanius, gifts not only bear disaster because they fuel desire, but they can also be misused by the recipient because of desire. Dido uses gifts to pledge her love, such as the horse she gives to Ascanius or the sword and robe she give to Aeneas, but she also considers a gift of revenge. Reminiscent of Procne’s crime, Dido contemplates serving Ascanius to his father in a perversion of the gift and banquet (4.601-2). The sword, upon which Dido falls, is a gift from Aeneas to Dido: *conscendit furibunda rogos ensemque recludit / Dardanium, non hos quaesitum munus in usus*, “Mad, she climbs the pyre and discloses the Dardanian sword, not sought for such a purpose (4.646-47). 31 The sword she gave...
him, in turn, is used by Aeneas to cut the cables when Aeneas leaves Carthage, thereby symbolically severing the tie between Aeneas and Dido. Dido’s use and misuse of gifts and the way gifts act upon her reveal the way divine gifts function in the Aeneid. We see through her story how dangerous gifts from the gods can be and how heedless the gods can be of one individual over another in their personal interests and conflicts. Dido’s initial reception, that is, her reception of Cupid is not erroneous. She receives him as Venus intends her to receive him. Once she falls in love, however, her furor leads to a disastrous perversions of gift and desire that end in her demise.

The gifts from Dido and Andromache are reminders that the indulgence of one’s emotions and passions and love can bring death: in Dido’s case a forsaken kingdom and tragic suicide, and, in Andromache’s, a stagnant, lifeless, imitative repetition of what is truly desirable. Gifts in Aeneas’ world often foreshadow or are associated with death and destruction. Neither giver nor receiver is finally determinant, because some god is there. It is this god and his gifts that Augustine seeks, and it is this god, with whom he seeks to align his interpretation and his action. This discussion of gifts above anticipates the examination of gifts from God in the Confessions, in which everything is a gift from God, including human gifts, such as the stories told by Augustine’s friends (e.g. Simplicianus telling the story of Victorinus) with the goal of converting him and even the deceptive lies of Faustus, which contribute to Augustine’s conversion in spite of their original

32 Basto (1984) 334
33 Rogerson (2002) 63 Rogerson also notes the dangers of succumbing to desire for the polished perfection of heroes, in the cases of Dido and Narcissus.
intention. The omnipotence of Augustine’s God is lacking in the gods of the
*Aeneid*, which we shall see demonstrated by their struggle to interpret the signs
and messages of the gods sent to them in the ambiguous gifts of omens, oracles,
and dreams.

**IV. ORACLES AND OMENS: THE PROBLEM OF THE GODS**

**The Problem of Prophecy**

In the *Aeneid* prophecy in the form of oracles and omens, like the gifts discussed
above, poses a problem for the interpreter or recipient, in part because the desire
of the recipient can cause misinterpretation. Reception of prophecy in the *Aeneid*
can also be misread because the prophecies themselves are misleading,
ambiguous, or simply contain lies. O’Hara points out many inconsistencies
concerning prophecies in the *Aeneid*, which he considers intentionally used by
Vergil to paint a certain picture of Aeneas’ world:

> Vergil uses these deceptively optimistic prophecies to depict a
world where man cannot know or face the truth, where perception
is clouded by misinformation, and where hopeful expectation is
repeatedly frustrated by grimmer reality.\(^{34}\)

The falsehoods and inconsistencies present in oracles call into question their
reliability in directing action. Even if the interpretation of the recipient is clear
and unclouded by desire, how can he know if the gods are lying or not? Mack

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\(^{34}\) O’Hara (1990) 4. O’Hara does not completely dismiss the possibility that some of these
inconsistencies in prophecy are due to Vergil’s failure to finish editing the *Aeneid* before his death.
For examples of the false and misleading prophecies in the *Aeneid*, including those of Creusa,
Helenus, Apollo, Tiberinus, Venus, and Anchises, see O’Hara (1990) 121.
makes the important observation that many of the events that these prophecies concern, such as the *res laetae* that await Aeneas as prophesied by Creusa or Aeneas’ death as told by Jupiter to Venus, do not happen within the text of the *Aeneid*. Therefore even the reader is left in the dark.

It is possible that the messages from the gods are incomplete or dishonest, because they do not trust mortal resolve alone to persevere in the face of sure death or catastrophe. Therefore they rely on lying and dissembling to persuade mortals to action out of necessity. As O’Hara has pointed out, oracles resemble rhetoric in that they are used to persuade the recipient. Mack works around this by redefining prophecy, in what appears as almost a defense of divine deception:

> Prophecy in the *Aeneid* is not, then, merely an anonymous statement of what will take place, an inflexible something fixed by fate; it is a statement of the shapes the future may assume, or be given, through the hopes, fears, or designs of the prophet. As an instrument of education, as in the present instance [Mercury to Aeneas, 4.272-76], it will be shaped by the speaker to suit the needs of the recipient.\(^{36}\)

Even if this is the case, prophecies then must be reduced to mere instruments of motivation heedless of any central truth. Hight argues that the distortions of the truth in speeches of the *Aeneid* reveal Vergil’s distrust of oratory and argues that this is a recurring characteristic of speeches in epic: “The speeches of Homer’s (and Vergil’s) characters are not objective statements, but subjective utterances. A

\(^{35}\) Mack (1978) 57

\(^{36}\) Mack (1978) 63. Moreover, Mack sees a pattern of the pessimism of the prophecies increasing only as Aeneas’ fortitude increases, implying again that the prophecy is made to suit to recipient. Mack (1978) 67
man says what he feels, or what he believes at the time, or what he wishes his
hearers to believe.” Moreover, though they assist Aeneas in accomplishing his
mission, their ambiguities and personal desires seem to lead him through
unnecessary hardship.

**Anchises**

Because Ascanius is a symbol of the future, he is ominous and easily associated
with omens. During the burning of Troy he is directly tied to an omen when a
flame appears above his head, a pivotal moment, because it moves Anchises from
hesitation to action and convinces him of the survival of the Trojans. Thereafter
Anchises becomes an unwavering guide to Aeneas, whose convictions are less
firm. Although Anchises is determined, it does not make his guidance infallible
for two reasons: the ambiguity of the oracles and the desire of the recipient. Even
as a shade, Anchises gives incomplete prophecies, which contradict those of
Jupiter and leave out the hardship Aeneas is to encounter.

Oracles and omens, as we saw with gifts are objects upon which desire can
be projected, sometimes with disastrous results. Anchises’ misinterpretation of
Apollo’s oracle in Book 3 is an example of the erroneous reception that desire can
cause. As Quint points out, death meets Aeneas and his men at every erroneous
attempt to settle a new Troy. The first is the Aeneadae at Thrace. They make

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37 Highet (1972) 286. See also Sinon’s speech for a truly devious intent to deceive (2.57ff.).

38 Perhaps the most well-known narrative of misinterpretation of oracles guided by perverse desire
is the story of Croesus in Herodotus’ *Histories*.

39 On Buthrotum Quint writes, “But to live in the past is to inhabit a state of death, and death
haunts the Trojan’s first attempted settlements” (1982) 32.
offering to Venus, but she fails to protect this unsanctioned endeavor. Not long after it is settled the Trojans meet with a terrible omen in Polydorus. The second, named Pergamum, is settled in Crete in response to Apollo’s oracle to seek out the Trojans’ ancient mother (antiquam exquirite matrem, 3.96). Quint sees Anchises pietas as so much attached to the past that does not permit a fresh start: “Anchises’ application of the oracle to Crete suggests a desire for what is familiar and recognizable from the Trojan past rather than a willingness to confront a new and unknown future.” At Pergamum they are driven out by pestilence (3.137). The misinterpretation of the oracle results from both the ambiguity of Apollo and the ignorance of the humans.

If divine signs were always misleading, they would not be so problematic. The trouble is they are beneficial, just as often as they are misleading. Signs from the gods often encourage or reveal helpful information to the recipient. For example, following Anchises’ misinterpretation of Apollo’s oracle, the penates, sent by Apollo without being consulted, tell Aeneas not to abandon his journey and reveal that what is meant by the ancient motherland is Hesperia (3.154 ff.). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the ambiguities in messages from the gods, but this scene certainly begs the question: if Apollo means for Aeneas to know his destination, why does Apollo not make his meaning clear from the beginning?

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40 See Quint (1982) 32. For more on the political implications of this forgetting and how it applies to Rome after the civil war, see pp.35-7.
Some scholars argue that the gods deceive *in order* to urge a hero along. Michels concludes, “If my interpretation is correct, Vergil must have agreed with Horace that God deliberately conceals the future from mortal men, who should not be unduly concerned with it, but cope with the present.”

Following the funeral games held in honor of Anchises in Sicily, Aeneas is once again distracted by an attractive settlement and deliberates whether to settle the friendly territory (5.700-703). Aeneas’ consideration of settling in Sicily reveals his weariness more than a neglect of *pietas*. Moreover, Aeneas’ wise and aged friend, Nautes, who is distinguished in his ability to discern the will of the gods, recommends that he leave the weak and weary behind (5.709 ff.). This time Anchises’ shade visits Aeneas to urge him on, after the burning of the ships has lowered his spirits considerably. Anchises points him to the underworld, where he will reveal to Aeneas all that is in store for the distant future. It has been observed, however, that Aeneas has no recollection of this experience, for when he sees the shield, which depicts the feats of these heroes, he does not know them: *rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet*, “he rejoices not knowing the image of things [depicted] (8.730).

Michels distinguishes between two kinds of prophecy, those that concern the short term and deal with present difficulties and those that deal with long-term history and are aimed at the Roman audience, such as Jupiter’s remarks to Venus about Aeneas living only three more years after he arrives in Hesperia

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43 Michels (1981) 140-143
Since Aeneas never hears the prophecy of Jupiter, it does not affect him. In fact, he is told a prophecy by Anchises in the underworld that seems to contradict Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus.\textsuperscript{45}

There are other times in the \textit{Aeneid} when oracles seem purposefully misleading for the purpose of encouraging the hero. Aeneas is told by Helenus (mouthpiece of Apollo) and Tiberinus to appease and make offerings to Juno:

\begin{verbatim}
praedicam et repetens iterumque iterumque monebo,  
lunonis magnae primum prece numen adora,  
lunoni cane vota libens dominamque potentem  
supplicibus supera donis.
\end{verbatim}

I foretell and warn you repeating again and again,  
Worship the divinity of great Juno first with a prayer,  
Pledge your vows to Juno willingly and conquer  
The powerful mistress with a suppliant’s gifts. (3.436-39)

After Tiberinus prophesies about the white sow and the location of the future city, he too bids Aeneas to do the same:

\begin{verbatim}
Iunoni fer rite preces, iramque minasque  
supplicibus supera votis.
\end{verbatim}

Offer fitting prayers to Juni, conquer both her anger and threats with offerings of a suppliant. (8.60-61)

Tiberinus comforts Aeneas by telling him that the omen of the sow and her great litter will indicate an end to his toils: \textit{hic locus urbis erit, requies ea certa laborum}, “Here is the location of your city, this is certain rest from your labors” (8.46), but the battle for Italy has only just begun. Both times Aeneas does as he is told and after he discovers the sow and her litter, he sacrifices them to Juno, but in

\textsuperscript{44} Michels (1981) 146

\textsuperscript{45} See O’Hara (1990) 91-94 for a discussion of this contradiction.
vain. Juno’s anger will not be mollified, and she will continue to wreak havoc for the Trojans. If Aeneas cannot depend upon his obedience of these direct commands, what sure direction does he have?

Aeneas gains the knowledge required to progress through his journey through the oracles, omens, and dreams given to him by gods and humans, speaking on behalf of the gods. These messages from the gods, however, are easily misinterpreted because of the desire of the recipient. They are necessary for moving action forward but also unreliable, because they can be ambiguous, misleading, and deceptive. In Augustine’s *Confessions* the cause for misinterpretation lies wholly with the human recipient. Moreover, correct interpretation and human compliance is not necessary in Augustine’s conception of receiving divine messages, since all events are controlled by God and manipulated to his good ends. This is reflective of the grace through which God bestows the gift of conversion. The problem of reception is due to erroneous human perception, however, although that is part of the conversion process, it is still ultimately God’s grace that leads man to his fate. In accordance with this Christian journey of grace, the need for knowledge in the *Aeneid* is replaced by faith in the *Confessions*. As we shall see, all Augustine needs is the humility of a child to have to truth revealed to him (*Conf.* 3.5.9, 8.2.3). In fact, desire for knowledge can quickly deteriorate into an excessive and perverse curiosity (*Conf.*10.35.54). Visions, dreams, and other signs from God are consoling, but they are never construed as a necessity in Augustine’s conversion. As we shall see, his conversion is a result of the grace of God and the *caritas* of others.
V. PIETAS: THE UNATTAINABLE OBJECT OF DESIRE

Overview of Pietas

Pietas, as an object of desire, guides reception, and it acts as the chief force behind Aeneas’ actions. Pietas has its own objects, as well. More specifically, Aeneas desires to live by pietas, and the objects of that pietas include Troy, Ascanius, and the will of the gods to fulfill his fate. Although pietas is one means of directing desire, it does not prove to bring fruition of desire any more successfully than attempts to embrace images and substitutes, because, instead of focusing and conducting desire to a clear object, pietas actually complicates and fractures desire. This is because pietas definition stipulates loyalty to the gods, country, and family.46 Should any of these three conflicts with one another or cause conflict in and of itself (such as loyalty to more than one god or person) pietas becomes problematic as a means of guidance and impossible to attain.

Pietas, in and of itself, is not desire. It is a sense of duty, which can direct, oppose, or even reveal desire. It can also be the object of desire, as it is for Aeneas. Pietas often involves the desire to do one’s duty while sacrificing the fulfillment of another desire. Consequently the following complication arises: the desire that is to be suppressed in order to fulfill pietas is determined by the outcome of an action. The pietas of the action is also determined by the outcome. This cyclical self-determining cycle makes defining specific acts of pietas a rather slippery task. The addition of fate complicates matters further. For example, the

46 Lee derives this definition from various passages of Cicero, see (1979) 18. For an overview of all the occurrences of pietas in Cicero’s works and how many references there are to gods, country, and family, see Michels (1997) 405 ff.
outcome of Aeneas’ journey is that he leaves Carthage and battles victoriously for a new homeland; this success is what turns an action, such as leaving Carthage, into an act of *pietas*. Most of his actions that bring about this outcome are characterized as *pius* actions. Because the Carthaginian Wars eventually do take place, they justify Aeneas’ leaving Carthage and Dido behind. The problem is that his abandonment of Dido results in the curse in the first place, which causes the wars themselves. By this it is demonstrated that *pietas* leads to the events, which result in the outcomes, which, in turn, determine whether an action is in line with *pietas*. *Pietas* cannot be separated out of history. It stands in history and is determined by the very events it sets into motion, the success of which, in turn, determines *pietas*. To succumb to anything in the course of history, which opposes any of these successes, is, in turn, to embody something that is the opposite of *pietas*. So, *pietas* is determined not by an internal dynamics of right and wrong but by the outcomes an action may have. This will apply and problematize the obstacles to *pietas* that arise for Aeneas.

Various threats arise throughout the *Aeneid* that impede Aeneas’ willingness or ability to uphold *pietas*. I will examine three in detail. The first notable obstacle is Aeneas’ desire for his former *patria*. The second is the divisive nature of *pietas*, that has Aeneas torn by conflicting loyalties, in addition to which he struggles with his own *furor*. I will examine these conflicts through the episode of Turnus’ slaughter; the third is Dido, whose temptations and *furor* pose on obstacle to Aeneas’ fulfillment of his fate.
**Pietas, Patria, and the Past**

Before Aeneas’ tour of the underworld, he struggles with crippling nostalgia and an inordinate sense of *pietas* toward the past. Although Aeneas’ primary desire throughout the *Aeneid* is to live by the *pietas*, which characterizes him, he can be seen at various points struggling with his torn loyalties. One could argue that Aeneas’ adherence to his fatherland and his dead companions is due to an unbalanced sense of *pietas*,\(^{47}\) which has given the past too much weight and handicaps his ability to hope in the future.

Otis points out that Cicero distinguishes the *patria* as the preeminent object of *pietas*, and therefore “to the Roman mind neither family nor local gods (in short, familial *pietas*) could properly exist without a *patria*”.\(^{48}\) Anchises exhibits *pietas* toward his former *patria* most notably when he refuses to leave Troy, as it is being destroyed. He is able, however, to redirect his *pietas*, upon seeing the omens in Book 2. Aeneas’ grip on his Trojan past can be interpreted as an unbalanced lingering of *pietas* towards his fatherland. In order to continue to demonstrate *pietas* toward a *patria*, he must form connections to a new *patria* and

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\(^{47}\) In the second chapter I will discuss the direction Aeneas is given early on with regards to his *pietas*, specifically where he must direct his *pietas* when Troy is about to destroyed.

\(^{48}\) Otis (1964), 245. See Michels (1997) 405-6 for a detailed account of the occurrences of *pietas* in the works of Cicero. Along with these and some citation of Catullus and Nepos, Michels determines that the order of importance for the three objects of *pietas*. Gods, which are least mentioned are the lowest on the list, followed by people/family, and *patria*, which is most often spoken of in conjunction with *pietas* would be the most important object, to which one should direct *pietas*. This hierarchy explains why *pius* Aeneas would only have vengeance for his fatherland on his mind as Troy is burning and why his desire would so often be directed back to his former homeland. This does not, however, solve the conflict that a *pius* individual would experience in having three objects that demand his loyalty.
leave the memory of his former patria behind. Anchises, whom Otis calls “the very embodiment of the new pietas and Rome and the future” and “the great symbol of conscience,” is the agent of this integration. Remember, however, Anchises struggled with his own attachments to the past before he left Troy and in his misinterpretation of oracles. In a sense even Aeneas’ seeking out of Hesperia is a return to the past, but this return is the basis of the claim that Latium is his future patria:

“Dardanidae duri, quae vos a stirpe parentum prima tuit tellus, eadem vos ubere laeto accipiet reduces. antiquam exquirite matrem. hic domus Aeneae cunctis dominabitur oris et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis.’

‘O harsh Dardan, return to the land, who first bore you, the same land will receive you again in her joyful bosom. Seek out your ancient mother. Here the house of Aeneas will rule all shores and the sons of his sons and those who are born from them.’ (3.94-8)

In this way his desires for the past are reconciled with the movement forward into the future, which is actually a movement backward to a past even further than the one Aeneas longs for. The same desire to integrate past with future is expressed in Aeneas’ hope that one day he and Helenus and all the Trojan survivors will reunite under one Troy (3.502-3). This reference to the future is actually a backward glance and longing for the former Troy, made up of people, who are

49 Otis makes this point about Anchises, but I believe it applies to Aeneas, as well. He also draws a distinction between the brands of pietas felt by each, labeling Aeneas’ pietas “filial” and Anchises’ “Trojan-patriotic” and a unification of pietas toward the past and future. Wiltshire, in a compatible reading, regards Aeneas’ pietas as an integration of public and private forms of pietas.

50 Otis (1964), 250
scattered now but once shared one founder, Dardanus (503-4). Thus, the kingdom Aeneas is to found is a meeting of the past and future, and this is solidified and clarified by the meeting with his father in the underworld. Weary and devastated, however, by the time Aeneas encounters Anchises, he seems ready to remain with him. We see Aeneas’ despondency, when he questions the desire of the souls to return to life in the upper world: “quae lucis miseris tam dira cupido?”, “Why do these wretches have so fearsome a desire for the light?” (6.721).

By the time he arrives in the underworld, it is becoming clear that to Aeneas that he must give up his nostalgic longings. His first meetings with Deiphobus, Dido, and Palinurus represent the past and a progression backwards in time. At this stage Aeneas is still clinging to the past and must be drawn away from his conversation with Deiphobus by the Sibyl, who warns him that they are wasting time in their weeping (6.539). At her words Deiphobus turns away. Dido, likewise, is turned away (aversa) from Aeneas. There is no reconciliation possible with the past. They indicate clearly that the true destiny of Troy now lies in the future. After these meetings Anchises shows Aeneas the future.

Once the past has literally turned its back on Aeneas, he has the opportunity to view his future, the very history that his pietas is aimed at forming. He is shown the brilliant line of leaders that will follow his success in Latium. Anchises has him direct his eyes upon the parade of heroes. After detailing the extent of the empire Augustus will achieve, Anchises warns him neither to hesitate nor to have fear (6.806-7). This is the purpose of Aeneas’ guided tour – to instill in Aeneas to desire to move forward. He does this by displaying the future,
for which Aeneas is to fight. Thus, the past represented by Anchises guides Aeneas to the future, and the shades point to the reality he must embrace in place of a dead past. These souls are different from the ghosts that Aeneas must leave behind in Troy, because they exist in the future, thereby promising Aeneas some hope of fruition. The line of descendants represents his hope, but unlike hope, which is typically unseen, here his hope materializes before him. Accepting Italy as his new fatherland, before even stepping foot on its soil, is essential, so that Aeneas may direct his pietas at it and persevere in his journey to Hesperia. But does Anchises’ tour make any difference? As discussed above there is some debate as to whether Aeneas even remembers his underworld experience. If we accept Michels’ argument that he does not, then there is no change brought about by his meeting with Anchises. I would argue that, although Aeneas’ is no longer seen sighing over his past after his katabasis, that he does not exhibit a change in will or desire either. He is characterized as pious from the start, and, with the exception of lingering too long in Carthage, all his actions point to his pietas.

In looking at this first obstacle of Aeneas’ mission, we see Aeneas misdirect his pietas to a dead patria rather than a future kingdom. For Augustine the parallel to this obstacle will be a loyalty focused on his friends and concubine rather than God (Conf. 4.8.13). He too will struggle with relinquishing the objects of desire in his past in order to replace them with God. The difference is that once Augustine arrives to his destination, he will find the fulfillment promised him,

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51 Similarly Creusa points Aeneas to his future before he reluctantly leaves Troy. I will explore Creusa’s role further in Chapter 2.
whereas Aeneas arrives at Hesperia only to meet with more hardship and loss. This is because the objects in the pagan world of the *Aeneid* are fleeting and temporary and fail to offer any permanent satisfaction.

**Turnus**

Aeneas’ *pietas* may be successfully redirected in the underworld, but the troubles of reception and desire are not left behind in the underworld. The desire to live by *pietas* becomes problematic for Aeneas when he too is overcome by *furor*, and no scene in the second half of the *Aeneid* calls into question Aeneas’ *pietas* more than the killing of Turnus. He emerges from the underworld only to encounter fresh challenges to his fortified *pietas*. *Pietas* proves elusive and unattainable. Its fulfillment will frustrate Aeneas repeatedly. As Johnson grimly puts it, “*Pietas* is helpless to save what it most desires: peace, human life. *Pietas* is at last defeated by discord, anger, and fate.”

Generally speaking the views on *pietas* and, specifically, Turnus’ killing have fallen in line with the pessimistic and optimistic schools of Vergilian criticism. The latter, as embodied by Otis’ reading, considers Aeneas’ *furor* as compatible with his *pietas*. The former, as represented by Williams, see Aeneas’ killing of Turnus, as a suppliant, as raising the question of whether Aeneas succeeds or fails in upholding *pietas*. Otis reads Aeneas’ killing of Turnus positively, considering his action not only in line with his fate and *pietas* but integral to its realization: “Pallas is the object of a *pietas* that not only

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52 Johnson (1965) 362

53 Otis (1964) 351. For other positive readings, see McLeish (1972) and Quint (1993) 78-9 in which he reads vengeance as interconnected with *pietas*.

54 Williams (1982) 54-56.
coincides with Aeneas’ destiny but supplies the emotional power that Aeneas needs to realize it.”\textsuperscript{55} Wiltshire, who has examined \textit{pietas} in terms of a progression from fulfillment of private \textit{pietas} to public \textit{pietas}, sees the problem of \textit{pietas} as a failure to properly integrate the two.\textsuperscript{56} Gross paints an even darker portrait of Aeneas, calling the fulfillment of his mission a sacrifice of his identity and humanity.\textsuperscript{57} Burnell entertains the idea that Aeneas might be doing the right deed in killing Turnus, though for the wrong reason and in the wrong state of mind.\textsuperscript{58} Johnson tries to strike a balance between wholly condemning Aeneas for killing Turnus, by arguing that killing Turnus could not be avoided, due to the \textit{pietas} owed Evander for Pallas’ death, but, as he remarks, “What frustrates Aeneas’ compassion is not so much Turnus’ guilt as his own disillusionment – his noble hopes blasted at every turn, his nature constrained to violate itself.”\textsuperscript{59} Despite Aeneas’ struggle to abide by \textit{pietas}, it is \textit{furor} in the end that overcomes him and drives him to his final action of the epic. Burnell comes to the moderate yet decidedly negative conclusion that Aeneas’ action, though not unjustified, is “intemperate”\textsuperscript{60} and has “wrongful loss of self-control as part of its essence.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{55} Otis (1964) 351
\textsuperscript{56} Wiltshire (1989) 135-138
\textsuperscript{57} Gross (1987) 154
\textsuperscript{58} Burnell (1987) 197
\textsuperscript{59} Johnson (1965) 363
\textsuperscript{60} Burnell (1987) 193
\textsuperscript{61} Burnell (1987) 194
Putnam’s reading of Aeneas’ action is resignedly negative, concluding that the scene embodies that “balanced intertwining of progress and hurt” which “reminds us not only of the suffering that any progress brings but of the humanness of all those who wield arms.” 62

Aeneas’ slaughter of Mago in Book 10 prefaces his killing of Turnus, which brings the epic to a close. In response to Mago’s offer of silver and gold, he reacts out of anger and vengeance fresh from Turnus’ slaughter of Pallas:

'argenti atque auri memoras quae multa talenta
gnatis parce tuis. belli commercia Turnus
sustulit ista prior iam tum Pallante perempto.
hoc patris Anchisae manes, hoc sentit Iulus.'

‘The many talents of gold and silver you mention – save them for your sons. Turnus did away with those negotiations of war just now when he killed Pallas. The manes of father Anchises feel this, Iulus feels this.’
(10.531-534)

His response is passionate and immediate. He pays no heed to Mago’s entreaties and slaughters him without hesitation.

By the time we reach the end of the epic, it seems possible that this initial furor might have abated. At Turnus’ plea Aeneas pauses and is on the verge of relenting: et iam iamque cunctantem flectere sermo / coeperat, “the speech began to move him more and more as he hesitated” (12.940-1), until he spies the belt of Pallas. This is the decisive moment before Turnus’ slaughter. Ironically, if Aeneas were to look closer, he would see a crime similar to the one he is committing. The belt depicts an act of revenge, in which the fifty daughters of

62 Putnam (1995) 164, 166
Danaus slaughter their bridegrooms at their father’s request. Aeneas’ killing of Turnus complicates the hope of a straightforward concept of *pietas* in the *Aeneid*. In the end Aeneas must make a choice between two competing forms of *pietas*. When Aeneas kills Turnus in an unequal contest at the end of the poem, he is choosing to abide by the form of *pietas* that charges him to avenge Pallas, but in doing so, he must disregard the *pietas* that would lead him to show mercy to a suppliant on the battlefield, which was part of Anchises’ injunction to Aeneas in the underworld: “*parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*”, “spare the conquered and fight down the proud” (6.853). Also, since Turnus has surrendered in front of all the Ausonians, there is no necessity for Aeneas to kill him. This final episode leaves Aeneas still unable to fulfill his desire to live out his *pietas*. Were he to obey Anchises’ command and spare Turnus, he would be neglecting the *pietas* directed to Evander and Pallas. In giving into the passions brought on by his loyalty to them and killing Turnus, he has disregarded *pietas* for his father. Either choice could be *impius*. In the end we see him torn by the very concept that seems to promise answers to his conflicting desires. The epic ends thus, leaving wide open the question as to how to fulfill the desire to be *pius*, especially when feelings of loyalty that stem from *pietas* can so quickly and ironically deteriorate into *furor*.

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63 See Putnam (1995) 157, in which he writes, “Aeneas now absorbs the symbolism of the scene Turnus has donned and kills in a burst of passionate vengeance.”

