

4-23-1997

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The Significance of Tongue and Heart Imagery  
in The Confessions of St. Augustine

Rebecca Kimmel  
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In The Confessions of St. Augustine the juxtaposition of tongue and heart images symbolizes the contrast of the exterior corporeal world and the interior spiritual world respectively. Throughout this autobiography the tongue is a dynamic symbol which serves as a gauge of Augustine's spiritual health. Initially, the tongue represents Augustine's vain pride in his achievements as a Pagan rhetorician, and later in the text it develops into a symbol of his conversion as the vehicle for his newly redeemed speech as a Christian preacher. While the tongue is a symbol of carnal desires and worldly success, it is at odds with the heart, which represents spiritual hunger. Augustine places the heart at the nexus of his conversion as it develops from a heart "empty of truth" to a "pierced" heart and finally to one of the "hearts of the faithful." Consequently, the tongue reflects the metamorphosis of the heart by abandoning rhetoric and becoming a medium of perfected language. With this transformation, the tongue and heart become complimentary symbols representing a unified intent to praise God in hopes of salvation.

The tongue-heart relationship not only represents the personal issue of Augustine's salvation, but also represents the larger conflict between Pagan and Christian language.<sup>1</sup> Augustine rectifies this conflict by baptizing the Platonic theory of language with the Incarnation of Christ. This theory draws a striking contrast between Platonic rhetoric, spotlighting pagan figures such as Cicero, and redeemed speech founded on the theological doctrine that the "Word was made flesh" (VII, 9). The symbol of the tongue develops from a medium of eloquent, yet empty, discourse to a "precious vessel" of truth. (I, 16). This development coincides with Augustine's philosophical movement from Manichean heresy to the Christian Word. The tongue is an image of man and his vast separation from God. Just as the Word crosses this

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<sup>1</sup> In my research I did not find any scholarly works which specifically treated the significance of the heart and tongue in the Confessions. I did, however, consult the Augustinian Studies journals, Colish's Mirror of Language, Burke's Rhetoric of Religion, and McWilliam's anthology, Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian.

distance allowing the tongue to express the mysteries of God, Christ, who is the Word, crosses the distance, allowing man to experience the mystery of God. However, Augustine emphasizes that the Word is written on the heart, and Christ must reside in the heart before the tongue can be converted. The symbolism of the tongue and heart is also further developed by the final step of conversion which moves past the corporeal tongue and verbal communication to meditation and inner speech of the heart eventually leading to a silent spiritual communion with God.

Augustine begins his autobiography with a concentration on the symbol of the tongue which is associated with oral images primarily of eating, drinking, and speaking. The tongue as an image of speaking is integral to the introduction of his theory of language. He immediately addresses the connection between speaking and the mystery of the Word, the central thesis of his theory of language, when he states in Book 1, Chapter 1, "my faith calls upon you, that faith...which you have breathed into me by the Incarnation of your Son and through the ministry of your preacher." This statement illustrates the focus of his theory by connecting man's faith, which is expressed to God verbally in the use of the word, "call," to the source of his faith, the Incarnation of the Son of God who is the Word. This one sentence addresses a primary thematic question of the work--the relation between temporal verbal communication and the divine intervention of the Word, the ultimate mediator between God and Man. Furthermore the end of the statement, "and through the ministry of your preacher," is a preview of the conversion of language which Augustine's speech undergoes before he becomes a preacher in the service of God. This prayerful introduction to the book serves both as an invocation of God's blessing and establishes a verbal relationship between man and God

## **Infancy and the Development of Language**

In the first two books of the autobiography, Augustine describes the training of his tongue in the rules of speech which take precedent to the mores of good character. His language skills develop from an infant's dumb cry for material needs to a boy's gradual adoption of language as a means to efficiently answer selfish needs. He explains that the innocence of infants is a fallacy because it is not "the infant's will which is harmless", but instead a lack of power renders the infant harmless (I, 7). When the "knots that tied his tongue" in infancy are broken, he uses the power of speech as a means to express his own wishes (I, 8). Augustine labels this use of speech to attain personal desires as sin. An example of this corruption of speech is his selfish boyhood prayer for relief from deserved corporeal punishment. (I, 9) This is a defining moment in the development of language in that his initial experiences with language are characterized by sin. This example is the first of many instances of the misuse of language which develops into a life centered around the manipulation of words for sinful purposes.

## **Education: Grammar School**

After describing the process of learning language, Augustine focuses on his education from grammar school to the university, all of which prepared him for his secular profession as a rhetorician before his conversion. It is in school that he is introduced to the great deception of worldly success and the means by which to achieve it. He is persuaded to believe that to fulfill his role as a young boy he must obey his teachers so that he "might succeed in this world and excel in those arts of speech which would serve to bring honor among men and to gain deceitful riches" (I, 9). In essence his elders value the ability to speak well, and therefore place the tongue--which is to be trained for success--at the forefront as an overarching symbol

representing his education and his professional goals.

His misguided education proves to be a challenge as he fights the discipline of learning and is motivated by fear of beatings or pride in success, both of which are rooted in self gratification. His study of foreign languages is described as being “sprinkled [with] gall” (1, 14). This is an oral image not only connecting the two functions of the tongue--speaking and tasting, but also a parody of Christ--who is actually offered gall as mock refreshment during his crucifixion. Augustine, ironically, draws a parallel between his own vain avoidance of language or words and Christ’s humble acceptance of his own death as the sacrificial Word. Augustine’s only interest in the classical languages is as a key to unlock all the mythological pagan stories which turn him to God’s “lowest creatures...turning him to earth” (1, 14). In addition, Augustine explains that it is not the stories themselves that are the temptation, but the eloquent manner in which they are told which attracts his eager reading. However he does not fault the words because words alone are innocuous, but combined with the perverse will of man they become weapons. Words can be “choice and precious vessels, but the “wine of error” can be “proffered” through them “by drunken teachers” (1, 16) Once again Augustine uses oral images of speaking and tasting in combination by drawing a connection between words as “vessels” containing the “wine of error” to express the vicious circle that immoral literature and eloquent words create. Like the dumb infant, literature gains power with words, yet the words alone are not condemned for there indispensable role in the propagation of temptation.

Augustine is raised in a culture which glorifies the well-spoken word and the tongue which speaks it regardless of the content. His mentors castigate themselves for grammatical “barbarism[s] or solecism[s]” (1,18), yet they immodestly reveal tales of debauchery. They are shameless, but they are not ambivalent. On the contrary, their pride is fed, by the praise they receive for portraying their “lustful deeds in good

order...and well-placed words" (I, 18). This emphasis on words and the style of speaking represents a larger picture of the sensual world in which Augustine is participating. Along with his teachers, he is submersed in a material existence, thriving on superficial appearances rather than interior truth as seen by the bawdy tales which are disguised by eloquent words. Augustine ends this commentary on his role-models with a reference to God's unique reaction to this corrupt manipulation of words. God who is most "truthful" in contrast to the deceit professed by rhetoricians chooses to be "silent" in the face of man's failings.(I, 18)

Associating silence with God presents the unusual implication that the theory of language proposed by Augustine the author includes a hierarchy which places silence in a position of supremacy over verbal communication. Augustine is illustrating the seemingly paradoxical relationship between Christ as the Word, which implies a form of communication, and God who is silent in the face of human adversity. However, this apparent paradox draws an important distinction between the verbal communication of the corporeal tongue and the spiritual expression of the "Word...made flesh" (VII, 9). The spiritual expression of the Word falls on the deaf ears of the verbal mentors of young Augustine and therefore God seems to be silent. It is not a mark of an apathetic God, but instead Augustine implies that man must quiet his corporeal tongue, a symbol of his own vain will, to hear the Word.<sup>2</sup>

The young Augustine is deafened to the Word by the eloquence of his secular teachers who surround him on all sides falsely proclaiming, "Here is the learned use of words! Here is eloquence acquired" (I, 16). This statement associates truth with eloquent expression. Furthermore, it creates a parallel between Augustine's instructors and Jewish Pharisees in that they are both obsessed with the letter of the

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond D. DiLorenzo in "*Non Pie Quaerunt*: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine's Confessions," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 127, further explains that pride and a distorted heart deafens the soul to God's voice.

law rather than the intended purpose of the law. The Pharisees, submersed in the details of Jewish canon, lose sight of the motivation behind the law and therefore lose perspective. Similarly, Augustine's instructors sacrifice the content of speech for the maintenance of grammatical rules and regulations. Both place the means, Jewish or grammatical law, above the ends, following God's will or efficient verbal communication. This misplaced emphasis on grammatical rules exhibits a misunderstanding in the purpose of language.<sup>3</sup> Augustine's instructor's and Augustine, himself, approach language as an end itself, and therefore prioritize the format of language over the meaning it expresses.

Augustine concludes his depiction of his grammar school instruction by dispelling the false impression that these institutions of learning held a certain mystical monopoly on knowledge. The curtains which hang before the entrance of his grammar school do not represent "honored mystery," instead they are the "cloak of error" (I, 13). The men who hide behind these curtains, speaking lies in place of humble and silent acceptance, inspire awe in young Augustine. The image of the cloaked school also creates a parallelism between young Augustine's grammar school and the Jewish temple whose entrance was also cloaked. In both cases the mysterious nature of the entrance implies a sacred quality and limited acceptance of a deserving few. In the case of the school, so called learned men are the elite, and in the case of the temple, the pharisees are the privileged group among the faithful. Furthermore, the curtain to the temple and the school are both destroyed by Christ, the Word. The temple's shroud is torn in two upon the death of Christ who later rises to a new life, and the curtain to the school is symbolically destroyed by the Word when Augustine abandons pagan rhetoric to adopt the eloquence of Christianity.

