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SPIRITUAL HUNGER AND THE SEARCH FOR GOD IN AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*: A NEW 'SENSORY' APPROACH TO THE TEXT-AUDIENCE INTERACTION

El hambre espiritual y la búsqueda de Dios en las *Confesiones* de Agustín:
un nuevo enfoque "sensorial" de la interacción entre texto y audiencia

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Abstract

This article investigates the role of sensory metaphors of food and hunger in the communicative project of the *Confessions*. Under the broad framework of cognitive poetics, which focuses on the interaction between text and audience, I analyse how sensory language contributes to an appeal to the readers' sensory imaginations and emotions that they might be responsive to the viewpoint put forward by the text. I find that Augustine stimulates and reorientates especially his Manichaean readers' intuitive but also cultural and familiar conceptions of the sensible world in relation to God, of their religious food and dietary rituals and, by extension, of their experience of God. This, I argue, seems to be a persuasive device to encourage new interpretation of the senses as signs which point towards immaterial reality, and new understanding of man's relationship to God as utterly transcendent and unchangeable.

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Keywords

Late Antiquity, Christianity, Manichaeism, Augustine of Hippo, Cognitive Poetics, Metaphor, Rhetoric, Audience, Senses.

Resumen

Este artículo investiga el papel de las metáforas sensoriales de la comida y el hambre en el proyecto comunicativo de las *Confesiones*. En el amplio marco de la poética cognitiva, que se centra en la interacción entre el texto y la audiencia, analizo cómo el lenguaje sensorial contribuye a apelar a la imaginación sensorial y a las emociones del lector, para que responda al punto de vista propuesto por el texto. Encuentro que Agustín estimula y reorienta las concepciones intuitivas, pero también culturales y familiares de su audiencia maniquea especialmente, respecto al mundo sensible en relación con Dios, su comida religiosa y rituales dietéticos y, por extensión, su experiencia de Dios. Argumento que esto parece ser un recurso persuasivo para fomentar una nueva interpretación de los sentidos como signos que apuntan hacia la realidad inmaterial y una nueva comprensión de la relación del hombre con Dios como totalmente trascendente e inmutable.

Palabras clave

Antigüedad tardía, Cristiandad, Maniqueísmo, Agustín de Hipona, Poética cognitiva, Metáfora, Retórica, Audiencia, Sentidos.

1. Introduction

In the *Confessions*, Augustine reveals rather a deep sensitivity for the affective power and value of sensory experience, of beautiful sounds that flood the ears and joyful tears that pour down the face, the delight in which arouse loving devotion of God. Indeed, Augustine considers himself better for having undergone such experiences since they moved him closer to God (see *conf.* 9.6,14). Conversely, Augustine does speak on numerous occasions in his *Confessions* about the temptations that accosted him as a young man, leading him to overindulge in sensory experiences and pleasure that detracted his attention away from God. In these instances, Augustine often uses metaphorical language of the senses and tends to intermingle his metaphors for mind/soul and body. For example, he describes the state of his sinful soul as a sickly body, which “was covered with sores and [which] flung itself out of doors, longing to soothe its misery by rubbing against sensible things” (*conf.* 3.1,1).² Elsewhere he admonishes his soul not to be vain and to “take care that the ear of your heart be not deafened by the din of your vanity” (*conf.* 4.11,16).³ Rather

2 Ulcerosa proiciebat se foras, miserabiliter scalpi auida contactu sensibilibium (CCL 27, p. 27). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 75).

3 Noli esse uana, anima mea, et absurdescere in aure cordis tumultu uanitatis tuae (CCL 27, p. 48). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 102).

than separating his discussions of the corporeal and spiritual, Augustine has them reinforce one another (Moncion 2016, p. 653).

As a result, the imagery that Augustine uses to describe his inner, spiritual quest in the *Confessions* is highly accessible, also to the modern reader. One particularly intuitive metaphor that will be the focus of his paper and that pervades the thirteen books is that of food and eating, used to describe spiritual hunger and satiation. It is, in this way, a metaphor of desire, comparable with the search for knowledge and truth (Moncion 2016, p. 653).

Jacobs (2022) studies Augustine's viewpoint on metaphors in line with Augustine's application thereof. According to Jacobs, Augustine seems, to some extent, to have followed the classical tradition concerning metaphor, whereby metaphor was appreciated for its rhetorical or ornamental value in persuading and delighting readers. Metaphors could bring clarity and concision, but less was made of the obscurity that can arise in metaphorical language or its ability to create new meaning. Jacobs finds, however, that in some instances of metaphor that Augustine contends with, he goes beyond classical theories on metaphor and views them not only as ornamental but as necessary, especially for conveying the ineffable. He was also fully aware that metaphors do not fully cover abstract and metaphysical concepts. Jacobs further notes that Augustine's later exegetical works especially leave large room for readers' interpretation. These views bear similarities with the contemporary approaches to metaphor which also focus on readers' interpretation and the larger societal landscape in which metaphors are found.