64 Putnam (1995) 155
To abide by *pietas* is Aeneas’ chief object of desire, but, like all other objects of desire in the *Aeneid*, it proves elusive and unattainable, both because of its fractured and divisive nature and because it is met with opposition in the *furor* of Dido, of Aeneas himself, and ultimately of Juno. The *furor* of the *Aeneid* represents for Augustine the passions and habits that chain him to his past even in his post-conversion state, but just as with the reception of gifts, he contends with only his own reception. He must be willing to receive the strength God is willing to provide him to free him from the constraints of vice. No matter where or how far he strays, God through Scripture provides him with a fixed truth by which to judge his actions. *Pietas* does not offer a constant standard, by which Aeneas may evaluate his actions, because it is determined by so many different variables, including gods in conflict, *patria*, family, and one’s own personal sense, which is so often confused by desire. Augustine will offer an answer to the problem of the *pietas* of the pagan world by offering a new form of *pietas* established by a unified God, who not only sets the standard and model to live by, but supplies the strength to obey in them as well.

**Dido: the Failed Substitute**

Before Aeneas yields to his own *furor* in the final battle with Turnus, he encounters another form of *furor* in Dido, who also threatens his adherence to *pietas*. McLeish points out that the oldest and best view of Dido is that “she is in the *Aeneid* principally to emphasize Aeneas’ *pietas.*”\(^{65}\) In so many ways Dido offers a contrast to Aeneas and poses an obstacle to his mission: her desire for

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\(^{65}\) McLeish (1972) 127
him interferes with his fate; she eventually becomes the embodiment of *furor*, while he is characterized by *pietas*; she gives in to her personal passions, whereas Aeneas resists his own. Dido’s oath to her dead husband anchors her to the past and she abandons it, while Aeneas is bound to the future by an unacknowledged desire for duty and fate.

After Cupid inflames Dido with love for Aeneas, Dido claims that Aeneas is the only one to move her since her husband and that she “recognizes the vestiges of the old flame”: “*agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*” (4.23). The use of *veteris* and *vestigia* to describe her passion is important to note. They imply that the flame of passion has always existed for her, and it is merely simmering, while waiting to be rekindled; but it never dies away, nor does it arise all of the sudden from the appearance of a love object alone. Desire continues to exist without an object. Dido is able to now take the same desire that she had invested in Sychaeus and transfer it to a new object.

The catalog of Dido’s desires is given voice by Anna’s speech (4.31ff.): companionship; children; a lover, who moves her heart; the security of her kingdom; protection from her brother; glory for Carthage. We see her initially clinging to the oath she swore never to love another after her husband (4.15-7). If not for this oath, Dido would yield. The oath is for Dido what Hesperia is for Aeneas. It is her duty to abide by it, and doing so reflects her *pudor*, just as Aeneas’ perseverance demonstrates his *pietas*. The conflict of duty and desire is as weighty issue for Dido as it is for Aeneas. Anna’s words give her hope and free her from shame (4.55). Ironically Anna’s rational entreaty fuels Dido’s irrational
frenzy, by justifying what Dido wants. Dido’s failure to live by her pudor and to give into her passion over duty and allegiance ultimately leads to her demise. This contrasts with Aeneas’ adherence to his sense of duty and pietas.

There are many reasons for Dido to desire Aeneas. She has founded a kingdom, which she must diligently strive to protect. Hemmed in on all sides threatened by hostile barbarians and a vengeful brother, she stands to gain security from the presence of the Trojans and their heroic reputation. As a lonely widow, lacking a formidable male authority figure beside her and an heir, she sees that Aeneas can provide both. The fact that she offers to share her kingdom with the Trojans as a whole, before meeting and falling in love with Aeneas, indicates that she does not necessarily need a husband. She needs men, and not just any men (presumably there are men in Carthage), but men with a heroic résumé. Furthermore, she is in a position to identify with and assist the Trojans. They have been ousted from their kingdom to find another, just as she has been. They are seeking to found another kingdom, a task in which she has already partially succeeded.

Dido, by asking Aeneas to recount his experiences offers a screen onto which Aeneas can project what he truly desires. In this way she turns herself into an object of his desire:

infelix Dido, longumque bibebat amorem,
multa super Priamo rogitans, super Hectore multa;
nunc quibus Aurorae venisset filius armis,
nunc quales Diomedis equi, nunc quantus Achilles.

Unhappy Dido, was drinking in her long love,
asking many things about Priam, many things about Hector;
asking now with what arms had the son of Aurora come, and then what Diomedes’ horses were like, then how great Achilles was. (1.749-752)

This will not, however, completely succeed in making Dido an enduring object of desire for Aeneas. In this particular case, as a screen for Aeneas’ desires, she may temporarily be Aeneas’ object of desire, but, as a screen, she is just that, a medium for reflecting images back at him. She can offer him consolation, praise, and commiseration, but she lacks what he needs to live by pietas, namely, the future kingdom of Rome. Therefore, she is infelix in this position, because her desire for Aeneas will lead to her ruin. Just as Dido does not satisfy Aeneas’ desires by acting as a screen, upon which he may project his desire, Aeneas cannot satisfy Dido simply with his stories, for it is not the story that Dido longs to hear, but rather the narrator who is telling it. She is not sated by hearing the story once but seeks the same stories again and again and hangs on the words that issue from the teller’s lips: Iliacosque iterum demens audire labores / exposcit pendetque iterum narrantis ab ore (4.78-9).66 In this way the stories are Aeneas’ response to her desire or even a gift to her from Aeneas. In return, she offers him the screen against which he can see the past he longs for replayed and the consolation he think he saw on the temple walls.

On every level Dido fails to fulfill her desires, embracing images of Aeneas, which all fail to materialize. She fails to stay faithful to her husband; she loses Aeneas’ love and the protection his settling in Carthage will offer; and she

66 Because Book 2 and 3 of the Aeneid are being told by Aeneas to Dido, there is a reception of Aeneas’ narrative happening that, in turn, excites desire in Dido. This idea of reception of a narrative will be explored in detail in Ch. 2.
left no consolation in the form of a child. In vain she embraces Ascanius, the image of his father, in an attempt to sate her passion. Khan, among others, notes the existence of parallels between Dido and Amata, rather than Dido and Lavinia, which highlights her unsuitability as a spouse for Aeneas.\textsuperscript{67} Just as Amata, possessed by Allecto, fights for a marriage that is not fated to occur, Dido fights for the one she claims with Aeneas. She calls her arrangement with Aeneas a marriage, so as to cover up her guilt: \textit{coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam}, “she calls it marriage, and covers her fault with this name” (4.172), a contract Aeneas denies ever having entered into: “\textit{nec coniugis umquam / praetendi taedas aut haec in foedera veni}”, “nor have I ever held the torches of matrimony or entered into this contract” (4.338-9). In the end we see the perversion of this ambiguous marriage, with her death pyre acting as an enormous wedding torch.\textsuperscript{68} Even death does not seem to bring an end the sorrow that stems from her feeling of loss. Aeneas finds her in the \textit{Lugentes campi} among those wasted by “cruel love” (\textit{durus amor}, 6.442). She has reclaimed the marriage to which she swore devotion, and Sychaeus responds to her love with love: \textit{respondet curis aequatque Sychaeus amorem}, “Sychaeus responds to her with concern and gives her back love for love” (6.474). Dido, nevertheless, still grieves her loss of Aeneas. She is freshly wounded (\textit{recens a vulnere}, 6.450), not just from the sword but from Aeneas’ abandonment, and she is hostile (\textit{inimica})


\textsuperscript{68} Segal (1990) 9
toward him. Even in death, she clings to the material past, to which Aeneas still belongs, and it is this material reality that causes her to grieve. Anchises is also in the underworld, but we know he is located in the Elysium Fields, among the pious, not sad, shades (5.733-35). Unlike Dido, we find him, not immersed in the past, but rather concerned with the future.

**Aeneas and Dido**

Before Aeneas meets Dido, he is already prepared to view her favorably by an encounter with his mother (1.314 ff.). In her account of Dido’s struggles up to that point, Venus gives Aeneas every reason to hope he will find an empathetic person in the queen. If he has any doubts on that score, his concerns are put to rest by the portrayal of the Trojans experiences depicted on the walls of Juno’s temple. Venus tells him of Dido’s tragic history and flourishing kingdom (1.340 ff.). The shared experiences of losing their spouses, being displaced from their kingdoms, and having to find new homes should also reassure Aeneas of a favorable reception. The difference between them is that Dido has already accomplished some of what Aeneas is seeking. The first view that Aeneas has of Dido is a propitious one. Hidden in a cloud that Venus casts about him, Aeneas watches her without her knowledge. Dido is described as having a very lovely figure (1.496), positioned in the center of an admiring throng (1.497), and is situated in such way, that she can be seen capably and competently governing her city (1.504 ff.). The account of the brief meeting that follows foreshadows the

69 For a reading of this scene through the issue of focalization, see Fowler (2000) 54-58.

70 For more on the connection between these two encounters, see Otis (1964) 65; Williams (1983); Oliensis (1997) 306
events of Aeneas’ stay in Carthage. When she arrives, Aeneas is captivated by the events of Troy as depicted on the wall of the temple to Juno (1.494-5). The description is filled with verbs of fascination and vision: miranda, videntur, haeret, stupet, and defixus. His gaze and rapt attention are utterly bound and fixed to those images on the wall, but when Dido arrives, the focus is quickly shifted to her.\(^71\) She is situated in the middle of a throng, and she is seen exercising her authorial powers. Presumably Aeneas sees her too, but there is no verb that indicates that he does see her; in fact, there is no verb at all indicating any action on Aeneas’ part with respect to Dido. Although, the gaze of the audience/reader is drawn to Dido and although we are encouraged to view her as attractive, there is never any mention of what emotions she might rouse in Aeneas. After the cloud is lifted from Aeneas, and he and Dido have had the opportunity to speak, her compassion is still evident, when she sends animals and wine down to his men on the beach (1.633-6).

Dido’s desirability is accentuated by her position in the banquet and hunting scenes. Just as her introduction positions her in the middle, other scenes do the same. She is prominently portrayed, beautifully depicted, and luxuriously ornamented (1.698), (1.133ff.). Her appearance before the hunt is accentuated by the anticipation produced by her delay in her room:

\[
\text{reginam thalamo cunctantem ad limina primi}
\]
\[
\text{Poenorum exspectant, ostroque insignis et auro}
\]
\[
\text{stat sonipes ac frena ferox spumantia mandit.}
\]
\[
\text{tandem progreditur magna stipante caterva}
\]

\(^71\) See Fowler (2000)
The first of the Carthaginians wait for the queen at the threshold
While she hesitates in her chamber, and with ornaments of purple
and gold. Her steed stands fiercely biting down foaming at the bit
At last she advances with a great crowd pressing round. (4.133-6)

All elements of this scene point to her desirability. Her entrance recalls Aeneas’
first sight of her among a crowd of followers. Her horse, richly bedecked in
purple and gold, reminds us of her lavish banquet. The crowd eagerly awaiting
her arrival demonstrates their adoration of her and reverence for her authority.
Her hesitation in her room is addressed in detail by Charles Segal, as the action of
a young bride, though she is not aware of the events to come. In all descriptions
of Dido we have every reason to assume that she appears attractive and desirable
to Aeneas.

In spite of just having met beautiful Dido, the thoughts of pius Aeneas
immediately return to Ascanius:

Aeneas (neque enim patrius consistere mentem
passus amor) rapidum ad navis praemittit Achaten,
Ascanio ferat haec, ipsumque ad moenia ducat;
omnis in Ascanio cari stat cura parentis.

Aeneas (for his fatherly love did not allow his mind to stop)
quickly sent forth Achates to the ships,
to bear these tidings to Ascanius, and lead him to the walls;
all his parental care rests in dear Ascanius. (1.643-646)

This is an indication early in Book 4 that Aeneas will choose his son and the
kingdom owed to Ascanius over Dido. Aeneas now is now beginning to
demonstrate the very sense of pietas that Venus and Creusa tried to instill in him

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72 Segal (1990) 5
as Troy was being destroyed – to look after Ascanius and what Ascanius’
represents, namely, the future and the fate that await him.

Dido becomes inflamed with desire for Aeneas as a result of the
machinations of Venus, and Dido’s desire becomes the desire to be what Aeneas
wants. But what is it that Aeneas wants? Up until Aeneas’ *katabasis*, he longs for
his former *patria*, Troy, and all its associations. His apostrophe to those who died
on the battlefield and to Diomedes demonstrates Aeneas’ despair. As he is being
tossed about during the storm, his wish is not for death, but rather to die nobly
rather than be drowned in obscurity.\(^3\) He wishes that he had died with his war
companions in the fields of Troy:

“O terque quaterque beati,
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis
contigit oppetere! O Danaum fortissime gentis
Tydide! Mene Iliacis occumbere campis
non potuisse, tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,
saevus ubi Aeacidae telo iacet Hector, ubi ingens
Sarpedon, ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis
scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volvit?”

“O three and four times blessed,
Who before the faces of the fathers of Troy under the high walls
Happened to die! O son of Tydeus bravest of all men!
Why could I not lie on Ilium’s plains,
And why could your right hand not have poured forth this soul,
Savagely where Hector was killed by the weapon of Achilles,
where huge Sarpedon, where the whole contaminated Simois rolls
helmets and shields and brave bodies of men under its waves.”
(1.94-101)

\(^3\) This is reaffirmed by Aeneas’ thought in Book 2: *pulchrume mori succurrît in armis* (2.317).
Pöschl comments that Aeneas wish to die *ante ora patrum* expresses a desire for both glory and home.\(^{74}\) This scene is almost identical to one in the Odyssey (*Odyssey*, 5.299 ff.), but there is a critical difference between the two heroes. While Odysseus’ nostalgia will take him to his destination, Aeneas must release his nostalgia, in order to fulfill his fate.

Dido, since she represents the possibility of a kingdom and a home for Aeneas and his men, offers a substitute for what Aeneas wants. Secondly, and at times in conflict with the first, Aeneas also desires to abide by his *pietas*, which encompasses fulfilling his fate, obeying the will of Jupiter, and founding a kingdom for his son. Before Aeneas’ underworld conversion, his desires all reflect a greater desire for Troy. Dido and Carthage can be counted among them.

Dido first offers Aeneas the kingdom he is seeking (4.74-5). The city is ready (*paratam*) to be handed to him, ready for him to rule. It is not surprising that Aeneas finds Carthage a tempting proposition. He admires the city from the start, remarking to Achates: ‘*O fortunati, quorum iam moenia surgunt!*’, “O fortunate ones, whose walls already rise!” (1.437). Soon he is helping to erect citadels and homes, which represent both the military and domestic investment he is making in Carthage. Besides entering into an ambiguous marriage, he lingers behind, helping to build a city that is not his own. He is harshly reminded by Mercury, at Jupiter’s behest, that his kingdom and fate are separate from Dido’s:

\[
\text{'tu nunc Karthaginis altae} \\
\text{fundamenta locas pulchramque uxorius urbem} \\
\text{exstruis? heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum!}
\]\n
\(^{74}\) Pöschl (1962) 35
Are you now laying the foundations, places, and city of high Carthage for your pretty wife?
Have you forgotten your own rule and your own matters!
(4.265-7)

He is settling into a place that closely resembles the kingdom he is promised, but after Mercury’s visit, as if woken from a dream, he becomes frightened and anxious, and he is determined to leave immediately. Mercury also offers Aeneas two excuses here for leaving Dido, excuses that Aeneas will use when the time comes for him to tell Dido about his departure. First he tells Aeneas to think of his own glory, and if that is that enough to move him, he reminds him of the kingdom that is owed to Ascanius.

Even after Mercury’s visit, it is clear Aeneas cares for Dido. He is seen pressing care back in his heart after Dido questions him: *obnixus curam sub corde premebat*, “steadfastly he pressed back care in his heart” (4.332); and he feels great love, and he desires to console her after she rebukes him for the second time:

\[
\text{At pius Aeneas, quamquam lenire dolentem}
\text{solando cupid et dictis avertere curas,}
\text{multa gemens magnoque animum labefactus amore}
\text{iussa tamen divum exsequitur classemque revisit.}
\]

But *pius* Aeneas, although he desires to soothe her pain and avert her cares with consoling words, groaning and shaken by a great love in his soul he nevertheless follows the orders of the gods and returns to his fleet. (4.393-6)

Here Aeneas demonstrates compassion, passion, and sense of duty, the latter of these being the most important with regards to *pietas*. Although compassion
comes to be associated with *pietas*, observance of duty is the key component of *pietas*. As Lee points out, it is not the *quamquam*-clause here that implies *pietas*, but rather the *tamen*. Aeneas stifles his emotions and gives way to duty, while Dido yields to her passions and falls to ruin as a result. When giving Dido his reasons for leaving, he informs her that it is not by his will that he leaves and begs her to desist from inflaming emotions in not just herself but in him as well (4.360-1), which indicates that his emotions are capable of being roused by her. He informs her that it is not his will to seek Italy (*non sponte*, 4.361), stressing in their underworld encounter that it is by the will of the gods that he seeks Italian shores: “*inuitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi. / sed me iussa deum*” / unwillingly, queen, did I leave your shore. / But it was by the (6.460-1). We have seen him press care back before. Though he exhorts his men to take heart, during the storm of Book 1, he hides his own pain: *curisque ingentibus aeger / spem voltu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem*, “sick with great cares / he pretended hope in his face and pressed back grief deep in his heart” (1.208-9).

Ultimately Dido cannot successfully satisfy Aeneas’ persistent longing for his homeland, and she is an obstacle to the fulfillment of his fate and arrival in Hesperia. For a time Aeneas seems satisfied building and sharing Dido’s kingdom, because in many ways she offers him what he is seeking, namely a substantial substitute for his beloved Troy. Otis notes that Dido and Troy are “the two elements in his past that effectively dispute his acceptance of the future: the

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75 Lee (1979) 23
home to which he has always, in his heart of hearts, wished to ‘return’ and the loved woman, the *eros* figure, that represented his most powerful substitute for home.” Aeneas regards Hesperia as an even more distant substitute for his homeland. Before all else desires Troy as it was, and since he cannot have that, he desires to rebuild Troy where it stood:

```
me si fata meis paterentur ducere vitam
auspicis et sponte mea componere curas,
urbem Troianam primum dulcisque meorum
reliquias colerem, Priami tecta alta manerent,
et recidiva manu posuissem Pergama victis.
```

If the fates allowed me to lead my life
by my own auspices and to allay my cares of my own accord,
I would first cherish the city of Troy and the sweet remains of my people, the high rooftops of Priam would remain and I would resurrect Pergamum for my conquered men.

(4.340-344)

Here *fata* opens the way for Jupiter’s intervention. Aeneas calls the remains of his people *dulcis*. Dido may also supply a substitute for the wife he longs for, as well. Aeneas also considers Carthage *dulcis*: *ardet abire fuga dulcisque relinquere terras*, “he burns to flee and leave behind the sweet lands” (4.281). A conflict of desire is apparent here. Carthage is sweet to him, because it offers him the opportunity to build the home he is seeking; however, it is not his intended destination, and he nevertheless burns to leave it. Aeneas desires something outside of what Carthage offers, and although he tells Dido he does not leave by his own will, his will burns for something else:

*Note*:

76 Otis (1964) 306

77 See Fowler (2000) 47 on how this line captures both the hesitation of Aeneas and his deliberation.
sed nunc Italiam magnam Gryneus Apollo,
Italiam Lyciae iussere capessere sortes;
hic amor, haec patria est.

but now Grynean Apollo and
the Lycian lots have ordered me to great Italy;
there is where my love is, there is where my fatherland is.
(4.345-7)

Aeneas’ use of *hic*, which aligns the word it modifies with the first person speaker, shows here that Aeneas is already identifying with his fate and future *patria*, and here he informs Dido of his choice.

What we see in the desire of Dido is the unattainable object and the failed attempts to fulfill it by embracing substitutes and images of that desire. She is also an obstacle, whose *furor*, among other obstacles, threatens the fulfillments of his *pietas*. For this reason Augustine uses his identification with Dido to illustrate his separation from God, his true object of desire. He identifies with Dido in his youth, but he fails to see, as a youth, that his embracing her as an object ought to be the basis of the identification. Instead he thinks he is sympathizing with her separation from Aeneas, unaware that he is mourning his greater and more critical separation from God. It is with this identification with Dido that he introduces the *Aeneid* in his *Confessions*.

VI. CONCLUSION

In examining the *Aeneid* we are immersed in a shadowy world where desire is unfulfilled and sought through channels that only complicate its fulfillment further: the dark and ominous nature of gifts; ambiguous and unreliable omens,
which are misleading and dangerous in their ambiguity; substitutes and images which frustrate and never satiate, the unattainable object, *pietas*, which can only be fulfilled in part and often at the expense of another aspect of *pietas*. Aeneas makes gifts to Dido, which include Ascanius, and that act essentially to woo Dido. She, as a result, falls in love and bestows gifts from a wife to her husband. But their steps begin to go disastrously awry, as the gifts end up used against the expectation of their original purpose: Aeneas’ sword becomes Dido’s instrument of suicide; a cloak beautifully embroidered by Dido drapes the shoulders of her traitorous lover, instead of a faithful husband; one of the beautiful coverlets she gives him wraps the bloodied body of Pallas; and Andromache’s embroidery is bestowed upon the son of another instead of her own. Gifts are not what they seem. They are ominous, dangerous, and deceptive, because through them desires and intentions are refracted and misinterpreted. Although they are used to direct desires, gifts are ultimately the greatest refractor, creating illusions and breeding other desires, as they foreshadow destruction and dissatisfaction rather than the fruition they seem to promise. Just as *parva Troia*, the very image of Troy itself, cannot hold Aeneas, because of its degraded form, Dido’s flourishing city is not enough to hold him either, a degraded form of the original in its own way. All substitutes for Troy prove dissatisfying. The only choice for *pius* Aeneas is to abandon his past. The tragedy of his situation lies in Aeneas’ inability to fulfill his desire, even when doing the “right” thing.

Omens, oracles, and other signs present a problem similar to the one gifts do, because of the personal motivations and conflicts of the gods. They are
unreliable in their inconsistency and especially their ambiguity, which requires interpretation, which, in turn, is often distorted by the desire of the recipient.

Reception and desire are problematic in the Aeneid, because a fixed point of reference by which desire, reception, and action can be gauged is lacking. This is at the root of Aeneas’ struggle to uphold pietas. If he is to align his will with the gods, then which gods? If he is to abide by pietas, how is he to fulfill his duty when conflicting duties tear him in different directions? In the next chapter I will examine Augustine’s response to the failure of desire in the Aeneid as model for his desire: false objects, ignorance of the past and future, the duplicity of the gods. His offers a solution to these problems with one God, in terms of whom all aspects of desire can be defined: substitutes, images, obstacles, and object.

History, empire, pietas, children cannot still the unquiet heart; the desires of the Aeneid cannot be fulfilled. Augustine has a response to this: what we want is the desire that precedes and creates our desire, not a hidden god (deus absconditus) but a God who desires us first and is still to come (deus adventurus).\footnote{Kearney (1999) 112-114} The desires of the Aeneid cannot be fulfilled, and it is this that the Confessions responds to, offering a new pietas, a Christian piety. In the Confessions, Augustine will learn what his desire is and he will learn this by learning what the one and only God really desires.
CHAPTER 2

AUGUSTINE’S RECEPTION OF THE AENEID: A JOURNEY TOWARDS CONVERSION

You were straight ahead of me, but I had roamed away from myself and couldn’t find myself, let alone you (Confessions, 5.2.2).

I. AUGUSTINE’S RECEPTION OF THE AENEID

The Aeneid is introduced in the Confessions in the context of Augustine’s lessons as a school boy. He speaks of hating lessons in the rudiments of language (1.13.20) but being delighted by the stories in the Aeneid. As a grown man, he comes to realize that these skills he abhorred learning were the more fruitful (uberiores), because they would enable him to read or write anything he wanted. While language is simple to interpret as a gift, the reception of the Aeneid as such is more problematic. This is especially the case given the themes of reception explored within the Aeneid itself.

While in the last chapter we looked at themes of reception and desire in the Aeneid, primarily by examining false objects and substitutes for true desire, in this chapter we will be looking at Augustine’s reception of those themes through his identification with Aeneas and Dido and how in that very identification his reception and desire are reflective of the attachments represented in the Aeneid.

We shall also examine how Augustine begins to overcome this problem of
reception, by recognizing the reasons for his identification with Aeneas and Dido, thus overcoming the distraction from one’s self that reading fiction can bring about. In this way, he transforms and incorporates the *Aeneid* in his conversion experience and narrative.

In the *Confessions*, God is depicted as the omnipotent agent of Augustine’s conversion, using even Augustine’s perverse desires to good ends (5.8.14). In his own search for truth and God, Augustine fails and meets with success only once he realizes that continence comes only as a gift from God. His own search for fulfillment includes intellectual pursuits, a semblance of a marriage, and intimate friendships. His attempts alone prove to be not altogether effective, for even when he is certain in God’s truth, he finds that is not enough to align his desires wholly with God’s will

Starting with the premise that God has created everything good, Augustine’s problem then becomes one of reception, since failed or perverted reception can lead to evil acts.¹ His conversion comes about when he receives God’s creation as a gift from God. Because one’s reception is informed by desire, Augustine’s conversion also entails a conversion of desire, in which he turns away from worldly objects and approval to the imperishable promises of God. Proper reception of God’s gifts is comprised of acknowledging that one’s virtues belong to God and must be used in accordance with his will; understanding that creatures are of God but they are not to be substituted for God; and realizing

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¹ Augustine’s privation theory of evil defines evil as an absence of good. See below p.81.
conversion is not something to be gained through one’s own strength but is rather a gift from God.

This chapter is a discussion of Augustine’s reception of themes of desire and reception in the Aeneid. In the Confessions we find in the place of shades, images, and longing for the past spoken of in terms of perversion, imitations of good, and chain of habit, while the false objects of Augustine’s desire include substitutes for intimacy with God, such as his unnamed friend and concubine. Augustine also misguidedly seeks out the approval of men for his own glory rather than winning God’s approval and praising him. I will begin with an examination of perversion and evil, which results from misdirected desire and accepting God’s gifts improperly, which will include a brief discussion of figmenta. These shades of the truth will establish the background for Augustine’s reception of the Aeneid.

The structure of this reception is organized around the five instances in the Confessions that Augustine explicitly refers to the Aeneid: First I will examine Augustine’s identification with Dido as a symptom of his separation from God and how his realization of his identification contributes to his conversion. Then I will look at Augustine’s response to the character of Aeneas and how Aeneas’ wanderings provide a model for Augustine’s own errores. Finally I will use the three scenes from the Aeneid, which Augustine mentions as having captivated him, in order to establish a framework for looking at themes of reception within the Aeneid, Augustine’s reception of these themes, and how Augustine overcomes and offers a solution to the desires represented by these scenes. They are the
Trojan Horse episode, the most deceptive and darkest offer of gifts, which invites the desire of the Trojans, and, as a result, brings about their ruin; the burning of Troy, in which Aeneas’ *pietas* is repeatedly directed toward his family and his future; and Creusa’s shade, whom Aeneas embraces in vain, and with whom I align the unnamed friend and unnamed concubine of the *Confessions*.

II. PERVERSION, EVIL, AND *FIGMENTA*

According to Augustine, God is good and created all things good in accordance with his will. All things are bestowed by God, therefore all things are gifts from God, including whatever we return to him. Evil, the perversion of good, is introduced when the gifts of God are received in ways against his will. For example, there is nothing evil in Augustine’s gift of using rhetoric well. In fact he encourages rhetoric as a tool for good (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 4.2.3). It is evil when he uses it to serve his vanity or pride. By doing so, he fails to make the proper return on the gift, in accordance with God’s will and intention.

