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- **Introduction (xi–xiv)**
- **Story: How to Be a Character (158–176)**
- **Homecoming (222–223) + related notes**

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ON THE ROAD WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE



*A Real-World Spirituality
for Restless Hearts*

JAMES K. A. SMITH



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What do I want when I want to change the world?



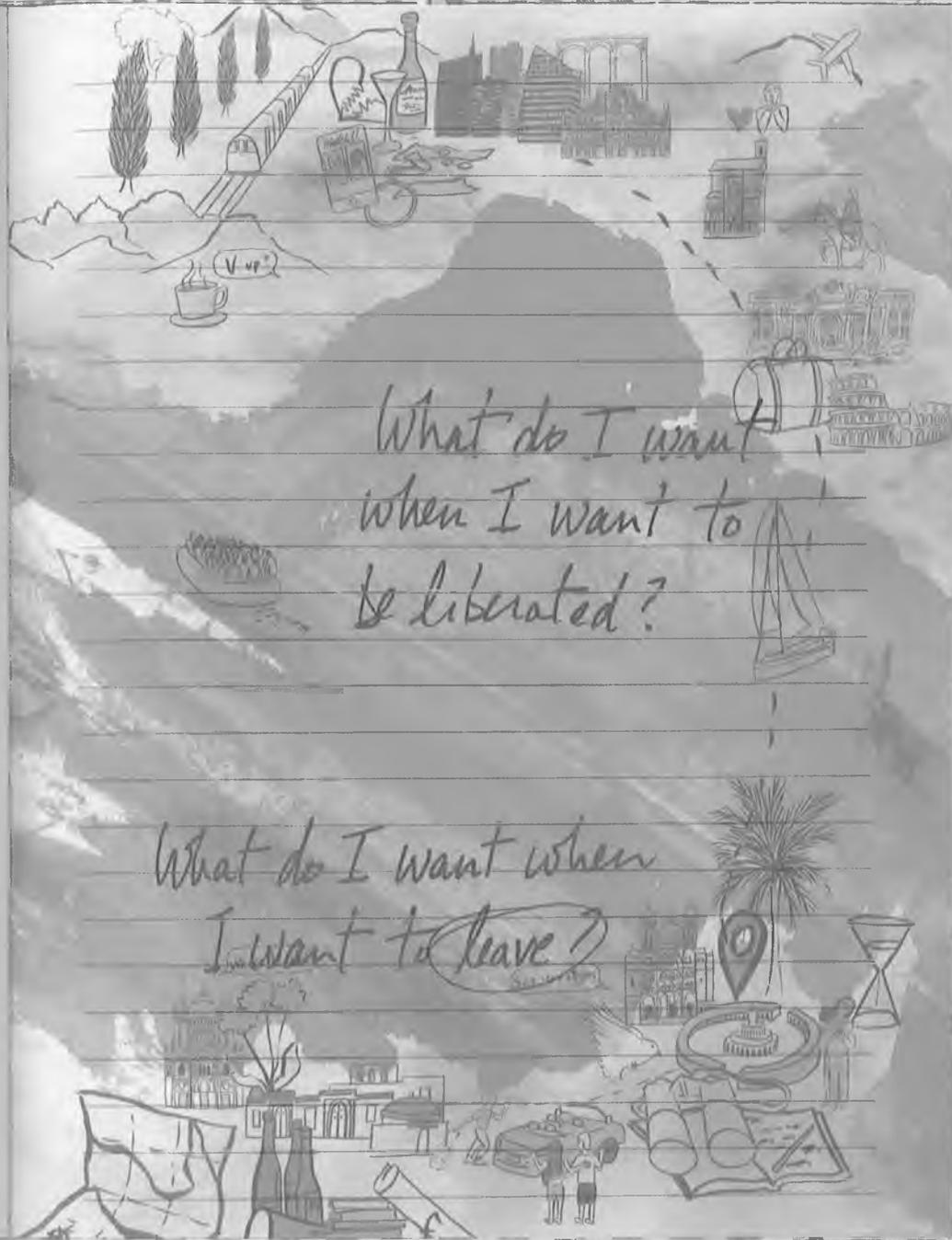
What do I want when I want to be noticed?

What do I want when I want to live?

What do I want when I want to belong?



What do I want when I crave intimacy? I want to be embraced?



What do I want when I want to be liberated?

What do I want when I want to leave?

“You boys going to get somewhere, or just going?” We didn’t understand his question, and it was a damned good question.

—Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

A heart on the run keeps a hand on the gun
You can’t trust anyone.

—Jason Isbell, “Cover Me Up”

Imagine you’ve been flailing and flailing and expecting to drown and your foot hits bottom.

—Thomas Wolfe, *The Story of a Novel*

Look, you’re here, freeing us from our unhappy wandering,
setting us firmly on your track, comforting us and saying,
“Run the race! *I’ll* carry you! *I’ll* carry you clear to the end,
and even at the end, *I’ll* carry you.”

—Augustine, *Confessions*

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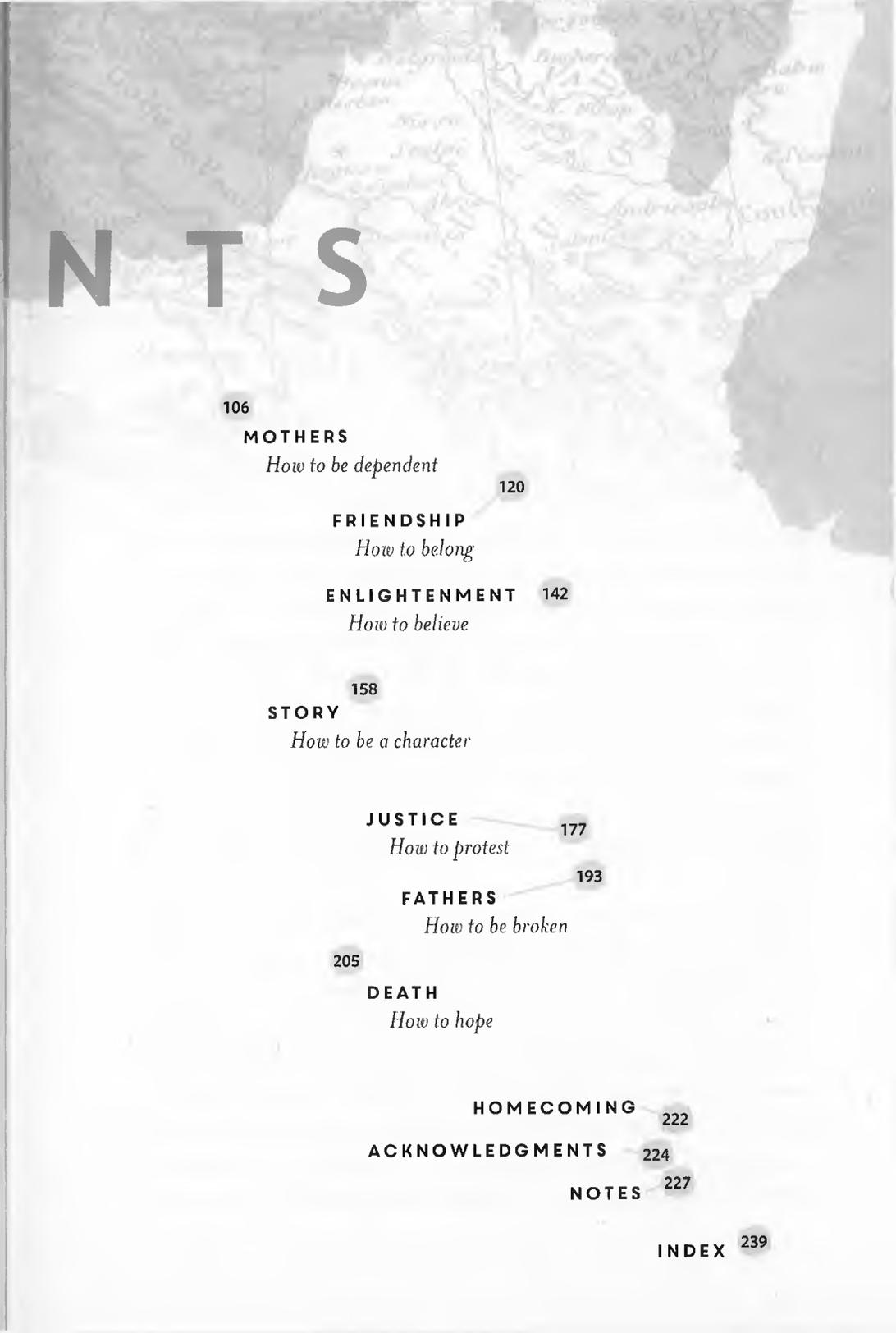
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INTRODUCTION