In the present study, I aim to clarify how Augustine uses sensory metaphors, in particular those of food and hunger, to appeal to his readers that they might adopt the viewpoint depicted by the narrative as leading towards God, truth and salvation.⁴ I will first offer a background on the growing appreciation of the senses in late antique Christianity in order to situate Augustine's views on the senses and sensory language. I will then propose a contemporary approach based on cognitive sciences by which the role of sensory language in text-audience interactions might be fruitfully traced in the *Confessions*. Finally, I will present an analysis of images of food and hunger within a broad framework of cognitive poetics to determine how Augustine 're-educates' intuitive and familiar conceptions of sensible realities, so that his readers view them as signs which point towards a truth beyond the material world. I will further analyse how this contributes to an appeal to readers' imagination and emotions leading them to new meaning and a change in their perspective. The study will suggest that the Manichaeans form a crucial intended audience of the passages analysed.

1.1. Background: a reorientation of the senses in Late Antique Christianity

The appreciation of sensory experience present in the *Confessions* forms part of a broader phenomenon in late antique Christianity. With the legitimisation of Christianity in the 4th century Roman Empire, important transformations began to occur in the valuation of the senses and the body, resulting in the

⁴ I use the terms metaphor and image/imagery loosely throughout this paper, since nuances between the two are generally not relevant to the arguments I would like to present.

emergence of a more positive view of the sensible, corporeal world and its relation to the transcendent (Ashbrook Harvey 2006, p. 2).⁵ Patricia Cox Miller coins the phrase “the material turn” for this shift in late ancient Christian sensibility and attitude towards “the signifying potential of the material world (including especially the human body)” (2009, p. 3). As Cox Miller observes, the significance of the body conferred by the incarnation of the divine in materiality was increasingly highlighted, not only in actions and good works, but in bodily, sensory experiences as a way of knowing God. Further, there was a growing acknowledgement of the body as a sign of inner transformation of the self into its true form as made in God’s image (2009, p. 5). Despite this, however, rhetoric of the body and its senses was embraced with some reserve. And, in a negative sense, there remained the awareness of human beings’ fallen condition embedded in temporality, limitation and imperfection, as well as of human corruptibility and ease with falling in favour of the sensible world as an end in itself.

Among Christian authors in this period, Augustine took great care that enthusiasm for sensuous apprehension and the instantiation of the divine in the corporeal world was handled with considerable nuance, especially that it did not lead to idolatrous treatment of the corporeal (see *conf.* 7.9,13 against pagan religious worship of idols). There is also an anxiety in his writings with confusing the material and the spiritual, particularly when speaking against Manichaeism. For him, corporeal sensation was, more often than not, entrusted to the guidance of the mind.

In his role as a bishop and spiritual guide, Augustine had the task, like many Christian authors in this time, to reorientate the senses that they be viewed as mediators of the kind of apprehension that pointed beyond the material. This without negating the function of the material world as only a sign of spiritual or eternal reality (see Cox Miller 2009, p. 6).⁶ As Cox Miller remarks, it was typical of Christian authors in that period to try to blur in their writings the distinction between reader and text by appealing to the reader’s sensory imagination, using pictorial strategies, metaphors, *ekphrasis*, all of which contributed to a ‘theological poetics of material substance’ (Cox Miller 2009, p. 8-9). Spiritual expressions of experiencing God became ever more visceral due, in some measure, to the value accorded to the senses, and sensory

5 Ashbrook Harvey seems to consider this something of a causal relationship. She illustrates that before the legalisation of Christianity in 312/3, Christians affirmed God as creator of all, but they understood themselves as living in a non-Christian world. The model of Christ was followed in such a way that the body and its senses were considered as an instrument not for this temporal world, but through which to seek eternal life. Since sensory pleasures could tie one to this temporal world, the body was important only for actions which expressed one’s faith: fasting, chastity, poverty and good works (2006, p. 44). The study by Ashbrook Harvey shows that bodily experience became increasingly prominent in the behaviour and discourse of late antique Christians post Constantine. The world from which Christians had been alienated became their world which bore witness to their God. The senses and the body directed them towards their relationship with God, a relationship that could be evoked not only in actions but in experiences, in liturgy, the eucharist and incense. Indeed, the body and sense perception gained value in knowing God (2006, p. 46).

6 Carol Harrison (2019) notes that Augustine wanted to hold that truth could be accessed independently of its sensuous expression. Nevertheless, she finds that he admits that it is more often than not through the sensuous expression of eternal truths, such as number, measure and logic, in the natural world, that human beings perceive them at all. Indeed, Augustine became aware that the sensible world, when viewed in the correct way, provokes the soul/mind to grasp eternal truths behind it, following Rom 1:20 (see *conf.* 7.17,23). Since God’s being is reflected in nature, particularly in beauty, order and unity, it can point the soul towards fuller understanding but also love of God, who caused the instantiation of the eternal truths in reality.

language could serve to unite rather than divide the two components, matter and soul, of human beings.⁷ Augustine's *Confessions* is an example of a text that engages especially strongly with readers' sensory imagination and emotions in this way, and as a result, the readers find themselves not only witnesses, but also active participants in the spiritual journey of conversion recounted.