In response to the Manichaean heresy on evil, a dualist theory claiming that evil is the opposite of good and its own separate entity, Augustine devoted much effort to his privation theory of evil, which counters the heresy by claiming that evil is a lack of good or deviation from good, but does not exist in and of itself (*City of God*, 11.22). 2 Since God created everything, everything that exists is good. Anything evil is non-substantial: *ergo quaecumque sunt, bona sunt*,

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2 On the relationship between good and evil, Dollimore writes, “Evil can only arise from good; in a sense good produces evil” (1991) 138.
malumque illud quod quaerebam unde esset non est substantia, quia si substantia esset, bonum esset (Conf., 7.12.18). Evil is the privation of good to the point of nothingness: _malum non esse nisi privationem boni usque ad quod omnino non est_ (Conf., 3.7.12). Therefore Augustine’s struggle with evil is a struggle with nothingness. Concerning the lack of substance that is evil, Fichter writes, “This philosophical stance puts the prospect of a moral epic in a new light, since its central governing agon, the struggle between good and evil, would be a conflict with nothingness, an illusion.”³ Luman discusses the concept of insubstantial evil in terms of the Neo-Platonic influences in Augustine’s intellectual life. He writes, “The journey out and in is a horizontalization, a temporalization, a biographization, so to speak, of the Plotinian fall of the soul and her return to the One. That fall positioned the soul in matter, in a world of deception, illusion, in which matter appears more real than spirit. Only by turning her back on the world of illusion, looking into herself, could soul escape imprisonment in that which exists on the edge of non-being, and so return to what is real.”⁴ Because evil is non-substantial, no object is evil in of itself; rather, the act of turning away from good is evil. According to Augustine, “When the will leaves the higher to the lower, it becomes bad not because the thing to which it turns is bad, but because the turning itself is perverse” (City of God, 12.6). Dollimore is concerned primarily with the part perversion has to play in the privation theory of evil. He theorizes that “‘essentially’, perversion becomes the negative agency within, at

³ Fichter (1982) 59

⁴ Luman (1990) 147
the heart of, privation. Perversion thus mediates between evil as agency and evil as lack; in bridging this contradiction perversion takes on its own paradoxical nature – which is also the basis of its disturbing power: it is that which is utterly inimical to existence while itself lacking authentic existence, ontological or natural”, 5 and “Augustine recognizes vice as not so much the antithesis of virtue as its perversion, the more dangerous and potentially subversive for being in intimate relation with the good, rather than being an absolute difference or otherness.” 6 For this reason evil, can sometimes be mistaken for good, particularly when one is led away from God’s truth.

In Book 2 Augustine tells the story of robbing a pear tree, in order to illustrate the perversity of his desire; it is a story in which he claims to delight in evil for the sake of evil:

*nam id furatus sum quod mihi abundabat et multo melius, nec ea re volebam frui quam furto appetebam, sed ipso furto et peccato*

For I stole that which I had in abundance and better by far, and I did not want to enjoy that which I sought through theft, but rather the theft itself and the sin. (2.4.9).

He and his friends rob a pear tree of its fruit and throw it to the pigs. The fruit is not very good, and if it tastes sweet at all, it is only because the theft itself lends it savor. Burke speaks of perversity as parody in the *Confessions*, and specifically how Augustine’s conversion in Book 8 is the antithesis or inversion of this pear robbing scene in Book 2. He writes, “God’s recent act of conversion

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5 Dollimore (1991) 140
6 Dollimore (1991) 141
whereby Augustine could become converted had been quite gratuitous, an act of grace and mercy, quite as Augustine’s adolescent theft, in lacking advantageous motive, had been a perverse imitation of such gratuitousness.” He goes on to conclude, “Thus, the themes of evil sought for its own sake . . . all add up to ‘imitation’ in the sense of parody.”

The perverse imitation of good, according to Augustine, accounts for most forms of sin. Following the scene of the pear theft, Augustine expounds on the resemblance vices bear to virtue, in that man commits sins of ambition, lust, or curiosity, in order to be like God (2.6.13). For instance, ambition resembles a desire for honor, which is owed only to God, or curiosity resembles a pursuit for knowledge, which God possesses in the highest degree. He, however, is unable to categorize the robbing of the pear tree among the sort of vice, which is committed in a search for something resembling a good, and questions in what way he is trying to resemble God when committing his theft:

ita fornicatur anima, cum avertitur abs te et quaerit extra te ea quae pura et liquida non invenit, nisi cum redit ad te. perverse te imitantur omnes, qui longe se a te faciunt et extollunt se adversum te. sed etiam sic te imitando indicant creatorem te esse omnis naturae, et ideo non esse, quo a te omni modo recedatur. quid ergo in illo furto ego dilexi, et in quo dominum meum vel vitiose atque perverse imitatus sum? an libuit facere contra legem saltem fallacia, quia potentatu non poteram ut mancam libertatem captivus imitarer, faciendo inpune quod non liceret tenebrosa omnipotentiae similitudine?

Thus a soul fornicates, when it turns away from you and seeks outside of you those things, which it does not find pure and true, except when it returns to you. Perversely all imitate you, who take themselves far from you and raise themselves against you. Yet even in this way by imitating you they demonstrate that you are the creator of all nature, and for this reason there is no way to
withdraw from you. With regard to my theft, then: what did I love in it, and in what sense did I imitate my Lord, even if only with depraved perversity? Did the pleasure I sought lie in breaking the law at least in that sneaky way, since I was unable to do so with a show of strength? Was I, in truth a prisoner, trying to simulate a crippled sort of freedom, attempting a shady parody of omnipotence by getting away with something forbidden? (2.6.14)

Augustine defines fornication here as the turning of the soul away from God. The sexual implication of the term meets with an equally sexual resolution, when Augustine, in turning back toward God, commits himself to celibacy. He speculates he is engaging in a perverse imitation of the omnipotence which is only God’s; in this way, even vice, in a sense possesses something of God. For Augustine true freedom is only gained through God. Here he is imprisoned by his own sinfulness, so he is attempting to achieve freedom, the attempt at which further imprisons him. In yet another paradox, Augustine finds he can only be truly free when most bound to God.

**Figmenta**

The theme of imitation in the narrative of Augustine’s early life, along with the *figmenta* in literature, with which he identifies, anticipates the exempla that play such a crucial role in Augustine’s conversion. When imitating his companions to gain their approval or misidentifying with figures from the pagan literature he reads as a boy, Augustine is engaging in a perversity or parody of what God intends for him. Later he will encounter stories of Christian converts, whom he will imitate, in accordance with God’s will.

Bennett focuses on *figmenta*, in her consideration of the scene in which Augustine describes his identification with Dido. She writes:
Figmenta, first, can only have meaning if one identifies oneself with them. One will only do so, however, if what they represent—in particular, the emotions they depict—are already known; these constitute the truth that art contains and which makes it effective. What begins as self-recognition and self-knowledge, however, inevitably ends as self-alienation, when the reader (or listener or viewer) identifies him- or herself with non-existent others, and more generally with the falsehoods of figmenta as well as their truths.  

This lays the foundation for her argument that Augustine is trying to instruct others how to read Vergil, rather than censuring works like the Aeneid. As long as readers recognize the truth in literature and how it pertains to them, they may read it therapeutically, instead of being lost to its falsehoods. By understanding oneself, even through literature, one can approach truth and God. Self-examination, therefore, is crucial, in seeking God. The errores of Aeneas and the desires of Dido function as a mirror and an anti-model or bad exempla. They reveal to him what he was and, from his retrospective vantage point, what he must struggle to overcome.

At an early age Augustine is captivated by stories and later by spectacles and tragic plays, the latter of which, Augustine regards, in a layering of false image and desire, as a substitute for true relationships, which are, in turn, substitutes for the communion he truly desires with God (3.2.2). As we will see with Dido, the heartbreak he responds to emotionally reflects yet masks his feeling of separation from God. Augustine attributes his fascination to the emotional identifications he makes with the characters or plot. What appeals to

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7 Bennett (1988) 58
him are the *figmenta*, those aspects of fiction that are false but resemble the truth. Bennett addresses Augustine’s discussion of *figmenta* in an argument primarily concerned with Augustine’s appropriation and critique of Vergil or, in other words, how to become a “correct reader” of Vergil, according to Augustine.⁸ She begins with a discussion of Augustine’s theories of literature, as spelled out by his Cassiciacum dialogues. In the *Soliloquiae*, dialogues between *ratio* and *anima*, Augustine comes to the conclusion that the false is that, which resembles the true, but is not true (*Sol*. II, 6.10). Art is especially dangerous, because it necessarily mingles truth and falsehood (*Sol*. II, 10.18). Later in the dialogue *ratio* enjoins *anima* to return to truth which dwells in oneself and turn away from the shadows (*Sol*. II, 19.33). We know that Augustine considers all truth God’s truth (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2.18.28), even that embedded in pagan literature. As his reception of God’s gifts change, so does his reception of literature, and his appropriation of the language and themes of the *Aeneid* is evidence of the benefits he has found therein.

### III. AENEAS AND DIDO

Augustine identifies with both the *errores* of Aeneas and Dido’s loss throughout the *Confessions*. They represent for him his own ties to the phenomenal world and false objects. Aeneas and Dido not only embrace false objects themselves but they, as *figmenta*, are also false objects for Augustine. Later when Augustine recognizes the reasons for his identification, Aeneas’ *errores* become a model for

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⁸ Bennett (1988) 59
Augustine’s spiritual wanderings, which Luman calls “a kind of enslavement to false perception and perverted will.”

Dido becomes a means for him to diagnose the desire for God he was ignorant of as a youth. Through the myriad implications of such identifications, we gain a richer understanding of the nature of Augustine’s desire. His appropriation and transformation of the desires of the *Aeneid* reveal how he overcomes what they represent for him.

Many of the false objects in the *Aeneid* are obstacles to Aeneas fulfilling his *pietas* and his fate. These include Aeneas’ longing for the past, Dido’s *furor*, misguided attempts to settle, and the fractured nature of *pietas* itself. When Dido, Aeneas, Anchises, and Andromache are unable to gain their true objects of desire, they embrace images of what they truly desire, which serve as unsatisfying substitutes. Aeneas’ delay in Carthage, for example, is one symptom of Aeneas’ longing for the past. Carthage and Dido act dually as substitutes for both the past he has left behind and for the future *patria* it is his duty to found. Augustine, in a passage which recalls Aeneas, finds himself tempted in Carthage, as well, immersed in a darkness of lust (*caligine libidinis*). The *Confessions* is replete with similar substitutes for the true desire of Augustine, which is always God. Under the “false name of religion” (*falso nomine religionis*), he and his friends pursue all sorts of worldly delights (4.1.1). In his narrative of these pursuits, he often alludes to the *Aeneid* and uses Vergil’s language to express his pre-conversion self.

Upon a cursory reading of the *Confessions*, Augustine seems highly critical of the classical literature, which comprised a large part of his boyhood

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9 Luman (1990) 147
education. However, we know that he continued to read the Aeneid even after his conversion. Augustine’s adoption of Aeneas’ wanderings essentially functions as an anti-model. In the same way that God uses Augustine’s perverse desires to conduct him to where he wants him to be, Augustine converts his perverse experience of having read of and identified with Aeneas and Dido into a useful tool for understanding what he was and how God’s grace turned him into who he became. Moreover, he teaches others how to properly read such texts. In other words, he turns the perverse for good. He reflects that even the tales of Medea’s flight are more wholesome than the lies of the Manichaeans, because at least he can transform them into something edifying: nam versum et carmen etiam ad vera pulmenta transfero, “for I can turn verse and song into real food” (3.6.11).

During the course of Augustine’s conversion what he reads and how he reads it changes. He is ultimately converted from the pagan texts of his childhood.

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10 See MacCormack (1998) 45 fn 3 for a list of citations from Contra Academicos, in which Augustine mentions his discussions of Vergil at Cassiacum.

11 Fichter argues, “It is not so much classical literature itself as a way of reading the Augustine means to censure,” and about Augustine’s childhood lessons in the Aeneid, “He is impeded only by his inability in his youth to distance himself from the narrative, by his lack of a moral vantage point beyond the literal text” (1982) 42-43. See Bennett (1988) footnote 15 on how she differs. Bennett provides a starting point for my own arguments on the conversion of the Aeneid: “This strategy of appropriation and correction of Vergil is central to Augustine’s use of the Aeneid in the Confessions . . . here, however, the imitated Vergil is also used to dramatize the distance between the old, false view of life and the new, accurate one. Moreover, the Confessions traces Augustine’s progress in becoming a correct reader” (1988) 59.

12 Ramage writes, “Augustine will not turn his back upon pagan literature; rather, he will oppose it by diverting its resources to Christian use, transforming what is for him the unreality of the Aeneid into spiritual nourishment for fledgling Christians”(1970) 55. This is similar to Bennett’s observations on how “pagan literature can be reappropriated for the service of truth.” (1988) 53

13 Dido is very closely associated to Medea, particularly in Book 4 of the Aeneid when she contemplates using magic to win Aeneas back or cutting him to pieces. Augustine’s mention of Medea, though fleeting, is interesting in light of her connection with Dido. See Spence (1988) 55-60 for a discussion of the connections between Aeneas, Dido, Icarus, and Medea.
to the philosophy of Cicero and Aristotle and eventually to Scripture, which he disdains early on for its seeming lack of sophistication. All his readings, despite their deficiencies, become beneficial, because Augustine is able to find the lesson of truth in all of them and then convert them for his own story of conversion.

**Dido and Separation from God**

Within the *Aeneid*, Dido is associated with loss, suffering, and passionate desire. She figures significantly in Augustine’s reception of the themes of desire in the *Aeneid*, because through her we see the nature of Augustine’s attachment to the world. Her *furor* stands in stark contrast to Aeneas’ *pietas* and poses one threat to his ability to abide by it. Frustrated in her desire, she embraces Ascanius, the image of Aeneas, in an attempt to deceive her desire. As Fichter puts it, “Dido’s love of Aeneas has a counterpart in Augustine’s cupidinous love of this world.”¹⁴ Because this love in the Aeneid comes from Venus and Cupid, for Augustine it would not truly be love at all.¹⁵ Augustine identifies with Dido’s loss and separation, and in weeping for her, he is distracted from his true plight of separation from God:

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nam utique meliores, quia certiores, erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebat in me et factum est et habeo illud, ut et legam, si quid scriptum invenio, et scribam ipse, si quid volo, quam illae, quibus tenere cogebar Aeneae nescio cuius errores oblitus errorum meorum et plorare Didonem mortuam, quia se occidit ab amore, cum interea me ipsum in his a te morientem, deus, vita mea, siccis oculis ferrem miserrimus.
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¹⁴ Fichter (1982) 42

¹⁵ Compare this to what Augustine says of his friendship with his unnamed friend – that it is not truly a friendship unless two people cling to the charity poured out by the Holy Spirit (4.4.7).
For in every way those first lessons were better, because they were more certain, and from them there came about in me that ability which I have to read whatever I find written and write myself whatever I want, rather than those lessons, by which I was forced to memorize the wandering of some Aeneas while forgetting my own and to grieve Dido’s death, because she died from love, while in the meantime I very miserably and with dry eyes put up with myself dying away from you, my God, my life. (1.13.20)

Here we see the very perversity of his action, dying (morientem) in the face of life (mea vita), weeping for a fictional queen but dry-eyed in his own wretchedness. He continues and in retrospect sees the error of his grief and chastises himself:

quid enim miserius misero non miserante se ipsum et flente Didonis mortem, quae fiebat amando Aenean, non flente autem mortem suam, quae fiebat non amando te, deus, lumen cordis mei et panis oris intus animae meae et virtus maritans mentem meam et sinum cogitationis meae? non te amabam, et fornicabar abs te, et fornicanti sonabat undique: “euge! euge!” amicitia enim mundi huius fornicatio est abs te et “euge! euge!” dicitur ut pudeat, si non ita homo sit. et haec non fleb am et flebam Didonem extinctam ferroque extrema secutam.

For who is more wretched than someone pitying not oneself, who is wretched, and weeping over the death of Dido, which happened by loving Aeneas, not weeping however for one’s own death, which was happening by not loving you, God, the light of my heart and bread for the mouth of my soul inside, virtue married to my mind and recess of my mind? I was not loving you, and I fornicated away from you, and [you could hear from those fornicating], “Well done! Bravo! For friendship with this world is fornication away from you and “Well done! Bravo!” is said with the result that it is shameful, if one is not so. I was not weeping for these things but rather for Dido who killed herself and sought her end by the sword. (1.13.20-21)

16 The term of endearment, mea vita, has an erotic lineage in the erotic poetry of Catullus, Ovid and Propertius.
The repetition of wretchedness (*miserius, miserо, miserante*) sets the scene. Augustine proceeds to explain why he is wretched. Here he describes Dido’s death coming about from a wrong sort of love that results from loving Aeneas, juxtaposed with another death that comes from *not* loving God. The scene of Dido’s death which comes about perversely from her love of Aeneas correlates with the perverse tears that Augustine sheds over her, yet he does not weep for what should be a truly frightening and sorrowful death that comes about from fornication against God. Dido’s death comes about as a result of having Aeneas as her object of desire, and a death of sorts is the result of Augustine taking Dido and Aeneas as his objects of desire, as well. In forgetting his own *errores*, Augustine becomes confused about what matters, becomes alienated from himself, and therefore finds himself farther from God. On young Augustine’s identification with Dido, Bennett writes

> There is something in the human condition itself which links the fictional queen to the real little boy (i.e. Augustine); Augustine’s response to the story of Dido requires that his own condition be like hers. In weeping for Dido, he wept, unknowing, for himself. He, too, was deprived of the object of his love . . . there is something true in all *figmenta*; Augustine’s responses were to the truth of Vergil’s portrayal of lovesickness and wandering.\(^{17}\)

To take Bennett’s observations a step further, not only does Augustine identify with Dido because they are both separated from their objects of desire, but by the very act of becoming lost in her grief, he is playing Dido. He pities Dido in place of pitying himself. In this way she is a substitute for both understanding his true

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\(^{17}\) Bennett (1988) 56
source of grief, separation from God, and also she impedes his path to filling it. As with Aeneas, she is an obstacle to Augustine’s mission.

Throughout the *Confessions* we see Augustine depict himself as a Dido figure, whenever he loses himself in his excessive attachment to worldly objects. The accounts of his watching tragedies in young adulthood recall reading Dido in his youth, reminding us that several years later Augustine is still forgetting himself by watching spectacles and tragic theatrical performances, as a means to scratch his itching self (10.3.4). Years later when Augustine is separated from his concubine, the language he uses to describe his anguish again recalls Dido’s suffering:

> avulsa a latere meo\(^\text{18}\) tamquam inpedimento conjugii cum qua cubare solitus eram, cor, ubi adhaerebat, concisum\(^\text{19}\) et vulneratum mihi erat et trahebat sanguinem.

She was torn from my side finally, regarded as an obstacle to my marriage, the woman, with whom I was accustomed to sleep; where she had clung, I was cut and wounded and trailing blood. (6.10.25)

Compare the metaphor of wounding to the description of Dido that opens *Aeneid* 4:

> At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura
> vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.

But the queen for a long time, wounded by serious worry, nourishes the wound in her veins and is consumed by a hidden fire. (4.1-2)

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\(^{18}\) For a Biblical explanation of Augustine’s language here, see Shanzer (2002) 158-162.

\(^{19}\) Cf. 4.7.12 on his soul after his unnamed friend’s death (*portabam enim concisam et cruentem animam meam*).
Both Augustine and his concubine can be read as Dido figures. His concubine resembles Dido, since she figures as part of his carnal experiences in Carthage and she is involved with Aeneas in an imitation or pretense of marriage (4.172). Even though his concubine is the abandoned figure, Augustine aligns himself with Dido, by using her once again to talk about painful separation first from his God, then from his God-substitute. His concubine is also aligned with Creusa, whom I will discuss below in detail.

Augustine alludes to Dido when he speaks of obstacles to his conversion, and in the examples above he is his own obstacles. When narrating his stealthy departure from Carthage, he casts Monica as Dido, as she tries to prevent him from going to Italy in a moment of faithlessness, unaware of the plan God had for Augustine:

\[
\text{cum et me cupiditatibus meis raperes ad finiendas ipsas cupiditates et illius carnale desiderium iusto dolorum flagello vapularet. amabat enim secum praesentiam meam more matrum, sed multis multo amplius, et nesciebat, quid tu illi gaudiorum facturus esses de absentia mea. nesciebat, ideo flebat et eiulabat, atque illis cruciatibus arguebatur in ea reliquiariu Evae.}
\]

You seized me away, using my very lusts to put an end to them and chastising her carnal desire with the scourge of sorrow. Like all mothers, though far more than most, she loved to have me with her, and she did not know how much joy you were to create for her through my absence. She did not know, and so she wept and wailed, and these cries of pain revealed what there was left of Eve in her. (5.8.15)

In this passage Monica is unusually depicted as a hindrance to God’s plan, whereas she is normally the instrument of his will. The account of Monica here has her implicitly figuring as Dido, in that, she is an obstacle to pietas, reaching
Italy, and fulfillment of God’s will. She is also explicitly a daughter of Eve, that first perpetrator of human sin. Monica’s failure here is to trust that God is in every action and every event. It, like Augustine’s sin, is a case of bad reception. She is ignorant of the joy that will come from Augustine’s absence. Here we have another echo of Dido’s longing in Aeneas’ absence. In the cases of both women, a greater goal is being accomplished at the cost of their sorrow. However, whereas Dido meets with a tragic death, Monica will be filled with joys beyond her expectations (8.12.30). He speaks of absence, as well, in the passage on the death of his friend at Thagaste, a scene in which I read Augustine as Dido. I will discuss the death of his friend below.

Even in this moment of departure, in which his mother is clearly cast as Dido, Augustine echoes the scene that Dido observed:

flavit ventus et implevit vela nostra et litus subtraxit aspectibus nostri

The wind blew and filled our sails and the shore withdrew from our gazes. (Conf. V.8.15)

In the Aeneid, however, it is from Dido’s perspective that we feel the wind fill Aeneas’ sails:

regina e speculis primam albescere lucem
uidit et aequatis classem procedere velis
litoraque et vacuos sensit sine remige portus.

The queen from her mirror saw first light dawn
and the fleet advance with filled sails
and she sensed the shore and ports abandoned of oarsmen.
(Aen. 4.586-8)

See Aeneid 4.83-5
In this way Augustine plays Dido once again, but he is simultaneously depicted as Aeneas. Fichter reads Augustine’s ambivalence in casting himself as both figures as going beyond simply a youth struggling with his identity. He argues that it points to the “principle on which the attempt to assimilate and overgo the *Aeneid* is grounded, his conviction that he as a Christian can achieve a resolution of the antagonisms that divide the soul of fallen man, including those dramatized in Virgilian epic.” In other words, he uses his identification with both Aeneas and Dido to express the ambivalence, which defines the human condition. I would argue that Augustine cannot escape that aspect of himself that Dido represents – the void in his soul that is separated from and longs for its true object. In a way he is less like Aeneas, because Aeneas’ desires are thwarted by the fractured nature of *pietas*, whereas Augustine’s anchoring desire, as he conceives it, can be filled by God, who is in no way fractured but whole and complete.

**Aeneas: Intellectual *Errores* and the Search for God**

Augustine finds in Aeneas a kindred spirit in the search for his fate. Both Aeneas and Augustine are required to relinquish their grip on the past, as Aeneas struggles to leave behind a ruined Troy and Augustine gives up his worldly attachments to ambition, career, and carnal lusts. Both journeys share several biographical features: after a series of wanderings, they end in supernatural episodes; Augustine spends some time in Carthage, where he is seduced by theatrical shows and love affairs. Aeneas delays in Carthage, where a love affair and new kingdom hold him back. Both travel from Carthage to Italy, leaving

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21 Fichter (1982) 49
behind women who love them. Once in Italy each fights a different sort of battle, Aeneas for a new home and Augustine for spiritual continence. They both must direct their desires towards the objects they are fated to attain by their gods. Before reaching their fates, however, their journeys of seeking involve embracing substitutes and images of their past and future desires. With Aeneas as his model, Augustine describes the experiences of his life as a young man and scholar, torn intellectually and grappling with Manicheism, Neo-Platonism, Aristotle, and astrology. Using the language of the *Aeneid*, he also reveals the struggles of the flesh and the spirit, primarily in God’s role in the course of events in his life and the separation from his concubine. The turmoil of his heart (*aestus cordis*) corresponds to the *aestus curarum* of Aeneas.\(^\text{22}\) He is tossed (*iactabar, 2.2.2; fluctuabam, 6.5.8; volvimur, 4.5.10*) by the will of God on an intellectual odyssey, which he often uses the language of sea-faring and storms\(^\text{23}\) to narrate. Augustine will also continue to use the erotic language of the *Aeneid*, though in a more understated way, to complete the story of his conversion.

As we saw above, in his first mention of the *Aeneid* in the *Confessions*, Augustine tells of how, as a young student, he forgets (*oblitus*) his own *errores* and is forced to memorize those of some Aeneas (1.13.20). The fact that he forgets his own *errores* is an *error* in itself, because he loses himself in his reading as opposed to using the reading as a means to gain understanding about himself. He will lose himself in other texts and beliefs, as well. His *errores* will

\(^{22}\) For more particulars of language, see McCormack (1998) 97, Ramage (1970) 55 ff.

\(^{23}\) See Ramage (1970) 55-56 where it is observed that storm imagery, which refers to political or social situations refer to personal toils and conflicts.
take on many forms. As a young man, he will find himself in Carthage tempted by love affairs and theatrical shows, substitutes for his true object of desire, which is God (3.1.1). Aeneas too forgets himself in Carthage and settles there, seduced by a beautiful queen and the trappings of a burgeoning kingdom, which temporarily replace the one he lost and the one he is fated to found.

In the errores narrative Augustine devotes most of his narrative to his intellectual endeavors. These he pursues with facility and success, which he attributes to the intellectual gifts God has bestowed on him. Receiving and using his gifts as God intends them prepares Augustine for his conversion but does not ultimately bring about conversion, which can only be granted by God. One of the first major moves Augustine makes towards his climactic conversion in Book 8 is his reading of Cicero’s Hortensius, which itself results in a conversion to philosophy for Augustine. Through this exhortation to philosophy Augustine takes his first step towards conversion, by realizing the vanity of his previous hopes and desires and desiring the immortality that comes from wisdom:

viluit mihi repente omnis vana spes et immortalitatem sapientiae concupiscebam aestu cordis incredibili, et surgere coeperam ut ad te redirem.

Every empty hope became cheap to me suddenly, and I desired the immortality of wisdom with an incredible passion of the heart, and I had begun to rise, so that I might return to you (3.4.7).

Augustine sees his reading of the Hortensius and the love for wisdom the results begins to pave the way for conversion. Even at this early point, Augustine, finds Cicero’s writing dissatisfying, because it lacks the name of Christ:
You know, Light of my heart, since these apostolic writings were not known to me yet, I nevertheless delighted in this alone in that exhortation, that I would not follow just this or that but that I would esteem wisdom itself, whatever that is, and seek and pursue and hold and embrace it firmly. I was excited and inflamed and fired by that speech, and this alone checked so great a passion in me, that the name of Christ was not there, since by your mercy my tender heart had drunk in this second name through the milk of my mother, Lord, this name of my savior, your son and retained it deeply. Anything without this name, however well written and polished and truthful could not seize me altogether. (3.4.8)

Note the language of fire (\textit{accendebar}, \textit{ardebam}, \textit{flagrantia}) and embrace (\textit{amplexarers}) that recalls the passion of Dido. He is not, however, describing a furious passion for an object of carnal or worldly desire, but rather the wisdom that comes from God. In this way he uses the erotic language of the \textit{Aeneid} to narrate his intellectual conversion. He builds up his new found love with fiery and passionate speech, yet at the very climax he reminds us that it could not completely claim him, even at the time, because it was missing the name of Christ, without which he cannot be altogether ravished (\textit{rapiebat}). Here he also brings up mother’s milk again, which he previously called a gift from God:

\[\text{nec mater mea vel nutrices meae sibi ubera implebant, sed tu mihi per eas dabus alimentum infantiae secundum institutionem tuam et divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispostas. tu etiam mihi dabus}\]
nolle amplius, quam dabas, et nutrientibus me dare mihi velle quod
eis dabas: dare enim mihi per ordinatum affectum volebant quo
abundabant ex te. nam bonum erat eis bonum meum ex eis, quod
ex eis non, sed per eas erat: ex te quippe bona omnia, deus, et ex
deo meo salus mihi universa.

My mother and nurses did not fill their own breasts, but you gave
me the nourishment of an infant through them in accordance with
your plan, from the riches deposited in the depths of creation. You
granted that I would not want more than you gave, and granted to
those nursing me to want to give to me: for they wanted to give to
me through the affection you set up by which they abounded from
you. For my good was good for them, which was not from them
but through them: all good things come from you, God, and my
whole salvation is from my God. (1.6.7)

The *Hortensius*, like the milk of his mother and his nurses, is nourishment and a
gift from God, and he receives it as God wills, as an initial step toward his truth

By making the connection between a mother’s milk and the name of Christ,
Augustine is emphasizing that Christ entered his consciousness at the very level
of necessity before desire takes hold. His dissatisfaction in not finding Christ’s
name in Cicero’s *Hortensius*, that lack that leads to desire for God is also a gift.