This is not a biography. This is not a book about Augustine. In a way, it's a book Augustine has written about you. It's a journey with Augustine as a journey into oneself. It's a travelogue of the heart. It's a road trip with a prodigal who's already been where you think you need to go.

But it's also the testimony of someone who has spent time on the road with Augustine. In Jack Kerouac's iconic novel *On the Road*, the narrator Sal Paradise plays chronicler to the antics of the star of the story, Dean Moriarty, who is really the exemplar, the hero, the model. So just call me Sal. I've been on a ride with Augustine. Here's what I've seen; here's what he's shown me (about myself); here's why you might consider coming along.

This is an invitation to journey with an ancient African who will surprise you by the extent to which he knows you. It's not because he's some guru, some Freudian analyst who haughtily sees through you. He only knows you because he's been there, because he has a sense of the solidarity of the human race in our foibles and frustrations and failed pursuits. If he jackhammers his way into the secret corners of our hearts, unearthing our hungers and fears, it's only because it's familiar territory: he's seen it all in his own soul. Augustine isn't a judge; he's more like an AA sponsor. "Nothing you could tell me would surprise me," he would

say. “Let me tell you my story.” One could say of Augustine what Leslie Jamison notes about Don Gately in *Infinite Jest*: He’s “no saint. That’s why he made salvation seem possible.”¹

But the reason to consider Augustine as a guide for the journey is not just because he’s an incisive psychologist familiar with the antics of the mind in exile, or because he’s mapped the joyrides of “liberated” selves. What makes Augustine a guide worth considering is that, unlike Sal’s Dean, he knows where home is, where rest can be found, what peace feels like, even if it is sometimes ephemeral and elusive along the way.

I won’t pretend there isn’t something scandalous about his advice. Augustine will unapologetically suggest that you were made for God—that home is found beyond yourself, that Jesus is the way, that the cross is a raft in the storm-tossed sea we call “the world.” But what I hope you’ll hear in this is not a solution or an answer, not merely a dogmatic claim or demand. For Augustine, this was a hard-fought epiphany that emerged after trying everything else, after a long time on the road, at the end of his rope. The Christian gospel, for Augustine, wasn’t just the answer to an intellectual question (though it was that); it was more like a shelter in a storm, a port for a wayward soul, nourishment for a prodigal who was famished, whose own heart had become, he said, “a famished land.”² It was, he would later testify, like someone had finally shown him his home country, even though he’d never been there before. It was the Father he’d spent a lifetime looking for, saying to him, “Welcome home.”

Augustine is uncanny for us: he is so ancient he is strange, and yet his experiences are so common they feel contemporary. My hope is that this uncanniness might give you a sense of what an authentic Christianity feels like from the inside. The wager here is that an ancient African might make Christianity plausible for you, mired in the anxieties and disappointments of the twenty-first century. That’s not necessarily because you’ve been looking for God, but because you’ve been trying to find yourself. When you go spelunking in the caves of your soul with Augustine, you might be surprised who you meet down there.

Augustine might make Christianity believable for you even if you've heard it all, been there, done that, and left the stupid Christian T-shirt at home. Here's a Christianity to consider before you stop believing. Augustine might make Christianity plausible *again* for those who've been burned—who suspect that the “Christianity” they've seen is just a cover for power plays and self-interest, or a tired moralism that seems angry all the time, or a version of middle-class comfort too often confused with the so-called American Dream. If the only faith you can imagine is the faith of your parents, Augustine has been down that road. What if it was precisely the strangeness of his ancient struggles that made Augustine perennial, someone with the distance from our own immersion to give us a vantage point for seeing ourselves—and the Christian faith—*anew*?



IN HER MEMOIR *Hold Still*, photographer Sally Mann quotes one of her father's diary entries: “Do you know how a boatman faces one direction, while rowing in another?”³ This book you are holding is an invitation to a posture like that: to move forward by looking back, to make progress by considering ancient wisdom. To get in a boat headed for a new future, looking back to Augustine on the North African shore as a landmark to orient us.

You might be surprised how many radicals and innovators have been in that boat. Thinkers and writers and playwrights who've shaped us more than we realize have looked back to Augustine across the twentieth century. You'll be reintroduced to them on the road here: Martin Heidegger, the father of existentialism, whose cascading influence across France and beyond eventually made us all seekers of authenticity; Albert Camus, who named our experience of the absurd, spent the early part of his career wrestling with Augustine, and perhaps never stopped; Hannah Arendt, who probed the nature of love and friendship in conversation

with Augustine; Jacques Derrida, *enfant terrible* of postmodernism, who deconstructed and unsettled our confidence in eternal verities and would later return to consider the secrets his North African compatriot offered. There are ways in which the twentieth century was Augustinian, which makes him our contemporary in ways we haven't considered. What if he still speaks? What if Augustine is not only behind us but also ahead of us, waiting for us to arrive where he ended? Maybe it's time to consider his answer to the questions he gave us.

ORIENTATION



Wherein we find
our bearings
and meet our companion
and discover he
has been alongside us this
whole time.

DETOURS ON THE WAY TO MYSELF



Wherein we embark,
looking for ourselves,
visiting the way stations
of a hungry soul,
wondering where this all
might lead—
and if there might be an end
to our striving.



STORY : *How to Be a Character*

What do I want when I want an identity?

One of the obstacles that novelist Leslie Jamison had to overcome on the road out of addiction was the peculiar way stories function in recovery groups. For the novelist, of course, the burden is to be original: to tell the story that's never been told, the one that makes a new world, discloses something we've never seen before. It's why the anxiety of influence hangs over the artist's aspiration: to make something new *as if* you had no influences, no debts, no history.

But in Alcoholics Anonymous, she noticed that the "addiction stories" traded back and forth as the oxygen of the group all made you think, "I've heard this before" because "addiction is always a story that has already been told."¹ It's why every book on addiction and recovery seemed like the same book (*I've already read that book*, the glazed eyes of others told her). So why write another?