The arrangement of sensory images in the *Confessions* is perhaps more than a device for colourful illustration and engagement. The vividness of sensory language, skilfully crafted and structured by various rhetorical techniques, is also, I find, a means of rhetorical manipulation and persuasion, with a specific communicative aim and intended audience. It is already well-recognised that rhetoric was key to the construction of effective communication with readers of the *Confessions*, so that they might be receptive to its teachings. The *Confessions* as protreptic-*paraenetic*⁸, aimed at converting or deepening the process of conversion of its readers, has been acknowledged and well-studied by, recently, Reimer (2013) and Kotzé (2004), who places emphasis on the audience under the broad framework of narratology. However, to better understand why the *Confessions* narrative is furnished with such vivid, sensory imagery and motifs, there is still need, I believe, for an approach that is able to reveal the significance of the sensory imagination and experiential qualities that such language can evoke in the audience's minds. This study will suggest a new avenue of research that may offer insight into the functions of sensory language in the text's engagement with its audience.

1.2. A contemporary approach

The fairly recent methodology of cognitive poetics offers a helpful model by which to study Augustine's *Confessions*, building upon the principles of cognitive science, linguistics and psychology. One of the central claims of these cognitive disciplines is that human cognition is, by nature, embodied. Researchers have shown that human beings have the capacity for extending concepts from our bodily interaction with the world and our experiences of our environment into the abstract and conceptual realm, informing our expressions and perceptions (Stockwell [2020, p. 6] and Tsur [2002]).

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that people tend to interpret and attribute meaning to a text or speech based on existing knowledge and beliefs, that are often non-cultural, universal, and intuitive. It has been found, for example, that representations of the divine that individuals make are universally

7 These techniques drew from the tradition of the 'spiritual senses,' most exemplarily in the writings of *Origen*. Augustine's sources for his understanding of the senses of the *homo interior* can tentatively be traced to *Origen*, although a more likely and immediate source might be *Ambrose* (see Lootens [2012] and *Fédou* [2018]). This would include significant influence from the Plotinian theory of cognition, as well as from Scriptural (especially Pauline) language, and even Manichaeism.

8 Protreptic literature comprises of discourses which follow the ancient tradition of λόγος προτροπικός, intended to win over the not-yet-converted and to attract people to a certain philosophy as a way of life. These exhortations often involved a rejection of alternative ways of living, while illustrating the truth claims of the recommended position. The term *paraenesis* is a broader term for such discourses. However, unlike protreptics, these usually presuppose a positive relationship and shared worldview between speaker and audience, and an already existing willingness on the part of the audience to follow the guidelines of the speaker (See Kotzé, 2004, pp. 52-66).

usually anthropomorphic (we often cannot help but think of divine entities as intentional agents who act and think like us), and that ideas about God thought of in such ontological categories as object, animal or person are more easily spread among people (Barrett [2019], Boyer [1994] on minimally counterintuitive religious concepts compared to maximally counterintuitive ideas that are not easily remembered, and Upal [2010] in response). These representations will also, importantly, be affected by the full range of personal and cultural knowledge, beliefs and subjective experiences that exist in people's minds (Czachesz 2007).

We see that certain theological concepts in the Christian doctrine run counterintuitive to our natural understanding and are thus more difficult for the human mind to hold onto and transmit. These are, for example, the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, the nature of grace, or the idea of God as transcendent and infinite. When it comes to these theological concepts, which open up the ontological divide between God and human beings, intuitive and universal concepts together with individual experiences can help to form a bridge to understanding (Cruz 2014).

Further, it has been argued that when human minds combine what they hear or read from a particular discourse with their existing knowledge, they are able to create a new meaning (Stockwell 2020, p. 91). The work by Lakoff and Johnson on conceptual metaphor complements this from the perspective of rhetoric, showing that the use of metaphor and the mapping of representations onto one another can be highly effective in the reader's cognition and construal of meaning. This can prompt a reader/listener to evaluate a certain idea from a new perspective.

When we approach Augustine's text within such a framework, we cannot hope to determine precisely how his audience received, interpreted and understood his arguments, or whether it had its intended effect. However, we can perhaps generate new insight into the ways in which the text itself elicits a particular response and thereby contributes to the communicative project of the *Confessions*.⁹ It thus helps us to gain understanding of how the audience plays a role in the text, complementing and supplementing other approaches of stylistics, reader-response theory and narratology.

As I hope to bring to the fore in the arguments below, Augustine is concerned in his *Confessions* with leading his readers towards a new/deepened *modus uiuendi*, orientated towards knowledge and devotion of God (*conf.* 10.3,4 and *retr.* 2.6,1). Since it may be difficult for his readers to grasp certain ideas about God crucial to his communicative aim, Augustine seems to exploit resources provided by everyday experience, the natural world and material reality to equip his readers for the more inaccessible concepts he has in store. This present study aims to offer one example that Augustine uses in his *Confessions* to lead his readers to new knowledge of God through the lens of a more familiar subject, stimulating their sensory imagination. I focus on his use of the highly accessible, intuitive image of food and hunger to activate especially his Manichaean readers' individual and cultural knowledge concerning food and dietary rituals, so as to bring them to a new way of thinking about God and the material world, and ultimately to conversion.¹⁰ It was therefore crucial to guide them through the argument and engage their receptivity.

