

Augustine in the Underworld: *Aeneid* 6 and the Puzzle of *Confessions* 10-13

The autobiographical *peregrinatio* of the first nine books of Augustine's *Confessions* is widely considered to be modeled after the wanderings of Aeneas in *Aen.* 1-5. However, since Augustine appears to abandon his autobiographical project after *Conf.* 9, turning instead to abstract philosophical questions in *Conf.* 10-13, it is commonly assumed that (a) these last four books do not belong to the same narrative as the first nine, and—as an implicit consequence of this—(b) there will not be Vergilian influences on their structure. This paper argues against both of these claims and suggests that the latter half of Vergil's *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 7-12) is, in fact, a model for the narrative of *Conf.* 10-13. Thus, this paper confirms Hübner's (1981, 261-2) suspicion that there must be an "iliadische Hälfte" in these books.

I propose that it is Augustine's mystical vision, or *anabasis*, at Ostia (*Conf.* 9.10.24—significantly one of the last historical episodes of the *Confessions*) that corresponds in terms both of content and narrative purpose to the *katabasis* of *Aen.* 6 (Bennett 1988, 64-5; O'Donnell 1992, 3.123-4). While Aeneas descends physically into the underworld in order to confront his past and future, here Augustine ascends metaphysically to heaven in order to transcend time altogether (Sorabji 1983, 167-8). In the process, both protagonists experience a psychological reorientation that results in a narrative shift between the first and second halves of the two works.

Aeneas, who throughout *Aen.* 1-5 had been distracted by his memory of a now dead past and his anticipation of an uncertain future, can at last move on to confront, in *Aen.* 7-12, that which is present-at-hand. For Aeneas, this is possible only after he has overcome his past and has seen what lies temporally before him (Otis 1959, 168-70; Williams 1972, 459; Bennett 1988, 65). I suggest that precisely the same be said of Augustine. The trick, however, is to identify the protagonist of the *Confessions* as the *narrator* of the thirteen books, not the narrated Augustine

of *Conf.* 1-9. Augustine makes precisely this claim when he explains that the *Confessions* is about who he is now, not who he once was (*Conf.* 10.3.4; 4.6)—a claim that also follows from his theory of time and recollection (cf. *Conf.* 11.18.23). This Augustine, the narrator-protagonist, is so distracted (*distenditur*) by the ghost of his past self—by something that no longer exists, like Dido for whom he mistakenly cried at *Conf.* 1.13.20ff.—that, throughout *Conf.* 1-9, he is unable to concentrate fully (*intenditur*) on the present and in the presence of God (Nightingale 2011, *passim*). Only through the transformation of the *narrated* Augustine via his vision at Ostia is Augustine the *narrator* finally able to overcome his own past and reorient his attention toward that which is present-at-hand (O'Donnell 1992, 3.151).

Although the transition between *Conf.* 9 and 10 may be jarring in a way similar to the transition between *Aen.* 6 and 7, the two halves of both works must still be understood as belonging to the same continuous story. As we cannot fully appreciate the latter half of the *Aeneid* without reading it as completing the half that came before it, so too must we not interpret *Conf.* 10-13 in abstraction from the books that precede—or rather, introduce—them (Young 1999; Pranger 2001; MacDonald 2003; Kotzé 2006). By suggesting a Vergilian model underlying the composition of the last four books of the *Confessions*, this paper offers a way to read all thirteen books as belonging to the same narrative.

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