It took Jamison a while to realize that stories function differently for such a community. The point of a story isn't originality or ingenuity; that would make the story really about the storyteller. "Look at me" is the secret desire of originality. But the stories that circulated in a recovery meeting served a different end: they were weaving a web of solidarity. The point wasn't to draw attention to the storyteller; the hope was to

give a gift to the listeners, to create a world in which listeners could see themselves, orient themselves, and maybe even see a way forward, a way out. "In recovery," she recalls, "I found a community that resisted what I'd always been told about stories—that they had to be unique—suggesting instead that a story was most useful when it wasn't unique at all, when it understood itself as something that had been lived before and would be lived again. Our stories were valuable because of this redundancy, not despite it."² What is meant to be damning in the review of a book (*just another addiction memoir*) "gets turned on its head by recovery—where a story's sameness is precisely why it should be told. Your story is only useful because others have lived it and will live it again."³

But why would I listen to the stories of this motley crew in a church basement who've never seen me before and know nothing of my own story? What makes their stories matter?

A therapist gave Jamison a concept to name how these stories function: *witness authority*. This is the authority you accord to someone who knows the trouble you've seen, who garners authorial attention from you because they've walked in your shoes. And when they tell *their* story, it's like they've been reading your mail. Addiction stories work because of this solidarity of experience. Jamison recalls what her friend Dana whispered at her first meeting, upon hearing someone else's story: "That's *me*," as if her whole life had been spent listening to the wrong radio station."⁴

To find ourselves in someone's story—to feel known by the witness of another—is not unique to addicts, surely. Rather, the brokenness of addiction only distills what is a *human* hunger: to be known, to find a place, to be given a story that gives us bearings, a sense of identity that comes from solidarity. "I've found my people," we say when we discover a community that shares with us what we thought was a solitary passion or alienating affliction. Despite all the ways we've been schooled in expressive individualism, we are all the more aware of the dynamics of *identity*, of finding ourselves in relation to some group that gives us meaning, significance, a cause. Identity is a characterization to which we accede

because the group comes with a story that makes us a character, gives us a role to play. Someone bears witness to what it means to be them, and we whisper, “That’s *me*.” Identity is our name for being found by a story someone else told.



WHY SHOULD WE care about Augustine’s story? Why listen? This is a question he wrestled with explicitly. And his only appeal—his only claim to authority—is witness authority. Augustine recognizes that he can’t prove anything: “I can’t prove to them that what I confess is the truth.”⁵ He’s not offering a demonstration that marshals evidence to prove a conclusion. He’s not trying to argue anyone into his story. Instead, he shares a story that he invites his readers to “try on” and see if it might perhaps fit their own experience. Why write these confessions to God “in such a way that other people can hear?” he muses. If I’m just confessing to God, why not keep a journal, work all of this out in private? Well, for the same reason that addicts share their story at a meeting: maybe someone will see themselves in my story, Augustine says. Maybe someone will hear this prodigal tale, with all its dead ends and heartbreak, and whisper, “That’s *me*.” And maybe if they can see themselves in my story, they might be able to imagine finding themselves in God’s story as the one making their way home, being gathered up by a father who runs out to meet them and throws a feast. Augustine’s story is only of interest if it is *unoriginal*, a story that’s been told a million times, one that rehearses the prodigal adventures of the human condition.

He pleads with God: “Make clear to me what the advantage is of my testimony.” Why risk satisfying all the haters who will chalk this up to my vanity? Why give fodder to the ancient African TMZ station so eager to get its hands on dirt about the bishop of Hippo? His response: “When the confessions of my past wrongdoings—which you forgave and hid so

that you could make me happy in yourself, changing my soul with faith and your rite of baptism—are read and heard, they arouse the heart out of its sleep of despair, in which it says ‘I can’t.’”⁶ It’s all worth it, Augustine says, if someone despairing might find herself in my story and imagines she could be otherwise—imagines that grace could irrupt in her life too. Someone might hear my story, Augustine hopes, and see in my past a familiar stretch of road. They might hear me describing my misadventures and anxiety and be able to say, “I’ve been down *that* road”—which means they might also be able to see a way out, a way forward, a way home. I write for others, he says, as “partners in my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens and sojourners abroad with me”—so they might find compatriots of a *patria* they didn’t know they were longing for. If in my past they can see themselves (“That’s me”), perhaps in my present they might be able to imagine: “That *could be* me.” The despair of “I can’t” is invited into the story Augustine shares: “You can.”

This is why the *Confessions* should never be confused with a memoir or an autobiography. If Augustine shares his story, it’s not to disclose something about himself. To the contrary, there’s a sense in which his own particularity is diminished, his biography eclipsed. The point is to share a story that is “generic” enough for any and all to be able to imagine themselves in it. In that sense, his story is not unlike the addicts’ stories in recovery: Dave and Arlene aren’t sharing their stories so you can get to know them; they’re sharing their stories so you can get to know yourself. Their story discloses something about you. It’s meant to help you face up to yourself. What the *Confessions* ask of a reader is not, “What do you think of Augustine?” but rather, “Who do you think you are?” Augustine is writing to get readers to respond not to him but to God. Jean-Luc Marion, in his philosophical study of Augustine, discerns this better than anyone: “The readers do not have to respond to the author about their literary enjoyment, nor about their psychological sympathy, but to God about their own confessing *affectus*,” their own desire. “The response asked for by the author does not ask of the reader that he or she respond to the author (for example, to pity him, to

approve him, to acquit him, to admire him, etc.) but to respond directly to what God asks." The *Confessions*, Marion suggests, are really "a machine to make a confession made by each of its readers by inciting in them the human *intellectus* and *affectus* for God."⁷ Augustine's story is a tool, a machine, that—like everything else in creation—is to be *used* in order to enjoy God.

This is not a stern demand, as if God were standing there, arms crossed, scowling, waiting for an answer. Rather, the story is meant as an invitation to see oneself in a new frame, as a "character" in a very different story—"to see oneself as God alone sees us: as *lovable*, however deformed we might have let ourselves become."⁸ The *Confessions*, far from being an egocentric memoir or autobiography (like those penned by Montaigne and Rousseau),⁹ are "a *hetero-biography*," as Marion puts it, "my life told by me and especially to me from the point of view of an other [*hetero*], from a privileged other, God."¹⁰ Augustine's story is the story that was given to him by the grace of God, an identity in which he found himself, and he tells his story for others with the same hope: that they might find themselves in the story God has to tell about them as his children, his friends, his beloved—as those for whom he is willing to lay down his life.

In the *Confessions*, but also in the preaching that would occupy the rest of his life, Augustine constantly invites fellow sojourners, sisters and brothers in the human condition, to try on a story they might not have considered, the story that they are made for more than the mundane, that they have hungers no *thing* can satisfy, that they are loved by the One who made them, that there is a home that's already been made for them, that the God of the universe knows everything about them and still loves them and is waiting to welcome them home with scars on his outstretched hands. "That can't be me," we might at first protest. It's too fantastical, too unbelievable. It might even offend our need to earn God's love or prove ourselves. "I know what you mean," we can almost hear Augustine saying. "I've been there. What if I told you that you can be released even from that? Would that be the secret you've been hoping is true? Welcome to a story you've imagined. I'm here to tell you it's true."