Throughout the narrative of the *Confessions*, Augustine depicts himself
frequently lapsing into his former ways. Following the intellectual conversion that
results from his reading of the *Hortensius*, he nonetheless becomes involved with
the Manicheans, whose fake virtue was seductive to those who were too ignorant
to know the difference:

> erat autem illa vecors et seductoria, pretiosas animas captans
> nondum virtutis altitudinem scientes tangere et superficie decipi
> faciles, sed tamen adumbratae simulataeque virtutis.

(The appearance of continence) was mad and seductive, capturing
precious souls not yet knowing how to touch the height of virtue
and being easily deceived by the appearance of a, nonetheless false
and imitation virtue. (6.7.12)

The language of fakes and imitations recall the objects of desire in the *Aeneid.*
Like Aeneas, Augustine is often uncertain of the object of his search, in part
because he lacks the light or the humility to see. Unlike Aeneas, however,
Augustine’s misguidance does not come from the ambiguity of God’s signs but
rather from his own faulty reception. When Augustine projects his desires on
God’s gifts and receives them wrongly, God turns his perverse reception to good.
In the *Aeneid,* however, misreading a divine gift, such as an oracle, results in
immediate consequences, which are not necessarily beneficial. For example,
Anchises’ misinterpretation (bad reception) of oracles drives the Trojans all over
the Mediterranean attempting settlements without success. Quint attributes this to
Anchises’ inability to let go of the past.24 The same kind of misdirection leads
Augustine in one vain attempt after another to find God’s truth and fill his need
for God’s love. In part what drives his intellectual drifting is a lust for knowledge:

Huc accedit alia forma temptationis multiplicius periculosae. praeter
enim concupiscentiam carnis, quae inest in delectatione omnium
sensuum et voluptatum, cui servientes depereunt qui longe se
faciunt a te, inest animae per eosdem sensus corporis quaedam non
se oblectandi in carne, sed experiendi per carnem vana et curiosa
cupiditas nomine cognitionis et scientiae palliata. quae quoniam in
appetitu noscendi est, oculi autem sunt ad noscendum in sensibus
principes, concupiscentia oculorum eloquio divino adpellata est.

Here another form of temptation approaches many times more
dangerous. For in addition to the concupiscence of the flesh, which
is in the delight of all the senses and pleasures, the slaves of which
perish if they are far from you, and in the pleasure of the flesh
through the same senses of the body, there is a temptation, which

24 Quint (1982) 22
does not gratify the flesh but rather gains experience through the flesh, a vain and curious desire, which disguised in the name of understanding and knowledge. Since it is based on the craving of knowledge, and the eyes are principal among the senses for gaining knowledge, it is termed by Scripture as concupiscence of the eyes (10.35.54).

This temptation for knowledge, in part, misleads Augustine in his intellectual search. Although Augustine wanders, impaired by arrogance and blindness, God out of grace leads him using his desires for worldly things to lead him to Italy, where he will meet the people, who become a critical factor in his conversion. Before this he finds himself gradually moving in the right direction, though not without folly. He comes to a point where he feels more aligned with the desires that he approves of in himself than the ones he does not approve (8.5.11). This also applies to the manner of his intellectual search; for instance, he seeks answers to the question of evil but is seeking in an evil way (7.5.7). Eventually Augustine is converted to reading Scripture, which he realizes he is prevented from understanding early on, because of his pride (3.5.9). He often attributes his inability to comprehend God to his own faults, sometimes speaking in terms of blindness or being turned away from the light (4.16.30); or in terms of weakness (8.1.2). Of his friends and himself, Augustine tells us that, even when they sought the truth, they lacked the light by which to see (6.10.17). This is because they still have not wholly embraced Scripture, the authority of which was established, according to Augustine, due to the inability of human reason alone to find truth (6.5.8).
Augustine will meet with success when his reception matches that of a child, in no way different from Ascanius’ playful observation that he and the Trojans had eaten their tables after all (Aen. 7.116). He notes the contrast between his fruitless erudition which misleads him, and the ignorance of youth which is more nourished by God:

quid ergo tunc mihi proderat ingenium per illas doctrinas agile et nullo adminiculō humani magisterii tot nodosissimi libri enodati, cum deformiter et sacrilega turpitudine in doctrina pietatis errarem? aut quid tantum oberat parvulis tuis longe tardius ingenium, cum a te longe non recerdent, ut in nido ecclesiae tuae tui plumescerent et alas caritatis alimento sanae fidei nutriren?

Therefore what had a sharp intellect produced for me through those teachings and with no support of a human teacher altogether when I erred disgracefully, sacrilegiously, and shamefully with regards to the teaching of holiness? Or what great obstacle was it for your little ones that their intellect was by far slower, since they did not withdraw far from you, but rather grew in the safe nest of your church and you nurtured them with the nourishment of sound faith? (4.16.31)

The same sentiment appears again when he tells of Simplicianus narrating Victorinus’ tale of conversion to him in the hope of exhorting him to humility that is hidden from the wise but revealed to children: ut me exhortaretur ad humilitatem Christi sapientibus absconditam et revelatam parvulis, “so as to urge me to the humility of Christ which is hidden from wise men and revealed to the little ones” (8.2.3). He realizes that his own efforts are not enough and that, in spite of his education, he is still unable to gain God. In spite of this realization, he
would not be ready to give up the intellect that has earned him so much praise and admiration in the eyes of men.\textsuperscript{25}

**Agency of God/gods**

A critical difference between the gods of pagan Rome and Augustine’s conception of the Christian god is the divided nature of the pantheon versus the unified conception of God. The gods in the *Aeneid* are not part of a joint cause to have Aeneas reach Hesperia safely. Even his own mother causes trouble in Carthage. He no longer has a *patria*, his loyalty to which he formerly directed his actions, and his attention must repeatedly be directed toward Ascanius. In short, he lacks a fixed point of reference by which to judge his actions. Augustine, on the other hand, trusts that the one God intends only good for him and that God is always shaping his steps and missteps to good ends. If Augustine strays, he regards it as the perversion of his soul, but God uses even his perverse desires and those of the people around him to guide him. For example before Augustine leaves Carthage, he considers the misbehavior of his students the chief reason for his seeking opportunities in Milan (5.8.14). At the time of composition, however, he comes to see the truth as God separating him from his former attachments and attracting him to new ones, in order to move him to Milan:

\[\text{verum autem tu, spes mea et portio mea in terra viventium, ad mutandum terrarum locum pro salute animae meae, et Carthagini stimulos, quibus inde avellerer, admovebas, et Romae inlecebras, quibus adtraherer, proponebas mihi per homines, qui diligunt vitam mortuam, hinc insana facientes, inde vana pollicentes, et ad}\]

\textsuperscript{25} See *Conf.* 6.6.9 in which Augustine tells the anecdote about seeing the happiness of the drunkard and concluding that he nonetheless preferred the misery of an intellectual.
corrigendos gressus meos utebaris occulte et illorum et mea perversitate.

In truth, however, you, my hope and my share in the land of the living, you moved to change my country for the wellbeing of my soul, and goads of Carthage, by which I was torn away, and the attractions at Rome, by which I was drawn, you presented to me through men, who love a dead life,\textsuperscript{26} you used them doing crazy things on the one hand, making empty promises on the other hand, to correct my path secretly by means of both their perversity and my own. (5.8.14)

There are also times when Augustine sees his comments, which are not intended for good, being used by God to good ends. For example, when his friend, Alypius, is crazed about spectacles (which Augustine no longer cares for), it is Augustine’s words that cause Alypius to give them up, but Augustine brings this about unwittingly and unintentionally, thereby making it clear that the change was brought about by God (6.7.12).

The role of the gods is one form of critique Augustine makes against the pagan gods. Aeneas is not driven from Carthage by any physical means applied by the gods. He must make the decision to leave, therefore his conscious compliance is required.\textsuperscript{27} Jupiter accomplishes this by a message sent to Aeneas through Mercury, who compels Aeneas to action. Augustine, on the other hand, regards his actions as the invisible hand of God acting upon him. God does not, for example, reveal to him or his mother the purpose of going to Milan (5.8.15). Augustine demonstrates the superiority of God, by displaying the pagan gods’ dependence upon human compliance. Additionally, he sees God sprinkling his

\textsuperscript{26} Cf. \textit{me ipsum in his a te morientem, deus, vita mea} (\textit{Conf.} 1.13.20) discussed below.

\textsuperscript{27} Fichter (1982) 50
pleasures with disappointments, so that he may seek pleasure without
disappointment (2.2.4).

Conversion

In the Confessions Augustine’s struggle with desire, along with his own
wanderings all culminate in the conversion scene in the garden at Milan in Book
8. For Augustine a conversion can be broadly defined as any commitment in line
with God’s will. It is literally a turning. In his case it is a turning from worldly,
base pleasures to the imperishable joys offered by God. The conversion in the
garden at Milan is not a transition from faithlessness to faithfulness; it does not
mark a transition from doubt to certainty, but rather a greater willingness to abide
in God: nec certior de te sed stabilior in te esse cupiebam, “I was not desiring to
be more certain but to be more steadfast in you” (8.1.1). Both Augustine and
Aeneas undergo a pivotal experience that is culmination of all the preceding
events that take place. In the underworld Aeneas is given a tour of his future by
Anchises, and from that point on no longer looks backward. Though no longer
burdened by longing for the past, Aeneas’ hopes to live by pietas are thwarted by
the very nature of pietas itself. The divided nature of pietas, that is, its various
loyalties to gods, family, and patria, make it complicated to fulfill whenever any
of those objects come into conflict with one another. Augustine addresses a
similar issue of various goods tearing at the soul:

si ergo pariter delectent omnia simulque uno tempore, nonne
diversae voluntates distendunt cor hominis, dum deliberatur, quid
potissimum arripiamus? et omnes bonae sunt et certant secum,
donec eligatur unum, quo feratur tota voluntas una, quae in plures
dividebatur.
Therefore if everything delights equally at the same time, do various wills pull apart the heart of man, while he decides which to choose? And all are good and contend with one another, until one is chosen, by which the whole will is brought together, which was divided into many. (8.10.24)

Augustine, however, finds a solution here, in the agreement of all good with any chosen good, whereas Vergil ends the *Aeneid* with Aeneas questionable act of *pietas*.

Both Aeneas and Augustine are persuaded during these pivotal scenes, which results in an abandonment of their past attachments. Whereas Augustine is offered exempla of conversion by Continentia, Aeneas is shown his line of descendants by Anchises in the underworld. With his journey into the land of the dead and his subsequent emergence, he experiences a sort of death and rebirth. These are the same terms in which Christian conversion is depicted. Augustine’s search for knowledge of himself and God’s truth leads to a spiritual death or the death of his former self, which is shackled by habit and lust. These pivotal moments in both texts share many similarities, but more significant are their differences. They both attain knowledge, but Aeneas descends to knowledge, while Augustine rises to it. Though some scholars argue that Aeneas undergoes a conversion of sorts, he remains unchanged after the underworld scene. He is

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28 The next chapter is devoted largely to Continentia and the exempla she offers.

29 See *Conf.* 9.10.24 where Augustine describes his mystical conversation with Monica, by which they mount towards Wisdom.

30 See Fuhrer for a summary of many scholars’ views of Aeneas and whether or not he changed significantly in *pietas* and heroism (1989) 93. Fuhrer herself argues that Aeneas does not undergo a change in personality.
pius from the beginning of the epic and throughout, but in spite of this he feels alone and despondent. Augustine, on the other hand, experiences a true transformation, which he attributes wholly to God. Even though he finds new life through his abandonment of worldly ambitions and pleasures, a commitment to continence cannot keep him from mourning his mother. This he regards as a great failure and show of weakness. Aeneas too will fail in pietas by his slaying of Turnus, but whereas the Aeneid ends on this dark and complex note, Augustine’s Confessions end in hope and understanding that seeking God is the only hope but also a promise of fruition.

Whereas Augustine undergoes a conversion of will, Aeneas, in order to arrive in Hesperia, must act against his will. He asserts as much to Dido twice, once before he leaves Carthage and once in the Underworld. Aeneas is driven by pietas, the sense of that motivates one to do one’s duty, though it may not align with his own will. He tells Dido twice he does not leave of his own will, once before his departure and once more when he encounters her in the underworld. Aeneas never seems to come to terms with what he has had to give up and the demands of his fate, as we see in his words to Ascanius in the last book of the Aeneid:

“disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem, fortunam ex aliis.”

“From me, my son, learn of valor and true labor; From others learn of fortune.” (12.435-6)

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31 See Aen. 8.28ff. and 8.520ff. and Sullivan (1959), whose sees a dramatic change in Aeneas but not until Book 8.
Augustine, on the other hand, is given peace in return for his commitment. Augustine depicts God as “turning us back to himself with his wondrous ways”: *convertis nos ad te miris modis* (4.4.7). When one is converted to God, they are converted along with their will. He defines happiness itself as necessitating seeking God. If you do not seek God, you must not want to be happy:

> Absit, domine, absit a corde servi tui qui confitetur tibi, absit, ut, quocumque gaudio gaudeam, beatum me putem. est enim gaudium quod non datur inpiis, sed eis, qui te gratis colunt, quorum gaudium tu ipse es. et ipsa est beata vita, gaudere ad te, de te, propter te: ipsa est et non est altera. qui autem aliam putant esse, aliud sectantur gaudium neque ipsum verum.

May it be absent, Lord, absent from the heart of your servant, who confesses to you, absent the thought that I may be happy with what joy I rejoice in. For there is joy, which is not granted to the impious, but to those who worship you without reward, whose joy is you yourself. And this very thing is a happy life, to rejoice to you, about you, on account of you: this itself is a happy life and nothing else. Those, however, who think that there is another joy, pursue one that is not the true one. (10.22.32)

Joy is granted to those who seek it. As with other gifts of God, the very experience of joy itself is the return. Aeneas, though full of *pietas* and successful in his mission, finds no such happiness. Certainly Augustine would have found Aeneas’ world an unsettling place to inhabit, a world in which gods set out to harm you and in which you have no sure path to truth and happiness, a world in which even the most steadfast adherence to the highest virtue can leave a pious man despondent.
IV. THREE SCENES FROM THE AENEID

Before Aeneas ever embarks on his wanderings, he experiences a pivotal chain of events in Troy that launch him on his mission. Augustine mentions three of these scenes that delighted him as a child before he too embarked on his own wanderings:

\[ \text{dulcissimum spectaculum vanitatis, equus ligneus plenus armatis et Troiae incendium atque ipsius umbra Creusae.} \]

The sweetest spectacle of vanity, a wooden horse full of armed men and the burning of Troy and the shade of Creusa herself.

(1.13.22)

Within these lines we must keep in mind that Dido hears Aeneas’ story as it is told to us. We do not have Dido’s reception, but we know she longs to hear Aeneas’ story and that he narrates his wanderings at her request. On the second level is Augustine’s reception of Dido’s reception. Just as the stories captivate Dido and fuel her passions for Aeneas, they captivate Augustine and distract him from his own misery. Once again he is aligned with Dido. Aeneas’ narrative is made in response to Dido’s request. In this way, she offers herself to him as a screen to project his desire for Troy, and, in a sense, she becomes his object of desire. Aeneas even begins his narrative in response to her desire, but her desire merely becomes a reflection of his own.

These three scenes are not part of the errores that Augustine identifies with, but rather they constitute a summary\(^{32}\) of the events that lead to Aeneas’ wanderings: the horse is the ruse that allows the Greeks access to Troy, which, in

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\(^{32}\) Austin (1959) 24
turn, causes the destruction of Troy, one result of which is Creusa’s death; her shade represents for Aeneas all that is left of Troy, an underworld full of shades of the dead, yet it is as a shade that she points him to his actual future. For Augustine, the reader, they are “spectacles of vanity”, and for Aeneas, as well, they will become illusory within the context of his story. Moreover, these spectacles become edifying, when read as three examples of erroneous reception of the *Aeneid* that Augustine will grapple with and overcome in writing his *Confessions*: First, the wooden horse, dangerously interpreted as a gift of protection when it is, in fact, a gift of destruction, demonstrates the way in which subjects project their desires onto objects often with devastating consequences in the *Aeneid*. Gifts and language of giving and receiving are treated very differently, as the dynamics between giver and recipient are radically recast in the Christian relationship between God and servant. Second, within the destruction of Troy, we see the redirection of Aeneas’ *pietas*, as his sense of duty must shift from a dying fatherland to his surviving family members. Aeneas, however, lacks the direction from one unified God that Augustine is promised by his faith. Third, Creusa’s shade represents the only form in which past dead desires can exist. As a shade of herself and a link to Troy, she is the image and symbol of what Aeneas truly desires. She is parallel to the images of desire in Augustine’s journey – the people and things that seem to offer a satisfying substitute for God but do not. In spite of holding Aeneas back, however, Creusa’s shade is the first figure to urge Aeneas toward his future. Augustine will eventually cease to embrace the images of God that Creusa stands for, and both he and Aeneas move on. Augustine,
however, will rise above taking an earthly bride and instead will enter a spiritual marriage to Continentia.

**The Trojan Horse, Gifts Recast, and the Economy of Desire**

In the previous chapter we saw the association between the Trojan horse and Ascanius, both deceptive gifts sent to destroy their recipients. Dido receives this gift of Cupid in the form of Ascanius, just as it is intended by Venus, that is, her desire is in line with the god’s. Unlike Augustine’s God, however, Venus and the other gods have their own loyalties, and their gifts can be beneficial, but they also can also evil. For this reason characters cannot be sure of what they are receiving.

In the *Aeneid* gifts often have dark associations. The language that surrounds the gift of the Trojan horse, for example, is ambiguous, just as the gift itself. Aeneas sets the scene, telling of how dream was deep in sleep and wine. Here he calls rest (*quies*) the most favorable gift from the gods, but in this case this gift of rest stealthily creeps in and contributes to Troy’s undoing: *tempus erat quo prima quies mortalibus aegris / incipit et dono divum gratissima serpit*, “It was the time when first rest begins for weak mortals and most welcome it creeps in as a gift from the gods” (2.268-69). The very act of giving the wooden horse is deceptive. It is *given* under the pretense of a gift of atonement to Athena for the stolen Palladium. The Trojans receive it blinded by their own desires. Though they are warned twice of its treachery and hear the weapons clank inside, they nevertheless work hard to bring it into the city walls.

Augustine too is blind to how he should receive his gifts and what he is seeking. In the *Confessions* the conceptualization of how gifts from God work is
radically different from the ominous, deceptive, destructive depiction of them in the *Aeneid*. In both works the power of gifts is dependant upon the desire of the recipient and the gift invites the recipient to cast his desires onto it; however, whereas the desire of the recipient in the *Aeneid* can and often does align with the will of the gods with disastrous consequences, the desire of the recipient in the *Confessions* must align with the will and intention of God, in order for the gift to be received properly. This is not the case in the *Aeneid*. Dido, for instance, received Venus’ gift of Cupid as it is intended, but it clearly does not result in anything beneficial. Dido tries to keep Aeneas from his destiny, and when she is thwarted, she destroys herself. Venus’ gift also results in the curse on Rome.

Augustine sees that he has been endowed with intellectual acumen by God: *et celeritas intellegendi et dispiciendi acumen donum tuum est*, “both swiftness of intellect and (4.16.30), but he has squandered such a gift in not making a sacrifice on it (*sacrificabam*, 4.16.30). His desires when receiving God’s gifts are misaligned with God’s will, which causes him to misuse and even abuse his gifts of intelligence. Gifts from God, which are misused, offer no benefit: *nam quid mihi proderat bona res non utenti bene?*, “For what profit was this good things to me when I failed to use it well?” (4.16.30).

Although it is unclear to Augustine at times how he should use his gifts, all gifts from God are nonetheless good (1.20.31). In accordance with Augustine’s teaching, anything that has existence is a gift from God, since God gives all things. We examined the basic Christian tenet above that everything is from God, and because God is good, everything is good. Evil, which deviates from the good,
in turn, deviates from being substantial. Augustine depicts everything as a gift from God, from the milk received through his mother’s breasts to the beauty and intellect he is endowed with to his very existence. To deviate from the economy of gifts as granted by God is to deviate from the concept of the gift-giving itself, that is, claiming from and for oneself the gifts that are from God and for the purpose of discovering God. Augustine acknowledges, in retrospect, that he was given gifts by God, but he squandered them. In terms of desire, gifts in the Confessions are granted by God as a means to return to him. Gifts will help you fulfill your desire for God, but they can be misused.

Augustine attributes the desire to do something evil to a perverted desire for good. One may, for instance desire power, which is a desire to be God, or desire things that are owed to God, such as knowledge or power. The point that the desire differs from the way God intends us to have them, is where the perversion takes place. In other words, whatever I receive, whether it is wisdom, power, or wealth, I must receive in alignment with God’s desires, in order for the gift to be repaid properly. Prayer, which is a combination of gratitude for gift and a request for gifts, demonstrates how the recipient aligns his desires with God. When praying properly, the recipient asks for things that God already wants for him, that is, he is aligning his desire with the will of God.

The ability to align one’s desires with God’s will also comes from God. Everything that comes from God, returns to God, and God is the one who grants the strength or virtue that makes it possible for one to return the gifts. As Augustine asks, who has anything which he did not receive to begin with
(7.21.27). The entire transaction is contained by God. This defines the economy of the divine gift in Christianity. A return is made by using the gifts properly. Regarding Juno’s speech, Augustine sees he could have used his gifts on something else more beneficial (1.17.27). Gifts are given by God, but, according to Augustine, they must be repaid: How can I repay (retribuam) you? (2.7.15) Although God demands repayment, he has no need for this repayment, because he neither needs nor lacks anything. Augustine sums up the economy of giving and receiving from God in the following paradoxes:

semper agens, semper quietus, collagens et non egens, portans et implens et protegens, creans et nutriens et perficiens, quaerens, cum nihil desit tibi . . . numquam inops et gaudes lucris, numquam avarus et usuras exigis. supererogatur tibi, ut debeas, et quis habet quicquam non tuum? reddis debita nulli debens, donas debita nihil perdens.

Always active, always at rest, gathering yet not needing, carrying yet full and protective, creating and nourishing and completing, seeking, when you lack nothing . . . never impoverished you rejoice in your gain, never greedy yet you demand interest. You allow us to overpay, so that you are in debt, but who has anything that is not already yours? You repay debt owing nothing. (1.4.4)

In the Aeneid the interpretation of a gift depends upon the desire of the recipient. The gift is recast in the Confessions, however, when the recipient of the gift reflects what the recipient thinks the desire of God is. God, of course, being without need and being totally and completely fulfilled, is without lack or need, but he, nevertheless, makes demands, yet what he demands is already his.
With the exception of the scene of Augustine’s departure for Italy, we see in Monica an exemplary\(^{33}\) of proper gift reception. Augustine emphasizes that these gifts are not her own, but endowed by God: *non eius, sed tua dicam dona in eam* (9.8.17). This proper reception of gifts involves simultaneously gratitude for the gift being given but also full relinquishment of the gift to God. Augustine always attributes Monica’s finest qualities to God: her facility as a peacemaker (*munus grande donaveras*, 9.9.21), her faith and spirituality (*ex fide et spiritu*, *quem habebat ex te*, 3.11.19), her courage (*virtutem feminae – quoniam tu dederas ei*, 9.11.28).\(^{34}\) All virtues are God’s gifts, and none can be claimed for oneself:

\[
\text{quisquis autem tibi enum\-erat vera merita sua, quid tibi enum\-erat nisi munera tua?}
\]

If anyone were to give you an account of his real merits, what else would that be but a list of your gifts? (9.13.34)

Monica falters in his faith at times, as evidenced by her grieving, but she nevertheless continues to receive gifts from God in the form of consoling dreams and signs. During Augustine’s involvement with the Manicheans, Monica deeply mourned her son’s spiritual death. Around this time, she has one dream Augustine attributes to God, in which a young man comforts her by telling her, “*ubi tu, ibi et ille*”, “Where you are, he will be also” (3.11.20). She also receives what she regards as a sign from God, when a priest consoles her: “*fieri non potest, ut filius istarum lacrimarum pereat*”, “It is not possible that a son of those tears of yours

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\(^{33}\) In Chapter 3 we will examine Monica’s role as exemplum further.

\(^{34}\) See also *Conf.* 5.9.17.
should perish” (3.12.21). She also has a dream on his voyage from Carthage to Italy, assuring her of a safe arrival (6.1.1). Augustine sees this as God’s promise to her. She, in turn, gives comfort to the sailors, who become nervous during the storms. Ramage, working from Courcelles observation that signs, oracles, and dreams are part of a pattern in the Confessions, adds that there is also such a pattern present in the Aeneid. The difference is that whereas Apollo’s oracles need clear understanding and are often misunderstood, God’s promises are clear. Moreover, although a potential convert must eventually receive God’s gifts properly, in order to achieve conversion, God, according to Augustine continues to move and act without human compliance, as discussed above.

Augustine speaks of his son, whom he did not even want at first, in terms of gifts. Augustine declares that he had no part in making Adeodatus except the sin and that his son is comprised of gifts from God:

adiunximus etiam nobis puerum Adeodatum ex me natum carnaliter de peccato meo. tu bene feceras eum. annorum erat ferme quindici et ingenio praeveniebat multos graves et doctos viros. munera tua tibi confiteor, domine deus meus, creator omnium et multum potens formare nostra deformia: nam ego in illo puero praeter delictum non habebam. quod enim et nutriebatur a nobis in disciplina tua, tu inspiraveras nobis, nullus alius. munera tua tibi confiteor.

We associated the boy Adeodatus with us as well, my son according to the flesh, born of my sin. Very fair had you fashioned him. He was then about fifteen, but surpassed many educated men of weighty learning. I am acknowledging that these were your gift, O Lord my God, creator of all things, who are more than powerful enough to give fair form to our deformities, for nothing did I contribute to that boy’s making except my sin. It was you, and you

35 Ramage (1970) 57; Courcelle (1968) 22.
alone, who had inspired us to instruct him in your truth as he grew up, and so it is your own gifts that I acknowledge to you.\footnote{Tr. Boulding} (9.6.14)

In the case of Adeodatus, the gift is the site of redemption. The uneven exchange of sin for gift demonstrates God’s grace and characterizes the nature of giving and reception in the \textit{Confessions}. This is rather different from the nature of gifts demonstrated through Ascanius in the \textit{Aeneid}. Ascanius is a blank slate, open for others to project their hope, desire, and gifts, both good and evil. He projects nothing certain, because he is such an ambiguous figure, whereas Adeodatus is portrayed as the place where sin is present yet overcome. Again this is an issue of reception. Early on Adeodatus is the unwanted child who is loved anyway (4.2.2). Here he is a gift in spite of the sin that produced him. This is yet another instance, in which Augustine demonstrates God turning all for good; even an unwanted gift becomes a blessing, markedly different from the gifts of the \textit{Aeneid} that seem auspicious but are in truth destructive.

\textbf{Troy Ablaze: \textit{Pietas Directed}}

By receiving the deceptive gift of the Greeks and interpreting it as an indication that the war has come to an end, the Trojans bring about their own ruin and, more specifically, the destruction of Aeneas’ former world.\footnote{Panthus, the son of Apollo’s priest reports to Aeneas: “\textit{fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium}” (Aen. 2.325)} From the Roman perspective this is good, because it leads to the founding of Rome. In narrating this event to Dido, Aeneas is revealing the loss that results in his desire and wanderings. Augustine, like the Trojans, casts his desires on the gifts from God, which he misuses. Although he gains a zeal for wisdom and truth through reading
the *Hortensius*, he pursues the lies of the Manicheans. Just as Troy must burn, in order for Aeneas to seek out his fate, Augustine too must experience loss and disappointment, in order to find God. In that loss both Aeneas and Augustine find direction, as they are both turned away from what they can no longer have. They will seek to regain it, but whereas Aeneas must ultimately give up his object of desire for a new mission, Augustine sees his desire as never changing. God is his fixed object of desire, and it is only his reception of God and all that God gives, as well as reception of his own desire, that requires changing. For both Augustine and Aeneas a certain abandonment of the past must occur, but whereas Aeneas must, in effect, forget his past, Augustine incorporates his past into his conversion.\(^{38}\)

The burning of Troy is the backdrop, against which initial attempts to direct Aeneas’ *pietas* take place. During the attack on Troy Aeneas abandons his gods and is repeatedly urged to redirect his feelings of *pietas* toward his family and future *patria*:

First, even though Hector’s shade tells Aeneas that the *penates* have been entrusted to him and that he is to find another land (2.293-7), Aeneas is heedless of Hector’s words, and his only thought is what a noble thing it is to die in arms (2.317).

