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## Mourning in Augustine's "Confessions" from a psychoanalytic perspective

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## MOURNING IN AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS* FROM A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

### LE DEUIL DANS LES CONFESSIONS DE SAINT AUGUSTIN: UNE PERSPECTIVE PSYCHOANALYTIQUE

Dans l'article qui suit, je vais analyser deux descriptions du processus de deuil dans les *Confessions* de Saint Augustin, livres IV et IX. Je me servirai de certaines conceptions psychoanalytiques de deuil, pour montrer les différences entre ces deux descriptions. Les différences en question s'expriment par un usage différent des symboles, en particulier celui des larmes. Dans la première description, les larmes coulent librement et semblent symboliser l'ami perdu, tandis que dans la description de la mort de Monique, Augustin est tout au début incapable de pleurer, ce qui peut être perçu comme un symbole d'une profonde ambivalence à l'égard de l'image de sa mère. Dans l'autre description le Dieu psychologiquement joue un rôle d'un objet bon, protecteur, qui aide Augustin à le consoler dans son chagrin, ce qui était impossible dans le cas de la mort de son ami, puisque Dieu à ce moment-là n'était qu'un *phantasma*. Les descriptions du deuil dans les *Confessions* de Saint Augustin peuvent être comprises comme une expression d'un inconscient processus créatif, qui, par le biais du processus d'écriture fait récupérer les objets perdus.

### Introduction

In this article I am going to take a look at two descriptions of mourning in the *Confessions*: one after the death of the nameless friend (4.4.9 – 4.9.14), the other after Monica's death (9.12.29 – 9.13.37), from a psychoanalytic point of view<sup>1</sup>. Psy-

<sup>1</sup> The *Confessions* have drawn the attention of psychoanalysts from the twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and seem to be particularly available for this type of psychological interpretation. There are studies by B. Legewie (B. Legewie, *Augustinus, Eine Psychotherapie*. Bonn, 1925) and E. R. Dodds („Augustine's *Confessions*, A Study of Spiritual Maladjustment”, *Hibbert Journal* 26 (1927–28), 459–473) as well as the article by Ch. Kligerman (Ch. Kligerman, “A Psychoanalytic Study of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine”, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 5 (1957), 469–484). In 1965–1966 there has been an important

choanalytic studies of the *Confessions* have been done mostly in two areas: the classical, Freudian theory with the focus on Oedipal conflicts<sup>2</sup> and Heinz Kohut's self psychology with its emphasis on narcissistic phenomena<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, in almost all of these studies the whole of the *Confessions* was taken into consideration and analyzed. The purpose of this article will be to show a grieving process expressed in the *Confessions*. The theory that will be used here is mostly Klenianism which is almost absent in existing psychological interpretations of Augustine<sup>4</sup>. Most scholars focused on the autobiographical part of the *Confessions* as a whole, whereas here my attempt will be to analyze solely the two passages in much more detail.

### Mourning the Friend's Death

The first passage I will comment on deals with the death of Augustine's close friend during his Manichean period (4.4.9 – 9.14). In 4.4.7 Augustine describes how