9 See the thought-provoking analysis by Stenger in the recent collection on new approaches to the study of Chrysostom (2022), which informed the current avenue of research on Augustine's *Confessions*.

10 That the Manichaeans are at least one group of anticipated readers of the *Confessions* has been highlighted by numerous scholars, most prominently by van Oort (2022) and Kotzé (2004, among other articles in the same vein). Other

I find that Augustine does this by using highly intuitive and sensuous images based on the embodied human experience, but also culturally familiar images and concepts that give way to reassessment and new understanding of these concepts.

2. Hungering for God and rejecting illusory food – Augustine’s treatment of Manichaeism

Throughout the *Confessions*, Augustine’s language of hunger and food, and the desire for God that it tends to represent, often refers to the soul’s in-between state of neither complete lack nor fullness (Moncion 2016, p. 653). On the one hand, Augustine does not consider it possible for even the converted soul to ever fully comprehend or enjoy God in this earthly life. We can catch “only a fragrance” (*conf.* 7.9,13). On the other hand, early in his *Confessions* when describing his pre-conversion/pre-baptism years, Augustine claims that his famished soul knew something of what it yearned for. This was in a large way due to his reading Cicero’s *Hortensius* which inflamed him with the love of wisdom, before which he “had no desire for the food that does not perish.”¹¹ Once he began to desire wisdom and hunger for God, whom he equated with wisdom even then, he was not in a state of lack of God, since God for Augustine is never fully absent. However, until his soul was properly ordered in its appreciation of corporeal and divine things, this hunger did lead him astray. Seeking truth, Augustine fell in with the Manichaeans and ate up their ideas. As he says of the Manichaeans:

I was hungering for you, but their teachings were like plates on which they served me not you but the sun and moon, which are your beautiful works, to be sure, but still your works, not yourself ... and all they set before me were dishes of glittering myths ... Yet I ate those offerings, believing that I was feeding on you; I ate them without appetite, for there was no taste in my mouth of you as you are, since those insubstantial shams were not you. I derived no nourishment from them, but was left the more drained. The food we dream we are eating in our sleep is very like the food we eat when awake but it does not nourish the dreamers, because they are asleep. Those mythical objects, however, did not even come near to resembling you as you are when you speak to me today, because they were nothing but figments of the imagination invested with bodily form, counterfeit bodies (*conf.* 3.6,10).¹²

Augustine creates before his readers’ eyes a splendid image of a banquet, in which there are glistening trays and plates of enticing foods and aromas. One would expect that such images would be used to refer to

studies which have given privileged attention to the Manichaean audience of Augustine’s works include Vanspauwen and Dupont’s recent approach to Augustine’s sermons (particularly sermons with implicit or explicit anti-Manichaean content), which is centered upon a reconstruction of the perspective and theology of Manichaean audiences of the sermons (2022).

11 *Conf.* 3.1,1: sed eram sine desiderio alimentorum incorruptibilium (CCL 27, p. 27). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 75).

12 Et illa erant fercula, in quibus mihi esurienti te inferebatur pro te sol et luna, pulchra opera tua, sed tamen opera tua, non tu ... et apponebantur adhuc mihi in illis ferculis phantasmata splendida ... et tamen, quia te putabam, manducabam, non auide quidem, quia nec sapiebas in ore meo sicuti es - neque enim tu eras illa figmenta inania - nec nutriebar eis, sed exhauriebar magis. cibus in somnis simillimus est cibus uigilantium, quo tamen dormientes non aluntur: dormiunt enim. at illa nec similia erant ullo modo tibi, sicut nunc mihi locuta es, quia illa erant corporalia phantasmata, falsa corpora (CCL 27, pp. 31-32). Trans. by Boulding (1997, pp. 81-82).

offerings that heighten the appetite and utterly satiate the eater, but Augustine undercuts such an assumption and tells his readers that this food, although magnificently presented, was unfulfilling and he ate it without appetite (*non auide*). Not only that, but the food he ate left him more drained, more malnourished, than he was before. His hunger was unabated and even deadened in the face of such nutriment.

While Augustine is negative about the food offered to him, he does not say that his hunger, or desire for knowledge/truth, was in itself wrong; it was only being fed by the wrong thing. False ideas, like dream food, only appeared to be a source of nourishment, but in fact lacked substance and sustenance (Moncion 2016, p. 656). Augustine had directed his desire towards a belief system with only the appearance of knowledge and truth, wherein there was nothing that led to fulfilment. Indeed, Augustine uses the term *phantasmata* to refer to the imaginative doctrine of Manichaeans, which he felt produced ideas about God from the world of the senses that had no bearing in truth, that did not exist (Bermon 2016, pp. 712-716). This link with the productive imagination (as opposed to the reproductive imagination which has bearing on reality) reinforces the sense of imitation and likeness to something true, which on closer inspection ends up to be false, illusory and “counterfeit”.