Second, Aeneas abandons the gods a second time, thinking the gods have abandoned the Trojans. When Aeneas is convinced of the gods’ abandonment of

\(^{38}\) See Quint (1982) for a discussion of the problems of forgetting the past; see also MacCormack (1998) 228ff. on Augustine’s references to Vergil.
him, he, in turn, abandons them and loses sight of what he ought to be doing. The combination of *furor* and the impulse to avenge his *patria* take over, and he urges his companions to die fighting, declaring it the only hope of the conquered:

\[
\text{‘iuvenes, fortissima frustra}
\text{pectora, si vobis audentem extrema cupido}
certa sequi, quae sit rebus fortuna videtis:
excessere omnes adytis arisque relictis
di quibus imperium hoc steterat; succurritis urbi
incensae. moriamur et in media arma ruamus.
una salus victis nullam sperare salutem.’}
\]

‘Young men, bravest hearts in vain,
if you have a final determined desire to follow me
as I take this risk, you see what the fortune we have:
all the gods have left and have abandoned their
shrines and altars, on which this kingdom stood;
you are trying to save a city on fire. Let us rush into
the midst of arms and die. The one hope for the conquered
is to hope for no deliverance.’ (2.348-54)

In the *City of God* Augustine questions the worship of gods who hate their subjects and who require protection (*De Civitate Dei*, 1.3). He points out that the *penates* are described by Aeneas as defeated (*victosque deos*) and entrusted to his protection rather than protecting him.\(^{39}\) He questions why Rome would entrust its wellbeing to defeated gods who, such as in Minerva’s case, cannot even protect their temple guards (*De Civitate Dei*, 1.2). Indeed even Aeneas declares: “*Heu nihil invitis fas quemquam fidere divis!*”, “O, one must not trust any of the wavering gods!” 2.402) Later Helenus will encourage Aeneas to worship and love Juno (3.434-39), worship out of fear rather than love. Tiberinus also urges Aeneas to offer prayers to Juno (8.60).

\(^{39}\) See *Aen*. 8.11
Third, Although Aeneas is fired to rush back into the fight by the will of the gods (*numine divum*, 2.336), his *furor* and *pietas* are redirected by another god, his mother. Here again we see the fractured nature of a pagan *pietas* that subjects men to loyalties of many gods. When Aeneas spies Helen crouched beside the altars of Vesta, in his fury he has the urge to kill her, but Venus reminds him of his duty to his family:

“nate, quis indomitas tantus dolor excitat iras?
quid furis? aut quonam nostri tibi cura recessit?
non prius aspicies ubi fessum aetate parentem
liquерis Anchisen, superet coniунxne Creusa
Ascaniusque puer? quos omnis undique Graiae
circum errant acies et, ni mea cura resistat,
iam flammae tulerint inimicus et hauserit ensis.
non tibi Tyndaridis facies in visa Lacaenae
culpatusue Paris, divum inclementia, divum
has evertit opes sternitque a culmine Troiam.
aspice (namque omnem, quae nunc obducta tuenti
mortalis hebetat visus tibi et umida circum
caligat, nubem eripiam.)”

“My son, what pain has roused this indomitable anger?
Why this madness? Where has your care for me gone?
Will you not first look for your father, where you left him,
Anchises, weary with age, or see whether your wife Creusa and the boy Ascanius survive? All the Greek lines run everywhere and if not for my interference the flames would have born them away and the enemy sword would have cut them down. It is not the hated face of the daughter of Tyndareos or culpable Paris whom you should blame, but the ruthlessness of the gods, of the gods, that overturns these riches and levels Troy from her pinnacle (I will tear away every cloud, which obstructs your mortal seeing and dulls your vision and the vapor that dims everything around it.)”

(2.594-606)

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40 This has a Homeric parallel in Athena holding Achilles back from killing Agamemnon (*Iliad* 1.193ff.)
This is not the first time *furor* and *pietas* will mingle. Aeneas’ killing of Turnus is described in similar terms.⁴¹ In his *furor* for the destruction of his *patria*, Aeneas is blind to the *pietas* owed his mother and to his family. Augustine will also ignore his mother, whose insights and visions he ignores in his blindness. Monica, in fact, has been likened to Venus by scholars.⁴² Aeneas’ reception of the events is clouded, as he blames Helen and Paris for the war and Troy’s downfall. In his case the cause of the evils in his life are the gods: *apparent dirae facies inimicaque Troiae / numina magna deum*, “Fearsome forms appear, the powers of the gods which are hostile to Troy” (2.622-23). Augustine’s evils, on the other hand, are due to his own erroneous reception and that of those influencing him. Augustine’s God will always send good things to him and steer him right. In this way the *Confessions* overcomes the evils of the gods of pagan literature.

Fourth, when Aeneas arrives at Anchises’ house only to encounter the recalcitrance of his father, he doubts and blames Venus for leading him there to see them all ruined together. Armed for revenge and longing for death, Aeneas begins to rush out of Anchises’ house after begging him to come with them. As he leaves to fight once again, Creusa beseeches him to protect his family and his household (2.675-8), repeating the Venus’ entreaty. In these two adjacent scenes, we see Aeneas direct his *pietas* toward a dying *patria* rather than his surviving family.⁴³ Aeneas has given up on the gods, and misguidedely defends a dying

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⁴¹ See Chapter 1, pp.57-61; *Aen.* 12.945 ff.
fatherland rather than his own family, not for lack of *pietas* but rather lack of direction from his defeated and reluctant gods. Augustine’s God, on the other hand, is victorious and steadfast.

Even after Aeneas has directed his *pietas* in such a way that he meets with success in Hesperia, he never considers himself a model for happiness. Towards the end of the epic he advises Ascanius to look to himself for an example of *virtus* and hard work but not of good fortune: *disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem / fortunam ex aliis*, “Learn virtue and true labor from me, boy, but fortune from others” (12.435-6). Aeneas presents himself as an exemplum, but an incomplete one.

Aeneas acts in an exemplary way throughout the *Confessions*, yet he is a victim of his fate. As we will see in the next chapter, the standards for Augustine as an exemplum will be inverted. Augustine, unlike Aeneas, presents himself as a broken man rather than a virtuous one, one mired in falsehood and images of goodness, rather than truth, but he is nonetheless exemplary, because he is the recipient of God’s grace. Therefore Augustine is the darling of fortune, because God uses all Augustine’s actions and decisions to direct Augustine to the places and people who will guide him in his conversion.

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43 In Chapter 1 I used Lee’s definition of *pietas*, which involved a threefold devotion to gods, fatherland, and family.
Creusa’s Shade: Substitutes for Intimacy with God

Ultimately, Aeneas ventures back into a falling Troy and is given a definitive injunction by Creusa’s shade to move forward. In this way the death of his fatherland, presented in the shades of Hector and Creusa, direct and compel him to proceed. As Aeneas is leading his family out of a blazing Troy, along the way, he loses Creusa and rushes back into the dying city to find her. She appears to him as an infelix simulacrum. After Aeneas attempts to embrace her three times in vain, she addresses him with these words:

“quid tantum insano iuvat indulgere dolori,  
o dulcis coniunx? non haec sine numine divum  
eveniunt; nec te comitem hinc portare Creusam  as, aut ille sinit superi regnator Olympi.  
longa tibi exsilia et vastum maris aequor arandum,  
et terram Hesperiam venies, ubi Lydius arva  
inter opima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris.  
illic res laetae regnumque et regia coniunx  
parta tibi; lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae.  
non ego Myrmidonum sedes Dolopumue superbas  
aspiciam aut Grais servitum matribus ibo,  
Dardanis et divae Veneris nurus;  
sed me magna deum genetrix his detinet oris.  
iamque vale et nati serva communis amorem.”

“What good is it to indulge this mad sorrow so much,  
O dear husband? These things do not happen without the  
will of the gods; it is not permitted to you to carry your companion  
Creusa away from here, otherwise the ruler of high Olympus  
would allow it. There will be a long exile for you and a vast sea  
must be plowed, then you will come to the land Hesperia, where  
the Lydian Tiber, a gentle stream, flows through the rich fields.  
There a happy situation, a kingdom, and a royal bride  
wait for you; hold back your tears for beloved Creusa.

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44 This is analogous to underworld scenes, in which he is cut off from figures in his past, most notably Deiphobus and Dido.

45 Andromache was also called infelix (2.455), as will Dido (4.450).
I will not see the haughty homes of the Myrmidons or the Dolopians or go to slave away for Greek matrons, I, a Dardan woman and daughter-in-law of divine Venus; but the great mother of the gods keeps me on these shores. And now farewell and protect the son we share.” (2.776-89)

Aeneas’ vain attempts to embrace Creusa’s shade on one level represent the pursuit of images in place of a true object of desire. She is not, however, an obstacle, as she once again directs Aeneas’ pietas toward the gods, which will ensure his future in a new land with a new bride. She also bids Aeneas to looks to Ascanius, who, hereafter, will be a symbol of the future. Creusa is only one of many other shades who will point Aeneas’ to his future.

I align two figures from the *Confessions* with Creusa, Augustine’s concubine and his friend who dies at Thagaste, because they are substitutes for the intimacy Augustine longs for with God. Augustine’s concubine, as described in the *Confessions*, can be read as a Creusa figure in three ways: she must be left behind for another bride (one whom Augustine never happens to marry); she is the mother of his child, a gift that points him to his future; and she sets a good example by committing herself to chastity. The unnamed friend who dies at Thagaste, Augustine loves more fervently than God. Creusa and the other shades pose a problem of reception for Aeneas. They are meant to be received as signs that point him to his future, but he only mourns their loss with that of Troy, unable to overcome his backward longing for all that they represent. Augustine

46 There are a number of similarities between Augustine’s account of his friend and his concubine. Asiedu identifies five: 1) They both go unnamed in Augustine’s narrative; 2) The story of each involves a crisis situation of both their own and Augustine’s; 3) The situations end in “unfinished business”; 4) God enters their stories when Augustine is alienated; 5) The separation from each leaves Augustine inconsolable (1994) 21.
experiences the same problem of reception with his unnamed friend and unnamed concubine,\textsuperscript{47} in whose scenes we hear echoes of the \textit{Aeneid}. For Augustine they are substitutes for intimacy with God. Even when they experience their conversions, he is unable to receive them as exempla. The turning point will come when Augustine realizes that the ability to turn comes from God alone and that exempla are exemplary because they receive the gifts of God has he intends them.

\textbf{Death of a friend at Thagaste}

Regarding the death of a friend at Thagaste, Augustine writes, concerning his soul:

\begin{quote}

\textit{et si dicebam, “spera in deum,” iuste non obtemperabat, quia verior erat et melior homo, quem carissimum amiserat, quam phantasma in quod sperare iubebatur”}

And if I told myself, “Hope in God,” rightly it did not obey, because truer and better was the man, who was most dear to it (\textit{anima}) and whom it had lost, than the phantom in which it was ordered to believe (4.4.9).
\end{quote}

Augustine meets his friend’s death with grief certainly, but concludes, in looking back, that he was not altogether selflessly disposed. For example, he did not want to die in his friend’s stead. Nonetheless his friend was more real to him, even in death, than the phantom he considered God to be. His feelings toward his friend reflect reception of friend as God, a form of idolatry. Instead of seeing all things

\textsuperscript{47} In a psychoanalytical reading Elledge argues that the fact that his friend goes unnamed signals a continuing distrust of union. In addition he argues, “It acknowledges the divinely unsanctioned nature of the relationship and feebly attempts to divest the individual of an identity Augustine nevertheless treasures” (1988) 80. In both cases the impersonal and detached nature of his reference to his concubine, \textit{cum qua cubare}, and to his also unnamed friend contrasts sharply with the highly emotional language of the separation.
as coming from God, he filters all things through his friend’s existence. Nothing that they shared is beautiful without him, because they no longer hold him or proclaim his coming:


My heart was darkened with grief, and whatever I saw there was death. My fatherland was punishment to me and my father’s house was terrible unhappiness, and whatever I had shared with him, without him had turned into immense torture. My eyes sought him everywhere, and he did not appear. And I hated everything, which held him not, because they could not say to me anymore “Look, here he comes,” just as they had when he was alive, whenever he was absent. (4.4.9)

This is a perversion of proper reception, because Augustine should see God’s creations as proclaiming him alone (9.10.25). In this way Augustine turns his friend into a substitute for God. This passage also recalls Dido, who sees and hears Aeneas in his absence: illum absens absentem auditque uidetque, “Absent she hears and sees him absent” (4.83). Augustine wants to return to this very inflection. He wants once again to hear his friend even in his absence (quando absens erat). Just as Dido is dangerously consumed by thoughts of Aeneas, Augustine’s whole world is suffused with the memory of his friend.48 Once again Augustine only sees only unhappiness (infelicitas) and death (mors), instead of

48 Augustine’s obsessive association of the phenomenal things of the world with his friend recalls Andromache’s dangerous obsession with Hector and Astyanax.
understanding that he can only find happiness with God and mourning the death he is undergoing because of his separation from God. The agonizing devastation he experiences at the loss of his friend demonstrates a passionate attachment. As Brown points out, “To be a friend of Augustine’s meant only too often becoming a part of Augustine himself.” Here Augustine has used both Vergil’s and his language describing Dido to narrate the loss of his friend, thus painting himself as a Dido figure yet again.

His reaction to his friend’s death seems especially intense, when contrasted with the peaceful acceptance, with which he meets his son’s death (9.6.14). He does not fear for his son, because Adeodatus’ actions are above reproach. Monica, on the other hand, as though she foresaw Augustine’s missteps deferred his baptism, for fear he would commit more sins in the time between his baptism and death. Though Augustine begged to be baptized, Monica, in anticipation of the sins he would commit, wanted to be sure that he would be cleansed of as many as possible (1.11.17).

Before his friend’s death, he and his friend shared the same beliefs about the church. Augustine expected his friend would join him in laughing over the baptism that had taken place, but his friend only shudders away from him as though he is an enemy (4.4.8). In retrospect Augustine comes to agree with his friend and later views his friend as having been rescued by God from his heretical clutches:

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49 Brown (1967) 63
ego autem stupefactus atque turbatus distuli omnes motus meos, ut convalesceret prius essetque idoneus viribus valetudinis, cum quo agere possem quod vellem. sed ille abreptus dementiae meae, ut apud te servaretur consolationi meae: post paucos dies me absente repetitur febribus et defungitur.

I, however, was stunned and disturbed, but I put off my feelings, so that he could heal first and be back in good health, at which point I could do what I wanted. But he was ripped away from my madness, so that he would be safe with you for my consolation. After a few days, while I was away, he was taken with fever again and died. (4.4.8)

Once again we see an allusion to Dido in Augustine’s absence. Augustine concludes that his friend was seized (abreptus, 4.4.8) by God, in order to save him from Augustine’s mad designs. Recall from above that God also seized Augustine (raperes) from Monica when her attachment becomes excessive. Like his mother and many others in his life, Augustine’s friend establishes a precedent and example for Augustine’s decision to convert, but he is not yet ready to follow his friend’s example and consoles himself with tears instead. His concubine, another false object, will also set an example for Augustine and point him to his future.

**Augustine’s concubine**

Just as Creusa must be left behind by Aeneas for another royal bride, Augustine’s concubine must be abandoned for the bride Monica has selected for him. Just as Creusa points Aeneas to his future, which he will not immediately be able to pursue without backward longing for Troy, Augustine’s concubine sets an example for him that he is too weak to follow (6.15.25). Just as Aeneas speaks only of his grief during this encounter with Creusa, while she resolutely points

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50 Monica is depicted as a Dido figure in that scene, *Conf.* 5.8.15.
him to his future, so Augustine focuses on his grief and makes no mention of his concubine’s reaction but her commitment to God. Creusa’s representation is two-fold. Although her scene is literally the embracing of an image or false object, she, nonetheless is a signifier of what is real and fated.

Augustine’s parents do not arrange a marriage for him in his youth in the interest of his academic pursuits, which his father encouraged out of vanity and his mother out of her belief that even a pagan education would be advantageous for his spiritual development (2.3.8). Augustine, however, insists that an early marriage might have curbed some of his more profligate behavior and directed his lusts into more beneficial channels:

\[
\text{quis mihi modularetur aerumnam meam et novissimarum rerum fugaces pulchritudines in usum verteret earumque suavitatibus metas praefigeret, ut usque ad coniugale litus exaestuarent fluctus aetatis meae? . . . . non fuit cura meorum ruentem excipere me matrimonio.}
\]

Who was there to curb my trouble and turn these fleeting beauties of the most novel experiences to some benefit and set bounds for their charms, so that the wave of my youth would have flung me onto the shore of matrimony? . . . Yet my family did not take care to intercept my ruin by arranging a marriage for me. (2.2.3-4)

First, the storm imagery that Augustine conjures up with his words here, as if marriage could be just another error of his journey.\(^{51}\) He paints himself as Aeneas once again, who is also flung upon the shores of Carthage to enter into a dubious marriage. Augustine, who finds his peace in celibacy, still views a marriage as a valid means of directing one’s desires, although he still considers Paul’s

\[^{51}\text{See Ziolkowski (1995) 6-8, especially n. 41, for a detailed look at the language of seafaring in the Confessions and the parallels in the Aeneid.}\]
injunction to remain unmarried preferable.\textsuperscript{52} In a similar passage in book 8, he speaks of being forced to adapt to marital life, to which he gave himself but no longer wants.

sed ego infirmior eligebam molliorem locum et propter hoc unum volvebar in ceteris languidus et tabescens curis marcidis, quod et in aliis rebus, quas nolebam pati congruere cogebar vitae coniugali, cui deditus obstringebam.

But I was too weak and I chose a gentler place and on account of this alone I was tossed about, vacillating and languishing in withered cares, because I was forced to adapt to other aspects of conjugal life, which I did not wish to experience, to which I had given myself to be bound. (8.1.2)

Just as Augustine mentions the superiority of Paul’s plan in the previous passage, so following this passage mentions the model of eunuchs, who castrate themselves for the love of the kingdom of heaven (8.1.2). It seems though marriage offers one way to direct one’s desires, he, in the course of his journey, finds it as unsatisfying as his other methods of seeking God, always turning to those who fully give up marital futures to live abstemiously for God.

Augustine never enters into an official marriage. He carries on a relationship with his concubine, with whom he will have a son and with whom he has a monogamous sexual relationship for approximately the next thirteen years. It was a widely accepted practice in Late Antiquity to maintain concubines, since marriage was a relatively difficult arrangement to make. Brown writes: “Concubinage of this kind was a traditional feature of Roman life. Even the Catholic Church was prepared to recognize it, provided the couple remained

\textsuperscript{52} I Cor, 17:32-33
faithful to one another. For a full marriage was prohibitively complicated: it
demanded that the partners should be of equal status, and it involved complex
dynastic arrangements.”

The provision that the couple should remain faithful to
one another is noteworthy, since it makes the arrangement seem to provide some
semblance of a marriage to men waiting to take an acceptable spouse. According
to van Bavel, Augustine’s arrangement with his concubine was “recognized by
Roman law as a marriage, be it of a lower rank than a fully lawful marriage.”

Brown gives a rather cool presentation of the arrangement: “No Late Roman
gentleman, for instance, wrote poems to his concubine. She would be his
housekeeper, the mother of his sons, of considerably lower class than himself.”

In fact, Brown attributes Augustine’s reserve in speaking of his concubine to his
status as a “gentleman.”

In any case, this imitation of marriage appeals to young Augustine. His
relationship with his concubine, though it resembles a marriage is a shade of true
marriage. Within this relationship, however, Augustine strives to a sort of virtue.
It is often the case in Augustine’s narratives that he mitigates his sin with some
measure of uprightness. For example, though their friendship was not bound by
the Holy Spirit, Augustine insists that his unnamed friend was nonetheless dear
(
\textit{dulcis}, 4.4.7) to him. On Augustine’s commitment to his concubine, Edwards

\begin{footnotes}

\footnote{Brown (1964) 62}

\footnote{Van Bavel (1989) 38; his source, Solignac, \textit{Augustin et la mère d’Adeodat}, in Bibliothèque
augustinienne 13 (Paris 1962) 677-679.}

\footnote{Brown (1964) 62}

\footnote{Brown (1964) 89}
\end{footnotes}
writes, “In place of prudence, he offers a kind of fidelity as a substitute, asserting
the ironic chastity of his devotion to a single mistress and the natural affection he
feels toward the child she subsequently bears him. Nonetheless, the relationship is
not coniugalis modus, a proper measure of conduct between a husband and wife
. . . it is an agreement (pactum) founded on carnal appetite.”57 He cuts his tie with
the woman, whom he has no hope of marrying and who eventually would have
kept him from more ambitious pursuits, worldly or spiritual; from the former
because she kept him from a career marriage and from the former because she
made the chastity he sought impossible.

Counted and recorded among his wayward behaviors in Carthage,58 his
cohabitation with his concubine is introduced:

in illis annis unam habebam non eo quod legitimum vocatur
coniugio cognitam, sed quam indagaverat vagus ardor inops
prudentiae, sed unam tamen, ei quoque servans tori fidem, in qua
sane experirer exemplo meo, quid distaret inter coniugalis placiti
modum, quod foederatum esset generandi gratia, et pactum
libidinosi amoris, ubi proles etiam contra votum nascitur, quamvis
iam nata cogat se diligi. (4.2.2)

In those years I had a girl not bound to me legitimately by
marriage but one, whom a wandering lust devoid of prudence had
tracked down, but one nonetheless to whose bed I was faithful. In
this relationship I learned by experience what the difference was
between a bond agreed to for the purpose of having children, and a
contract of libidinous desire, where children are born unintended,
although once they are born one is compelled to love them. (4.2.2)

57 Edwards (2006) 24

58 Edwards notes that Augustine’s account of his relationship with his concubine is one among
three scene, the theme of which is Augustine’s “latent probity.” Though he takes his concubine out
of lust, he is nonetheless faithful to her (2006) 24.
The relationship, though founded on the basis of taming a *vagus ardor*, became essentially a marriage for Augustine, with the only real point of difference being the intention to conceive children (4.2.2). In a way marriage is yet another gift from God, the proper use of which is to produce children. Despite a desire to the contrary, Augustine and his concubine conceive a child, who, as we saw above, Augustine, nonetheless, considers a gift from God.

After the dismissal of his concubine, Augustine is unable to be married soon afterward because of the young age of his fiancée. He is too unhappy to accept his concubine as an exemplum and become the “imitator of a woman”: *at ego infelix nec feminae imitator* (6.15.25), and, in fact, turns in the other direction, as his lust forces him to take another woman, described as “not at all a wife”: *non utique coniugem* (6.15.25). As we see in the passage above, although he does not consider his first concubine a wife either, there are some later indications that he did regard her as such. In *de bono coniugali* Augustine seems to make some self-referential judgments:

> Etenim si aliquam sibi uir ad tempus adhibuerit donec aliam dignam vel honoribus vel facultatibus suis inveniat quam comparem ducat, ipse animo adulter est, nec cum illa quam cupid invenire sed cum ista cum qua sic cubat ut cum ea non habeat maritale consortium. Unde et ipsa hoc sciens ac volens impudice utique miscetur ei cum quo non habet foedus uxorium. Verum tamen si ei tori fidem seruet et, cum ille uxorem duxerit, nubere ipsa non cogitet atque tali prorsus opera continere se praeparet, adulteram quidem fortassis facile appellare non audeam.

Indeed, if a man takes on some woman for the moment, until he can find some other worthy of his status or his wealth whom he can marry as his equal, he is an adulterer at heart, not with the one whom he is keen to search out, but with the one with whom he has sexual intercourse without the intention of partnership in marriage.
So too if the woman knows and approves the situation, she is clearly in an immoral relationship with the man with whom she does not have the compact of a wife. However, should she maintain sexual fidelity with him, and after he takes a wife she gives no thought to marriage herself to refrain utterly from such sexual intercourse, I should not perhaps readily call her an adulterer. (De bono coniugali, 5.5)\(^59\)

According to this, had Augustine married after his concubine, he would have considered it an act of adultery against her. Asiedu argues that his concubine’s vow of chastity left Augustine with no choice but to follow her example.\(^60\) He does not do this immediately. His use of \textit{infelix} here once again recalls Dido. Like Dido, he is still given to his passions and urges, and he doubts in his ability to give them up. He is the obstacle to his own quest for continence.

The concubine that he takes \textit{non amator coniugii et libidinis servus}, “not a lover of marriage and a slave to lust” (6.15.25), is another refraction of the marriage he does not even desire anymore. Though his desires are changing, the chains of his old desires (6.11.20) have bound himself inextricably to a woman: \textit{non iam inflammantibus cupiditatibus . . . sed adhuc tenaciter conligabar ex femina}, “no longer by inflaming desires . . . but still firmly bound to a woman” (8.1.2). What comes to replace both Augustine and his mother’s desire for an advantageous marriage for him is a spiritual marriage to a fertile and abundant \textit{Continentia}. Fichter writes, “His visionary ‘marriage’ to \textit{Continentia} at once parodies Aeneas’ destined marriage to Lavinia and overgoes the \textit{Aeneid} by

\(^{59}\) Ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh (2001)

\(^{60}\) Asiedu (1994)
celebrating the event that Virgil relegates to his poem’s future (8.11).”\textsuperscript{61} After his attempts at finding substitutes for the marriage that he could not have, he finds a fertile and modest bride in Continentia.

V. CONCLUSION

The \textit{Aeneid} serves as not only a model for Augustine’s own journey from false objects to God, but it is in itself a false object for Augustine. By incorporating and transforming the language of the \textit{Aeneid}, Augustine offers a critique of the \textit{Aeneid} and turns his past to good ends. He condemns his boyhood reception of the \textit{Aeneid}, because he failed to see why he identified so strongly with Dido and Aeneas. What he comes to understand is that the misidentification he has with her should have been the true basis for their identification. In other words, Augustine, as a boy, thought he was like Dido, but he was only like Dido in thinking he was like her. He received her as a false object, just as she received Ascanius as one. In correcting his reception of Dido properly, Augustine not only gains knowledge of himself but he uses to give back to others, as well, in the form of the \textit{Confessions}. He does not abandon the past but appropriates it to move into the future. His boyhood reading of the \textit{Aeneid} is part of this past, but whereas Aeneas no longer glances backward at his past, Augustine does just the opposite. His \textit{Confessions} is an exercise in memory and scrutiny of the past.

Augustine’s goal in composing the \textit{Confessions} is to persuade his audience of how greatly they are in need of God. In this respect, it is a rhetorical work. In

\textsuperscript{61} Fichter (1982) 52
the next chapter we shall examine rhetoric as a gift from God to Augustine and, in
turn, a gift from Augustine to his audience. We shall also look at the relationship
between rhetoric and desire and how rhetoric is a critical instrument in
Augustine’s conversion.
CHAPTER 3

RHETORIC, EXEMPLA, AND CONTINENTIA: THE GIFT OF CONVERSION

I. INTRODUCTION

The pivotal moment in Book 8 of the *Confessions* is Continentia’s appearance before Augustine, an encounter that defines his conversion (8.11.27). Augustine has mentioned previously that Continentia only comes to man as a gift from God: *neminem posse esse continentem nisi tu dederis*, “no one can be continent except when you grant it” (6.11.2). In Book 8 she is depicted as an orator, exercising the skills of rhetoric, which up to this point have been discussed variably as a gift to Augustine and others. At this moment just as Augustine is about to give up teaching rhetoric, Augustine ascribes rhetoric to Continentia, who not only comes as a gift but offers gifts of exempla, in turn. These exempla shape Augustine’s conversion experience and narrative throughout Book 8. They come to replace the model of Aeneas’ journey, which becomes inadequate for narrating Augustine’s experience. Augustine, however, does not turn his back on his epic model but appropriates its themes of desire and erotic language to narrate his conversion. In this way his use of the *Aeneid* demonstrates the conversion of his reception and desire. In the process he also brings about a conversion of themes and language of
the *Aeneid*, as well. In presenting these exempla in Book 8, as well as other exempla in other books, Augustine often includes contrasting examples, or counter-exempla, of the kind of behavior that reflects the desires his former self. This narrative pattern in his story of perversion and conversion\(^1\) always reminds us that perversion, a turning away or perverse imitation of the good and, therefore, of God, is part of the conversion, the return to God. The narrative movement back and forth between what is right and what is questionable demonstrates the conversion process, as well. Despite Augustine’s insistence that he comes as who he is at the time of narrative: *non qualis fuerim sed qualis sim*, “I am not as I was but as I am” (10.4.6), he, nevertheless, constantly reminds us of who he was, which defines conversion not as a moment but an ongoing process. By constantly bringing in his past, Augustine also reminds us of God’s grace and how his conversion is a product of the grace, through which divine gifts are bestowed. The exempla that come from Continenceia are not only a part of her rhetoric, but they are part of the rhetoric of the *Confessions*, which is a rhetorical and persuasive work. In composing the *Confessions*, Augustine is making a return on the exempla he received as a gift, by becoming an exemplum himself. Unlike in the case of human gifts, the return on divine gifts can be identical and immediate.\(^2\) Just as the gift of existence is returned by one’s very existence, the return on the gift of continence is to be continent, thus the return is defined by the gift.