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<sup>3</sup> See Marcia L. Colish, The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 26, for elaboration on Augustine's grammar school education which emphasized "techniques rather than values."



## Education: University Student and Professor

Before his conversion, he is further perverted by a university education and his work as a professor in rhetoric. With his growing interest and talent in oratory, an inverse relationship develops between the tongue and his heart; as his tongue becomes a vehicle of attaining his materialistic desires, his heart descends into spiritual decay.<sup>4</sup> Augustine has learned this pattern of polishing the talents of his tongue at the expense of the health of the heart from philosophers such as Cicero, “whose tongue almost all men admire, but not his heart” (III, 4). Augustine the author explains that choosing men such as Cicero as mentors is dangerous because although philosophy is honored with the name “love of wisdom,” pagan philosophy actually detracts from the truth by “falsifying [the] errors” of men. Philosophers such as Cicero depend on this assumption that all philosophy is associated with truth, when in actuality, their philosophy only amounts to eloquent words designed to manipulate the listeners. The young Augustine’s admiration of Cicero represents a loyalty to the verbal culture of rhetoric which honors titles rather than the truth behind them.<sup>5</sup>

Augustine the author reflects on his academic years as a waste of his “talents and his tongue” on “empty trifles” (I, 17). He spent his young years on improving his oratory skills, rather than devoting his talents to the service of the true Word found in the scripture. Devotion to the truth found in the scriptures would have “upheld [his] heart’s young vine”(I, 17). His indictment of his education as a molder of tongues apathetic to the heart illustrates the relationship between the tongue and the heart as

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4 Francis J Chivers in “Wordsworth’s ‘Real Language of Men’ and Augustine’s Theory of Language,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 23, describes false language as the expression of the mind’s rejection of eternity, and Chivers links the perverted speech with the perverted mind.

5 Raymond D. DiLorenzo in “*Non Pie Quaerunt*: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine’s Confessions,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 120-121, explains that philosophers can find God through the analysis of creation, but their pride prevents them from praising God. Therefore, “they become corrupt in heart and blind to truth within the truths they find.”

one of victor and victim, respectively. Furthermore, he summarizes his university experience with a regretful commentary on the superficial product of his secular and pagan education, refined speech. Young Augustine's dedicated efforts to sharpen his rhetorical skills as a tool to achieve material success escalates with the continuation of his education. His devotion to corporeal satisfaction is similar to religious fervor. Therefore, his submersion in the verbal culture of rhetoric can be summarized in the metaphorical concept of a religion of language, and his tongue has become a symbol of this secular worship of words at the expense of the heart.

The young Augustine was "cultivated in speech even though [he] was left desert, uncultivated for...God...good Lord of that field of which is the field of his heart" (II, 3). This summation combines the image of both the tongue (in his reference to the cultivation of speech) and the heart. In addition, this imagery reveals the consequence of his perverse faith in the power of language, which is a spiritually barren heart. The use of the desert metaphor is a synthesis of the oral imagery of speech and hunger and illuminates the connection between the refinement of speech and spiritual hunger. The uncultivated field of the heart represents Augustine's unfulfilled spiritual desires. This connection between the images of heart and tongue expresses the impotence of the tongue in its ability to fertilize the field of his heart and therefore satiate his hunger. The oral imagery of the unfertile field barren of food as a symbol of the heart is further illustrated by his explanation that he does not desire the incorruptible food of truth because the more empty he is, the more he develops a distaste for it. (III,1) His tongue has developed an affinity for corruptible food because of the "sweetness" of worldly success. However, this "sweetness" masks the "gall" of spiritual descent represented by the status of his heart. (III, 1) Augustine explains that the superficial attraction to worldly success distracts his attention from the deterioration of his heart. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the deceptive "sweetness" does not provide real fulfillment by

labeling the words expressed by the tongue as “empty phantasms” on which he fed, but was not fed (III, 6), and his perverse will as intoxicating wine luring him to creation rather than the creator. (II, 3) In this oral context, words are not nourishment; instead they are the exhausting food for sleeping men. (III, 6) These men, who are seduced by creation, are not conscience to the truth which is illustrated by the metaphor of sleeping men feeding on nothing. They have yet to be awakened by the Word, the genuine source of nourishment.

Although Augustine’s “hunger” is not satisfied by his secular education (III, 1), he becomes a professor, a “word merchant” who sells his knowledge of letters to students, who like himself can not be satiated by his superficial wisdom. He intensifies his sin by not only enslaving himself to creation, represented by the tongue, but also by persuading his students to do the same.<sup>6</sup> His students, who become disciples of his religion of language, “take from his mouth weapons for their madness” (IX, 2). His mouth is the den of his tongue which produces words transformed into weapons of deception, and these feed the madness of his students’ delusions of grandeur rather than their hunger for truth. His years at the university represent his descent into pride and vanity, and his tongue becomes the embodiment of his sin since his misplaced love of self motivates his professional achievements as a rhetorician. His profession as a rhetorician, who manipulates words to disguise truth and “lead men astray” (III, 4), opposes the Word who is synonymous with the truth. He is not only the antithesis of the Christian evangelist, but his employment as a professor is a parody of Christ’s role as an anointed messenger because while Augustine is the vehicle of lies, Christ is synonymous with divine truth.

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<sup>6</sup> Marcia Colish explains in The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 26, that Augustine’s search for pleasure increasingly led him away from God and toward His creatures. He not only moved away from God, but he led other men astray as well.

## Manicheism

The culmination of Augustine's religion of language is his acceptance of the Manichean heresy, a cult believing in the existence of two equal and coeternal powers of opposing good and evil involved in an on going war in which the human soul is the battlefield. The oral nature of Manichean rituals and belief system links Augustine's belief in this heresy and his participation in the verbal culture of rhetoric. The doctrine of this cult describes God as a material entity embodied in His own creation. This belief attracts Augustine because it is an ideal justification for his carnal enjoyment of creation. Based on this doctrine the saints of this cult are believed to be capable of releasing God by chewing sacred fruit and breathing forth angels and bits of God which are trapped in the food until released by man. (II,10) The Manichean heresy is the fulfillment of the tongue imagery since the mouth is the vehicle for releasing both God and words, thereby creating a perverse connection between the two. This belief system is a parody of the Gospels which encourage evangelization of the Word, God made flesh. In Manicheism it is man who gives life to God by releasing him from the same orifice from which words are expressed. In contrast, the Christian God gives life to man through the Word, His only begotten Son.

God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are not absent from Manichean doctrine, but they are present in name only. They are used as empty labels without any true representation in reality. The Manichean vision of the trinity amounts to a perverted facade of the truth as is explained by Augustine when he describes their blasphemous reference to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They spoke these names often "but [they] were only the tongue's sound and clatter, while their hearts were empty of truth" (III, 6). This explanation explicitly ties Augustine's belief in the Manichean heresy to the relationship between the images of the heart and the tongue. Augustine's tongue becomes the vehicle of deception and his "empty" heart is the consequent of this

masquerade. Taught well by his Manichean instructors, Augustine grows deaf to the true Word, and he submits to the onslaught of temporal voices which proclaim the vacuous words "Truth, Truth" (III, 6). Their promise of "Truth" is a mockery of the evangelization of the Word, the source of all truth. Ironically, Augustine has reached the pinnacle of his career as a word smith, yet his mastery of the language is revealed to be an exercise in futility. Words have come to symbolize nothing and represent illusions rather than reality.

Young Augustine's increasing regard for the aesthetic beauty of rhetoric and his decreasing concern for the content of his speech begins to invade his reason. The submission of his intellect to the illusion of rhetoric is apparent when he accepts the Manichean belief that God, "the life of...life was a great corporeal substance" (VII, 1), thereby imposing the imperfections of creation on the creator. He is so engulfed in the carnal desires, that he is unable to comprehend incorporeal existence. As a result he embraces the idea of a corporeal God which not only epitomizes the religion of the tongue, but also illustrates the pattern of descent from the misuse of the tongue to complete submersion in a world of the senses. Since his reason is tied to creation, instead of the creator, he is unable to ferret out the truth and discard inane claims such as a corporeal God.

Although Augustine's senses, specifically hearing, are deceived by the verbal simulations of truth, he does acknowledge that his "hunger" is not yet satiated. The fact that Manicheism seems to fail the test of reason is disconcerting to Augustine. Therefore, he confronts Faustus, a leader in the heresy who had come to Carthage, where young Augustine has recently moved. Faustus has been heralded as a source of wisdom, and Augustine hopes that he will provide the answers to his questions. However, Augustine discovers that Faustus' reputation is based solely on his superficial talents in oratory, and like the heresy, he has little to offer beyond his

eloquent presentation. This confrontation of Faustus reveals Manicheism as a fraudulent imitation of truth disguised by rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> In support of this revelation, Augustine's describes Manicheans as "carnal minded" and "glib of speech" (III, 6) because while the presentation of Manichean dogma is impressive, it is in actuality shallow and lacks logical cohesion. Faustus, who is a polished speaker with an agreeable nature, is the personification of this heresy since both Faustus and Manicheism are initially attractive, but beyond their exterior, they fail to provide the wisdom their reputations promise.<sup>8</sup> Faustus' "smooth language" is a "snare of the devil" which has entangled many in the doctrines of Manicheism (V, 3). However Augustine, unsatisfied by this "comely cup bearer", begins to delve for the meaning behind the words because he is no longer seduced by "vessel[s] of discourse" (V, 3). He is interested in the knowledge that Faustus has "put before him to eat" (V, 3). The previous description of Faustus' language and Augustine's reaction to his confrontation with Faustus is expressed primarily with oral images, including language as a tool of the devil, eloquent speech as a vessel holding food, and, finally, knowledge as food to be consumed. Augustine's use of oral images is a symbol of Manichean dependence on verbal manipulation to coerce disciples. Furthermore, the images reveal the denial of Manicheism as an initial step in the conversion of language. He realizes that false and vain language is a hindrance to his search for truth because he has set himself "high and...[his] mouth against heaven" (IV, 12) rather than embrace the humility of a "contrite...heart", which is necessary to understand the Word (IV, 4).