The images of hunger, food and eating that Augustine uses are based on natural, embodied human experiences and are thus highly accessible and relatable to any reader, no matter the background. However, a Manichaean reader would have a quite different experience reading this passage than other readers, Christian and not. The extensive food metaphor is reminiscent of the sacred daily ritual of the Manichaean Elect, who would consume particles of the divine in dishes served to them by hearers in the church (see also *conf.* 3.10,18). Manichaean readers would thus bring to the text their personal experiences of attending these rituals, and some of them may even remember Augustine partaking in them himself while still a Manichaean *auditor*. Also reflected in this passage is the Manichaean conception of Christ as God’s power and wisdom, present in the sun and moon respectively (see *c. Faust.* 20,2). As has been noted by Kotzé, Augustine seems to use Manichaean terms in the *Confessions* in a way that both contradicts and appropriates them, a procedure arguably “designed to effect highly efficient communication” (Kotzé 2004, p. 216).

The crux of Augustine’s criticism of Manichaeism in the passage above (*conf.* 3.6,10) concerns its fantastical myth, which Augustine may have read overly literally, but which nevertheless led him to consider the religion not as truth but merely as beautiful images, “figments of carnal imagination” (*conf.* 6.3,4).¹³ Augustine takes what engenders a deeply spiritual experience for the Manichaean and highlights its carnality using literal components of the dietary ritual. The problem for Augustine is not with the material food and ritual, nor with the imagination, but with taking elements of the material, sensory world and creating stories and deities from them that do not exist nor lead to knowledge of the truth. While stories, poems and songs may be interpreted and certain truths drawn from them through figurative interpretation (“I can turn verse and song into a means of earning real food”¹⁴), Augustine does not consider this possible with the Manichaean myth and doctrine. The Manichaean myth, he claims, was to be taken at face value. This meant to Augustine that, by believing in the Manichaean myth, hungering “under the scarcity of truth,” he was seeking God not with the powers of his mind by which one would interpret, reason and judge, but

13 Carnalium cogitationum figmenta (CCL 27, p. 76). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 139).

14 *Conf.* 3.6,11: nam uersum et carmen etiam ad uera pulmenta transfero (CCL 27, p. 32). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 83).

“through carnal inclination” (*conf.* 3.6,11). For Augustine, the Manichaean spirituality and conception of divine nature is brought into the changeable carnal world in a way that he considers blasphemous.

That Augustine associated Manicheism with deceptive sensory imagination is further shown by the way he refers to persuasive rhetoric and delight in his descriptions of the movement, and especially of the Manichaean bishop Faustus, whom Augustine met in his later years as a Manichaean. For Augustine, Faustus was “[a] man adept at serving finer wines” (*conf.* 5.6,10)¹⁵ and many people were persuaded by the “sweetness of his eloquence” (*conf.* 5.3,3)¹⁶, himself included.

However, Augustine says that at that point he had begun to distinguish such smooth delivery from the truth that he craved. What interested Augustine “was not the dainty verbal dish on which he served his offerings, this Faustus of such high renown, but how much knowledge he could provide for me to eat” (*conf.* 5.3,3).¹⁷ Pleasant and skilfully expressed words had come to lose their pull, and no longer meant anything to Augustine in his hunger and thirst for the truth. By now, Augustine was able to distinguish between presentation and content:

“I had come to understand that just as wholesome and rubbishy food may both be served equally well in sophisticated dishes or in others of rustic quality, so too can wisdom and foolishness be proffered in language elegant or plain” (*conf.* 5.6,10).¹⁸

Olmsted points out that according to Augustine’s conception, rhetoric of delight can be dangerous in the way it encourages the mind to linger on rhetorical expression rather than on learning and being moved to right action. The Manichaeans err then not because their language fails to correspond to reality *per se*, but because rhetorical distortion affects what is knowable, and they misguidedly seek truth in *phantasmata*. According to Augustine’s account, truth is not found in the relation of language to its referent (since language only indicates things), but in the thing itself (Olmsted 2002, p. 72).¹⁹

15 Sed quid ad meam sitim pretiosorum poculorum decentissimus ministrator? (CCL 27, p. 61). The word *poculorum* from *poculum* usually refers to a drinking cup or vessel, but is strongly associated with what the cup holds. Thus, Boulding’s translation of *poculorum* as “wines” holds up, although Augustine may not have intended the inference of wine specifically. I would like to thank my co-promoter Aäron Vanspauwen for pointing this out, as well as the fact that the Manichaeans were actually forbidden from drinking wine. The word choice of *poculum* is interesting and makes more sense to use than *uinum* in an appeal to the Manichaean reader. Since *poculum* can refer just to the vessel, it also includes a suggestion of emptiness in keeping with Augustine’s illustration of Manicheism. It can also have connotations with social drinking and banquets.

16 Multi implicabantur in eo per inlecebram suauiloquentia (CCL 27, p. 58).

17 Nec quali uasculo sermonis, sed quid mihi scientiae comedendum apponeret nominatus apud eos ille Faustus intuebar (CCL 27, p. 58). It is perhaps important to note here that for Augustine there was no such thing as false knowledge, rather knowledge in itself implied comprehension of truth.