\(^1\) I borrow this pair from Burke.

\(^2\) Bourdieu (1977) 1-30.
Before Augustine’s conversion, however, he must overcome the chains of habit that bound his own perverse will:

ligatus non ferro alieno sed mea ferrea voluntate. velle meum tenebat inimicus et inde mihi catenam fecerat et constrinxerat me. quippe ex voluptate perversa facta est libido, et dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo, et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.

Bound not by another’s sword but by my own iron will. The enemy held my ability to will and from this had made a chain for me and had restrained me. For lust comes about from a perverse will, and as long as is served it becomes habit, and as long as habit is not resisted, it becomes compulsion. (8.5.10)

He will realize that even for the converted soul, the inclination to return to these habits and compulsions will still draw his soul and that conversion is a continual process of God’s grace being bestowed on his wretchedness. An important post-conversion example of lapsing is Augustine’s mourning of his mother’s death. He will, in turn, lament this act of mourning, but offers himself hope in his conceptualization of conversion.

The *Confessions* itself is a rhetorical work, composed to convince others of their own need for God. Within the narrative of the *Confessions* Augustine traces rhetoric in his early years as an instrument of vanity and pride to his understanding of rhetoric as a gift of God, ultimately used to turn him back to God. In the last chapter we saw how Augustine “converted” the language and themes of the *Aeneid* to narrate his own *errores* in a journey toward conversion, specifically a conversion of reception. In this chapter we shall look at how rhetoric too undergoes a conversion reflecting his change in reception. This happens in two ways: first, Augustine’s use of rhetoric to narrate the *Confessions*
marks a change in rhetoric as a genre. Augustine Christianizes rhetoric by making the primary goal of his rhetoric the persuasion of truth. Secondly, within the narrative of the *Confessions* reception of the rhetoric of others also changes, as Augustine begins to see their rhetoric, good or bad, as an instrument of his conversion.

To begin I will discuss the rhetoric of Augustine, which returns to a Platonic emphasis on truth. Then I will go on to examine the reception of rhetoric on two levels: Augustine’s own use of his skill and how he receives the rhetoric of others, such as Cicero and Ambrose. The shift in views he adopts toward rhetoric reflect the conversion process itself, as he sees rhetoric increasingly as an instrument of praising God and expounding his truth rather than a means to fulfill his vanity. Finally I will look specifically at the exempla of Book 8 as gifts from God, offered through the rhetoric of Continentia, and their role in shaping Augustine’s conversion. The discussion of exempla will include an in-depth examination of Monica, that most persistent exemplum in Augustine’s life. I argue that the roles of rhetoric, Continentia as orator, and the exempla offered by her all constitute a gift of conversion, the return on which is the conversion itself and Augustine’s dedication to persuading others that they too need to seek God.

**II. THE RHETORIC OF THE *CONFessions***

Rhetoric is a gift on many levels in the *Confessions*. Language, the base of rhetoric, is regarded by Augustine as a gift from God, but with its acquisition, he
is plunged into a world of desire not formerly known to him (1.8.13). Since desire is his way back to God and all desire is for God, we could read the acquisition of language, which results in desire, a gift meant to lead us back to God. The deployment of rhetoric is also a gift, which Augustine sees himself as squandering on fruitless exercises, starting with his boyhood speech as Juno (1.17.27) up until his eulogy of the emperor in Milan (6.6.9). Eventually rhetoric is deployed by Continentia, as she approaches Augustine, as a gift from God, offering to Augustine the exempla that will become instrumental in his conversion. Thus rhetoric, as a means of conversion, is a gift itself.

A pervasive theme throughout the *Confessions* is God’s utilization of all things to his ends. Augustine sees God using his very desires, however perverse or misguided, and the desires of his friends, to drive him to Italy. He sees the virtue in the truth found in the self-alienating, pagan literature he sometimes condemns, because even that truth can lead to understanding of self. Rhetoric, like his desires and like the classical literature Augustine identifies with in terms of his desires, is another instrument that God uses to turn Augustine. If classical literature is one lens through which Augustine recognizes and identifies his desires, then the way he speaks about and uses rhetoric is an indication of his vicinity to fulfillment of that desire. It is also the means by which Augustine sees himself persuaded of the truth and his path and the means by which he will persuade others. He misuses the gift of rhetoric in his early years, however.

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3 Bennett writes, “thus language gave expression to desire, but desire in turn was shaped by the conventions of language” (1988) 57
Within the narrative of the *Confessions*, Augustine combines the position of audience and *rhetor*, as he, formerly *rhetor*, hands the wand of rhetoric over to Continentia and becomes her audience in his own rhetorical work. The incorporation of this inversion is part of the conversion of rhetoric that takes place, reflecting the spiritual conversion that Augustine undergoes.

The *Confessions* is a work of praise, of repentance, and of persuasion, but it is chiefly concerned with discovery of truth (Book 10.1.1). Because it is a work of persuasion, it is a work of rhetoric, through which Augustine attempts to persuade those like himself that they too can do what he has done. He combines this with a fierce commitment to the instruction of truth and interweaves it with the pleasing and personal anecdotes of his confession. Throughout the *Confessions* one finds this seamless integration of teaching with narrative, which marks Augustine’s new style of rhetoric. Much work has been done on rhetoric per se in the *Confessions*, and I do not intend to focus on rhetoric, so much as rhetoric as a gift, the reception of which reveals the nature of Augustine’s desire throughout the course of the *Confessions*. Therefore I will mention only a few key points here, which are essential to my examination.

**Augustine’s Rhetoric**

Augustine was born into a world where rhetoric was a central means of social agency, which, in turn, was dependent upon the rhetoric of the Second Sophistic. He departs from emphasis on style prized by the second sophistic by returning to

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4 For an extended discussion of rhetoric in the Confessions see Mazzeo (1962); Kennedy (1980), especially pp.149-160; Troup (1999).
the Platonic concern for truth. Augustine was an admirer of Cicero’s, and he both studied and taught rhetoric himself. He adopts the Ciceronian aims of an orator: *docere, delectare, flectere* (Conf. 4.12.27 from Cicero Orat. 21.69). Augustine reduces Cicero’s five canons of rhetoric to *inventio* and *dispositio*. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book 4 of which is essentially a treatise on Christian rhetoric, Augustine places the greatest emphasis on teaching the truth, which is associated with content, while delighting and moving are concerned with manner or style (4.12.27). Above all truth must be taught with the emphasis on clarity over eloquence (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 4.9.23). Instruction of truth, particularly the meaning of Scripture, is the ultimate goal of Christian rhetoric. Augustine’s recommendation of keeping Scripture in mind, especially for the ineloquent, not only emphasizes the importance of the priority of truth but addresses the need to delight the audience, as well (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 4.5.8). He will go further still in de-emphasizing verbal eloquence to prize the rhetoric of silence that is beyond words and beyond language and that proclaims God as sovereign over all his creation (9.10.24-25). O’Donnell emphasizes the importance of God’s truth as a grounding feature of Christian rhetoric: “I take confession in its root form to go to the root of *confessio* – an affirming speech, affirming because it affirms what another would say. It is a narrative or avowal that aligns the will of the speaker

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5 Mazzeo (1962) 176

6 Mazzeo (1962) 176, n. 5 for a detailed explanation of this development. Cicero’s five canons of rhetoric are *inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and actio*.

7 Although the *Confessions* is replete with Scripture and, naturally, with the doctrine presented in Scripture, the emphasis of my study will be the personal nature of Augustine’s confession and of what he is trying to persuade his audience.
with the antecedent will or belief of some other and authoritative figure. It is a repudiation of the self in favor of some larger or other truth.”

Even though Augustine regards truth and instruction of foremost importance in rhetoric, he still understands the importance of persuasion, which results in the audience’s move to action. For this reason Troup calls the *Confessions* rhetorical because “it intends to influence the social behavior of its audience.” Because rhetoric has this goal of persuasion, it is naturally geared toward desire of the audience:

Sicut est autem, ut teneatur ad audiendum, delectandus auditor; ita flectendus, ut moueat ad agendum. Et sicut delectatur, si suauiter loqueris, ita flectitur, si amet, quod polliceris, timeat, quod minaris, oderit, quod arguis, quod commendas, amplexatur, quod dolendum exaggeras, doleat; cum quid laetandum praedicas, gaudeat, misereatur eorum, quos miserandos ante oculos dicendo constituis, fugiat eos, quos cauendos terrendo proponis; et quicquid aliud grandi eloquentia fieri potest ad commouendos animos auditorum, non quid agendum sit, ut sciant, sed ut agant quod agendum esse iam sciunt.

Just as the listener ought to be delighted, so that he may be retained to listen, thus he ought to be moved, so that he may be moved to act. And just as he is delighted, if you speak sweetly, thus he is moved, if he loves what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you denounce, embrace what you commend, and grieves what you insist should be grieved; when you say that something should be rejoiced in, he rejoices, he pitied those, whom you set before his eyes and say ought to be pitied, he flees those, whom you suggest they should beware of; and whatever else can be done by means of grand eloquence to move the souls of listeners, not so that they know hat they ought to do but so that they do what they already know they ought to do. (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 4.12.27)

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9 Troup (1999) 54
Just prior to Augustine’s conversion, he needs to be persuaded of what he already knows he ought to do. No doubt remains about God’s truth and the service he should perform, but he must be convinced to take action (8.5.11). His Confessions is a speech to convince others that they too can do what they know they must do. In this way, docere takes on a new function. He is writing, in part, to an audience that already desires to serve God. He writes to persuade them to turn their desire into action.

The composition of the Confessions is also a response to the desire of the audience (10.3.3-4). This is implied in Augustine questioning why those, who do not want to hear who they are, want to hear who he is: quid a me quaerunt audire qui sim, qui nolunt a te audire qui sint? (10.3.3). Why do they want to hear from Augustine? What could their motives be and how does Augustine respond to their desires? When Augustine makes himself the audience of Continentia’s speech, he has her address his desire for certainty and has her demonstrate through exempla how he is able to take critical steps towards conversion. Through Continentia’s speech to Augustine we learn that Augustine desires to know he is able to devote his life to continence. Paradoxically he learns that he is able, precisely when he is finally convinced that he is unable by his own strength, and that it is only through God’s strength and God’s bestowal of continence that allows him to gain it. The desire to be able to do what God commands is the desire he presumes for his audience. They may, in fact, have a myriad of other desires when requesting his confession, however, the audience’s desire to take

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10 See Troup (1999) 44
action in accordance with their convictions is the assumption from which he claims to address them, and he writes in the hope that his audience will listen to him with hearts full of caritas.

**Caritas and the Christian audience**

While considering his reasons for composing his *Confessions*, Augustine devotes much thought to whether or not he will be believed, and he concludes that those who listen to him out of caritas, will believe him:

> sed quia caritas omnia credit, inter eos utique quos conexos sibimet unum facit, ego quoque, domine, etiam sic tibi confiteor ut audiant homines, quibus demonstrare non possum an vera confitear. sed credunt mihi quorum mihi aures caritas aperit.

But because charity believes everything, at least among those who are made one with one another, I confess also in such a way, Lord, that men hear, to whom I cannot demonstrate the truth, hear me. But they, whose ears charity opens, believe me. (10.3.3)

Aristotle identified three modes of persuasion: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.\(^\text{11}\) These were redefined by the Romans as *probare*, *movere*, and *conciliare*. Certainly Augustine adheres to a version of this. As we saw above, he advocated proof as a form of delight; it is important to keep in mind that proof is more concerned with truth in Scripture than *logos*. According to Kennedy (in his reading of *De Doctrina Christiana* 4.59-63) *ethos* is an important element of Augustine’s rhetoric, as well: “He thus revives ethos as a major rhetorical factor, though not ethos as projected in a speech, which is what Aristotle had in mind. That quality has been transmuted into the second of the duties of the orator, to delight. To Augustine ethos is Christian works, the life of the teacher, and the extent to which

\(^{11}\) *The Art of Rhetoric*, 1.2.3-6.
it accords with his teaching.”\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{Confessions}, however, is unique, in that Augustine transcends these in his appeals, by appealing to the sense of \textit{caritas} in his Christian audience. The Aristotelian categories of persuasion do not apply the same way in the \textit{Confessions}. A need for proof, which appeals by virtue of \textit{logos}, must be suspended.\textsuperscript{13} Need for credibility and trust, which belong to the realm of \textit{ethos}, is replaced by grace. I agree with Kennedy that “to Augustine ethos is Christian works, the life of the teacher, and the extent to which it accords with his teaching.” In other words a Christian rhetor is an exemplum. Moreover, an ideal Christian exemplum is not an exemplum because he is remarkable in virtue, but because he is persuaded of his own weakness and God’s strength. Augustine is displaying his wretchedness (bad \textit{ethos}) to his audience, but he is also exhibiting the renewal of his character through God’s grace and God’s victory over his vileness. In other words, he is an exemplum of God’s grace. Augustine is not asking to be believed because out of trust in his upstanding character, but rather out of Christian \textit{caritas}, which ideally understands the transgression of man and loves all the same. By changing the basis from which his audience receives his rhetoric and de-emphasizing the role of the orator, Augustine draws a firm distinction between the Christian audience and the classical audience. O’Donnell in his commentary, on Augustine’s choice of title, writes:

\textsuperscript{12} Kennedy (1980) 157

\textsuperscript{13} Kennedy, on a similar note, regarding the textual interpretation of \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, a work concerned primarily with interpretation of Scripture, Kennedy writes, “Proof in Christian rhetoric is primarily a matter of discovery of the authoritative utterance in the text and its clear explication.”\textsuperscript{13} Kennedy restricts the subject matter of Christian rhetoric to “the exposition of the Scriptures and their meaning for the Christian life.” (1980) 158
By presenting his words as a ‘confession’, A, disclaims authority for his own text (and by so doing does exactly what he claims not to do), but refers to a higher authority those who question his authority for speaking. He turns away skeptics by telling them (at 10.3.3) that his text is for those who are joined to him in caritas (again invoking the higher authority), and that it is not surprising if others refuse to believe what they read in it. This strategy aims to freeze out the hostile or skeptical reader. A. admits that the text has no authority with such a reader, but implies that this failure is the fault of the reader, not of the writer. His business is with his God, for the edification of those who are chosen by God to benefit from the text; other readers are left to shift for themselves.14

The classical audience desires proof of what they want to hear and flattery. Therefore persuasion depends on the orator’s ability to play to the audience’s ratio and desire. The Christian audience, on the other hand, presumably shares a desire for God’s truth, and Augustine argues that they will be persuaded not out of rationale or proof or trust, but out of caritas, which comes from and reflects God’s love. The Christian audience will also, for his sake, charitably rejoice for his triumphs and grieve for his transgressions (10.3.4). He identifies his intended readers as such:

hic est fructus confessionum mearum, non qualis fuerim, sed qualis sim, ut hoc confitear non tantum coram te, secreta exultatione cum tremore et secreto maerore cum spe, sed etiam in auribus credentium filiorum hominum, sociorum gaudii mei et consortium mortalitatis meae, civium meorum et mecum peregrinorum, praecedentium et consequentium et comitum vitae meae.

This is the fruit of my confessions, not what I was but what I am, such that I confess this not only before you, in secret exultation mixed with fear and secret sorrow with hope, but even in the ears of those believing sons of men, companions in my joy and sharers of my mortality, my fellow-citizens and fellow-travelers, those

who have preceded me and those who will follow me and the companions of my life. (10.4.6)

This echoes a previous remark earlier in the _Confessions_:

> neque enim tibi, deus meus, sed apud te narro haec generi meo, generi humano, quantulacumque ex particula incidere potest in istas meas litteras. et ut quid hoc? ut videlicet ego et quisquis haec legit cogitemus, de quam profundo clamandum sit ad te.\(^{15}\)

> For not to you, my God, but I tell these things to my kind, human kind, however a little bit they may chance upon in my writings. And to what end? Naturally so that I and anyone who reads these things may think about how deeply he ought to cry out to you. (2.3.5)

He is an exemplum, but he approaches his audience ambivalently. As we have seen, Augustine uses of contrasting exempla that offset his exempla. Augustine, as exemplum, also functions as his own contrast. He is joyful and fearful, sorrowful yet hopeful, and he invites the audience in certain passages, to join his confession, by including them in the address (4.1.1, 11.1.1).

The relationship between desire of the audience and rhetoric has been theorized about as far back as Plato. In the _Apology_ Socrates’ speculates about his supporters’ thoughts:

> “Perhaps you think that I was convicted for lack of such words as might have convinced you, if I thought I should say or do all I could to avoid my sentence. Far from it. I was convicted because I lacked not words but boldness and shamelessness and the willingness to say to you what you would most gladly have heard from me, lamentations and tears and my saying and doing many things that I saw are unworthy of me but that you are accustomed to hear from others (38d-e).”\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Psalms 129.1

\(^{16}\) _Apology_ translations, G.M.A. Grube
Socrates is addressing his audience’s desire for his survival. He emphasizes the importance of truth over eloquence at the beginning of the speech: “From me you will hear the whole truth, though not, by Zeus, gentlemen, expressed in embroidered phrases like theirs, but things spoken at random and expressed in the first words that come to mind, for I put my trust in the justice of what I say, and let none of you expect anything else (17c).” Augustine will return to the reliance on the power of the truth. Plato’s *Phaedrus* similarly summarizes the attitude of the day and the danger of current rhetorical practices: “The intending orator is under no necessity of understanding what is truly just, but only what is likely to be thought just by the body of men who are to give judgment; nor need he know what is truly good or noble, but what will be thought so, since it is on the latter, not the former that persuasion depends” (259e). In fact the orator is so aware of his audience that, according to Phaedrus, he begins his speech with the name of his admirers (258b). This sets up rhetoric with a slippery moral base; if the goal of rhetoric is persuasion alone, an orator need not be versed in what is just at all, only what the audience desires to hear. Socrates does not see rhetoric as evil in and of itself. Rhetoric can be good when it is used to persuade men of the truth. In line with this, Augustine argues that, since rhetoric can be used to persuade even what is evil and, as such, is morally neutral, and therefore it should be adopted for good ends:

Cum ergo sit in medio posita facultas eloquii, quae ad persuadenda seu praua seu recta ualet plurimum, cur non bonorum studio comparatur, ut militet veritati, si eam mali ad obtinendas peruersas uanasque causas in usus iniquitatis et erroris usurpant?
Therefore since the faculty of eloquence is made available to all, which is very effective to persuade of the perverse or upright, why not appropriate it for the pursuit of good, so that it serves the truth, if the evil usurp it to achieve perverse and vain causes for the sake of iniquity and error? (De Doctrina Christiana, 4.2.3)

Christian rhetoric differs in that it is based on God’s truth. No matter how the argument strays or what the desire of the audience is, the Christian orator can always return to the fixed truth of God, in the form of Scripture interpreted for the Christian life. The burden of the Christian orator lies in persuading non-believers to believe and believers to live more fully in God; he is to console those who are persecuted and lend support to converts. In the Confessions, as Augustine moves from emphasis on style and attainment of glory to an emphasis on truth and instruction of the Word, we see how Augustine moves from viewing rhetoric as an instrument of elevating himself to a means of glorifying God.

**Rhetoric in Augustine’s Life**

I will examine the reception of rhetoric on two levels: first, Augustine’s reception of his own skills at deploying rhetoric, as bestowed by God; second, Augustine’s reception of the rhetoric of others, as applied to him. Augustine’s career interest in rhetoric explains the prominence and value of speech and rhetoric in the Confessions. His speaking skills are valued by him in the past because of the praise they garner for him from men and they seem to have value in the narrative present because of the influence they may have on his audience. The difference is that, at the time of narration, he is seeking to earn praise for God and no longer for himself. Speech of others plays a significant role in Augustine’s conversion.
The moment of conversion itself is urged by speech, as an unseen child bids him with the words, “Tolle, lege”, “Pick up and read” (8.12.29)\textsuperscript{17}.

Augustine began studying rhetoric at an early age, and from the beginning he is urged toward the worldly rewards achieved through pursuing rhetoric:

\begin{quote}
\textit{deus, deus meus, quas ibi miserias expertus sum et ludificationes, quandoquidem recte mihi vivere puero id proponebatur, obtemperare monentibus, ut in hoc saeculo florerem et excellerem linguosis artibus ad honorem hominum et falsas divitias famulantibus. (1.9.14)}
\end{quote}

God, my God, what wretchedness and I experienced and how I was trifled with, in as much as it was proposed for a boy to live rightly, to obey those reproaching, so that I could flourish in this life and excel in serving the language arts for the purpose of gaining the honor of men and false wealth. (1.9.14)

He goes on to win praise for excellence in speaking, including a prize for a speech, in which he takes on the voice of Juno. From the age of nineteen to twenty-eight he teaches rhetoric in Carthage and teaches students who are “lovers of vanity and seekers of lies”: \textit{diligentibus vanitatem et quaerentibus mendacium} (4.2.2). He moves to Rome claiming to seek not higher pay but more disciplined students. He is appointed professor of rhetoric in Milan some time later. While there, his activities include delivering a panegyric on the emperor, in which he tells many lies to win the favor of the knowing: \textit{cum pararem recitare imperatori laudes, quibus plura mentirer et mentienti faveretur ab scientibus}, (6.6.9). Following his conversion, Augustine decides it will please to God to give up a career of selling rhetorical weapons to students desiring things contrary to God’s law:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{17} Spence (1988) 79
\end{quote}
et placuit mihi in conspectu tuo non tumultuose abripere, sed
leniter subtrahere ministerium linguæ meae nundinis loquacitatis,
ne ulterius pueri meditantes non legem tuam, non pacem tuam, sed
insanias mendaces et bella forensia, mercarentur ex ore meo arma
furori suo.

It was pleasing in your sight for me not to tear away suddenly but
to withdraw smoothly the service of my tongue from the market of
speaking, lest boys, thinking not of your law, nor your peace, but
of mad lies and legal battles, buy from my mouth the arms of their
fury. (9.2.2)

Not only do his students seek false objects through their speech, but they gain
these false objects by playing on the false desires of the audience, as opposed to
the true desires of the ideal Christian audience. Augustine shifts from acting on
his desire to please God as opposed to his desire to please men. His career of
teaching rhetoric is tied to gaining approval. He will eventually wholeheartedly
give up his teaching career and bring his talents under the authority of God. He
accomplishes this, in part, through a speech he puts in the mouth of Continentia,
which we will examine below. God, after all, appropriates all things to his ends,
including rhetoric.

Juno

During his time with the Grammaticus, Augustine wins a prize for delivering a
speech as Juno. He wins based on his ability to best display her anger while

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18 Augustine would have been of elementary school age.

19 Sarah Spence argues that Augustine ushers in a cultural conversion for rhetoric, such that desire
is reincorporated into rhetoric and valorized. She sees Augustine’s recitation of Juno’s speech as a
student as “ritually calling out to be heard.” Moreover, he “becomes Juno as a way of asking not to
be suppressed, ignored, and forgotten” and “the voice of the suppressed, it is perhaps internalized
as he voice of his conscience and of the fighting part of his soul, which will ultimately lead to his
conversion” (1988) 56. Spence also writes, “By altering scenes taken from the Aeneid he
acknowledges a connection with that work and, I would suggest, offers an answer to the cries and
maintaining her dignity. He speaks of this speech as an example of how he wasted his gift of intellect (de ingenio meo, munere tuo, 1.17.27) from God. As a nod to his present confession, he adds that his gift of eloquence would have been better used in praising God’s name (1.17.27) and would also have been the proper return of such a gift. Instead Augustine misuses a gift that was present for him at a very early age. In this passage he acknowledges both his past use of rhetoric and his present use, modified to match his spiritual change. Juno is the first of many examples of this treatment of rhetoric by Augustine. To return to Troup’s point, Augustine’s rhetoric seamlessly blends narrative with teaching here. He uses rhetoric to teach lessons about rhetoric, which are actually lessons about God’s truth. In the passage above he begins with the anecdote about his boyhood competition and the old useless goals of rhetoric and ends with a lesson on the virtues of Scripture and its ability to nourish. This formula is employed for other examples of rhetoric: he presents the old rhetoric and ameliorates it with what he has newly discovered is the proper purpose for rhetoric.

**Augustine’s Reception of the Rhetoric of Others**

Given his background in rhetoric, Augustine naturally pays particular attention to the speech of others. He sees his friends and mentors as instruments of God, and they gain access to him through both eloquent and unrefined speech. Even rhetoricians, who do not know God, Augustine interprets are being used to turn him to God. When talking about Cicero, Faustus, and Ambrose, the same

pleas found there” (56). This is very similar to Bennett and Fichter’s arguments about Augustine’s critique and “overgoing” of the Aeneid.
narrative pattern always emerges: he mentions his disposition toward them when reading or hearing them; he analyzes their contribution to his journey toward conversion, and he presents them along with figures that contrast with them. He will provide these same contrasting figures when talking about the Christian models in Book 8. By including these contrasting exempla Augustine is offering a critique of the desires of not only these “bad” examples but also of his own former desires. In this way Augustine’s presentation of himself post-conversion incorporates the past. The role of Augustine as speaker and audience frequently shifts. As a speaker he directs his confession at an audience, serving as an exemplum himself. Before this happens, however, he is the audience to Continentia’s orator receiving exempla, which result in his ability to offer himself as exemplum. Throughout the Confessions he is also the audience to various speeches of others, including Simplicianus and Ambrose. Augustine’ attitudes toward rhetoric change in the course of the events of the Confessions narrative, and this change reflects the change that he eventually sees God effecting in him.

When Augustine is nineteen, he tells us that he eagerly studied treatises on eloquence, admitting that his goal was only to satisfy his vanity (3.4.7). The moments when Augustine finds himself paying attention not to the style but to the content is noteworthy. For example, when he reads Cicero’s Hortensius, he notes that he does not have an interest in the book for the purposes of sharpening his language, but that it moves him by its content: non ergo ad acuendam linguam referebam illum librum, neque mihi locutio sed quod loquebatur persuaserat, “therefore I did not refer to that book for the purpose of sharpening my tongue,
nor for my own speech, but it persuaded me by what it had to say” (3.4.7). Some scholars mark Augustine’s conversion to philosophy with his reading of the Hortensius, which alters the way he prays to God and his very desires: \textit{mutavit preces meas, et vota ac desideria mea fecit alia}, “It changed by prayers and made my vows and desires different” (3.4.7). Overall Cicero meets with great praise from Augustine. In fact, the only fault Augustine seems to find with Cicero is the missing name of Christ, for whom he has a longing instilled from childhood and which he attributes to God’s grace.\footnote{See Chapter 2, pp. 98-100.} Augustine always self-consciously understands this longing for God. As a young child he desires God without reservation, begging to be baptized when he falls seriously ill (1.11.17). It is noteworthy that in adulthood, despite Augustine’s need to satiate his vanity and win approval from others, and despite his enchantment with eloquence, he is unable to be utterly taken in without Christ being mentioned. His desire for Christ anchors him in spite of himself, and he is aware of it even at the time of the event, not just during a retrospective glance at the time of composition (3.4.8). The fact that Augustine reads Cicero for content rather than for style is a conversion of how he receives rhetoric and a step toward his spiritual conversion, as well.

In some brief remarks on Scripture, directly following this passage about Cicero, Augustine praises Cicero while recalling his criticism of Scripture, calling it unworthy (\textit{indigna}) of Cicero. Reflecting back on his abhorrence for Scripture, he also criticizes himself, by demonstrating how he was unable to humble himself as a child, in order to receive the simple truths of Scripture:
non enim sicut modo loquor, ita sensi, cum attendi ad illam
scripturam, sed visa est mihi indigna quam tullianae dignitati
compararem . . . verum autem illa erat, quae cresceret cum
parvulis, sed ego dedignabar esse parvulus et turgidus fastu mihi
grandis videbar.