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<sup>7</sup> See Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 36-37, for more information about the sensuous and superficial nature of Manicheism and Faustus' inability to answer Augustine's questions.

<sup>8</sup> see Raymond D. DiLorenzo, "Non Pie Quaerunt: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine's Confessions," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 119, for elaboration on Faustus' eloquence and his inability to provide the knowledge for which Augustine was searching.

## Love of God versus Lust for Creation

While the young Augustine rejects the falsity of Manicheism, he has yet to accept the truth of Christianity. The search for truth involves the struggle of the will between the love of God and the lust for creation. To illustrate this conflict Augustine the author plays the symbols of the heart and tongue against each other as dynamic opponents. In search of the “God of his heart” the unconverted Augustine has listened to the tongues of rhetoricians and has been left “despairing” for the truth (VI, 6). The tongue is not capable of being a vehicle of truth without the love of God residing in the heart. Despite the fact that nothing is to “be loved more than God’s truth”, Augustine is struggling with contrasting loyalties. He is seduced by both the “caresses of...wanton...love” of creation represented by the tongue and the “caress[es]” of God’s “charity” represented by the heart (II, 6). This twofold seduction juxtaposes the external world of sensual experience labeled “wanton love” and the interior world of the spiritual experience defined by the love of God. The images of the heart and tongue and their relationship are used to highlight this theme of the internal and external existence of man.

To glorify the tongue for its own sake is necessarily to sacrifice the heart. In response to the misplaced glorification of creation, young Augustine’s heart weakens and submits to mortal passions. This is evident in Augustine’s desire for worldly approval. He explains that criticisms delivered by fellow rhetoricians “deeply wound” his heart because it is “empty of [God’s] solidity” (IV, 14). Unlike his tongue which is agile and capable of superficial eloquence without an alliance to the creator, his heart reveals the true condition of his soul in that it is “wounded” by worldly attacks without the defense of faith in God.

Augustine the author explains that until he rejected his loyalties to the physical world and his ardent love of creation, his heart would remain at the mercy of his

tongue, the central vehicle of his vain success as a rhetorician. His love of the created world develops from a desire for worldly success to a lust for corporeal pleasures. The “caresses of... wanton...love of creation” (II, 6) successfully seduce him into embracing the entire sensual experience, which is evident when he describes himself as avid for things of sense, to love and to be loved, to enjoy a lover’s body. (III, 1) His life centers around the perverse love of the material world. Although he refers to his lust for creation as love, and presumably love should be associated with the symbol of the heart, this love is a destructive force of alienation. Instead, he draws a parallel between his lust and the symbol of the tongue by describing his tongue as a “sweet snare” through which the “serpent spoke”. The metaphorical description of the tongue as a “sweet snare” reveals that he is not only deceiving himself by falsely justifying his own actions, but he is also tempting his friends to do the same. This misplaced love separates him from true love and the “caressing charity” found only in God (II, 6), and his heart “cries out violently against” the impostors (VII,1). He portrays this reaction with vivid descriptions of his soul which is “ulcered over” (III 1) and his “diseased...sacrilegious heart” (V, 9) which is infected by his rejection of true love.

Despite the destruction of his heart, he still responds to his carnal desires. As long as he acts under the domain of the tongue representing the corporeal world, he is unaware of the inner spiritual domain of his heart. He is enamored by the “lower goods,” and he is oblivious to the fact that no goods surpass God, who is the “joy of the upright heart” (II 5). Instead his perverse delight in creation manifests itself in his most challenging temptation, incontinence. His lust for the female body is the continuation of his descent into the realm of the tongue--the physical world. Augustine the author juxtaposes his incontinent life by describing the monastic life as a “fruitful desert” (VIII, 6). The reference to food continues the oral metaphor. However, it is an unusual use of oral imagery because rather than representing corporeal pleasures as it has



previously, it is a symbol of celibacy. However the imagery is fundamentally different because the sweetness of corporeal pleasure leads to an “unfertile field” while the denial of carnal desire offers the fulfillment of a “fruitful desert” (VIII,6). Ironically, it is celibacy which results in spiritual fertility, and incontinence which leaves the fields of the heart barren.

The young Augustine attempts to realize his heart’s hidden desire for spiritual fulfillment by “beat[ing] off the throng of unclean images”(VII, 7), yet his unabated lust for creation obstructs the efforts of his heart. This conflict of desires pits the symbol of the heart and the tongue against each other and the struggle cannot be resolved without God, and as a result, neither his tongue nor his heart may be converted. He cannot “beat off the...unclean images” without the grace of God to overcome the efforts of his will influenced by worldly desires. It is only through God that he can counter the rhetoric with truth and quench his lust with love. God must set “a watch before [his] mouth, a door of continence round [his] lips so that [his] heart would not decline” (V, 10). His heart must be converted before his tongue can become a vehicle of truth,<sup>9</sup> but regardless of his efforts for his conversion, he will remain “gross of heart” until he is assisted by divine intervention. Augustine cannot, however, sporadically accept convenient moments of divine intervention. He must “establish...a dwelling place” for Christ, the Word, in his heart (IV, 11).<sup>10</sup>

## Perfected Language

It is only through Christ that man can be saved; He is the mediator between the

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<sup>9</sup> Francis J Chivers in “Wordsworth’s ‘Real Language of Men’ and Augustine’s Theory of Language,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 23, likens false eloquence to lust.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond D. DiLorenzo in “*Non Pie Quaerunt*: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine’s Confessions,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 127, describes the conversion of the soul from the false love of creation to the true love the creator through the mediation of the Word.

father and his creation. Christ is the Word made flesh, but He is not born of the flesh “nor the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God” (VII, 9). Therefore, Christ as the Word is the medium of spiritual expression. The Word is not only a catalyst for Augustine’s change of heart, but it is also a necessary component of perfected language.<sup>11</sup> Augustine’s theory of language hinges on the perfection of language in which understanding the Word transforms the tongue from a symbol of pagan rhetoric to a symbol of redeemed speech. The Word, which was present at the advent of language during the creation of man, is intended to be the foundation of language.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, if Augustine does not welcome the intervention of the Word, his words are only empty symbols, but if he invites the Word to speak through him, his language gains meaning and is perfected.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the Word counteracts young Augustine’s efforts to “sharpen his tongue” (III, 4) as a tool to attain created delights rather than unity with the creator. If the new Word originates within the heart, and the redeemed tongue is a tool of the heart, the tongue will no longer master words, rather the Word will be the master of the tongue.

Augustine, the author describes perfect language as an interior voice spoken within the heart and heard by God, which he is unable to understand without first

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11 See Marcia L. Colish, The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 32, for elaboration on the role of the Incarnation in the redemption of speech. Augustine sees Christ as the “verbal and actual reconciliation of God and man.”

12 Mark D. Jordan elaborates on the fact that the Word is the foundation of language because although “Words are used to cast some light on the Word...it is the Word Who teaches us how to understand, the Word Who speaks to us in the scriptures, and the Word who heals us so we may understand the scriptures. So, finally, it is the Word, Who alone can ‘explain’ words.” “Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” Augustinian Studies 11 (1985): 189. While this journal does not directly address the *Confessions*, *De Doctrina Christiana* is a contemporary work and addresses similar themes dealing with linguistic development.

13 See Francis J Chivers “Wordsworth’s ‘Real Language of Men’ and Augustine’s Theory of Language,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 15, 22, and Mark D. Jordan, “Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,” Augustinian Studies 11 (1985): 184, for an elaboration on understanding words as signs.

accepting God. It is the voice of faith, the voice of genuine prayer, and the voice of evangelization which is founded in the Word. It is the fulfillment of rhetoric which, by itself, is only a parody of God's truth. The reformation of language from external rhetoric to interior speech does not abandon the symbol of the tongue; it simply reforms it into an image of creation serving the creator, rather than creation alone. Augustine's initial experiences with the perfected language of evangelization are to no avail because it is incoherent to his ears which are deaf to the Word. For example, Augustine's mother continually prays for her son's conversion, and God responds by speaking through her words, thereby perfecting her speech. However, Augustine rebuffs her efforts of evangelization. Her words "sang [his] ears...yet none of them sank deep into [his] heart" (II, 3). To comprehend and accept the truth, the Word must dwell in his heart. If the heart is a barren field, evangelization, such as the words spoken by Augustine's mother, is futile. Although her words express truth, to the deaf ear they are symbols without meaning similar to Augustine's own rhetoric.

The incomprehensibility of perfected language to the pagan ear is further illustrated by Augustine's experience with his friend who is on his death bed. His friend is baptized when his death appears imminent, and therefore he undergoes the initial step of accepting the Word into his heart. During his convalescence, a conversation with Augustine reveals that his friend's perspective of language has changed. Augustine jokes about his friend's baptism and is quickly silenced by the friend's indignation. Ironically, words fail Augustine, the master of language, and he is "struck dumb" by his friend's reaction (IV, V). His friend has realized that words are no longer trivial tools of pleasure, but instead vehicles of truth. Young Augustine is incapable of abiding by this definition because the truth is incomprehensible to him. He mistakenly assumes that he can eventually corrupt his friend's clarity; however, his friend unexpectedly worsens and dies. He is united with the Word before Augustine

can manipulate him with words.