OUR LONGING FOR an identity is bound up with finding a story. That story might be covert and submerged. Its plot may never be diagrammed. But we nonetheless find ourselves adopting a role, playing out a script that has been given to us by some narrative. That's not inauthentic or some version of bad faith. To find a role is to find yourself ("I was made for this"). It can be freeing to effectively live as the understudy of some exemplar who gives us an orientation to the world, something to live for and a way to live. To be without a story is to live without any sort of script that might help us know who we are and what we're about. We flail and meander. We frantically try on roles and identities to see if they fit. To be character-ized by a story is to have a name, a backstory, a project—all of which serve as rails to run on, something stable and given that we count on. We can be known because there's someone to know. Jonathan Franzen captures the anxiety that stems from being un-storied in a passage in *Freedom*, documenting an episode where the protagonist, Walter, feels like his world is melting because he keeps flitting from narrative to narrative.

He let the phone slip from his hand and lay crying for a while, silently, shaking the cheap bed. He didn't know what to do, he didn't know how to live. Each new thing he encountered in life impelled him in a direction that fully convinced him of its rightness, but then the next new thing loomed up and impelled him in the opposite direction, which also felt right. There was no controlling narrative: he seemed to himself a purely reactive pinball in a game whose only object was to stay alive for staying alive's sake. . . . How to live?¹¹

It's the hunger for an orienting narrative that our culture industries tap into. Whether it's Disney or HBO, HGTV or Instagram, they're all myth-making, which is just to say they are offering scripts we can live into. The danger, of course, is that so many scripts today invite us to become not

characters but models—people who are seen but have no story, whose generic stares seem to have no identity behind them. Instead, we know only the clothes they wear, the façade they've assumed, which will be stripped and replaced in an instant. They are not selves but machines for displaying products.

An actor, unlike a model, at least has the potential to show us a character we can adopt. It might be an aspirational call to justice in the Mr. Smith who goes to Washington, or crusading for the same in the character of Atticus Finch. It might be black empowerment in *Black Panther* or female empowerment in *Wonder Woman*. It might be journalistic communities chasing the truth in *Spotlight* or *The Post*. In response to any of these a young person might say, "That's me," and then spend a life following their lead. Our fictions often hold out better characters to emulate than the dead-end desire to be merely "famous" (and "famous for being famous") that plays out in "reality" TV.

It was books that used to play this role (and still do, to some extent): we see ourselves in characters of mythology and fiction. Sometimes we see our own vices and resolve *not* to play out that character trajectory. In other cases, the allure of a character's heroism or sacrifice or compassion becomes an aspiration: "I want to be like that," we say in our hearts, and live a life that steals from the character's script. Books, as the arks of such stories, are not just technologies for information transfer; they become incubators of life, enshrining icons of who we want to be.

Thomas Wright captures this dynamic in an interesting case study: the life of Oscar Wilde. We might call Wright's *Built of Books* a "bibliobiography," a telling of Wilde's complex, tragic life in which books are the spine of the narrative. That we can do this is itself part of the tragedy: while Wilde was in prison awaiting the trial that would lead to his demise, the entire contents of his house in Chelsea had to be auctioned off to cover the legal costs of his rash—and ultimately unsuccessful—libel case against the Marquess of Queensbury. Thanks to a surviving copy of the sale catalogue, we know that Wilde's library, which he had been building since he was an

adolescent, contained around two thousand volumes, including French novels, a large library of classics, first editions of his own books, sumptuous *éditions de luxe*, and volumes of poetry inscribed by the authors. The entire collection was sold off for a song (some friends and acquaintances tried to reacquire some of them once they hit booksellers' shelves in London).¹²

It was hard to imagine a more invasive revenge on Wilde, whose library was not just a collection of artifacts but the personally curated archaeological strata of his life. As is true for many, to look at his shelves was to see the person, the spines speaking to the unique shape of a life. "Wilde's library was far more than a museum of personal mementoes," Wright argues. "It was the source of so much that was vital in his life. . . . Books were the single greatest influence on Wilde's life and writings. He sometimes referred to the volumes that most affected and charmed him as his 'golden books.'" Indeed, he made the same true of his characters: it was the infamous "yellow book" that would lure Dorian Gray into the life that would destroy him. Live by the book, die by the book. Books, for Wilde, were ersatz friends, conduits of personality: "these readerly encounters were as significant as his first meetings with friends and lovers."¹³

Wilde is not unique in being "built of books," but our possession of the catalogue does give us a unique opportunity to peek into the secret script that generated a life. Wright notes a tension on this point. On the one hand, Wilde builds a life out of what he reads. It is an act of self-creation fueled by fiction and mythology. On the other hand, that means even this virtuoso of self-invention—who would decry "influence" in his essay "The Critic as Artist"—was *receiving* roles to play. "Wilde did not so much discover as create himself through his reading," Wright suggests. "He was a man who built himself out of books. . . . He always came to life via books, literally seeing reality through them." But then again Wright sees in Wilde someone who was emulating what he had read. "He was essentially a pre-modern author who adapted and conflated the books he read, rather than a Romantic writer concerned with originality and self-expression."¹⁴

It explains why, “when the prison doors were closed upon him, books were the first things he asked for.”¹⁵ And which volumes did he request from the doldrums of Pentonville prison? The first two on Wilde’s list were Augustine’s *Confessions* and *City of God*.

The notion that we are built of books, that we live into stories, is as old as the novel itself. At the heart of Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* is the errant knight for whom chivalrous romances are not an escape but a how-to manual. He reads them not as fantasy but as a rule for living. This insight is one that we find inscribed in Augustine’s ancient *Confessions*. If Augustine writes a hetero-biography, he also offers us a bibliobiography, his life in books. Different books offered different maps of the world, charting different courses, each a different encapsulation of the world. Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Cicero’s *Hortensius*, Mani’s *Letter of Foundation* and *Book of Treasures*, the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the epistles of Paul, the parable of the prodigal son: all are stories that Augustine “tried on,” as it were, stepping into their narrative, assuming a role, playing the part of someone who assumed their take on the world. They are books he treated like compasses at various points in his life, until he found one that was finally calibrated to true North.

It’s no surprise, then, that books function like characters in his own book’s rehearsal of his conversion. In book 8 of the *Confessions*, the drama unfolds as a call-and-response litany of friends with books, including Simplicianus—who points Augustine to Victorinus, the translator of the Neoplatonic books Augustine has been reading and who was himself transformed by reading the Bible—and Ponticianus, who drops in and, when he spies the book of Paul’s letters on the gaming table, shares the story of his friends’ discovery of *The Life of Antony* (itself the story of a life revolutionized by hearing the Gospels), which then turns out to be a bookish encounter that changes everything. All of these books are like literary stained glass, holding up images of exemplars to imitate, trailblazers to follow. And so the culmination of Augustine’s conversion is picking up a book in which he finds himself. In Gozzoli’s portrayal of the

scene in San Gimignano, Augustine's conversion is depicted almost as a kind of studiousness (see figure 6). But perhaps we might imagine him poring over the book as an atlas, as if the world were finally coming into focus—like he'd spent his life trying to drive in Los Angeles with a map of San Francisco, but now someone has given him the sacred *Thomas Guide*, and all of a sudden he knows where he is, and where he wants to go, and how to get there. He realizes he's holding a map given to him by the One who made the cosmos. Spying the arrow that reads, "You Are Here," Augustine says to his friend, "That's *me*." And in Gozzoli's image, Alypius is eager to get his hands on such a book.