For it was not in the same way that I am saying now, thus I felt,
when I attended to that Scripture, but it seemed to me unworthy to
be compared with Cicero’s worthiness . . . Indeed [Scripture]
grows with children, but I disdained to be a child and swollen with
arrogance, I seemed great to myself. (3.5.9)

When Augustine hears the Manichaean bishop, Faustus, he, as he does
with Cicero, focuses on content rather than eloquence, though Faustus’ reputation
for speaking well has preceded him. Augustine hungers for answers to his
questions and anticipates satisfying answers from Faustus (5.3.3). The
Manichaean bishop disappoints him, however, and reveals ignorance behind his
sweet and charming speech (inlecebram suaviloquentiae, 5.3.3). In fact,
Augustine ends up teaching the teacher, as he facilitates Faustus’ studies in
literature (5.7.13). This brings about an unexpected shift with regards to
Augustine’s view of rhetoric. Augustine acknowledges an earlier naïve
expectation that fine language necessarily accompanies a fine argument. He
anticipates the arrival of Faustus with an eager openness to learning, but the
encounter ends with Augustine’s disillusionment and begins to break the
enchantment of eloquence in general that has always beguiled him:

iam ergo abs te didiceram nec eo debere videri aliquid verum dici,
quia eloquenter dicitur, nec eo falsum, quia incomposite sonant
signa laboriorum; rursus nec ido verum, quia impolite enuntiatur,
nec ido falsum, quia splendidus sermo est.

Therefore I had already learned from you that neither should
anything said seem true, because it is said eloquently, nor false,
because the signs of the lips sound disorderly; on the other hand, it is not true because it is said crudely, nor false, because the speech is splendid. (5.6.10)

The source of Augustine’s disenchantment is a lack of knowledge. Faustus is, in a sense, another evil which God turns for Augustine’s good. Although Augustine is careful to point out that Faustus has a good heart, in that he does not pretend to know something when he knows nothing, he nevertheless calls him a *magnus laqueus diaboli*, “great trap of the devil” (5.3.3.). Ironically it is this very trap, his eloquence, paired with his ignorance that causes Augustine to rethink his attitude towards speech and truth: *ita ille Faustus, qui multis laqueus mortis extitit, meum quo captus eram relaxare iam coeperat, nec volens nec sciens*, “Thus Faustus, who appeared as a trap for many deaths, began to loosen the trap by which I had been caught, neither willingly nor knowingly” (5.7.13). In this way, Augustine comes to receive Faustus as an instrument for his conversion, though he is the snare of even the devil himself, in yet another example of God’s “marvelous and hidden ways”: *miris et occultis modis* (5.6.10).

Augustine does not stay the course of listening for content rather than style. Even when a speaker is knowledgable and speaks the truth, Augustine still has a tendency to listen to the manner of a speech’s delivery rather than the truth it may contain, as when he contemptuously regards the speech of Bishop Ambrose:

> et studiose audiebam disputantem in populo, non intentione qua debui, sed quasi explorans eius facundiam, utrum conveniret famae suae an maiore minore proflueret quam praedicabatur, et verbis eius suspendebar intentus, rerum autem incuriosus et contemptor adstabam. et delectabar suavitate sermonis, quamquam eruditioris,
I was listening diligently to him dispute among the people, not with the intention with which I ought, but probing his eloquence, to see whether it corresponded to its reputation or it flowed out more or less than reported, and I was held intent by his words, however I stood indifferent and contemptuous to the matters of his discourse. I delighted in the sweetness of his speech, although learned, nevertheless it was less light-hearted and delightful than Faustus’ was, but it applies only to the way of speaking. There was no comparison with regards to content: for Faustus wandered through Manichaean fallacies, Ambrose was teaching salvation in the most salutary way. But far is salvation from sinners, such as I was then, but nevertheless I was gradually approaching though unaware. (5.13.23)

In spite of Augustine’s defenses, the truth seeps into his soul:

For when I was not talking any trouble to learn what he was saying, but only to hear how he was saying it (that had remained an empty concern for me despairing of your laying a way to you for man), they came into my soul at the same time with words, which I delighted in, the substance of which I ignored, for I could not separate them. And while I opened my heart to listen to how skillfully he spoke, equally how well he spoke also entered, though only gradually. (5.14.24)

Once again Augustine describes God using his perverse intentions and interests to turn him. Augustine is disposed differently according to each situation. For example, as an audience to Cicero’s philosophy, he is ready to accept wisdom as a
means toward truth and desires to find that truth, but he is not yet ready for conversion, for when listening to Ambrose, he still resists the tenets of Christian belief. However, it does not seem to matter how Augustine is disposed, for God reveals truth in spite of Augustine’s defenses.

It is clear that Augustine sets up Faustus as a contrast to Ambrose, whose wisdom offsets Faustus’ ignorance. He contrasts Ambrose’s goal of teaching salvation to Faustus’ Manichean deceptions: *nam ille per manichaeas fallacias aberrabat, ille autem saluberrime docebat salutem*, “For [Faustus] wandered through Manichean fallacies, however [Ambrose] taught salvation in a salutary way” (5.13.23). He includes parallel and contrasting elements in both accounts. Both are well-known for erudition, but while Augustine prepares to receive answers to his questions from Faustus, he has no such hopes from Ambrose. He is positively disposed to Faustus as a mentor and teacher, whose reputation for eloquence precedes him, while he regards Ambrose’s words with contempt, despite his reputation. Faustus learns more from Augustine than Augustine is able to learn from him, while Ambrose’s truth insinuates itself into Augustine’s mind and soul, in spite of his unwillingness to receive it. The inversion of expectations and outcomes are part of the process of conversion. Both Faustus and Ambrose are acknowledged as instruments of God’s plan: Faustus as a snare of the devil appropriated for God to turn him, another “wondrous and hidden” method of God’s; and Ambrose, to whom he is led by God’s plan.

The meetings with Faustus and Ambrose reinforce how misguided and ill-equipped Augustine is in finding his object of desire. He recounts how he wants
the opposite of everything God wants for him and notes his disappointment. Before he meets Faustus, he thinks he wants the sort of fame and reputation that Faustus commands, giving little thought to wisdom until he reads Cicero’s *Hortensius*. Cicero, too, is an inadequate teacher, because he does not know Christ. Yet when Augustine meets Ambrose, he resists his teaching, too blind to understand that Ambrose is the teacher he has been seeking. At this point he still is unable to recognize God’s gifts and instruments.

Under the influence of Ambrose, who teaches Augustine to read Scripture figuratively instead of literally, Augustine begins to rethink his opinions on Scripture. He reconsiders the words of St. Paul, whose teachings he originally finds self-contradictory (*adversari sibi*, 7.21.27). Scripture has been available to him, just as the tenets of Manichaeism, but he is beginning to reverse the roles they play for him. By putting himself in a position to be taught, Augustine is becoming like the child, with whom Scripture grows (3.5.9). By desiring purely and allowing his desire to be directed, Augustine lifts his self-imposed restrictions of Manichaean and Academic doctrine, and gives himself over as a catechumen of the Catholic Church to continue his spiritual upbringing, as his parents always wished for him (5.14.25, 6.11.18); this too, in a sense, is a return to childhood. This will lead to conversations with Ponticianus and Simplicianus, whose stories he will conceive as the exempla Continentia will offer, exempla, which will urge him in his last critical step towards conversion.

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21 See also Matthew 7:27
**Continentia’s Rhetoric**

We know that Augustine defines continence as attainable only as a gift from God; one does not achieve it by one’s own strength:

> expertus non eram, et propriarum virium credebam esse continentiam, quarum mihi non eram conscius, cum tam stultus essem ut nescirem, sicut scriptum est, neminem posse esse continentem nisi tu dederis.

I was not experienced in it, and I believed that continence was of one’s own strength, of which I was not conscious, when I was so stupid that I did not know, just as it is written, that no one can be continent unless you grant it. (6.11.20)

As we see here Continentia is conceptualized as a gift from God, but she is different from the gifts we have seen before. In the *Aeneid* gifts are received as the desire of the recipient, that is, they reflect the desire of the recipient. In the *Confessions*, however, Continentia’s gifts are what, in Augustine’s imagination, God desires for him. In the end Continentia herself will have to convince Augustine that through God’s power he can be freed from the chains of habit that keep him from attaining his desire. She will reveal to Augustine that it will not be by his own strength that he devotes his life to chastity, but by God’s. At the end of Book 8, Continentia is depicted as an orator, holding her arms open to Augustine, fertile in abundant exempla of those who have gone before Augustine, in order to persuade him that what they have done he too can do:

> 'tu non poteris quod isti, quod istae? an vero isti et istae in se ipsis possunt ac non in domino deo suo? dominus deus eorum me dedit eis. quid in te stas et non stas? proice te in eum, noli metuere; non se subtrahet, ut cadas: proice te securus, excipiet et sanabit te.'

> “Can you not do what these men have done, these women? Could any of them do it by their own power and not through the Lord
their God? The Lord their God granted me to them. Why do you stand on your own, yet not stand? Cast yourself upon him and do not fear: he will not step back so that you fall. Cast yourself upon him free of care; he will catch and heal you.” (8.11.27)

Here again we see Augustine present his perversity, as Continentia questions his ability to stand yet not stand, paradoxically bidding him to throw himself down but without fear. Though we have seen that Augustine condemns the rhetoric he teaches, and we have seen him give up his career teaching these skills, he nevertheless portrays Continentia as an orator. Using this personification as a mouthpiece, he has appropriated rhetoric for God. Rhetoric becomes another instrument of God’s will, just as Augustine’s desires and actions have. Troup goes beyond even this, by asserting “the Confessions does promote rhetoric – directly, positively, and pervasively.”

Continentia speaks to Augustine’s desires and fears, reassuring him by insisting on God’s faithfulness and providing others Christ for Augustine to fall on. Christ is the ultimate example, but he is also God incarnate. He is to be imitated, but he does not necessarily fortify the belief that one is able to do what he did. Augustine must question how he, a mere mortal, is to follow the example of God incarnate. Doing so is a grim prospect: *et placebat via ipse salvator, et ire per eius angustias adhuc pigebat,* “The way, which is the savior himself, was pleasing to me, but it pained me to go through its narrowness” (8.1.1). Keeping in mind that rhetoric appeals to the desire of the audience, we see that Continentia has provided Augustine with what he has needs and desires, namely examples of
those who have been able to succeed by God’s grace. Below I will first examine the exempla Continentia provides Augustine and how he uses each to narrate part of his own conversion narrative. Then I will examine how Continentia addresses Augustine’s struggle to fulfill his desire, a desire which is formerly reflected in his identifications with Aeneas and Dido, but is converted here by Continentia. In this way Augustine offers a solution to the problem of desire that Vergil illustrates in his *Aeneid*.

III. EXEMPLA AND DESIRE

Although the stories of Book 8 are summarized under Continentia’s oratory, we must remember that the stories themselves were told to Augustine by friends, who were hoping to persuade him of conversion. In this sense their stories are part of the rhetoric of conversion, that is, rhetoric used with the purpose of converting others by sharing conversion experiences mingled with lessons of God’s grace and mercy. Augustine will also adopt this rhetoric to compose his *Confessions*. Augustine frames the narrative of his conversion with these conversion stories of others told by others. This not only provides structure, but it is also reflective of how he adopts the desires of others to gain a clearer understanding of what God desires for him and to give form to his own conversion experience. Prior to his conversion scene in Book 8, Augustine depicts his search for God as an intellectual journey, in which he devours the works and philosophies of others, in order to find God’s truth. Gradually and inspite of himself, Augustine moves from desiring the approval of men to desiring communion with God. The approval and
desires of others are not without their function in conversion, however. His friends are the lens through which he views God when his blindness and weakness do not permit him. They also actively urge him to devote himself to continence, and they are the first to affirm the conversion immediately after it takes place. Immediately following Augustine’s conversion, as is the case with Victorinus, Augustine makes the announcement to others, who will rejoice with them. The *Confessions* is not just an introspective look at who Augustine was, but an examination of what and who produced and formed who he became. Ultimately we see that Augustine, in his search for self and in turn for God, does so through the desires of others for him.

The aim of this section is to examine how Augustine draws on the conversion experiences and desires of others to generate his own conversion experience and to direct his own desires. In the previous chapter we saw the way that Augustine identifies with Aeneas and Dido and draws on their experiences in order to narrate his own journey as part of the way he narrates his conversion story. Just as he uses the *Aeneid* and language of the Vergil to narrate the wandering portion of his journey, he uses conversion narratives of others to structure the narrative as he approaches the decisive moment of conversion.

Although the conversion in Book 8 is the featured, climactic conversion of the *Confessions*, there are, in fact, many conversion stories in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Van Fleteren counts at least twelve and outlines recurring characteristics in these conversions that define them as conversion experiences
and give them their commonality.\textsuperscript{23} Among the twelve, six are Augustine’s including his climactic conversion in Book 8. The remaining five are extensions of or preludes to this conversion, some intellectual or philosophical in nature. Asiedu counts others, including the conversion of his mother from drinking wine, his concubine’s commitment to chastity, and the fortification of his unnamed friend’s faith shortly before his death.\textsuperscript{24} Augustine uses these other conversions to point to his conversion in Book 8. Each story not only echoes a part of Augustine’s own conversion but informs his desire and shapes a particular phase of the conversion process: First Victorinus’ story points to Augustine’s conversion of career ambitions to delight in studying the truth of God; second the conversions of the court officials at Trier point to the conversion of Augustine’s sexual lusts; third the story of Anthony marks the supernatural event that impels Augustine into his moment of conversion; fourth Monica’s conversion to joy in Augustine’s decision and away from her desire for grandchildren affirm Augustine’s new “marriage” to \textit{Continentia}. The exempla set for Augustine are not limited to these four. Within these conversions there are other conversions. All of them are among the exempla Continentia offers him.

Throughout the \textit{Confessions}, we witness how important it is for Augustine to be pleasing in the eyes of men: \textit{placens mihi et placere cupiens oculis hominum}, “pleasing myself and desiring to be pleasing in the eyes of men” (2.1.1). When he contemplates his motivation for stealing the pears, he concludes

\textsuperscript{23} Van Fleteren (1990) 65-66

\textsuperscript{24} Asiedu (1994)
that he loves camaraderie with his fellow-sinners (2.8.16). When hypothetically having to choose between the freedom and happiness of a beggar and the shackles and misery of his own existence, he opts for his own life, only because he has the erudition that garners approval from his peers (6.6.9). Even regarding his judgment of others, he claims that he considers those admirable who are admired by others (4.14.22). He notes that his admiration of the orator, Hierius, and desire to be like him, stems from the acclaim Hierius has from admirers (4.14.23). He sends his work on aesthetics to Hierius, expecting to glow, should it meet with an auspicious review, or feel devastated otherwise (4.14.23).

Given his inclination to seek the approval of others in both recreation and work and how the opinions of others shape his desires, it is not surprising that his conversion too is shaped by others. As we have seen, my Chapter 2 examined how Augustine’s conversion is a turning of desire from false objects to true ones. These episodes occur in the narrative at a point when Augustine finds that he is willing but unable to convert. Before this he has had other exempla, such as his mother and his concubine and his friend at Thagaste but finds himself unable and unwilling to follow them. As literary models, he has used the stories of Aeneas and Dido, among other classical figures, upon which to model his journey. Now he has models, with whom he can identify in a very real way. Regarding the exempla in Book 8, Bennett writes, “These were more promising models than Dido and Aeneas; they encouraged self-identification, for Augustine could scarcely pretend that he was not like these people, could not transfer his emotions to them and thus lose them. Thus, instead of alienating Augustine from himself,
these stories acted as mirrors.25 When he hears inspirational conversion stories, which he retells in Book 8, however, he is fired to imitate them like no others he has seen or heard before.

As we have seen, often juxtaposed with these exempla are contrasting figures. Just as the negative example of Faustus provides a contrast to Ambrose, so these Christian exempla are paired with opposites. The contrasting figures reflect part of Augustine’s former self and what he formerly desired. Edwards sees these contrasts as a recollection and correction, or a balancing of previous elements in the narrative.26 These contrasts also represent the dueling wills, the old and the new, of the flesh and of the spirit, that of others and his own (8.5.10).

Exempla are important in the direction of desire, because they provide a model for seeking God, which depends upon relinquishing control and seeking strength in God instead of oneself. If another man can devote himself to chastity or renounce his ambitious career pursuits or seek wisdom, then it shows a potential convert that he too can do as other men have done before him. He confesses at the request of others27 and invites others to confess with him.28 His audience desires to be close to God, but they also require and desire a figure, such as Augustine, to fuel their desire to be with God and convince them that they are

25 Bennett (1988) 66
26 Edwards (2006) 30
27 Troup (1999) 44
28 Troup (1999) 57
able. By writing the *Confessions*, Augustine is participating in an ongoing chain of persuasion, charity, and conversion to imitating Christ.

**Victorinus**

Augustine begins with conversion of Victorinus as relayed to him by his friend, Simplicianus, who wishes to instill in him a childlike humility:

> deinde, ut me exhortaretur ad humilitatem Christi sapientibus absconditam et revelatam parvulis, Victorinum ipsum recordatus est, quem Romae cum esset familiarissime noverat, deque illo mihi narravit quod non silebo.

Then, in order to urge me to adopt the humility of Christ hidden from philosophers and revealed to children, he recalled Victorinus himself, whom he knew well in Rome, and I will not remain silent about what he told me about that man. (8.2.3)

This recalls how Augustine did not wish to become like a child to understand the simple truths of Scripture, but he has since changed his view about Scripture owing to Ambrose’s instruction. He emphasizes that he must tell this story, and it will be one in a chain of influential narratives.

We can tell from Augustine’s account that he was well aware of the influence his friends were trying to exert over him. Victorinus shares much in common with Augustine, and Simplicianus, perhaps noticing their similarities, chooses the story, with which he knows Augustine cannot help but identify. Like Augustine, Victorinus is a student of philosophy and a highly honored teacher with potential for an increasingly successful career. Augustine speaks of the great number of souls Victorinus must have controlled for Satan and his corresponding worth. As he does in the case of Faustus, Augustine associates Victorinus’ rhetoric with the arts of the devil:
quanto igitur gratius cogitabatur Victorini pectus, quod tamquam inexpugnabile receptaculum diabolus obtinuerat, Victorini lingua, quo telo grandi et acuto multos peremerat, abundantius exultare oportuit filios tuos, quia rex noster alligavit fortem, et videbant vasa eius erepta mundari et aptari in honorem tuum et fieri utilia domino ad omne opus bonum.

Therefore, how much more valuable the soul of Victorinus was considered, which as much as the devil had secured as an impregnable stronghold, the tongue of Victorinus, with which, as a great and sharp weapon, he destroyed many, the more abundantly your sons saw fit to exult, because our king bound up their powerful enemy and they saw his weapons seized and cleaned and appropriated in you honor and saw them become useful to their Lord and to every good work. (8.4.9)

Again the theme of God’s appropriation of all things to his ends appears here, as Victorinus’ weapons are appropriated for the kingdom of God. Victorinus, armed for God’s purpose, is an exemplum in the arsenal of God’s rhetoric. Unlike Augustine, Victorinus was a worshipper and advocate of cults, which returned to formerly worshipped pagan gods. In this way he represents an actual conversion from the pagan gods of the Aeneid to the Christian God. This results in Victorinus’ close study of the gospels, which, in turn, leads him to private admissions to Simplicianus that he is already a Christian. Simplicianus responds that he will not believe him until he sees him in the house of Christ (8.2.4). Owing to Simplicianus’ insistence, Victorinus eventually shows himself at church. When the time comes for him to profess his faith publicly, the priests offer him a more private version of this rite, an offer, according to Augustine usually made to the shy (8.2.5). Victorinus, however, refuses, reasoning that through rhetoric he had publicly professed things that were not faith in God, therefore had nothing to fear
now from God’s gentle flock (*mansuetem gregem*, 8.5.2), an example of the *caritas*, with which the Christian audience receives.

Van Fleteren points out that public profession and congratulations from friends are recurring elements of the conversion story in the *Confessions*, in effect demonstrating how others are necessarily involved in the conversion process. In fact, as Augustine points out, it is a custom for those about to be baptized to publicly profess their decision before those who have already been baptized (8.2.5). A characteristic of conversion is the affirmation and approval of others which follow it. Approval, which has always been important to Augustine, remains important to Augustine, and he trades the approval of the world for the approval of his Christian circle, or as Levenson puts it, “Augustine has replaced the approval he sought before with a ‘new community of gazes’.”

Burke notes that Augustine’s desire for imitation of Victorinus is a “radical revision of such imitation censured in Book 2” in the pear stealing scene. The difference is now the approval sought is a means to Augustine’s conversion.

Victorinus and Augustine find themselves in similar positions. They are ready to call themselves Christians but are unwilling to take the final step. In Victorinus’ case, he hesitates because of vanity and fear of the opinions of those proud demon-worshippers (*superbos daemonicolas*, 8.2.4), among whom Victorinus used to not only circulate but who he was proud to resemble. Augustine, who so greatly desired to be pleasing in the eyes of men, must have

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29 Levenson (1985) 511
30 Burke (1961) 110
been able to identify with such an attachment to the approval of others. Victorinus’ conversion from the worship of pagan gods parallels Augustine’s turn from the desires represented for him in the pagan world of the *Aeneid*. The *daemonicolae* mentioned contrast with recall the devil’s snares that Augustine associates with Faustus. In the end Victorinus must give up teaching, because at the time it is forbidden for Christians to teach rhetoric. Augustine views this as not so much a sacrifice as an enviable situation, in which Victorinus will be able to devote himself more fully to godly pursuits (8.5.10).

**Court officials at Trier**

The conversion story of the two court officials (*agentes in rebus*) at Trier looks forward to Augustine’s conversion to celibacy and renunciation of marriage. The officials are in a garden when they convert, like Augustine. Gardens are a recurring motif in the *Confessions*. The garden conjures up images of Eden and Christ’s prayerful agonizing the eve of his death, the fall and its reparation. Augustine’s pear theft also takes place in a garden, analogous in Genesis, and his conversion also takes place in a garden.\(^{31}\) This recalls the association that Burke observes between the conversion scene and pear-stealing scene, namely that they are inversions of one another.\(^{32}\) By setting both acts against the same backdrop, Augustine converts the scene of sin into a scene of redemption.

In the account of the court officials’ conversion, Augustine mentions that the emperor is away enjoying the spectacles of the circus (8.6.15). This not only

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\(^{31}\) For more on the garden motif, see Luman (1990)

\(^{32}\) Burke (1961) 94
provides a contrast to emphasize the piety of the officials’ action all the more, but it also recalls the amusements of Augustine’s first experience in Carthage and when he and his friends were drawn to such spectacles; more specifically it is a contrast to Alypius’ addiction to spectacles (6.7.11). It also provides a contrast that emphasizes the nature of the officials’ actions all the more. Furthermore, Ponticianus and another friend remain behind, as the two court officials go wandering (digressos, vagabundos), which leads to their chance encounter with the text of *The Life of Antony*. This is an echo of Augustine’s wandering, but in a rather condensed fashion, since the events of their conversion all take place in one day. The officials return to announce their sudden conversion to Ponticianus and his friend, who return to the palace ruefully dragging their hearts on the ground (8.6.15). Regarding their despondency, Edwards writes, “They achieve the self-recognition and appropriate compassion that pagan tragic spectacle hides from the spectators’ consciousness.”

Their inability to follow the two court officials recalls Augustine’s experience of seeing his friend and his concubine devote themselves to God but being unable to follow their examples himself. Instead he is only able to focus on the tremendous grief at the loss of them, which is indicative of his stubborn attachment to the world. Perhaps, in addition to mourning their deaths, he is also sorrowful about the deliverance they are able to achieve that he still unable to even see.

The first official responds to Antony’s story in the same way as Augustine does, in that he becomes disgusted with himself (8.6.15). Their conversion

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33 Edwards (2006) 30; see also *Conf.* 3.2.2.
involves imitation of Antony, but even within this imitation there is imitation, as the second official imitates the first (8.6.15). Moreover, there is a third imitation, when they announce their conversions to their fiancées, who, upon hearing their news, also dedicate their lives to God. The story of the court officials alone is a model for conversion in the *Confessions*. It spreads by the influence of others in a chain, resulting in an interconnectedness of the conversions mentioned in Book 8. These conversions are part of the greater work of the *Confessions*, which in itself is an exemplum for future converts.

Augustine likens Ponticianus’ telling of this story to a reflection of himself, at which God is forcing him to look:

narrabat haec Ponticianus. tu autem, domine, inter verba eius retorquebas me ad me ipsum, auferens me a dorso meo, ubi me posueram dum nollem me adtendere, et constituebas me ante faciem meam, ut viderem, quam turpis essem, quam distortus et sordidus, maculosus et ulcerosus. et videbam et horrebam, et quo a me fugerem non erat. sed si conabar avertere a me aspectum, narrabat ille quod narrabat, et tu me rursus opponebas mihi et inpingebas me in oculos meos, ut invenirem iniquitatem meam et odissem. noveram eam, sed dissimulabam et cohiebam et obliviscebar.

As Ponticianus was saying these things, you, Lord, were turning me to myself, holding me from behind, where I had placed myself because I did not want to pay attention to myself and you set me in front of my face, so that I would see how base I was, how distorted and filthy, stained and festering. I was both looking and shuddering, and I had no place where I could take refuge from myself. But if I tried to turn away from my own gaze, I was faced with Simplicianus continuing his story, and you put me in front of myself again and forced me before my eyes, so that I would discover my sin and hate it. I knew about it, but I was hiding and suppressing and forgetting it. (8.7.16)
Augustine uses the same metaphor of having his sins thrust before him and hating them after his encounter with Faustus: *qui me tunc agebas abdito secreto providentiae tuae et inhonestos errores meos iam convertebas ante faciem meam, ut viderem et odissem*, “you led me then by the hidden mystery of your providence and you put my dishonorable sins before my face, so that I should see them and hate them” (5.6.11). Part of Augustine’s conversion is necessarily this turning, not only toward God, but first toward himself, so that he can see and hate the part of himself that cherishes the world. Though the story of the court officials does function like it mirror, it does not reflect Augustine, but rather defines him in relief or in the negative. It illustrates what he is, as yet, unable to be, but now wishes to emulate.

**Antony**

The last exemplum Augustine mentions before his moment of conversion is Antony, the same Antony, whose life story is read by the court officials at Trier just prior to their conversion. If Victorinus’ story is a preface to Augustine’s conversion from ambition and the court officials herald his commitment to celibacy, then Antony’s corresponds to the supernatural event that provides the impetus for the decisive moment of conversion. Augustine hears the voice “*tolle, lege*”. He then remembers having heard about Antony arriving somewhere when the following words from the New Testament were being read, which he takes to be addressed directly to himself: “Go and sell all you possess and give the money
to the poor: you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Augustine does the same when he takes up the Bible and randomly selects a passage to read: “Not in dissipation and drunkenness; nor in debauchery and lewdness; nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires” (8.12.29). In the same vein as the sortes Vergilianae, Augustine’s act recalls a moment in Book 4, in which a doctor, formerly an astrologer, explains to Augustine that divination is correct only by chance rather than any skill of the astrologer:

a quo ego cum quaesissem, quae causa ergo faceret, ut multa inde vera pronuntiarentur, respondit ille, ut potuit, vim sortis hoc facere in rerum natura usquequaque diffusam. si enim de paginis poetae cuiuspiam longe aliud canentis atque intendentis, cum forte quis consultit, mirabiliter consonus negotio saepe versus exiret, mirandum non esse dicebat si ex anima humana superiore aliquo instinctu nesciente, quid in se fieret, non arte sed sorte, sonaret aliquid, quod interrogantis rebus factisque concineret.

et hoc quidem ab illo vel per illum procurasti mihi, et quid ipse postea per me ipsum quayererem, in memoria mea deliniasti.

When I asked him how it happened that so many pronouncements [of the astrologers] were true, he responded as well as he could, saying that this happened by the force of chance which is pervasive in nature. For if, when someone consults by chance the pages of some poet singing about something far off and intending something different, often a verse stands out that is marvelously suitable. He said we should not wonder that if something happened from the human mind, unaware of what is happening to it, by some inspiration from above that corresponded to the circumstances and actions of the one consulting, that this happened not by skill but by chance.