## Oral Metaphors for Mourning

Augustine describes his mourning for the death of a friend in terms of the symbol of the heart. Since Augustine is governed by the language of the tongue rather than the interior language of the heart, his suffering over the death of his friend multiplies without the comfort of the Word. He experiences acute misery because he does not comprehend his friend's salvation nor the perfection of language made possible by his baptism. Augustine's weeping is initially a superficial salve for his pain, but his heart cannot be healed by physical expressions of grief. It is unable to communicate with God through the Word and is therefore isolated from the consolation of the truth. His grief made his "heart...dark with sorrow" (IV, 4), and Augustine the author explains that he must turn his "heart's ear to God's mouth" to receive relief from his sorrow (IV, 5). This image of a "heart's ear" is a direct reference to the oral metaphor of interior language which enables internal communication between God and man. His heart will be barren until he listens to the Word rather than the permitting voices of his teachers and mentors who excuse his sins.<sup>14</sup> Both Augustine's mother and his friend, who have opened their hearts to hear the truth, contrast those teachers who have encouraged Augustine to sacrifice his internal ear for his external tongue.

Augustine the author expands his use of oral imagery representing his conversion from verbal metaphors to food metaphors, thereby encompassing both of the literal functions of the tongue, speaking and eating. He uses the oral imagery of eating when he describes weeping as a "sweet fruit...plucked from life's bitterness" (IV, 5). Similar to the images of listening with the heart's ear to remedy the pain of

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<sup>14</sup> Mark D. Jordan in "Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1985): 182, explains that the interpretation of the Word calls for a purification of the sinner's life, and he describes the steps of purification.

mourning, this use of food images also oralizes the emotional experience of mourning. However, the eating imagery is slightly different from the verbal imagery in that it refers to an external response to grief, weeping. The reference to oral communication through the “heart’s ear”, in contrast, represents a movement inward. Unlike previous instances of oral imagery which complement each other, these images contrast one another. The two images do not symbolize the same concept. Instead, the mixing of meaning in these two oral metaphors implies a struggle between a loyalty to the carnal world of the tongue and the complete ascent into the spiritual world of the heart. Despite his hunger for truth, young Augustine holds “back [his] heart from all assent” (VI, 4). This sentiment of reluctance is a possible justification for this apparently contradictory use of the metaphors.

His possible reasons for initially emphasizing verbal rather than eating imagery to represent internal conversion are two fold. First, words can literally serve both as a medium of external speech and internal thought, while food is primarily associated with an external need for physical sustenance. Therefore, words are an appropriate analogy for the transition from the corporeal to the spiritual, and food is an appropriate symbol for Augustine's reluctance to submit his complete self--corporeal and incorporeal--to the service of God. Secondly, the conversion of words is a key factor in the altered relationship with his deceased friend and the development of his theory of language. The best remedy for his inability to converse with his friend is to become fluent in the language of Christ, the Word, and the verbal image of the “heart’s ear” is an appropriate analogy for this remedy. However, young Augustine is oblivious to the remedy of perfected language.

His only awareness of this perfected language is an unexplained compulsion to search for truth beyond corporeal existence because his heart is lured by the voice of the conscience and is “strained towards [God’s] interior melody” despite the tongue’s

efforts to mute the melody. Initially the melody of truth is drowned out by Augustine's rhetoric which becomes a barrier between the Word and his heart and therefore his understanding of redeemed language. As the compulsion to understand becomes more insistent, he tries to escape the "interior melody" in his heart (IV 16), but he realizes that he is trying to escape his true self who is search for spiritual fulfillment. His search for solace is misleading because he has turned outside himself rather than searching inside himself for the source of his torment, the interior melody of his heart.<sup>15</sup> This commentary on Augustine's misdirection reveals insight on his actions as a Pagan which are largely characterized by avoiding personal responsibility and looking to the external world for his sustenance and successes. Both his profession of rhetoric and his belief in the Manichean heresy are consequences of his preoccupation with corporeal pleasures. Rhetoric celebrates the aesthetic and Manicheism worships creation and denies personal accountability. Augustine's suffering, which is centered in the heart, is the consequence of this persistent effort to escape himself and immerse himself in externalities gained by the talents of his tongue. Augustine the author comments on the futility of his efforts when he questions, "where could my heart fly to , away from my heart, where could I fly away to from my own self?" (IV, 7). His questions not only imply that the heart is at the center of the self, they also foreshadow the heart as the site of his conversion.

## **The Bible**

Augustine will not, however, comprehend the meaning of this melody of truth until he understands the recorded Word--the Bible--because it is the foundation of

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<sup>15</sup> See Francis J Chivers "Wordsworth's 'Real Language of Men' and Augustine's Theory of Language," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 14, 23, for details about the effects of false and true language on the pursuit of truth, and eternal peace. He also addresses the inability of a person who uses false language to recognize redeemed language.

perfected language. The voice of his conscience is explained by the Biblical idiom that the law of God is written on the heart. The law is innately apart of man therefore man's claim of ignorance does not justify his indiscretions. Like Augustine the author, the Bible uses a metaphor of language by portraying the spiritual revelation of God's laws as a written message, namely the Word, on the surface of the heart. In addition, the weak justification of ignorance for violating God's law is a partial excuse of Augustine's instructors, "those wordy fellows, from whom [he] had suffered much" (V, 7). Although they encouraged the development of the language of the tongue, external rhetoric is an impotent substitute for the Word of God.<sup>16</sup> "[N]o knowledge of letters is more interior to us than that written in conscience" (I, 18). Therefore, God's law, which is written on the heart, could have countered their influence, presuming young Augustine had chosen to submit to the symbol of the heart rather than the tongue.

Before Augustine abandons his pagan beliefs, though, his approach to the Bible is perverted. He condemns the style of the Bible as crude and simple while he praises Pagan works of philosophy because his judgment is impaired by the values of the tongue which are beguiled by superficial appearance.<sup>17</sup> The Bible "seemed unworthy...of comparison with the nobility of Cicero's writings" (III, 5). He assumes the convoluted style of secular writings hints to a deeper meaning; when in actuality pagan rhetoric emphasizes the value of words in themselves rather than treating them

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<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Burke in Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948) 50, explains that the word conceived within the self is more true than the spoken word expressed outside the self. He also explains the Augustinian distinction between the word spoken in the silence of the mind and the word expressed in the heart.

<sup>17</sup> see Raymond D. DiLorenzo, "*Non Pie Quaerunt*: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine's Confessions," Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 123, for further information on the humble style of the Bible and the inability of the perverted heart to understand scripture.

as representations of reality.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the Bible uses words as saturated symbols, as vehicles to a greater understanding. It has several layers of interpretation disguised by a simple style accessible to all men.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the surface simplicity of the work precisely serves its purpose--to communicate revelation on several levels. "It is lowly on one's entrance, but is lofty upon further advance" (III, 5). This is a sharp contrast to rhetoric which uses words for the purpose of decoration and persuasion. Rather than conveying reality, they create a world of fantastic illusions. Augustine the author warns against these illusions because they "deafen [the] heart's ear" with nonsense, while the "Word cries out " beseeching the listener "to return" to the truth (IV, 11). It is not until young Augustine responds to the allurements of the internal melody of the Word that his heart's ear will decipher truth from fantasy.

## Augustine's Pride

His response to the spiritual seduction of the heart is gradual as he opens his internal ear in hopes of finding the truth. His heart must be humbled to be granted access to the Word and thereby understanding of the melody that haunts him. The concept of humility is alien to him, yet he is intrigued by the humility of Christ and the powerful dictate that "every knee shall bend...in heaven, on earth, and under earth: and...every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God" (VII, 9). It is this divine calling for a suppliant will which Augustine continually fights because he has "set up in [his] heart" (VII, 14) his own false idols of worldly honors and corporeal

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18 Marcia Colish in The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 20,56, describes pagan rhetoric as "sterile" and lacking "cognitive content and moral relevance" in contrast to moral language used to serve God. She also explains the importance of faith in gaining understanding of the scriptures.

19 see Mark D. Jordan, "Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," Augustinian Studies 11 (1985): 185 for more information on the meaningful interpretations and accessibility of the scriptures.



pleasures. Augustine the author likens his young self to the Old Testament Jews who escaped the wrath of the Egyptians only to worship a golden calf rather than their savior. In addition to the Biblical allusions, he also uses oral metaphors to describe his pride as the primary obstacle between his reason and the comprehension of the spiritual language of God. Ironically, a rhetorician's pride is fueled by a mastery of words, yet it impedes his understanding of the true Word. In juxtaposition to the Christ who inspires humility through the spread of the Word, Augustine's instructors, whose cheeks are "bursting and booming with pride" (IV, 16), use pagan philosophy as a medium to enhance their reputations. The association between the tongue and pride is not only solidified by the reference to the teachers of rhetoric, but also the reference to "cheeks bursting... with pride" explicitly ties the sin to a facial feature traditionally associated with the mouth. Furthermore, Augustine reaffirms his previous parallels between his instructors and the pharisees. Like the pharisees, his instructors are also prideful figures who gain pleasure from flaunting their knowledge.