Books will be the wallpaper of all ensuing iconography. Just like Wilde always posed for pictures in his library, or with book in hand, the bishop of Hippo will always appear with books: reading them, writing them, studying them, stomping on them, surrounded by them, inhaling them (see figures 2 and 8). It's also not surprising that someone so shaped by books gave his life to writing them ("ninety-three works in two hundred and thirty-two books," plus letters and sermons).¹⁶ He would die writing, in fact. Hounded in his old age by Quodvultdeus to write a critical catalogue of heresies (which Augustine promised), he would fail to finish his *Answer to Julian*. Also unfinished would be his *Retractations*, the book in which he reviewed all of his own books. He found himself in a story that had once been unbelievable to him. He would spend the rest of his life inviting others to find themselves in that story.



THE BOOK THAT would finally arrest this search for a story was the Bible. The script that would finally guide his way was the Scriptures. As Brian Stock notes in his magisterial study *Augustine the Reader*, Augustine realized that identity was storied, and that meant finding your story in the story revealed by your Creator. "What distinguishes him from other philosophical

thinkers on this issue,” Stock comments, “is the link that he perceives between self-knowledge and an appreciation of God’s word, in which the reading of scripture plays a privileged role. Throughout the lengthy period of his intellectual development after 386–387, his main guide was scripture.”¹⁷ What was it about the biblical story that “fit”? Why was it that this particular story became the governing narrative for the rest of his life?

The very notion will scandalize us, we who’ve been encouraged to live “our” truth, to come up with our own story, for whom authenticity is the burden of writing our own *de novo* script. The notion of a governing narrative that is not your own feels like signing over the rights to your life—which it is! But for Augustine, being enfolded in God’s story in Scripture was not an imposition but a liberation. When you’ve realized that you don’t even know yourself, that you’re an enigma to yourself, and when you keep looking inward only to find an unplumbable depth of mystery and secrets and parts of yourself that are loathsome, then Scripture isn’t received as a list of commands: instead, it breaks into your life as a light from outside that shows you the infinite God who loves you at the bottom of the abyss. God’s Word for Augustine wasn’t experienced as burden or buzzkill but as autobiography written by the God who made him. Scripture irrupted in Augustine’s life as *revelation*, the story about himself told by another, and as *illumination*, shining a light that helped him finally understand his hungers and faults and hopes.

To spend any time in Augustine’s corpus, but perhaps especially the letters and sermons, is to hear a voice that has been soaked by the language of Scripture. The Bible—especially the psalms—was Augustine’s gift of tongues. Augustine’s speech is so suffused with the Scriptures that the contemporary translator is almost at a loss to know where the Bible stops and Augustine begins. For the rest of his life, Augustine, like a hip-hop bricoleur, “samples” Scripture in everything he says. The psalms, especially, are always on the tip of his tongue, a storehouse of metaphors and comfort.

It’s incredible how quickly the Scriptures became Augustine’s first language, so to speak. The Scriptures are the heart of Augustine’s lexicon

because the cosmic story of redemption is his governing story. This was the language of the homeland he'd never been to. Like glossolalia, he quickly found himself able to speak a language that wasn't his but also wasn't foreign. It's less a language he owns and more a language that owns him and comes naturally. Jacques Derrida, his fellow North African, would say something similar much later: "I said that the only language I speak is *not mine*, I did not say it was foreign to me."¹⁸ This is the lexicon of an émigré spirituality, when a foreign tongue finds you and becomes your first language. You become who you are because this Word gives you the words to finally say who you are.¹⁹ "To hear you speaking about oneself is to know oneself."²⁰

When, in the garden, Augustine scrambles back to pick up the book of Paul's epistles and lights on Romans 13, there is an infusion of more than information—this Word will be the conduit of the grace that transforms him. "I didn't want to read further, and there was no need. The instant I finished this sentence, my heart was virtually flooded with a light of relief and certitude, and all the darkness of my hesitation scattered away."²¹ The Word is a sacrament—it is a means of God's *action*, not just God's disclosure. When Augustine explains why he would bother sharing his own story with others, "my fellow citizens and sojourners abroad with me," he situates his words in relation to the Word, but more important, he situates his act in relation to God's action. "And this, your Word to me, would not have been enough as a mere precept spoken by you; it had to precede with action by you. And I myself carry out that Word with both actions and words; I carry it out under your wings; the danger would be too great unless my soul were under your wings," echoing (you guessed it) the psalms.²²

After that garden transformation, Augustine, Alypius, Adeodatus, and several others retreated north of Milan to Cassiciacum, between the city and Lake Como. While this would be a season of philosophical reflection that would generate some of Augustine's earliest works, preceding his baptism, in the *Confessions* he notes that this was really an opportunity for intensive

language learning, giving himself over to the psalms. The episode illustrates how this language was a gift that he could also make his own. In the psalms, God gave him words that he could speak back to God. These songs, he says, were a school for his passions: “The words I poured out to you, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, those faithful songs, the sounds of godliness that shut out the spirit that’s full of itself! I was then unschooled in true passion for you.”²³ The Cassiciacum curriculum of psalm-singing was like a Berlitz program for the soul, training his affections by giving him new words, a new cadence of aspiration, a new story to live out. But this wasn’t instantaneous. As he notes, when he wrote to Ambrose from Cassiciacum and asked where he should begin reading in the Scriptures, Ambrose recommended the book of Isaiah (perhaps wanting to challenge any lingering Manicheanism in Augustine’s imagination that would have dismissed the Old Testament). “But I didn’t understand the first part I read,” Augustine admits, “and thinking it was all like that, I put off taking the book up again until I was more practiced in the Master’s way of speaking.”²⁴



THE MASTER’S WAY of speaking. If Scripture became Augustine’s governing narrative, then *story*, we might say, became the bass note of his rhetorical method. As Stock notes, Augustine ultimately landed on a different understanding of identity that was tied to Scripture in a way the philosophers would never have entertained, and his rhetoric would reflect this conviction. Augustine spent his life inviting others into this story, in his *Confessions* and then in a lifetime of preaching, by a performance of the truth rather than an argument. To side with performance over proof was, in a sense, to stand with the imagination as prior to reason—to take sides in the longstanding battle between philosophy and poetry.

From its beginning, philosophy banished poetry. When Plato imagined the ideal republic, governed by philosopher-kings trained in logic and

mathematics, he wanted the mushy poets exiled outside its walls. The republic would be governed by *ratio*, not rhetoric; the city would traffic in syllogisms, not stories. You're welcome in this city as long as you leave your imagination at the door. Otherwise, the philosopher-kings and thinking things will see you out.

Riffing on Philip Rieff, we might call this "the triumph of the didactic." It is a construal of the world that treats us as brains-on-a-stick, reducing what matters to what we think, what we can analyze, what we can quantify and process in server farms owned by Google and Amazon. Our so-called information age is still an outpost of this city.

And it is surely an irony that Christianity has been prone to a similar kind of rationalization and privileging of the didactic (especially in Protestantism). We reduce the wonder and mystery of grace to teachable bullet points and statements of faith. We prefer the didactic environs of the epistles to the action and metaphor of the Gospels. We reduce the dramatic narrative of Scripture to a doctrinal system. We say we love Jesus, but we prefer to *learn* from Paul, who gives us God straight, without the meandering meaning of parables.