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34 Matthew 19:21
35 Romans 13:13-34
By the answer he gave me, or which you gave me through him, you made provision for my needs and sketched in my memory an outline of the truth. (4.3.5-6)

From this passage we see that even the chance that accounts for astrology’s success is contained by God. The doctor’s explanation goes beyond mere coincidence, but it is sent from above (superiore aliquo instinctu), in other words, a gift from God. His words also prepare Augustine for the scene in the garden when Augustine opens up to the words of Scripture that will apply to him by chance. After Augustine reads the passage he has selected, Alypius, who is with him, reads further, “Make room for the person who is weak in faith,” whom he takes to mean himself, and thus converts, as well. When they announce to Monica what has happened, she rejoices, resulting in a conversion of her own to desire grandchildren no longer. This announcement parallels the court officials’ announcement to Ponticianus and his friend following their conversion. Whether this is how events really transpired or this is a narrative device of Augustine’s, the conclusion about conversion can be made: it is characterized by Augustine as a chain reaction, necessarily involving the appropriation of the desires of others. In this way, conversion and exempla are gifts that keep on giving.

Monica

Book 8 ends with Monica’s reception of her newly converted son, whose decision surpasses her hopes for a spouse and children for Augustine. In this way Monica undergoes a conversion of sorts herself, and her joy for Augustine’s conversion seals his. Of all the examples and models in the Confessions, none figures so

36 Romans 14:1
prominently or pervasively as Augustine’s mother, Monica. It is impossible to escape the tremendous emotional and spiritual influence and control she has not only over her son but over everyone who came in contact with her: her unfaithful non-Christian husband, her mother-in-law, the frightened sailors who accompanied her to Carthage, Augustine’s friends who became like sons to her, to name a few. After the death of Augustine’s father, Monica becomes solely responsible for financing Augustine’s education and arranging a marriage for him. It is because of his mother that Augustine both refrains from marriage early on and later enters into an engagement, which separates him from his long-term concubine. From the beginning Monica is depicted as a paragon of devotion and virtue. She is the ultimate exemplum for Augustine’s spiritual development, but he does not always recognize this. Nevertheless, through all his years of seeking, he can never quite elude the influence of her persistent devotion to him, her faithfulness to God, and the recognition of desire for God planted in him. He idealizes her to the point of deification at times and criticizes her only once in the text, namely for her extraordinary attachment to him.\(^{37}\) He sees his conversion, though not exclusively, as a result of her prayers and intervention with God (5.7.13). He is convinced that through her faith and loving she brings about his salvation (1.11.17). Like the conversion stories discussed above, Monica’s desires for Augustine’s spiritual life have a great impact on forming Augustine’s conversion experience. He, in essence, fulfills her desires and, in doing so, fulfills

\(^{37}\) Ziolkowski (1995) 14
his own. In this way, her desire becomes his desire. This response to the desire of another corresponds yet again to Dido and Aeneas and their becoming what the other wants, but whereas Dido interferes with Aeneas’ *pietas* and Aeneas with Dido’s loyalty to her oath to Sychaeus, Augustine’s desire aligning with his mother’s produces a life change intended by God.

Monica functions as means for Augustine to direct his desires. To Augustine, her desire represents God’s desire. He equates the will of his mother to God’s in several instances: when Augustine departs from Carthage he writes that God listens to the real nub of Monica’s desire, intending to fulfill it, not because he wishes to fulfill her will, but because her desires and God’s are the same (5.8.15). Augustine equates restoration to Monica with restoration to God. He talks of her prayers for him at the time when he is no longer a Manichee but not yet a Christian, alluding to the widow of Luke 7:14, whose son is brought back to life (6.1.1). Monica’s sacrifice of blood and tears is another part of the wondrous ways God deals with Augustine (5.7.13). Moreover a certain bishop, whom she seeks for consolation, reassures her that “it is not possible that a son of such tears should perish”: *fieri non potest, ut filius istarum lacrimarum pereat* (3.12.21).38 God’s wondrous ways (*miris modis*) are also used to describe the means, by which God brings Ambrose into Augustine’s life. The way the truth and the spirit enter him through these individuals is marvelous, in that it is contrary to what he wants at the time, yet the truth and spirit creep in despite his defenses. By

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38 Ziolkowski compares Monica and Dido to Euryalus’ mother, whom Euryalus leaves without bidding farewell, because he cannot bear her tears (9.284-289) (1995) 9.
connecting Monica’s desires with God’s Augustine has a means of discerning what God wants for him when his soul is too corrupt to determine what that is. Even after Augustine is certain of God’s desire for him, he requires still more motivation to comply. This is the case with Aeneas, whose acts against his own will. Unlike the others, however, Monica’s desires have been with him his whole life, and she plants the seeds of desire in him that finally flourish under the influence of his friends in Milan.

Augustine always depicts Monica as an instrument of God’s will. She is the means by which he has access to God, and, in turn, the means through which God chooses to have access to Augustine. She too seems to see this as her chief role. Once her desire for Augustine is fulfilled, she no longer sees any purpose for continuing to remain in the world:

Dicebam talia, etsi non isto modo et his verbis, tamen, domine, tu scis, quod illo die, cum talia loqueremur et mundus iste nobis inter verba vilesceret cum omnibus delectationibus suis, tunc ait illa, “fili, quantum ad me adtinet, nulla re iam delector in hac vita. quid hic faciam adhuc et cur hic sim, nescio, iam consumpta spe huius saeculi. unum erat, propter quod in hac vita aliquantum inmorari cupiebam, ut te christianum catholicum viderem, priusquam morerem. cumulatius hoc mihi deus meus praestitit, ut te etiam contempta felicitate terrena servum eius videam. quid hic facio?”

I said such things, although no in that way and in these words, nevertheless, Lord, you know, what on that day, when we said these things and the world with all its charms grew cheap to us among our words, then she said, “Son, as far as I am concerned, I find pleasure now in nothing in this life. What I will do here and why I am still here, I do not know, now that the hope for this life is gone. One reason I desired to delay a little in this life was to see you become a Catholic Christian before I died. My God established this so fully for me, that I see you as his servant even holding in contempt earthly happiness. What am I doing here? (9.10.26)
Monica is not only an instrument of God, but she is also the beneficiary of his “wondrous and hidden ways”. Van Fleteren counts the end of her childhood wine-bibbing as one of fifteen (by his count) conversions of the *Confessions*.\(^{39}\) Augustine speculates about God’s means of turning her and attributes her healing to another:

> quid tunc egisti, deus meus? unde curasti? unde sanasti? nonne protulisti durum et acutum ex altera anima convicium tamquam medicinale ferrum ex occultis provisionibus tuis et uno ictu putredinem illam praecidisti?

What did you do, my God? How did you cure her? How did you make her well? Did you not proffer a harsh and sharp accusation in the form of a surgical scalpel from your secret provisions and cut out that rot with one stroke? (9.8.18)

Just as all the conversions above have required some impetus from another introduced by God, whether they mean good or ill, Monica’s temperance comes about by a maidservant’s bitter reproaches and the shame of discovery (9.8.18). The maidservant is presented another of God’s secret means (*occultis provisionibus*) by which he turns those he wishes to turn.

For the most part, however, Augustine mentions Monica’s vices sparingly. Rather, he uses the vices of others to highlight her virtue. Augustine often situates his father as a contrast to his mother. In Patricius’ very occasional appearance in the *Confessions*, we see his temper, infidelity, and lack of faith, a stark contrast to Monica’s serenity, loyalty, and piety. In fact, when Patricius does eventually come to the Catholic faith, Augustine attributes it to his mother’s example

\(^{39}\) Van Fleteren (1990) 66
(9.9.19). Patricius encourages Augustine to excel in school out of desire for ambition and wealth. Monica encourages his studies, as well, but only because it may serve him in finding God. At the bathhouse Patricius, upon seeing Augustine’s budding manhood, delights in his future grandchildren:

ubi me ille pater in balneis vidit pubescentem et inquieta indutum adolescetia, quasi iam ex hoc in nepotes gestiret, gaudens matri indicavit, gaudens vinulentia, in qua te iste mundus oblitus est creatorem suum et creaturam tuam pro te amavit, de vino invisibili perversae atque inclinatae in ima voluntatis suae. sed matris in pectore iam inchioaveras templum tuum et exordium sanctae habitacionis tuae: nam ille adhuc catechumenus et hoc recens erat.

When my father saw me at the baths reaching the age of maturity and wrapped in restless youth, as if he already would be eagerly looking forward to it, from this he became eager for grandchildren, rejoicing to my mother as he told her, rejoicing in the intoxication, in which the world, perverted by invisible wine and inclined towards the depth of its desire, forgot its creator and began to love your creation instead of you. But in my mother you had begun your temple and the beginning of your holy dwelling place, for he was still a catechumen and a recent one at that. (2.3.6)40

Augustine criticizes his father for his investment in the fleeting values of this world, but Augustine himself once hoped for the same. The theme of loving God’s creations in place of him is a recurring one in the Confessions. We saw the height of this sin, when Augustine mourned his friend Monica too hopes for grandchildren, and even arranges a marriage for him later, but she is converted of these desires when Augustine’s commitment to celibacy secures an even greater joy for her. In the passage above, Monica’s preparation for serving God in eternity stands in stark contrast to Patricius’ desires for creations rather than their

40 It was pointed out to me by Fritz Graf that there is an allusion here to an episode in Genesis, in which Noah’s son, Ham “saw his father’s nakedness” (Genesis 9:20-27), a phrase argued by some as suggesting Ham’s engaging in sexual relations with his father.
Maker. In the chapters of Book 9 that Augustine devotes to his Monica’s story, he uses his father’s vileness to highlight his mother’s piety:

Educata itaque pudice ac sobrius potiusque a te subdita parentibus quam a parentibus tibi, ubi plenis annis nubilis facta est, tradita viro servivit veluti domino et sategit eum lucrari tibi loquens te illi moribus suis, quibus eam pulchram faciebas et reverenter amabilem atque mirabilem viro. ita autem toleravit cubileis iniurias, ut nullam de hac re cum marito haberet umquam simultatem. expectabat enim misericordiam tuam super eum, ut in te credens castificaretur. erat vero ille praeterea sicut benivolentia praecipuus, ita ira fervidus. sed noverat haec non resistere irato viro, non tantum facto sed ne verbo quidem.

Therefore she was brought up chastely and moderately and rather subdued by you to her parents rather than by her parents to you, and when she reached a marriageable age, she was handed over to a husband and served him as a master and she troubled herself to win him for you, telling him of the ways, by which you made her beautiful and reverently loving and wonderful to her husband (in her husband’s eyes). In this way however she put up with his infidelities, such that she had no feud with her husband about this matter ever. For she was hoping for your mercy over him, so that believing in you he would become chaste. Moreover, he was just of benevolent as his anger was hot. But she knew not to resist these things in her husband, either in word or deed. (9.9.19)

Separation from such a mother is a painful one. Augustine, following his mother’s death, as with the separation from his concubine, is left feeling wounded (sauciabatur, 9.12.31). This recalls his separation with his concubine and his association with Dido, as she, wounded, wanders madly after Aeneas’ abandonment of her. By alluding to those episodes, he reminds us of his former self and the agony of desire and loss. He and his companions check their mourning, for they reason it does Monica no credit when they mourn her so, but Augustine cannot help but feel the bitter pain of separation from his mother, with whom he had grown accustomed to living (ex consuetudine simul vivendi,
9.12.30), which he decides must be the reason for his sadness. Recall the grip that habit had on Augustine before his conversion. He uses the same term here, *consuetudo*, to describe the habit of living with his mother, as he uses to describe the sexual lust he cannot escape because it has hardened into compulsion (8.5.10). Augustine sees this is God’s lesson that past habits are chains and he may continue to battle whatever their nature:

. . . toto die graviter in occulto maestus eram et mente turbata rogabam te, ut poteram, quo sanares dolorem meum, nec faciebas, credo, commendans memoriae meae vel hoc uno documento omnis consuetudinis vinculum etiam adversus mentem, quae iam non fallaci verbo pascitur.

. . . the whole day I was deeply grieving in secret and in my disturbed mind I was begging you, as much as I could, to heal my pain, but you did not do it, because, I believe, you were committing to my memory by this one example that every habit is a chain against even a mind which no longer grazes on deceitful words. (9.12.32)

In this episode we see Augustine stifling his mourning and that of Adeodatus, as if mourning somehow invalidates what Monica has left behind, namely the legacy of her character and sincere faith (9.12.29), which lives on in the memories and in God’s kingdom. Augustine is also disappointed that the eternal nature of her actions eludes him, leaving him mourning not only her death but also his weakness in mourning her death:

at ego in auribus tuis, ubi eorum nullus audiebat, increpabam mollitiam affectus mei et constringebam fluxum maeroris, cedebatque mihi paululum. rursusque impetu suo ferebatur non usque ad eruptionem lacrimarum nec usque ad vultus mutationem, sed ego sciebam, quid corde premerem. et quia mihi vehementer displacebat tantium in me posse haec humana, quae ordine debito et sorte conditionis nostrae accidere necesse est, alio dolore dolebam dolorem et duplici tristitia macerabar.
But in your ears, where none of them could hear me, I rebuked the softness of my emotion and restrained the flow of my grief, and it ebbed a bit for me. Then it was borne back by its own force not so much that it resulted in tears or even a change in expression, but I knew what I was suppressing in my heart. And because it so displeased me that these human matters had this power over me, which must happen by the natural order of things and because of the lot of our condition, I grieved one sorrow over another and was vexed by my double sadness. (9.12.31)

He is displeased with his attachment to things of this world. Mourning his mother’s absence, the absence of her corporeal self is a return to the world that he thought he left behind through his conversion. His faithful mother, as we have seen, also shed many tears over him, an indication of her imperfect faith. They both weep out of mortal weakness, and when Augustine mourns his mother, he mourns along with her the failure to completely attain his object of his desire. Just as his tears were once wasted on Dido, they too are wasted here. Were he in perfect communion with God, he believes he would not grieve so.

Augustine returns to his audience and asks them, through his prayer to God, that they, out of caritas, weep for but not laugh at his mourning, which he considers a sin:

```latex
et nunc, domine, confiteor tibi in litteris. legat qui volet et interpretetur ut volet, et si peccatum invenerit, flevisse me matrem exigua parte horae, matrem oculis meis interim mortuam, quae me multos annos fleverat, ut oculis tuis viverem, non inrideat sed potius, si est grandi caritate, pro peccatis meis fleat ipse ad te, patrem omnium fratrum Christi tui.
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41 Note that Aeneas must be reminded by the Sibyl in the underworld that he is wasting his time in tears, as he reminisces with Deiphobus until dawn (6.539). For Aeneas the nature of his vice has been a pietas that has been misdirected toward the past. The encounter with Deiphobus is the last time he will meet with his past before he views his future and ascends back to the world above.
And now, Lord, I confess to you, in writing: let he who reads this as he wishes and infer as he wishes, and if he considers it a sin that I have cried a small part of an hour over my mother, my mother who was dead in my eyes for a moment, who had cried over me for many years, so that I would live in your eyes, let him not laugh at me but rather, if he possesses great charity, let him weep for my sins himself to you, father of all brothers of your son Christ. (9.12.33)

His request to his audience is a combination of defense and repentance. Just as Monica once wept for his spiritual death, he now mourns her earthly death. With the exception of criticizing his mother’s inordinate attachment to him, Augustine never once finds fault with her tears, and, in fact, sanctifies them as an appeal to God, whereas he condemns his own tears, which, to him, signify a transgression and reversion to his former self.

**Continentia and God’s Gift of Conversion**

I have argued that Continentia is a gift from God. She, in turn, offers the *exempla*, which are pivotal in Augustine’s conversion. Through his gift of intelligence, he probes and searches for truth in his studies and begins to turn away from his attachments to the world, but, although his intellectual pursuits prepare Augustine for conversion, he never attributes his conversion to this means. We see how, in fact, there is a gap between knowledge and action. Even when Augustine is certain of what he must do, he finds he is still unable to make his commitment of celibacy to God. Continentia meets him to bridges this gap through her rhetoric of conversion, which in a revolutionary way, is also a conversion of rhetoric. Let us revisit Continentia’s invitation to Augustine:
aperiebatur enim ab ea parte, qua intenderam faciem et quo transire
trepidabam, casta dignitas continentiae, serena et non dissolute
hilaris, honeste blandiens, ut venirem neque dubitarem, et
extendens ad me suscipiendum et amplectendum pias manus
plenas gregibus bonorum exemplorum. ibi tot pueri et puellae, ibi
juventus multa et omnis aetas, et graves viduae et virgines anus, et
in omnibus ipsa continentia nequaquam sterilis, sed fecunda mater
filiorum gaudiorum de marito te, domine. et inridebat me inrisione
hortatoria, quasi diceret, “tu non poteris, quod isti, quod istae? an
vero isti et istae in se ipsis possunt ac non in domino deo suo?
dominus deus eorum me dedit eis.”

For the chaste dignity of Continentia appeared from the direction I
had directed my gaze and where I trembled to cross. She was calm
and not carelessly cheerful, honorably charming so that I could
come and not hesitate, and extending holy hands to receive and
embrace me, hands full of many good examples. There so many
boys and girls, where many young and of every age, and dignified
widows and elderly virgins, and in all of them there was
Continentia herself not at all barren, but a fertile mother of joyful
children from you her husband, and she smiled at me mockingly
provoking me, as if to say, “Can you not do what these men, what
these women have done? Indeed are they able by their own power
and not by the Lord your God’s? Their Lord has given me to
them.” (8.11.27)

In his very description of Continentia’s approach, language is converted along the
way. She is seductive (blandiens) but honorable so (honeste). She is fertile
(fecunda mater) with children but chaste (casta). She laughs (hilaris) at him and
mocks him (inrisione) but not idly (dissolute); in fact, it is edifying (hortatoria).
Dido (amplectendum) and Aeneas (pias manus) return in an understated way, but
Continenia’s embrace is pure and holds forth the truth, whereas Dido embraced
what was perverse, and Continentia’s piety is directed by a true and infallible
guide. In this way, Augustine appropriates the erotics of the phenomenal world,
which he identifies with in his reading of the Aeneid and transforms or converts
them into erotics of a spiritual realm. Unlike Aeneas, he is not a pius man, who is
misdirected, or like Dido, a victim of love (god) embracing images of what he truly desires, but he is a wretched man, who by grace is able to embrace God as his only and all-fulfilling object. Augustine, by responding to God’s desire, which precedes his own, in accordance with God’s will finds fruition in that moment of exchange that is mutually demanded and reciprocal. Continentia is appealing to what he has desired all along and persuades him. Thus Augustine finds fulfillment when his desire becomes the desire of God.

V. CONCLUSION

The decisive moment of conversion for Augustine is brought about by God’s gift of Continentia, whom Augustine depicts as an orator, who offers abundant exempla of conversion, which he uses to shape his conversion narrative and sees as shaping his conversion experience, making it possible for him to become an exemplum himself. In this way, he participates in a chain of influence and turning, which is part of how conversion in the Confessions is characterized. The pivotal moment occurs when Augustine is finally persuaded that it is not by his strength but by God’s, proving that continence is achieved only as a gift from God. The return for continence is made in the realization of the gift itself. By living in continence, Augustine is repaying it. As Augustine requests, God has given what he commanded (10.29.40).

Conversion is necessarily dependent on the influence, manipulations, stories, and philosophies of others. The model exempla are always presented with

42 Milbank (1995) 124
contrasting exempla, which highlight the actions of the converts and recall the vices of Augustine’s former self. It reminds us, as Augustine tells us, that who he is at the time of narration is a product of who he was, that is, all that he repents of, grieved over, delighted in, and desired. Ultimately all these things were a reflection of his desire for God. He spends the first part of the *Confessions* trying to fulfill this desire by seeking illusions, images, and substitutes for God, but through a passionate pursuit of philosophy, the tears of his mother, the influence of his friends, the desires of himself, all of which collectively fall under the hand of God, Augustine’s object is brought into sharp relief. The *Confessions* is a story of learning that the turning and focusing desire on God is accomplished and bestowed by God, and it is an exhortation for others not to turn but to allow themselves to be turned.

This is not to say that a potential convert cannot prepare himself to receive God’s gifts. It is after a search for God’s truth and consolation through various philosophies and recognition of his own desires through literatures and friendships, Augustine perceives Continentia offering him a way to gain his true object of desire, namely through God’s strength. But whereas Aeneas’ *errores* do not contribute to his heroism or his mission, Augustine’s *errores* teach him numerous lessons of God’s truth. For example, Aeneas’ time in Carthage produces no real benefit, and subsequent mentions of Dido and her reappearance in the underworld are sorrowful and ominous, but Augustine’s reflections on his stint with the Manicheans or attachment to his unnamed friend are redeemed by the truth he now has to share with his audience.
Augustine is exemplary not because he himself is exceptional, but because he is an example of the conversion process and acknowledges that it is accomplished by God. Even though he uses God’s gifts, such as his gift of intellect, to search for God and prepare for his conversion, we see too that this is not necessary, since God appears even more readily to children who possess no facility such as Augustine’s. Though a convert, Augustine confesses a tendency to fall back to the habits of the world that once shackled him so tightly. As the mourning of his mother illustrates, despite this tendency to fall, he is nonetheless the recipient of God’s gifts. Conversion is not a complete turn from the past – Augustine must incorporate the past, former desire and identifications, sins, and wandering, which are transformed as reception of them is converted. They make him mindful that he was saved and that he must, in turn, serve through gifts of his own.
CONCLUSION

Caputo and Scanlon observe, in the introduction to their collection of essays, *Augustine and Postmodernism*, that God has been “making a comeback”.¹ Central to this reemergence of God is the renewed engagement with Augustine, in which critical theorists have been participating in recent years. Certainly Augustine’s own discussion on language, desire, and the gift anticipate much of the critical theory that engages with his work and that underlies and informs the arguments of this paper, particularly the work of Derrida, Lacan, Kearney, and Marion.² The postmodern work that interacts with and is produced by Augustinian thought is merely a sliver in the whole of Western thought, upon which Augustine has exercised a profound and undeniable influence. As Hankey concludes, “Most of the central and always opposing developments of western culture since the early Middle Ages can be depicted as Augustinianisms.”³ In this way Augustine has laid a foundation for argument between even opposing philosophies and theories.

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² Most notable are Bennington and Derrida’s *Derridabase/Circumfession*. See also Barzilai (1997) in which Lacan’s repetition in various works of a scene from the *Confessions* is examined; see Kearney (1999); and Milbank’s discussion of Marion and the gift (1995).

³ Hankey (1997)
The *Aeneid* too has spoken to centuries of readers. In addition to being a site of contestation for Stoic and Platonic philosophy, the *Aeneid* has also been utilized for a Christian discourse on paganism, as well. In the *City of God* Augustine uses the *Aeneid* to explain the fall of Rome and the relationship between his God and the pagan gods of Rome. He cites the failure of these same “conquered” gods to protect Troy (*De Civitate Dei*, 1.3). It is in his *Confessions* that preceded it that Augustine treats the *Aeneid* on a more personal level, by arguing not only the superiority of his God but also how by God’s grace he himself exemplifies the Christian convert. Unlike Aeneas, he is no pious hero, but rather a wretched man bound by chains of habit and desire. It is only through God’s good gifts and authorial hand that he is able to change.

As I have shown, throughout the *Confessions* Augustine’s various identifications with literary figures and those from his own life, his use of rhetoric and shifting attitudes towards rhetoric, and his transition from intellectual pursuit to spiritual action reveal the movement of his desire as it comes in line with its longed for and true object, which Augustine recognizes as God. By bringing all manifestations of desire under one desire for a unified God, Augustine offers a fixed point of reference as a solution to the slippery gauges and illusory objects of desire in the *Aeneid*. Because every desire can be traced back to desire for God and everything God gives is good, Augustine sees his failure to achieve his desire as a result of his attachments to the things of the world, his misuse of his virtues, and his neglect of God’s commands. In other words, Augustine’s failure to find
fruition is a matter of reception, that is, how one receives God’s gifts. Provided one seeks God and receives his gifts properly, desire can assuredly be fulfilled.

Augustine’s literary reception of the *Aeneid* becomes integral in his narrative of this conversion of reception, Augustine uses the *Aeneid*. As we have seen, he does this by excelling the aspects of the *Aeneid*, which captivated him as a boy. He replaces the deceptive gifts of gods and humans alike, as seen in the Trojan Horse, with God’s gifts of grace and continence. The sort of desire engendered by the destruction of a worldly *patria*, as seen in the burning of Troy, is replaced by hope of an eternity spent with an imperishable and everlasting God. Finally Augustine casts aside the illusory objects of one’s desire, as represented by Creusa’s shade, for the attainable, knowable fulfillment that God offers.

Augustine offers his confession by appropriating the erotic language of the phenomenal world of the *Aeneid* to create a new erotics of spirituality, in which he burns and hungers for God and his truth.

In the texts produced by the pagan world Augustine also comes to recognize that there is self-knowledge to be gained from them, particularly from the characters, whom, unlike the author and the title of the text, Augustine explicitly refers to in the *Confessions*. He does the same with other classical figures, such as Medea and Orestes, mentioning no works or authors, only character names.\(^4\) In recognizing the truth behind his identification with Dido and Aeneas, Augustine gains knowledge of himself. Augustine tells us that knowledge

\(^4\) See *Conf*. 4.6.11 for Augustine’s mention of Orestes and Pylades in the narrative of his friend who dies at Thagaste. For the contrast between the myth of Medea, which can nonetheless provide some spiritual nourishment, and the lies of the Manicheans, which are empty, see *Conf*. 3.6.11.
of the self as integral to communion with God is a recurring theme of the
Confessions. The continence that comes as a gift from God is concerned with
collecting the fragmented pieces of oneself:

Per continentiam quippe colligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in
multa defluximus.

In fact, through continence we are collected and restored to the
unity, from which we flowed away into many pieces. (10.29.40)

It is to this scattered self that the identifications with Aeneas and Dido speak, but
in understanding his erroneous identification with them, Augustine comes closer
to knowing himself, and therefore closer to knowing God.

Dido embodies the submission to the kind of passion and desire, which
grip Augustine earlier in his life. Her embrace of Ascanius as an image of her true
desire is echoed in Augustine’s embrace of her as a reason for tears. Dido differs
from Augustine, however, in that she is a victim of the machinations of the gods.
Her furor results from the gifts of the gods. Even Aeneas, for all his pietas, is an
object of the gods’ deceptions and misguidance, which makes him an exemplum
of an erroneous path to his object. He has no fixed guidance and it is questionable
whether his will is ever transformed. Unlike in Aeneas’ world, in which oracles
and omens are necessarily ambiguous and the objects of pietas confused, the signs
and movements of Augustine’s God are revealed to the faithful as clear, true, and
beneficial. Augustine has only his own reception to contend with.

Dido and Aeneas function as powerful models for Augustine’s narration,
but also pointed anti-exempla in the rhetorical work of the Confessions. In Book 8
Augustine begins to adopt other exempla in their place, namely Christians who have undergone conversion themselves. With these he normally offers counter-exempla. Outside of Book 8, figures, such as Monica, the concubine, and the unnamed friend, are depicted both in terms of characters in the *Aeneid* but also portrayed as exemplary. In other words, they act as anti-exempla to themselves. Monica, the most remarkable of these, is the most pervasive Christian influence in Augustine’s life, however, she is also drawn as a Dido figure and daughter of Eve. In all these exempla and in Augustine’s depiction of himself as exemplum, we see Augustine incorporate the evils of the fallen soul that necessitate conversion. Augustine never fails to point out the way he and others stray from God, but he always offers hope alongside his own wanderings and those of others.

The rhetoric of the *Confessions* is structured by this process of confessing sin, darkness, and false objects and offering hope, light, and truth in its place. Just as with the human exempla discussed, this is how Augustine uses the *Aeneid* in his work of persuasion. At the end of the *Aeneid*, we are left trapped in a world where desire is never satisfied, where even the desire to live by *pietas* is repeatedly frustrated. As a solution to this hopelessness, Augustine offers his *Confessions*, an account of grace continually overcoming the darkness of the phenomenal world, and where it is possible to catch a glimpse of God who is coming (*deus adventurus*) to fulfill his desire for us and our desire for him.

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5 That is not to say that Augustine does not include anti-exempla for them, as well. For example, Patricius, Augustine’s father, acts as an anti-exemplum to Monica.