Augustine emphasizes the detrimental effects of pride on his understanding with oral metaphors. For example, he describes the results of his initially prideful pursuit of wisdom as a "taste of death" (IV, 15). His search for understanding is rejected by God because He "resists the proud" (IV, 15). The deceptive sweetness of his successes, which has fueled his pride, has turned "all bitter" (IV, 9). The obstacle of pride is associated with the symbol of the tongue not only because the tongue is a tool of his success in rhetoric, but it also serves as the medium by which man metaphorically tastes his death. Augustine the author emphasizes divine justice by using the tongue as both the vehicle of sin and the metaphorical punishment. The perception of death as a foul taste is also used in the depiction of Christ's crucifixion when He asks God to take from him this cup of poison--His death. However, Christ does not relinquish the cup; instead, He humbly accepts His death as the only avenue

towards man's salvation. Christ reverses the pattern of bitterness represented by the gall served to Him on the cross to the sweetness of the holy cup of his sacrificed blood. Similarly, Augustine must humble himself to transform this taste of death into his own "cup of redemption" (VII, 21). To sweeten the taste of death with salvation, Augustine must deny his earthly instincts and humbly accept Christ who reopened the avenue to immortality.<sup>20</sup>

### **Establishing the Word in the Heart**

Although his desire for salvation grows in earnestness, it is based on a fear of death rather than faith grounded in the heart. He describes his fear of death in terms of oral imagery as "gnawing cares" from "within [his] unhappy breast". Although the imagery implies that his heart is suffering "within [his] unhappy breast," his suffering is rooted in fear, and his fear of death is not sufficient for his conversion. His horrified reaction to mortality is only a symptom of his lust for worldly life revealing his misplaced faith in creation as a source of lasting fulfillment; he does not submit to live according to God's will because he can not envision life outside the confines of earthly pleasures. He remains fettered by his carnal desires represented by the tongue not only because of his enjoyment of sensual pleasures, but also because a spiritual existence represented by the heart calls for a leap of a faith which arouses more fear than his impending judgment. He is afraid of what he cannot see because he is dependent on his senses to determine the nature of his existence without which he believes he will fall. (VI, 4) He bases certitude on the material world, and he does not trust the solid foundation of the Word if rooted in his heart. He is still only capable of

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond D. DiLorenzo in "*Non Pie Quaerunt*: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine's Confessions," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 124, explains that to confess initially involves a humble response to God's speech communicated through creation, through scripture, and most importantly through the interior of the soul.

conceiving existence in a “corporeal way” (VI, 4); therefore, spiritual substance evades his understanding. Augustine the author castigates his own shortsightedness because if he had opened his heart’s ear and sincerely confessed his desire to listen, God would have bestowed the grace upon him necessary for his leap of faith beyond corporeal existence. “If with inward groaning [he] had knocked at [God’s] ears and with firm faith cast all [his] cares upon [Him],” his misconceptions would have been eliminated. Instead, the “winds” of confusion are “driving [his] heart” and delays his conversion (VI, 11). The description of inward groaning and God’s ears implies an inner verbal communication as an integral part of his conversion. Literally, it is a penitent prayer for divine intervention, but metaphorically it represents the larger concept of a verbal conversion which the heart must undergo to become a “dwelling place” for the Word (IV, 11). The concept of a verbal conversion is the transformation of his metaphorical religion of language. Verbal conversion marks the realization that language is not to be admired in itself, but rather it is a medium for the service of God, specifically the expression of the Word.

Ironically, to complete his verbal conversion, he must deny the symbol of the tongue which is the origin of words, and he must return to his heart to find the Word. To find the Word is to find the truth he so avidly seeks because “where he is...is wherever truth is known” (IV 12). Augustine proclaims that sinners must “Return...to the heart” (IV, 12) and hold fast to Christ rather than the bodily pleasures which draw attention away from the truth to the illusions of the external world. Creation is only to be praised as proof of God. Therefore, the symbol of the tongue should not be an end in itself, or the central vehicle of Augustine’s ambitions. Instead, the symbol of the tongue should be subordinate to the symbol of the heart. As previously explained, the tongue is associated with Augustine’s prideful endeavors as a rhetorician and therefore represents his loyalty to worldly success. In contrast, the heart serves a

greater purpose as the medium for Christ's intervention in Augustine's life.

Christ enacts God's will by rejecting the world. Augustine uses the ascension of Christ to illustrate the important role of the heart as a counter to the lure of creation. Christ left the physical world after His resurrection, but He remains in the human heart. Christ "departed from our eyes, so that we might return into our hearts and find him there" (IV,9). Augustine's depiction of the ascension emphasizes the eternally spiritual existence of Christ in the heart rather than his temporal existence in which he was apparent to human senses. However, Augustine's description surpasses a simple endorsement of spiritual contemplation. More importantly, he claims that man's interior journey is dependent on Christ's departure from the corporeal world. The ascension necessitates the abandonment of physical perception to find the truth embodied in the Word. In leaving creation, Christ forces man to transcend creation to find Him. Augustine must "return to [his] own heart to find [H]im there". (IV, 12). Upon his return, he will find Christ who will supplant his religion of language and enable his tongue to serve the creator with the Word rather than manipulate words to gain the pleasures of creation.

### **Ambrose as Augustine's Spiritual Mentor**

When Augustine moves to Milan to further his career as a rhetoric master, he is ironically lured into service of the creator, by the talents of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan.<sup>21</sup> Augustine had left Carthage dissatisfied with his meeting with Faustus, the bishop of Manicheism who was incapable of answering Augustine's philosophical inquiries. Augustine did attempt to consult the scripture, but to no avail because the

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<sup>21</sup> Ambrose is a "praedicator", which is described by Raymond D. DiLorenzo, as a messenger who communicates divine knowledge through the use of allegory so as to approach non-believers on their "level of receptivity". Their receptivity depends on the intensity of their attachment to corporeal pleasures. See "Divine Eloquence and the Spiritual World of the Praedicator: Book XIII of St. Augustine's Confessions," Augustinian Studies 16 (1984): 84.

truth within the Word alludes him since he does not understand perfected language. Ambrose reopens the avenue of the scripture as a plausible source of understanding if read correctly. However, Augustine does not immediately accept this solution. Initially, he is only fascinated by Ambrose because he is a noted orator. Augustine is not interested in Ambrose's spiritual message, rather it is his eloquent delivery which attracts Augustine. (V, 13-14) Augustine does not accept him as a "teacher of truth"; on the contrary, he views the bishop as a mentor of rhetoric. Since he is motivated by the urge to sharpen his rhetorical skills by studying Ambrose, the tongue is the dominant symbol representing Augustine's original relationship with the bishop as shown by his description of the sermons as a taste of sweetness. (V 13)

Despite Augustine's disinterest in the truth expressed in the bishop's message, he begins to inadvertently absorb some of the meaning behind the eloquent words.<sup>22</sup> The truth which pervades Ambrose's speech with meaning is inescapable. Augustine opens his heart to "the eloquence with which [Ambrose] spoke, there likewise entered, although only by degrees, the truths that he spoke" (V, 14). The content of Ambrose's sermons begin to intrigue Augustine because although he finds Ambrose less entertaining than Faustus, the bishop is more knowledgeable and may be the source of the wisdom which alluded Faustus. Ambrose, whose gift of speaking is complimentary to the truth, is the antithesis of Faustus, whose sole entertainment value is superficial beauty. Although both are eloquent speakers, their presentation is notably different as a result of their subject matter and motivation. While Faustus manipulates words, "wandering among his Manichean fallacies" (V, 13), Ambrose is a guide on a direct path to the Word. Ambrose serves as the catalyst for Augustine's

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<sup>22</sup> Marcia Colish expresses in The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 20, that Augustine illustrates the role of spoken and written language as a vehicle of conversion. A thematic purpose of Confessions is to analyze the uses of redeemed speech such as evangelization in the case of Bishop Ambrose.

spiritual and linguistic conversion to the Word because he is the synthesis of a skilled orator and an evangelist.<sup>23</sup>

The Catholic faith becomes more inviting because it offers a path to the Word without the shameful loopholes with which Manicheism is plagued. While Augustine remains wary of complete acceptance of Catholicism, he is willing to entertain the Catholic interpretation of the Bible because it appears to solve several of the inconsistencies which he had previously found in the Bible.<sup>24</sup> Ambrose reintroduces Augustine to the scriptures by expanding his literal interpretation into an allegorical reading. Augustine's literal interpretation of the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, is a consequent of his inability to decipher the deeper meaning behind scripture. He accepts scripture at face value as if it is only a narration of objective fact, and given the fantastic nature of some of the Biblical stories Augustine had read, a literal interpretation is problematic, and trivializes the message of the Word. The passages which were "killed when [he] had taken them literally" become clear with a spiritual explanation. (V, 14). An allegorical interpretation of scriptural meaning transcends the written word and reveals the interior language of God's Word.

Augustine the author uses oral imagery to emphasize Ambrose's role as an interpreter of the interior language of the Word. Ambrose fulfills the negative images of a barren field and a tongue which feeds on phantasms. He represents the nourishment of truth which will finally satiate Augustine's hunger. Augustine applies oral imagery to Ambrose; however, it is baptized imagery in which food and tastes do not represent carnal enjoyment as they do for Augustine. The "secret mouth within

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<sup>23</sup> In J. J. O'Meara, "Elements of Fiction," rpt. in Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992) 86, Augustine is described as a *homme de coeur*. Augustine admits that it was God's beauty (revealed in Ambrose's eloquent oratory) which first attracted Him.

<sup>24</sup> Marcia Colish in The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 72, explains that with the acceptance of the Catholic faith, comes an understanding of perfected language, thereby enabling Augustine to not only pray, but to perform biblical exegesis as well.

[Ambrose's] heart" is fluent in the Word and feeds upon the "bread" [God] gave him (VI, 3). Unlike the Manichean dogma that God is subject to the will of man who can release Him from creation by consuming fruit, Ambrose's consumption of spiritual sustenance of the Word strengthens his servitude to the creator. The spiritual nourishment which Ambrose consumes is unlike the corporeal nourishment of food found in creation because the nourishment of God's Word will not be changed into man as food is changed into flesh. (VII, 10) Spiritual food is not consumed by the prideful; on the contrary, it converts the humble.