18 Sicut sunt cibi utiles et inutiles, uerbis autem ornatis et inornatis sicut uasis urbanis et rusticanis utrosque cibos posse ministrari (CCL 27, p. 62).

19 For Augustine, although communication often makes use of verbal signs, these by themselves do not teach anything. Signs carry meaning, but they themselves are not the ‘treasure.’ Whether a sensory or intelligible object, Augustine asserts that apprehension is from within. Apprehension may need external, sensible signs, but only so that a person may turn within to find the substance, the reality, of what they seem to receive (Mazzeo 1962, p. 194 and Toom 2016, p. 83).

Olmsted further elaborates that this has bearings on Augustine's distinction between *uti* and *frui* (what is to be used and enjoyed respectively). Since only God should be enjoyed as an end in itself, and everything else must be used for the sake of the love of God, the dangers of delight can be both rhetorical and religious. They are rhetorical inasmuch as delight, for the sake of delight, distorts rhetorical speech and argument by focusing attention upon language rather than upon an inquiry that could lead to truth. The dangers are religious in that delight may cause human beings to devote themselves to transient creation rather than the divine creator (Olmsted 2002, p. 72).

When Augustine describes his meeting of Ambrose, after his move to Milan and having lost his conviction in his Manichaean beliefs, he offers a parallel to Faustus that highlights the difference between eloquence/style and substance/truth. Readers are shown that while Augustine's intention was to listen to Ambrose's eloquence, he comes, gradually, to redirect his attention to Ambrose's arguments as he expounded on spiritual and allegorical reading of scripture.

Augustine learns from Ambrose that through argument and refutation he can evaluate and accept probable beliefs, and comes to recognise the reasonableness of the Nicene-Catholic faith. Further, he learnt that his reading of scripture and assent to its authority depended upon proper interpretation of signs. Obscurities and inconsistencies in scripture need not block inquiry, rather they can stimulate the investigation and consideration of how interpretation may lead to truth (Olmsted 2000, p. 75). These were crucial in helping him to abandon Manichaeism once and for all. He need not take a naïve reading as truth as he had with the Manichaean teachings, nor need he adhere to the scepticism of the Academics for fear of committing himself to another faith that proved false (see *conf.* 5.10,19).

This insistence on the importance of hermeneutics was ground-breaking for Augustine, and in the *Confessions* he brings with this an insistence on the need for rhetoric—for a teaching that acknowledges the gap between sign and signified. It is this gap that he hopes his Manichaean readers might become aware of.

On a figurative level, Augustine connects his descriptions of Manichaeism with those of the Nicene-Catholic faith using food metaphors. While Manichaeism came with splendid platters, dainty dishes and figs served to the Elect few, Ambrose in the Catholic faith is said to have “provided your [God's] people with choicest wheat and the joy of oil and the sober intoxication of wine” through his preaching (*conf.* 5.13,23).²⁰ Augustine also speaks of wondering about the “exquisite delights he (Ambrose) savo[u]red in his secret mouth, the mouth of his heart, as he chewed the bread of your word” (*conf.* 6.3,3).²¹ This kind of food imagery differs greatly from the magnificent banquet imagery that referred to Manichaeism in *conf.* 3, and the language shifts to scriptural and eucharistic overtones and a focus on interiority. The food is portrayed as nourishing and intoxicating, content that feeds the soul and inner self in its richness for interpretation and meaning. This is far cry from Augustine's deprivation and lack of appetite which was fed by dainty portions and the tasteless food of the Manichaean teachings.

20 Cuius tunc eloquia strenue ministrabant adipem frumenti tui et laetitiam olei et sobriam uini ebrietatem populo tuo (CCL 27, p. 70). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 131).

21 Et occultum os eius, quod erat in corde eius, quam sapida gaudia de pane tuo ruminaret (CCL 27, p. 75). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 137).

The Manichaean texts are indeed full of metaphors, drawn especially from medicine and the bodily ailments, which are used to describe the healing and nourishing power of spiritual forces, particularly the Light-*Nous*. The wisdom of the Light-*Nous*, an emanation of God, is said to provoke inner transformation of the human self, the light soul within, and seal the bodily senses as gateways of sin. However, the bodies of the Elect, purified and enlightened, served as receptacles which could effectuate the release and purification of divine light trapped in the fruit and vegetables that they ingested, aided by the recitation of prayers. Salvation for the Manichaean rested in the individual and cosmic soul, considered a 'spark' of God, and *not* the body (which was viewed as a demonic corpse). Yet the bodies of holy and continent men could play a significant role in the redemption of divine light and its return to God (Piras 2018, pp. 33-41). Food for the Manichaeans contained particles of divine substance, the spiritual was bound in the material, and their doctrine did not seem to Augustine to acknowledge the ontological difference between the two, the gap between what should be sign and signified.

What can be identified as anti-Manichaean in these sections of the *Confessions* represent a repudiatory stage in the communication with the Manichaean reader, and this is combined with a strong element of appeal in the use of Manichaean terms, images and motifs. These terms and images continue in the *Confessions* within a new framework, and seem to be used as a device to capture the goodwill of the Manichaean reader, to lead them to new ways of thinking, and to persuade them to imitate the path of conversion—from hunger to nourishment—advocated by the text.