I confess that this is how I came to Christianity, or how I learned to be a Christian very early on. The gospel quickly became something to know, to analyze, to systematize, to *wield*. The nineteenth-century Princeton theologian Charles Hodge taught me that the Bible was a "storehouse of facts," and Christian philosophers taught me the logic that would chop it up into digestible bits for cognitive processing. In fact, as a young man I used to be proud of the fact that I didn't read novels or poetry—why would I waste time on such sentimental stuff when there was all this *knowledge* to acquire? Why would I wallow in the lies of made-up fictional worlds when I was interested in the Truth? I had effectively re-created the kingdom of God as if it were Plato's republic: Poetry prohibited. Imagination excluded.

I can't remember exactly how I began to break out of this. I do remember reading Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes* and coming

to understand something about the broken beauty of God's world that I couldn't have understood any other way. And I remember an English professor at the University of Waterloo, John North, who introduced me to the enchanted wonder of Gerard Manley Hopkins. And I remember Cardinal Ratzinger, long before he was Pope Benedict XVI—in fact, when he was head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the doctrine police of the church—challenging this triumph of the didactic when he said: “Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story.”²⁵

But perhaps it has been my decades of wrestling with St. Augustine that have most challenged the rationalization of faith. If you know Augustine only from a distance, as one of the great “doctors” of the church, or someone anthologized in theology textbooks, you might imagine that he too falls prey to the triumph of the didactic, just another scholastic who flattens the gospel to the measure of the intellect. But then you've probably never read his *Confessions*, which are infused with the grace of God from beginning to end and could never be confused with the sterile skeletons of systematic theology. The *Confessions* is a book that breathes, a book with a beating heart. Augustine isn't just trying to convince you; he's trying to *move* you. He is trying to “stir up” his fellow travelers.²⁶

Augustine had to work through some of his own early “didacticism.” It's worth remembering that Augustine was trained in rhetoric, in the flourishes of speech meant to elicit the affect. He had always wanted to put this at the service of the emperor (and his own ambition), so when he finally scored a post in the imperial court in Milan, he had realized that goal. But when he became a Christian there, significantly influenced by Platonism, one of the first things he did was abandon his post as a rhetor and retreat to a philosophical monastery of sorts north of town. For the young Augustine, conversion seemed to require privileging logic over rhetoric. He assumed that becoming a Christian meant converting to didacticism.

By the time he writes the *Confessions*, though, we can already see him reconsidering this assumption. In many ways, the *Confessions* represent

the redemption of rhetoric for Augustine. He doesn't give us a philosophical dialogue or a collection of syllogisms: he invites us into a story. But that means deploying the dynamics of drama. The *Confessions* are more art than science, more aesthetic than logic. In the *Confessions*, Augustine doesn't just analyze his thoughts; he paints a picture of the adventures (and misadventures) of his loves. The parallel isn't Descartes's *Meditations*, populated with "thinking things"; the parallel is more like Kerouac's *On the Road*, filled with characters who hunger and thirst, strive and fail, and yes, bump and grind.

Near the end of the drama, in book 10, Augustine owns this. He openly worries about his motives in writing the book: "Why then should I be concerned for human readers to hear my confessions?" he asks.²⁷ (Augustine the bishop is still haunted by ambition, by a heart that drinks up the "praise of men." In a sense, Augustine probes a dynamic that many artists grapple with.)²⁸ The point of the *Confessions* isn't to parade himself or to write a treatise trying to argue people into the kingdom of God. Instead, Augustine is writing to *move hearts*. The "good" he hopes will result from this undertaking, he says, is that God would "stir up the heart when people read and hear the confessions of my past . . . which you have forgiven and covered up to grant me happiness in yourself."²⁹ Augustine is writing to the imagination, appealing to the affections, to *move* people into a different story—just as Augustine's heart burned when he heard the stories of St. Antony of Egypt, Victorinus, and others.³⁰

Why does Augustine give us the drama of this narrative instead of the arguments of a treatise? Because his apologetic is aesthetic. Augustine knows that the heart traffics in stories, that the lingua franca of love is more like poetry than logic. It's a song that takes you home. And so he pens his *Confessions* to "prevent their heart[s] from sinking into the sleep of despair and saying, 'It is beyond my power.'" Don't despair, Augustine pleads; listen to my story. If even someone like me can find grace, you can too.

If Augustine is a cartographer of the human heart, it's because the Scriptures are the God-breathed map that orients his understanding of

the human condition. He suggests exactly this years later in *City of God* when he returns, once again, to his favorite metaphor: the journey. The problem is that we can't *think* our way home. "The mind of man, the natural seat of his reason and understanding, is itself weakened by long-standing faults which darken it." Our eyes are too weak even for the light. So "in order to give man's mind greater confidence on its journey towards the truth along the way of faith, God the Son of God, who is himself the Truth, took manhood without abandoning his godhead, and thus established and found this faith, so that man might have a path to man's God through the man who was God." Christ is the Way, the road, the bridge who, as God-become-human, makes it possible for humanity to reach God.

For there is hope to attain a journey's end when there is a path which stretches between the traveler and his goal. But if there is no path, or if a man does not know which way to go, there is little use in knowing the destination. As it is, there is one road, and one only, well secured against all possibility of going astray; and this road is provided by one who is himself both God and man. As God, he is the goal; as man, he is the way.³¹

Augustine then immediately points to the Scriptures, which function as a map given to us by the Mediator. The one who is the road has given us a map. "This Mediator spoke in former times through the prophets and later through his own mouth, and after that through the apostles, telling man all that he decided was enough for man. He also instituted the Scriptures, those which we call canonical. These are the writings of outstanding authority in which we put our trust concerning those things which we need to know for our good, and yet are incapable of discovering by ourselves."³²

Here Augustine suggests a different test for why you might consider the Bible as a guide: Does it provide guidance you couldn't get elsewhere? Even if the way it delineates is difficult, does it look like a way out, a way

home? If every other map has left you lost, what's to lose trying out this one? In Augustine's experience, the Word was like an enchanted map. It not only told him, "You Are Here" and pointed him toward home; it also gave him legs to run.



THE FIRST TIME I visited the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) was also my first encounter with the arresting work of Kehinde Wiley. Now a presidential portraitist, over a decade ago Wiley was making a name for himself in the New York art scene but hadn't become a household name. A rainy day in Seattle seemed like a good excuse to hide out in the SAM for a while, so I wandered rather indiscriminately into the European Baroque gallery only to be gobsmacked by a large canvas (six feet by five feet) in almost-neon fuchsia and blues, featuring the confident gaze of a young black man in contemporary attire—a military jacket, teal pants, a funky octopus necklace hanging around his chest (see figure 7). His garb said "Brooklyn," but his pose and demeanor said "Renaissance."

What was this doing in the European Baroque gallery, alongside Italian and Spanish paintings from the 1600s? As I inched closer and saw the title, there was a clue. The artist, Kehinde Wiley, called the painting *Anthony of Padua*. This young man that Wiley had encountered on the street was given a new name, a new identity carried in his very pose. And not just any identity: Wiley invoked a saint, Anthony of Padua. As a young man, the Portuguese Fernando Martins had left his home to become a novice at an Augustinian abbey just outside Lisbon. But when he heard the story of Franciscans who had been martyred in Morocco, Fernando, who would become Anthony of Padua, was granted permission to leave the abbey and join the Franciscans.