In addition to the distinctions in dogma between Christianity and Manicheism, the "bread" of Christ contrasts the empty plate which Faustus "put before" Augustine (V, 3). Manicheism created the pretense of fulfillment, and many men were drunk on its folly (V,13), yet in reality they were "mouths...in want" (VI, 10) and weakened by their hunger for real food given by God. When Augustine had embraced Manicheism, he literally turned to creation to find God and heralded fruit as the "dwelling" of God. Ambrose's converted language counters this misplaced search for nourishment. His sermons fill the vacuous, yet "comely cup" of Faustus (V,3) with truth and feeds his listeners with that truth. Ambrose provides the "fat of [God's] wheat and the sobering intoxication of [God's] wine" (V, 13) to the interior "mouths in want" (VI, 10). To satiate his hunger, Augustine must allow the uncultivated field of his heart to be planted with God's wheat, and he must abstain from the drunkenness of folly to take part in the intoxication of truth.<sup>25</sup>

The final characterization of Ambrose as the interpreter of spiritual language is Augustine's commentary on his reading practices. Unlike the typical Roman reader who reads aloud, Ambrose retires to solitude and reads God's Word in silence. While

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Burke in *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies of Logology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 66, points out that as Augustine approaches conversion, he uses the oral metaphor of an appetizing food that he can smell, but he cannot eat.

this observation has a pragmatic explanation in that Ambrose probably needed to save his voice for preaching, Augustine the author includes this detail to achieve a deeper thematic purpose. Regardless of Ambrose's actual motivation, he transforms reading into an interior pursuit by incorporating his inner voice which speaks the words of the text to the inner ear of "his heart" which "sought out their meaning" (VI, 3). His external "voice and tongue remained silent" (VI, 3) while he absorbed the Word. The internalization of reading contrasts the oral readings of Pagan literature. On the one hand, the value of Pagan works is largely dependent on its aesthetic value, and on the other hand, the Word is invaluable because of the meaning it conveys.<sup>26</sup> As Augustine's initial lack of interest in the scripture illustrates, if a pagan reader disdains the aesthetic presentation of the Word, he affords the work little value, and the meaning remains opaque to his understanding.

Serving as a vehicle of understanding, Ambrose is the fulfillment of Augustine's university teachers who instructed Augustine in the art of verbal manipulation and the utilization of words as tools of deception rather than clarification. Augustine, who "once looked upon [the Word] as absurdities," now returns to the scripture enlightened by Ambrose's interpretation of the Word (VI, 4). Unlike the teachers of rhetoric, who proclaimed false truths behind a protective veil of mystery, Ambrose lifts the veil of mystery and reveals spiritual truths. (VI, 4) The mysteries of rhetoric which mask lies are only accessible to the academic elite, while the mysteries of the Word can be understood by a humble disciple. The distinction between rhetoric and the Word is reiterated by Ambrose's use of the Biblical axiom, the "letter kills, while the spirit quickens" (VI, 4). The revelation that the letters of rhetoric end in death, while the language of the spirit, the Word, opens the dialogue of salvation between the sinner and God is central to the concept of verbal conversion which rejects the prideful use of

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<sup>26</sup> see Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies of Logology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 67.



language for man's own gain and embraces a pious communication between creator and creation through the Word.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the influence of Ambrose, Augustine remains enticed by the letter. He is not prepared to accept the all encompassing Word into his life. His interior ear had accidentally overheard the Word in Ambrose's eloquent sermons, and truth began to invade his heart. However, coincidentally eavesdropping on the truth is not sufficient for conversion. Augustine must fully open his heart and extend an invitation to the Word to establish a dwelling within him. Comprehending the language of the spirit demands the devotion of his whole heart with "all assent" (VI, 4). It is not a simple endeavor like Augustine's previous academic exercises in which success came with ease. He is accustomed to accumulating knowledge with his natural talents and using his gift of words as a vehicle to compliment his pride and satisfy his desires. In contrast, the gift of the Word is granted through grace which is not a product of his own efforts. Instead, it is given completely at the discretion of God, whose will is not only separate, but superior to Augustine's will. Furthermore, the Word, once attained, is not a tool to be manipulated. On the contrary, it transforms man into an instrument, and his talents are perfected in the service of the Word. Therefore, fluency in the language of the spirit comes at a much greater material cost than his previous worldly pursuits, yet the self-sacrifice it calls for reaps an infinitely greater reward.

## **Suffering of the Heart**

His resistance is increasingly weakened by this new found awareness of the

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<sup>27</sup> see Raymond D. DiLorenzo in "Divine Eloquence and the Spiritual World of the Praedicator: Book XIII of St. Augustine's Confessions," Augustinian Studies 16 (1984): for elaboration on the humility inspired by the scriptures.

reward awaiting complete assimilation into the Word.<sup>28</sup> While his tongue continued to reject the language of the spirit for want of mortal praise, his “heart pound[s] over such causes...and it burn[s] with the wasting fever of his thoughts” (VI, 6). Augustine the author spotlights the suffering of the heart during this spiritual changing of the guard as the tongue finally begins to concede to the dominion of the Word. Augustine realizes that his tongue is incapable of adequately expressing his sufferings, let alone cure them. (VII, 7) For the first time his eloquence fails him, and his desires continue unchecked by his words. He confides his torments in his friends in a quest for solace, but the efforts of his tongue are not sufficient to quiet the “interior melody” which tortures him with the truth (IV, 16). Augustine is tormented by the infuriating voice of truth which he does not understand, and understanding will only come from internal communication with the Source of truth, God through the medium of the Word. Augustine reaches the realization that the only relief from his torment is to abandon his external voice and turn inward and speak with his interior voice of prayer. His expression of his suffering inadvertently becomes a prayer because, unbeknownst to Augustine, God’s ears are always “turned to him” awaiting the burgeoning of his internal voice. The “unspoken sufferings of [his] soul were mighty cries for [God’s] mercy” (VII, 7). His pain is expressed not by his tongue, but by his heart which “roared with [his] groanings...into [God’s] ears” (VII, 7). The potency of the tongue is being supplanted by the heart, but with change comes the pain of recognizing his deficient spiritual nature which he expresses internally in the form of incomprehensible groans and cries known only by God.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Marcia Colish in The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 71, holds that there is a correlation between a believer’s verbal knowledge of God and his conversion in Christ.

29 Kenneth Burke in The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies of Logology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 105, describes the necessary purging of the heart for conversion.

The suffering of the heart climaxes and is resolved in Book VIII, 8 while he is living in a home with his friend, Alypius where they both attempting to meditate on the truth and find the answers for which they have been searching. Augustine retreats to a garden outside the home for solitude and undergoes a spiritual metamorphosis as he struggles with his desire for corporeal pleasures and his yearning for conversion. The symbol of the tortured heart is emphasized as the setting for this “great struggle in [his] inner house, which [he] had violently raised up against [his] own soul...in [his] heart” (VIII, 1). He cries out in frustration because he is sickened by his attachment to the flesh at the expense of his heart. (VIII, 1) As a result of the internal struggle, his speech is notably transformed from its normal controlled and eloquent manner to hysterical nonsense. His words lose meaning as the tone of his voice “spoke more of [his] state of mind than the words that [he] uttered” (VIII, 1). This deterioration of verbal communication represents a reordering as the battle within his heart comes to the forefront, and the talents of his tongue recede in importance. His “fleshy garment” holds fast to him, yet when the countless miseries which accompany his devotion to the flesh parade before his heart, his will finally breaks and in an emotional outpouring he submits to God’s mercy (VIII, 11). As he submits his will to God, he hears the voice of a child who urges him to pick of the scriptures once again and read. He opens the Bible, and his eyes immediately land on the verse, “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences” (VIII, 12). With the gift of grace, he transcends his initial passive experience with the Word and listens with his heart’s ear to this profoundly apt verse which calls him to completely deny his sensual desires, and for the first time the truth of the Word is revealed to him. This is not only the pinnacle step in his spiritual conversion, but his verbal conversion as well because he abandons his fidelity to the world to gain understanding of the

creator through the mediation of the Word. Consequently, he experiences “a peaceful light” which streams “into his heart” (VIII, 12). This revelation is the long awaited invitation to the Word to reside in his heart.

## **Complimentary Relationship of the Heart and Tongue**

In response to the invitation, the relationship between the heart and tongue transforms from antagonistic to complimentary. In Book IX, the tongue and the heart are no longer representations of the spiritual conflict within the pagan Augustine, but rather represent the unified pursuit of salvation. He opens the book with the prayer, “Grant that my heart and tongue may praise you” (IX, 1), which represents not only a literary union of the symbols of heart and tongue, but also a metaphysical union of spirit and body. The marriage of tongue and heart plays an integral role in the thematic development of The Confessions because it reflects young Augustine’s abandonment of the physical world and his embrace of the spiritual world. He emphasizes the servile role of the corporeal world when he continues the prayer with the request, “Grant that all my bones may say, ‘Lord who is like unto you?’ Grant that I may speak, and deign to answer me and ‘say to my soul; I am you salvation’” (IX, 1). This is a prayerful introduction to young Augustine’s newfound understanding that the body is of a lesser stature to the spirit as shown by the admission of his “bones” that creation is not “like unto” God. This is a striking contrast to his earlier devotion to physical beauty and desires. In addition, the final request that he may “speak” and God may “deign to answer” him with the offer of salvation is a direct reference to his redeemed speech, which is a consequence of his new found understanding of the hierarchy of creator and creation.

Augustine not only expresses the conversion of the tongue in terms of verbal communication, but also in terms of taste, thereby baptizing the two primary purposes

of the tongue which were previously perverted by his worldly desires. Augustine describes his transition from the “sweets of folly” to God “the true and highest sweetness” (IX, 1). Although young Augustine was hesitant to lose the deceitful taste of sensual pleasures, he realized that God who enters in the place of false pleasure is “sweeter than every pleasure, but not to flesh and blood”. Augustine includes the distinction, “not to flesh and blood,” to reiterate that the tongue which tastes the sweetness of God is no longer a symbol of physical nature but of spiritual nature, which experiences the ethereal enjoyment of an incorporeal God.