The narrative presents Augustine's personal experiences, perspective and thought on the Manichaean belief system, offering a carefully curated and purposeful reconstruction. By detailing the pressure of his dissatisfaction with the doctrine through visceral language and images familiar to the Manichaean reader, the text was likely highly successful in directing especially his Manichaean readers' emotions and thought (see Morton 2013). This would have made it more likely that they would resonate with the narrative, and be receptive to the ideas presented as an alternative to Manichaeism, even going so far as to rouse some of them to imitate the path of the narrated Augustine's conversion.

3. Discovering the food of truth with increased appetite—the presentation of an alternative

In *conf.* 7, Augustine describes his intellectual breakthrough, following his reading of certain books of the Platonists, as he came to an understanding of spiritual reality. Rather than viewing God as a corporeal substance spread out throughout space (*conf.* 7.1,1-2), he came to view God as incorporeal, as the principle of truth by which all things may be judged to be true and as being itself (*conf.* 7.10,16 and 7.17,23). He considers the sole cause of his error to be the remnants of his beliefs about God while a Manichaean, as a divine substance that infused and pervaded material space.²² Thus once he came to envisage spiritual substance, he was able to abandon the Manichaean doctrine once and for all (see *conf.* 5.14,25).

22 Although matter and the flesh were held strictly apart from the divine in the dualist system of Manichaeism, there was a substantive equality between divine light and light in the visible world. God as ruler of the realm of Light was thought to be superior, however, and utterly inaccessible to the senses. Thus, Augustine's materialistic view of God while a Manichaean was one not necessarily given by the Manichaean system, but one not excluded as a possible interpretation either (see Drecoll and Kudella 2011, pp. 35-36).

When Augustine reaches his description of his intellectual breakthrough in the seventh book, he shifts his readers' attention towards inward experience of the divine. Once again, images of food appear and refer not only to falsehood but also to the true knowledge of God. The knowledge that the illusory dream-food of the Manichaeans imitates is indeed the truest knowledge of God, but at this point in the narrative, the images of food reveal Augustine's growing awareness that he is drawing near to the main meal for which he has long searched (Ferrari 1978, pp. 7-8). He experiences regret that he did not vomit up the false food of the Manichaeans years before (*conf.* 7.2,3), and later brings up the idolatry he found reading the books of the Platonists, although he himself "did not eat that food" (*conf.* 7.9,15).²³ Then, Augustine describes an inward vision he experienced of God as the unchangeable light of truth, transcending his mind. In response to Augustine's "feeble gaze," God seems to tell him: "I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me" (*conf.* 7.10,16).²⁴

This last formulation highlights the difference between material food's effect on the body and spiritual food's effect on the soul. While physical food is absorbed and transformed by the body into nourishment, spiritual food transforms its recipient. This is a subtle overturning of the Manichaean dietary rituals referenced in *conf.* 3.6,10 and 3.11,18, in which divine light is separated, purified and released through the workings of the stomach of the Elect. Through God's words, Augustine prescribes spiritual growth as necessary to discern and receive God in this inward way. However, there is the foresight that when one is afforded the chance to dine on God's presence/knowledge of God, the transformation that occurs is within the recipient of the food themselves. The food (God) remains untouched, undiminished and unchanged by eating. Although the working of the Manichaean Light-*Nous* within human beings is similar to the working of God's grace that Augustine is describing here to effect salutary change, the emphasis on God's unchangeability in the passage is in line with arguments against Manichaean doctrine typical of Augustine, since he felt that their worldview compromised God's unchangeable nature by confining it to the material. As illustrated in *conf.* 7, his discovery of the incorporeal abstractions of the Platonists helped to keep intact this quality of God better than the Manichaean system.

The antithesis to the "figments of carnal imagination" that represent the Manichaean system in the *Confessions* is further, and aptly, presented in Augustine's description of his conversion and the outpouring of God's grace in his tenth book. He uses sensuously heavy images to describe his experience of God within him, activating his readers' sensory, corporeal imaginations. This would arguably have been greatly received by the Manichaeans, whose own texts rival Augustine's in their sensuous illustrations. He says, in his famous passage:

"Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! Lo, you were within, but I outside, seeking there for you, and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong, I, misshapen. You were with me, but I was not with you. They held me back far from you, those things which would have no being were they not in you. You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed,

23 Inueni haec ibi et non manducaui (CCL 27, p. 103). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 172).

24 Cibum sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me (CCL 27, p. 104). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 173).

banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace” (*conf.* 10.27,38).²⁵

In the passage quoted, Augustine offers a model to replace the one he abandoned following his conversion and baptism, whereby the senses are engaged in a way that represents proper devotion to God. Augustine speaks about his conversion towards God and the advent of God’s grace as a kind of sensory overload. Before his conversion, he was seeking God in the ‘outside’, corporeal world, imagining God to be some material shape or substance. In this way he is referring to his previous Manichaean/Stoic-influenced conception of the divine.²⁶ As such, he considers that he was imagining God at that time to be of the lowest order of reality, that of a corporeal substance. He makes sure to indicate to his readers that the corporeal –as well as all created matter–is not bad in itself, rather it is, as he says, “shapely,” that is, well-ordered. But in conferring upon created matter a higher value than it truly possesses, it was he who was not properly ordered. He was “misshapen,” sinful and thus without God.