Anthony was known for his immersion in the Scriptures and his power as a preacher and orator—which is why in later iconography he would

be pictured with a book, sometimes with the Christ child resting upon it (as in El Greco's portrayal). His tongue is displayed for veneration in a large reliquary, along with his jaw and vocal cords, relics of his proclamation of this story. In popular piety, St. Anthony is the patron saint of lost things ("Tony, Tony, look around. Something's lost and must be found!"), a charisma that seems to trace back to an episode in which Anthony lost his psalter and, after much prayer, found it.

What's happening, then, when Wiley titles this work *Anthony of Padua*? As critics have pointed out, the painting is a contemporary example of the "swagger portrait"—a style of portraiture that signals social status and communicates power and bravado.³³ Wiley is bringing together two worlds of swagger, the European and the African American, the portrait and fashion, Rembrandt meets Kanye.

But Wiley is also giving this man a story and hence an identity, which has echoes—of one who served the poor, who was studiously devoted to the Word, who was looking for the lost. An identity comes with its own sort of swagger, the confidence of knowing who one is, and whose one is. Anthony the exemplar gives orientation for aspiration.

So I had to grin when I turned to the opposite wall and saw a painting I recognized from prints: Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *Saint Augustine in Ecstasy*, a Spanish painting from the late 1600s (see figure 8). Augustine is again surrounded with books. But his arms are outstretched. The weight of his bishop's mitre is resting on a table, the staff leaning in a corner. He is alone before God, face turned upward, pleadingly. A light illumines his face. And inscribed in the upper left corner are Augustine's own words: "My heart is restless until it rests in you."

Everyone is looking for rest, which is just another way of saying we're looking for an identity, a story that gives us the kind of gifted swagger of being known, named, and offered a map home.

HOMECOMING

“That last thing is what you can’t get,” Sal Paradise reminds his fellow wanderers in *On the Road*. “Nobody can get to that last thing. We keep on living in hopes of catching it once for all.”¹ This is the counsel of someone who has decided “the road is life.” The road is long enough to tempt you to believe this. It seems like there is no end in sight—that we can’t get the last thing, can’t even glimpse its end, can’t imagine rest. Despair is natural.

Running faster won’t help. Crumpling into the middle of the road and giving up doesn’t really solve anything either. And telling yourself “the road is life” over and over and over again starts to ring as a hollow consolation.

You can’t get there from here. But what if someone came to get you? You can’t get to that last thing, but what if it came to you? And what if that thing turned out to be a someone? And what if that someone not only knows where the end of the road is but promises to accompany you the rest of the way, to never leave you or forsake you until you arrive?

This is the God who runs down the road to meet prodigals. Grace isn’t high-speed transport all the way to the end but the gift of his presence the rest of the way. And it is the remarkable promise of his Son, who meets us in this distance: “My Father’s house has many rooms” (John 14:2). There is room for you in the Father’s house. His home is your end. He is with you every step of the way there.



IN THE DUOMO in Milan, built on the site of the cathedral Augustine visited so often, sitting now atop the baptistry where he was raised to new life, there is a quiet section of the church where you will see a curious sign. Marking off an “Area Reserved to Worshipers,” this sign instructs: “Please, no tourists. Do not go beyond this point except for confession.”

You reach a point on the road with Augustine where mere tourism comes to an end. You’re faced with a choice: Do you want to step in there? The next step isn’t arrival. It’s not the end of the road. To make that step won’t solve all your problems or quell every anxiety. But it is the first step of giving yourself away, arriving at the end of yourself and giving yourself over to One who gave his life for you. It is the first step of belonging to a pilgrim people who will walk alongside you, listen, and share their stories of the God who doesn’t just send a raft but climbs onto the cross that brings us back.

NOTES

As Augustine's works were later compiled into standard editions, they were "versified," in a way, like the Scriptures: organized into chapters and subsections. I follow the standard practice of citation for each work so readers can locate a passage across different translations.

Introduction

1. Leslie Jamison, *The Recovering: Intoxication and Its Aftermath* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018), 361.
2. Augustine, *Confessions* 2.18, trans. Sarah Ruden (New York: Modern Library, 2017), 50.
3. Sally Mann, *Hold Still* (New York: Little, Brown, 2015), 361.

Heart on the Run

1. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 200.
2. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 1.
3. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 23.
4. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 31.
5. When, on "the saddest night," the women that Dean and Sal use and abuse finally resist, to denounce Dean's scoundrelness, then look "at Dean the way a mother looks at the dearest and most errant child," Sal's response is to distract them with geographical redirection: "We're going to Italy." Kerouac, *On the Road*, 184.
6. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 79.
7. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 115.
8. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 197.
9. Kerouac, *On the Road*, 18.
10. Augustine, *Confessions* 5.8.15, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 82.

11. John Foot, *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 4.

12. Cf. Patty Griffin's song "Mary": "Jesus said, 'Mother, I couldn't stay another day longer.'"

13. In the next scene, the arrival in Milan, we see a servant removing Augustine's riding clothes, almost as if Milan will become his home. Of course, Augustine finds home elsewhere.

14. Augustine, *Confessions* 4.22, trans. Sarah Ruden (New York: Modern Library, 2017), 96.

15. *Confessions* 1.18.28 (trans. Chadwick, 20).

16. *Confessions* 2.2 (trans. Ruden, 35).

17. *Confessions* 5.2, 2.18 (trans. Ruden, 107, 50).

18. Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* 1.35.39, in *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, *The Works of Saint Augustine* 1/11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996), 123.

19. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 2.2, in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA, *The Works of Saint Augustine* III/12 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2009), 56.

20. *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 2.2 (trans. Hill, 56).

21. *Confessions* 4.19 (trans. Ruden, 93).

22. *Confessions* 6.26 (trans. Ruden, 166).

23. Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.16.41, in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free*

Mental Health, and the Meaning of Life," *Atlantic*, August 19, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/08/qa-the-miseducation-of-our-college-elite/377524>.

10. Cf. Augustine, *The Happy Life* 1.4.

11. Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 105–11, quote on 105.

12. For an introduction to the cult of the Brights, see Daniel Dennett, "The Bright Stuff," *New York Times*, July 12, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/12/opinion/the-bright-stuff.html>.

13. Augustine, *The Advantage of Believing* 1.1, in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Ray Kearney, ed. Boniface Ramsey, *The Works of Saint Augustine* 1/8 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2005), 116.

14. *Advantage of Believing* 1.2 (trans. Kearney, 117).

15. *Confessions* 5.6.10–5.7.13.

16. *Advantage of Believing* 9.21 (trans. Kearney, 133).

17. *Advantage of Believing* 10.24.

18. *Advantage of Believing* 10.23 (trans. Kearney, 134).

19. *Advantage of Believing* 14.30 (trans. Kearney, 141).

20. *Advantage of Believing* 15.33 (trans. Kearney, 144).

21. Sermon 182.4–5, cited in Justo L. González, *The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian between Two Cultures* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 93.

22. See Augustine's early dialogue, *Contra academicos*, in *Against the Academicians and the Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).

23. *Confessions* 5.23 (trans. Ruden, 131).

24. *Confessions* 5.23 (trans. Ruden, 131).

25. *Confessions* 6.5 (trans. Ruden, 141).

26. Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1.6.12, in *Earlier Writings*, ed. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 30.

27. *Soliloquies* 1.6.12 (Burleigh, 31, emphasis added).

28. *Confessions* 7.1.1.