### **End of Rhetoric and the Conversion of the Tongue**

In response to his spiritual reformation and the integration of the heart and tongue, he decides to relinquish his occupation as a rhetorician who sells the language of the world. His tongue is now in the service of the Word, or of redeemed speech; therefore, he must “withdraw the service of [his] tongue from the language marts” (IX, 2). His employment in rhetoric is associated with the dominance of tongue imagery used to describe his young life because his mastery of words had been the foundation of his worldly success and an obstacle of his understanding of the Word. Furthermore, in order to evangelize the true Word of God he must abandon rhetoric. As a rhetorician, he spread deceit to “youths who did not meditate on [God ‘s] law , but on foolish lies”, which they could “no longer pry from [his] mouth” (IX, 2). Furthermore, he realizes the tongue is not only a deceptive weapon ensnaring his listeners, but it is also a self-defeating tool because “while seeming to counsel” him, the tongue “would oppose” him and “devour him as it does as food” (IX, 2). This realization is a reverse of his earlier belief in Manicheism, which professed that man possessed the power to release God by devouring food. Augustine now sees this doctrine for the deception that it is, in that while Manicheans falsely believes they possessed the ability to control

the presence of God, they are actually consumed by the deception they are espousing. Augustine expands on the conversion of the tongue by likening man to food; it is not a question of whether man will eat or be eaten. Man will be consumed; it is only a question of whether he will be consumed into truth or devoured by lies.

Augustine further explains this phenomenon when he quotes the voice of Christ "I am the food of grown men. Grow and you shall feed upon me. You will not change me into yourself, as you change food into your flesh, but you will be changed into me" (VII, 10). Although Augustine's redeemed tongue will feast on the fulfilling nourishment of the Word, it will not control the expression of the Word. Instead, the tongue will be consumed by Christ and become a vehicle of the Word. This spiritual paradox that man is consumed by food upon which he feeds serves a two fold thematic purpose. First, it reveals that the tongue, regardless of the appearance of superiority, is always subservient to a greater power, namely the Word which resides in the heart, not on the tongue. The tongue as a pagan symbol represents the prideful man who is greedy for material consumption and unbeknownst to him is actually engaged in a futile conflict with the creator who will always be victorious. Secondly, the paradox is central to Augustine's theory of language because it encompasses the larger theme of The Confessions that the sinner must humble himself in the service of God before he may be exalted. Similarly, Augustine must abandon the multitude of honors bestowed on him for his expression of words before he can receive the pinnacle of honored positions--an apostle of the Word. Essentially, he must be consumed by the Word before he expresses the Word.

Despite Augustine's decision to leave his occupation as a seller of words, he chooses to postpone his departure. He is afraid that his decision will be construed as a prideful gesture because the holidays are approaching, and he can easily leave the profession at this time without fanfare. However, in light of his recent conversion, the

continued service of his tongue in the occupation of lies arguably manifests itself in a physical sickness. He is unable to proceed with his duties because he is infected with a lung sickness and can no longer speak clearly for an extended period. (IX, 2)

Although the coincidence of this ailment and his delayed decision to leave his profession may be of little literal significance, the fact that this disease interfered with his ability to profess rhetoric is a powerful literary commentary on his verbal conversion. Now that his tongue and heart have been devoted to the expression of the Word, his tongue is inhibited from expressing rhetoric. "With a heart now completely in [God's] service" (IX, 2), he questionably chooses to remain in the "chair of lies" (IX, 2), yet this mysterious illness hinders this choice and renders his tongue impotent. In an ironic finale to his career as the esteemed rhetorician, he is forced to leave in humble silence.

### **Domination of the Heart and Internal Speech**

During this period of silence to the world, the symbol of the heart becomes a dominate image of his remaining journey to complete conversion. With his tongue suppressed by illness, his heart begins to listen to the spiritual voices of believers and begins to speak fluently with the interior voice of prayer. He hears for the first time, the "sweet singing Church...whose voices flowed into [his] ears, and God's truth penetrated [his] heart" (IX, 6). The songs of the brethren of the Church represent the union of the redeemed tongue and heart in the service of Lord, singing together in "voice and heart" (IX, 7). This union is the fulfillment of Augustine's childhood teachers who promised "Truth, Truth" from the study of rhetoric, and yet molded Augustine's tongue to produce lies. In contrast, the truth which emanates from the Church inspires Augustine to speak not with his tongue, but rather with his heart which "rose up" in prayer (IX, 9). The adoption of the heart as his medium of communication is

necessary to attain fluency in redeemed speech.<sup>30</sup> The passionate cries and callings from his heart which accompany the final moments of his conversion are the child-like attempts of the newborn Christian to speak the language of the spirit. He “cried out with a deep cry from [his] heart” (IX, 4) for understanding of God’s Word. In addition, Augustine urges his friends on wax tablets to communicate in the language of the spirit as well by praying for his convalescence. Augustine’s involuntary silence and the invoked prayers of his friends reveal to him that the tongue and all that it represents pales in the shadow of the heart, which is central to his verbal conversion. Possibly the greatest illustration of the dominance of the heart in Augustine’s conversion is his admittance that his heart will find rest only when it rests in God (IV, 12). The Confessions can be summarized by this one expression, where the heart is spotlighted as the dynamic location of spiritual as well as linguistic development.

Ironically, his verbal conversion affirms the primacy of the symbol of the heart, while it undermines the importance of the symbol of the tongue as an end in itself. He enumerates the benefits of language expressed in the heart in contrast to external speech expressed by the tongue. Unlike rhetoric which is expressed by the tongue solely for the audience, silent prayers expressed by the heart are shared with God alone and therefore are characterized by a unique freedom which is absent from worldly speech. Worldly speech is dominated by appearances and the sensual demand for pleasure. Since the Word is only constrained by the truth, the prayerful enjoy a freedom of spiritual solitude. Augustine describes this comfort at length when he writes:

Would that [my friends] could have heard me while I did not think that I said for their benefit the things that I uttered along with the words of the psalm. For in truth, I would not say those same words, nor would I say them in the same

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<sup>30</sup> see Marcia Colish, The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 21, for explanation of the paradox of the redemption of language which is dependent on faith in the Word as the medium of communication.



way, if I knew that I was being heard and seen by them, they would not understand them in the way that I spoke them in your presence, by myself and to myself out of the closest feelings of my mind

(IX, 4)

This is complete rejection of external speech, as well as the corporeal world in its entirety as a source of solace; Augustine now recognizes it as a source of anxiety and a fear of judgment. The sugar coated sweetness symbolized by his unconverted tongue has been displaced by an incorporeal haven symbolized by the heart. Augustine uses oral images of tasting to illustrate the sharp transition from a dependence on corporeal comforts to a trust in spiritual protection when he contrasts “lick[ing] the images of...good things in the outward world” and “tast[ing] that inner eternal light” (IX,4). The search for an incorporeal haven internalizes the journey toward “good things”, thereby bringing “joy to his heart” (IX, 4).

## **Love fulfills Lust**

Furthermore, Augustine explains that his movement inward has been inspired by God’s love residing in the heart. This pure love both fulfills and transforms the lust which attracted him to creation, specifically sexual relationships with women. Augustine addresses the beginning of the reformation of his lustful desires in Book VII when he comments “By inner goads you aroused me so that I did not rest until you stood plain before my inner sight” (VII, 8). By Book IX, he has completely internalized his search for fulfillment. Therefore, similes describing God’s love presiding over Augustine’s heart supplant the earlier sexual imagery of a metaphorical seduction into the service of God. God’s “love pierced [his] heart like an arrow...transfixing [his] innermost parts” (IX, 3). God’s love is no longer a distant temptation likened to sexual attraction; instead, it has penetrated Augustine’s heart, enticing him to turn inward for fulfillment. As a result of this metaphorical courtship, Augustine has fallen in love with

## **Relationship with Monica and the Reformation of Grief**

The nonsexual nature of the conversion of Augustine's heart is further emphasized by his communion with his mother, Monica. Throughout a majority of the autobiography, Augustine has had a discordant relationship with his mother because while the symbol of the tongue represented his life, the symbol of the humble heart epitomized her service of God. His mother is a mentor for both his verbal or spiritual conversion, because unlike his unconverted tongue which he set "against heaven" (IV, 12), "no word had issued from her mouth contrary to [God's] commandment" (IX, 13). While Augustine inspired Pagan beliefs in others, Monica inspired faith because all who knew her "recognized [God's] presence in heart" (IX, 9). Their discordant relationship is a consequence of their contrasting characters and is a reflection of Augustine's larger, yet interior, battle of allegiance between the creator and His creation. Augustine the author describes the parallel between his internal conflict and his relationship with his mother when he writes, "in her flesh...I was born into this temporal life, and in her heart so that I might be born into eternal light" (IX, 8). He acknowledges that through her flesh he has been given mortal life, but he explains that the faith within her heart gives him the possibility for immortal life.

His recognition of immortality as a gift of his mother's heart comforts him when she dies. In sharp contrast with the death of his friend before Augustine's conversion (IV, 5-9), he is not engulfed by grief because he is assured of her immortality. He meditates on the "gifts...which [God] instill[s] into the hearts of [the] faithful...and [he] rejoiced" (IX, 9). However, recognition of the gift of salvation does not completely

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31 See J.J. O'Meara "Elements of Fiction," rpt. in Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992) 86, for elaboration on Augustine's love of God and his existence in the "order of love."

alleviate the pain of his loss. The symbol of the heart becomes central to the expression of his grief because he does not verbalize his pain; rather he “crushed down within [his] heart” his shameful emotions and attempts to silence his “heart’s own voice” (IX, 12). This is the antithesis of his reaction to his friend’s death during which he found pleasure in submerging himself in grief and tears. The bitterness of grief which he perversely enjoyed when his friend passed away no longer emanates from his heart (IX, 12). In addition, his internal expression of grief further supports his endorsement of internal speech because the voice of his heart is silent to the ears of man who would ridicule his sorrow, but it is heard by the ears of God, who eases burdens, and “frees...worried hearts from grief. (IX, 12)” By expressing his pain within the privacy of his heart, he is granted the divine grace to surrender the grief which he previously savored.