Augustine takes care to emphasize that the inability to perceive God is in no way the result of God’s absence²⁷, but remains a problem of the sensing agent. Augustine seems to imply that human beings possess inner senses as natural faculties of being human that are the means of experiencing God. But this openness to God is more often than not impaired by a kind of self-imposed spiritual blindness, deafness, hunger, caused by sin, error, bad habit, and pride. His conversion is described as a healing of these inner senses, of this natural sensibility, by God.

Breathing in God’s fragrance, and tasting God, does not, like ordinary perception, mean enjoying, capturing, changing or depleting the sensory object, rather it is an experience which only heightens the senses and sensory desire. It leaves Augustine gasping, hungering and thirsting, and burning for God. Yet Augustine is not in the same state of famishment that he had experienced while devoted to the God of the Manichaeans. Not only does he know which food to long for, he has been granted a taste of this food, and desires to feast upon it even more. The difference and distance between the divine and the temporal, embodied human, only strengthens the desire to return to God (see Dupont 2018, p. 44). Humility then comes together with the impulse to seek what one lacks without expectation of fulfilment.

Augustine’s recourse to such language brings about a certain integration of the sensible into a spiritual experience; and it supposes a receiving and participating in divine presence in an experiential manner resembling ordinary sense-perception. While the experience highlights the very difference of God from any corporeal sensory object, or even any intelligible object, the sensory language and rhetorical manipulation

25 *Sero te amaui, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam noua, sero te amaui! et ecce intus eras et ego foris et ibi te quaerebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis inruebam. mecum eras, et tecum non eram. ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent, non essent. uocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam, coruscasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam, flagrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelo tibi, gustauit et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam* (CCL 27, p. 175). Trans. by Boulding (1997, p. 262).

26 Augustine’s materialist worldview in that period was likely a combination of Manichaean and Stoic philosophical influences (Baguette 1970).

27 Indeed, Augustine shows here that God is ever present—although new to the converted Augustine’s sensibility, God is an ancient beauty. The is perhaps drawn from Plotinus’ tractate on beauty which the soul recognises from ancient knowledge (*Enn.* 1.6.2).

reflects Augustine's insistence on the brief and mediated character of human knowledge/perception of God.²⁸ The full engagement of the senses in the passage above captures something of a liturgical and devotional piety in which faith and love of God reaches its fullest and most glorious expression. Augustine's starvation is gone, his energy is restored and his search is renewed.

4. Conclusion

This study barely scratched the surface of the literary and rhetorical activity in Augustine's *Confessions*, aimed only at demonstrating that the study of the senses, informed by cognitive approaches, may help in our understanding of the speaker-audience interaction and communicative intentions of the text. In the sections above, I argued that the narrative of the *Confessions* involves readers in the development of its arguments by stimulating them to experience what the narrator is describing. Readers feel the impact and the negative effects that are ascribed to adhering to a Manichaean model of truth – the distress, restlessness, and dislike of being deceived, as well as the positive effects of conversion – the relief and joy that comes with enjoying knowledge of the truth. Sensory images become a means of such activation of reader's minds and imaginations, which itself becomes a key mechanism of persuasion. Augustine's confession of his past mistakes and the story of conversion seems to be aimed at shaping the mindsets of his readers, particularly the Manichaean readers, that they may adopt the way of thinking advocated in the text. It attempts to achieve this by provoking readers to imagine and play out scenarios in their mind, which together with existing perceptions and experiences, inform their understanding and application of the text.

A sensory approach that examines the techniques through which Augustine engages with his audience highlights the experiential qualities of his narrative – the role of imagination, perception, and emotion. This cognitive perspective shifts the attention to the interaction between text and audience, so that we may become more aware of the audience's presence in the text and move towards a more integrated picture of Augustine's literary project.

28 Following the Platonic mimetic tradition, Augustine believed that God is beyond all transience and beyond even human language, which ultimately fails in signifying transcendent reality, but which can serve to elevate the soul towards that reality. As van Geest notes, Augustine believed that it was dangerous for the soul to be consumed by sensory beauty and calls to mind such beauty in his text in order to radically distinguish it from the Beauty that is God. However, van Geest shows that Augustine at the same time depicts the experience of God as something like a light, sound, scent, taste, or embrace (see *conf.* 10.6.8). Although Augustine does not equate the experience of God with sensory experience, he seems to hold that a human being's sensory experience can serve as an indispensable aid to one's forming an image and understanding of God. The senses and corresponding affective experiences increase both one's understanding and receptiveness to God, even as Augustine emphasizes that such experiences and the objects of such experiences are nothing like the unchangeable and undiminshable God (see van Geest 2010, pp.54-56 and 2011, pp. 93-94). Augustine does not, however, seem to consider God utterly incomprehensible.

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