29. *Confessions* 7.5.7 (trans. Chadwick, 115).

30. Augustine, *Of True Religion* 3.3–4.7.

31. *Confessions* 7.9.13 (trans. Chadwick, 121).

32. *Confessions* 7.9.14 (trans. Chadwick, 121–22).

33. *Confessions* 8.9.19 (trans. Chadwick, 146).

34. *Confessions* 7.9.14 (trans. Chadwick, 122).

35. *Confessions* 7.14 (trans. Ruden, 186–87).

36. Albert Camus, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, trans. Ronald D. Srigley (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2015), 53.

37. Camus, *Christian Metaphysics*, 67, 69 (emphasis added).

38. Camus, *Christian Metaphysics*, 93.

39. Camus, *Christian Metaphysics*, 108.

40. Camus, *Christian Metaphysics*, 116, 117.

41. Camus, *Christian Metaphysics*, 46.

42. *On Reprimand and Grace* 8.17, in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other*

Writings, ed. and trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 199.

43. Augustine, *The Retractions*, trans. Sister Mary Inez Bogan, RSM (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), prologue, 1.

44. Augustine, *True Religion* 39.73, in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Ray Kearney, ed. Boniface Ramsey, *The Works of Saint Augustine* 1/8 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2005), 78.

Story

1. Leslie Jamison, *The Recovering: Intoxication and Its Aftermath* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018), 9.

2. Jamison, *The Recovering*, 9.

3. Jamison, *The Recovering*, 310.

4. Jamison, *The Recovering*, 205. This function of "witness authority" is precisely why Simplicianus told Augustine the story of Victorinus—because he knew that at the end of such a story, Augustine could realize: "That's me." Or: "That could be me."

5. *Confessions* 10.3, trans. Sarah Ruden (New York: Modern Library, 2017), 278.

6. *Confessions* 10.4 (trans. Ruden, 279).

7. Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 41–42.

8. Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 44.

9. "The majority of modern readers (even the most knowledgeable or the most devout) remain essentially curious. But they must be granted an excuse: the most notable retrievals of the Augustinian project, Montaigne and Rousseau, have deformed the model and, willing or not it matters little, missed the point." Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 51.

10. Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 45 (translation modified).

11. Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 318–19.

12. Thomas Wright, *Built of Books: How Reading Defined the Life of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 1–3.

13. Wright, *Built of Books*, 5.

14. Wright, *Built of Books*, 6.

15. Wright, *Built of Books*, 7.

16. Augustine, *The Retractions* 2.93, trans. Sister Mary Inez Bogan, RSM (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), xvi.

17. Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 273.

18. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 5.

19. Cf. Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 45: "I find myself cited to God by citing the word of God."
20. *Confessions* 10.3.3, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 180.
21. *Confessions* 8.29 (trans. Ruden, 236–37).
22. *Confessions* 10.6 (trans. Ruden, 281).
23. *Confessions* 9.8 (trans. Ruden, 246).
24. *Confessions* 9.13 (trans. Ruden, 252).
25. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Funeral Homily for Msgr. Luigi Giussani," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 685, available at <https://www.communio-icr.com/files/ratzinger31-4.pdf>.
26. *Confessions* 10.3.4 (trans. Chadwick, 180).
27. *Confessions* 10.3.3 (trans. Chadwick, 180).
28. *Confessions* 10.36.59.
29. *Confessions* 10.3.4 (trans. Chadwick, 180).
30. *Confessions* 8.5.10; 8.8.19.
31. Augustine, *City of God* 11.2, in *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 430–31.
32. *City of God* 11.3 (trans. Bettenson, 431).
33. See Michael Clarke, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. "swagger portrait" (p. 240).

Justice

1. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2017), 109.
2. Coates, *Eight Years in Power*, 110.
3. Camus's 1948 remarks at the Dominican Monastery of Latour-Maubourg are included as "The Unbeliever and Christians," in Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1960), 71.
4. Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 69–70.
5. Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 71.
6. Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 73. Camus is alluding to *Confessions* 7.5.7.
7. Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 230.
8. Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Matthew Ward (New York: Everyman's Library, 1993), 116–17.
9. You can listen to these lines sampled at the beginning of Explosions in the Sky's song, "Have You Passed through This Night?" where the soundtrack evolves into a discordant score of defiance.
10. Augustine, *Confessions* 7.5.7, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 115.
11. *Confessions* 2.4.9 (trans. Chadwick, 29).
12. Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.1.1, in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

13. "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, proposition 7.
14. *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.1.1.
15. *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.1.2.
16. *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.17.48 (trans. King, 107).
17. *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.17.48–49 (trans. King, 107).
18. Augustine, *City of God* 12.6, in *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 477.
19. *City of God* 12.7 (trans. Bettenson, 479–80).
20. *City of God* 11.15 (trans. Bettenson, 446).
21. Google the scene "Who Lit This Flame in Us" to appreciate the visuals and soundtrack.
22. In *City of God* 12.6, Augustine explicates the evil will as a perverse choosing of lower over higher goods but emphasizes that this doesn't mean these "lower" goods (temporal things) are to blame. "It is not the inferior thing which causes the evil choice; it is the will itself, because it is created, that desires the inferior thing in a perverted and inordinate manner" (trans. Bettenson, 478, emphasis added). Now, I think Augustine is saying created wills are susceptible to this because they are not divine; but it leaves open the door that finitude qua finitude is a problem.
23. *City of God* 11.22. The danger here is that the darkness of evil can become an "apparent" evil that we see as evil only because we can't see the whole. In this case, Augustine is trying to defend God's goodness by assuring us that everything has a "purpose."
24. *Confessions* 9.6.14 (trans. Chadwick, 164).
25. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 135.
26. Sermon 159B.9, in *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, OP, ed. John E. Rotelle, 11 vols., *The Works of Saint Augustine* III/1–11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997), 5:155.
27. Sermon 159B.4 (trans. Hill, 5:149).
28. Sermon 159B.9 (trans. Hill, 5:155).
29. Lyrics used with permission.
30. This is the title of John Owen's 1647 treatise *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.
31. Letter 153.3, in *Letters*, trans. Roland Teske, SJ, ed. Boniface Ramsey, 4 vols., *The Works of Saint Augustine* 11/1–4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001–2005), 2:392. For a compelling account of what an Augustinian criminal justice might look like, particularly in an age of mass incarceration, see Gregory W. Lee, "Mercy and Mass Incarceration: Augustinian Reflections on 'The New Jim Crow,'" *Journal of Religion* 98, no. 2 (April 2018): 192–223.
32. Robert Dodaro, "Between the Two Cities: Political Action in Augustine of Hippo," in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2005), 104.

Sarah Ruden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 189.

21. *Letters*, trans. Roland Teske, ed. J. Ramsey, 4 vols., *The Works of Saint Augustine* 1/1-4 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001-2009), 4:209.

25. Letter 263.2 (trans. Teske, 4:209-10, first emphasis added).

26. Letter 263.4 (trans. Teske, 4:211).

27. *Confessions* 9.3.6 (trans. Chadwick, 159).

28. François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. Edward Smither (Cambridge: James Clark, 2011), 167.

29. Letter 10.2, in Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 189.

30. Letter 222.3 (trans. Teske, 4:82).

31. Letter 229.1-2 (trans. Teske, 4:113).

32. Letter 230.2 (trans. Teske, 4:116).

Homecoming

1. Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 43.