## **Spiritual Communion with Monica**

Before Monica’s death, Augustine shares with her a spiritual communion which is a climatic summation of his transition from the tongue to the heart. The communion develops from a verbal conversation concerning the afterlife of saints to a silent, yet enormously potent, discourse between the hearts of a Augustine and his mother and finally ascends to a divine vision of eternity.<sup>32</sup> Augustine and his mother are contemplating eternal life “which eye has not seen, not ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man” (IX, 10). Since they are attempting to understand a divine and therefore incorporeal idea, words fail them, and they must turn inward, “straining...with the heart’s mouth” (IX, 10). To understand immortality, God’s Word must illuminate their hearts because words alone fail in his pursuit of wisdom. They must initiate their

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<sup>32</sup> See Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 47-50, for more details concerning the spiritual communion between Augustine and his mother.

prayer with the internal voice of their hearts because it is here that Christ resides as the Word, which is synonymous with the wisdom of divine truth. This marks a spiritual development for Augustine because his capacity for verbal communication has returned to him, yet he still subverts his verbal talents for the voice of the heart, which he recognizes as an infinitely more powerful tool.

The evolution of the conversation young Augustine has with his mother initially refocuses on the tongue because their communication represents the redemption process of Augustine's speech. Furthermore, it parallels the larger pattern of spiritual development revealed in the book as a whole. Like the pagan Augustine, the beginning of the conversation is a verbal communication grounded in the world and elevates to "the highest delight of fleshy senses" (IX, 10). Similar to Augustine's life before conversion, the initial moments of his conversation produce sensual pleasure. However, Augustine the author does distinguish between this spiritual communion with his mother and young Augustine's several corporeal communions with other women by explaining that all other worldly pleasures "when set against the sweetness" of this shared communion with his mother, "seemed unworthy not merely of comparison with it, but of even remembrance" (IX, 10). Despite the conversation's sensual nature, it should still be regarded in the "brightest corporeal light" (IX, 10). In the Neoplatonic tradition, Augustine has set this language within the confines of creation because it is still verbal communication characteristic of the world, but he elevates it to the height of corporeal existence.

This hierarchical categorization of communication is the foundation of Augustine's theory of language. It illustrates the doctrine that words are tools which can be utilized to express man's egocentric belief in himself, which is a lower level of communication, or his humble belief in God, which is the zenith of communication. This distinction excuses words from culpability and places the speaker at the fulcrum

of choice.<sup>33</sup> Words represent steps on the ladder of his linguistic development, and the choices of the speaker allow or disallow him to move forward towards Wisdom, which is embodied in the Word and is the key to perfect communication. The movement on the linguistic ladder is fueled by the “effort of his whole heart” (IX, 10). By devoting his whole heart, Augustine attains a glimpse of Wisdom by transforming his tongue from a tool of rhetoric into a vehicle of contrite prayer, and finally abandoning the tongue in favor of spiritual meditation. He uses the ladder imagery to describe his verbal ascent as a procession “step by step through all “bodily things up to that heaven...ascend[ing] higher...by means of inward thought and discourse” (IX, 10). This internal procession supplants “bodily” symbols such as the tongue with “inward thought” which is a product of the “efforts of [the] whole heart” (IX, 10). This metaphorical transition creates an image of Augustine and his mother engaged in a purer communication between their hearts, rather than their tongues<sup>34</sup>.

Although this conversation is a marked improvement on Augustine’s prowess in spiritual communication, its development does not end with the perfected communication. Rather Augustine reaches the zenith of the verbal hierarchy, and faces his greatest challenge--silence. Unlike the silence invoked by his illness, this is a voluntary choice to quiet his own internal voice to allow his heart to hear the Word.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Augustine clearly does not disdain the words “carnal and vocal” by which he speaks to other men. Otherwise he would not have written the Confessions. Nor would he have lavishly adorned the language of his work with rhetorical tropes and figures.” Raymond D. DiLorenzo, “*Non Pie Quaerunt*: Rhetoric, Dialect, and the Discovery of the True in Augustine’s Confessions,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 124.

<sup>34</sup> Francis J Chivers in “Wordsworth’s ‘Real Language of Men’ and Augustine’s Theory of Language,” Augustinian Studies 14 (1983): 13, explains that language can be a bond between men. Through language “soul reaches out to soul” communicating knowledge and benevolence.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Burke in The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies of Logology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 121, describes Monica’s desire to an eternity of “postverbal silence.”

Ironically, in possibly one of Augustine's most poetic moments he describes the art of silence:

If for any man the tumult of the flesh fell silent, silent the images of the earth, and of the waters, and of the air; silent the heavens; silent for him the very soul itself, and he should pass beyond himself by not thinking upon himself; silent his dreams and all imagined appearances, an every tongue, and every sign; and if all things that come to be through change should become wholly silent to him--for if any man can hear, then all these things say to him, "We did not make ourselves, but he who endures forever made us"--if when they have said these words, they then become silent, for they have raised up his ear to him who made them, and God alone speaks, not through such things but through himself, so we hear his Word, not uttered by a tongue of flesh, not by an angel's voice, "nor by the sound of thunder," nor by the riddle of similitude, but by himself whom we love in these things, himself we hear without their aid--even as we then reached out and in swift thought attained to that eternal Wisdom which abides over all things.

(IX, 10)

This description of the living prayer of creation embraces the complete expanse of Augustine's spiritual and verbal metamorphosis from his lustful desires to his embrace of Manicheism to his success as a rhetorician to his final conversion and to his future spiritual growth. It begins with quieting the flesh, images of creation, and the soul itself. The transcendence beyond creation refers to young Augustine's calling to deny his addiction to the world, his own selfish ambitions, and all the symbols and signs, including the tongue, to which he previously swore allegiance. When the "tumult" of his "flesh fell silent", he sacrificed his own needs so that he might truly hear the truth, namely that creation is not an end in itself. Rather, "he who endures forever made"

creation, and therefore all created things, including Augustine, are beholden to Him.<sup>36</sup> This revelation represents Augustine's denial of Manicheism, which is a misplaced faith in corporeal existence. The prayer continues to describe a state in which all creation is now silent because it has already voiced its praise and gratitude to the creator. This is the central moment of this prayer because it touches on a theme which Augustine the author has yet to truly breach: although his speech may be redeemed, once he has served his purpose as an evangelist there is an essential time for silence. Just as creation becomes silent after it proclaimed the truth of its origin, so must Augustine--the Christian, the author, and the evangelist.<sup>37</sup> It is only then that God may be heard not "uttered by a tongue of flesh" or any other vehicle of creation, "but through himself" the Word will be heard.

This final moment of complete silence, and therefore complete conversion, is not a static achievement of Augustine's, which he reflects on as a past stage of his conversion. Eternal silence and therefore the infinite awareness and understanding of the Word, is a gift of immortality which even Augustine the author has not yet fully experienced.<sup>38</sup> Rather he has experienced small moments of enlightenment such as this vision, but these moments are transitory. He is forced to "return to the noise of [his] mouth where both a word begins and ends" (IX, 10) in contrast to the eternal Word. This open challenge for spiritual silence leaves the autobiography in a sense

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<sup>36</sup> Marcia Colish in *The Mirror of Language A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968) 58, explains Augustine's distinction between those things which are to be enjoyed only as a means to a greater end, and the only real end to be enjoyed in itself, namely God.

<sup>37</sup> see Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 121, for commentary on the paradoxical idea of the "wordman" conceiving of an eternal silence.

<sup>38</sup> In Colin Starns, "Augustine's Conversion and the Ninth Book of the Confessions", rpt, in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992) 52. It is explained that at the moment of conversion, we become Christian, but unless the Christian dies immediately, the process is incomplete. We must spend the rest of our lives "becoming a Christian" by obeying Christ in all things, and this process ends only in death.

unfinished because historically it is documented that Augustine did in fact become a bishop and therefore an evangelist of the Word. This information reveals that Augustine not only maintained his new found skill in the internal language of the spirit, but also shared his skills in spiritual communication as a preaching apostle. He alludes to this at the end of Book IX, when he prays “O God of my heart....accept O Lord, ‘the free offerings of my mouth’” (IX, 13). However, this development does not complete his spiritual evolution as his prayer describes. The deep and unabiding silence of which he speaks cannot not be explained or exhibited. Ironically, despite his conversion, both verbal and spiritual, Augustine must except that the advent of eternal silence cannot be expressed in words.

The tongue and the heart imagery in The Confessions serves a complex metaphorical purpose. Primarily it helps elucidate Augustine’s spiritual and linguistic development. Initially the tongue and heart are introduced as contrasting symbols of Augustine’s internal conflict between corporeal pleasure and spiritual fulfillment respectively. On the one hand, the tongue represents young Augustine’s experience as a student, a professor, and a rhetorician, his belief in Manicheism, his struggle with incontinence, and eventually his divine calling to evangelization. On the other hand, the heart represents spiritual hunger and suffering, rightly ordered love, the home of the Word, the center of the self, and lastly the site of his conversion. It is only when these symbols represent a harmonious effort in the service of God that Augustine finds peace because with the rhetoric silenced, his pride humbled, and his internal ear open to the Word, his restless heart can finally rest in God.



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