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- set of articles in the *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, with the contribution of J. E. Dittes ("Continuities between the Life and Thought of Augustine", *JSSR* 5, 1 (1965), 130–140), J. Havens ("Notes on Augustine's *Confessions*", *JSSR* 5, 1 (1965), 141–143), W. H. Clark ("Depth and Rationality in Augustine's *Confessions*", *JSSR* 5, 1 (1965), 144–148), D. Bakan, "Some Thoughts on Reading Augustine's *Confessions*", *JSSR* 5, 1 (1965), 149–152), P. W. Pruyser (P. W. Pruyser, "Psychological Examination, Augustine", *JSSR* 5, 2 (1966), 284–289) and P. Woollcott ("Some Considerations of Creativity and Religious Experience in St. Augustine of Hippo", *JSSR* 5, 2 (1966), 273–283). Later, in the eighties, there has been another set of studies, mostly in the *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* and in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, by P. Fredriksen ("Augustine and His Analysts, The Possibility of a Psychohistory," *Soundings* 61 (1978), 206–227), M. R. Miles ("Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine's *Confessions*", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, 3 (1982), 349–364), P. Rigby ("Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's 'Confessions'", *JAAR* 53, 1 (1985), 93–114), D. Capps ("Augustine as Narcissist, Comments on Paul Rigby's 'Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*', *JAAR* 53, 1 (1985), 115–127), again J. E. Dittes ("Augustine, Search for a Fail-Safe God to Trust", *JSSR* 25, 1 (1986), 57–63), V. Gay ("Augustine, The Reader as Selfobject", *JSSR* 25, 1 (1986), 64–76), R. Fenn ("Magic in Language and Ritual. Notes on Augustine's *Confessions*", *JSSR* 25, 1 (1986), 77–91) and E. TeSelle (E. TeSelle, "Augustine as Client and as Theorist", *JSSR* 25, 1 (1986), 92–101).
- <sup>2</sup> Especially, Kligerman 1957, Dittes 1965 and 1986, Clark 1965, Baken 1965, Woollcott 1966, Rigby 1985 (who uses Ricoeur's understanding of Freudianism) and TeSelle 1986.
- <sup>3</sup> Fredriksen 1978, Capps 1985 and Gay 1986. Extra-Freudian approach is present also in Havens 1965 who briefly mentions Rogers and behaviorism, Miles 1982 who deals with preoedipal struggles of early infancy and, also, Madden (K. Madden, "The Dark Interval: Inner Transformation Through Mourning and Memory", *Journal of Religion and Health*, 36, 1 (1997), 29–51.) who introduces the thought of object relations theorists: Klein and Winnicott. There is also an article by D. Dombrowski ("Starnes on Augustine's Theory of Infancy: a Piagetian Critique", *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980), 125–133) who uses the developmental theory of Jean Piaget.
- <sup>4</sup> The only exception being Miles (who refers to Klein's views, but not in depth or detail: 1982, 352) and Madden (whose article deals with depressive phenomena and even ascribes to the *Confessions* the Winnicott's ascensive-depressive mechanism. but very briefly and there is reference only to book 10: 1997, 33).

he came back, when he was nineteen, to teach in his hometown and spent there a lot of time with his friend, who became to him the dearest person in the world. The Manichean faith which they shared brought them even closer and made them virtually inseparable. Then, his friend got sick, was baptized and suddenly died. Their last conversations were not pleasant for Augustine, since he tried to mock the baptism, but the friend reacted very strongly: he said that if Augustine does not respect his new decision, they will not be friends anymore (4.4.7). Augustine describes a powerful pain that darkened his heart after his friend died (4.4.9). Augustine describes his mourning by using language of extremes<sup>5</sup> – first, his heart is completely covered with darkness, as if leaving no place for anything good or happy; then, the whole world becomes dead and empty. There is a correspondence between the external and internal world – both seem empty<sup>6</sup>. We could say that internal darkness and death within Augustine was projected by him on the real world, in this way darkening everything around him.

Augustine speaks about his hometown and his home; both are symbols of the internal world of objects and both become the source of pain<sup>7</sup>. Augustine is surprised that the place of comfort brings him unhappiness and both his town and home are full of memories. Augustine himself describes the process in terms strikingly corresponding to Freudian terms and images: he says that he was expecting to see his friend everywhere and that he hated everything for not “having” his friend in it. There is emptiness where the loved object was and libido must be “ripped off” of every single memory of the object<sup>8</sup>. Yet Augustine adds also that he had a pe-

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this is what TeSelle refers to by saying that in the Augustine's description of the grief after his friend's death the language is “extravagant” (1986, 94).

<sup>6</sup> Freud emphasizes the emptiness of the external world from his “economic” point of view: the loved object was invested with such an amount of libido that when the subject realizes that the object is gone, there is intense emptiness in the place where the object was (S. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), in: J. Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914–1916): *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. London, 1957, 243–258). Klein, on the other hand, in her classical papers on mourning and depression explores the internal world of fantasies from an object relations point of view and points out that also the introjected good object in the ego is dead, not only the real, external object (“A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states”, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 16 (1935), 145–174 and “Mourning and its relation to manic-depressive states”, *IJP* 21 (1940), 125–153).

<sup>7</sup> The concept of the internal world of objects vs. the external world was elaborated by Klein (Klein 1935, 1940). According to her, every infant normally introjects the mother and other significant people who then continue to exist in his/her unconscious. Her conceptualization of depressive states and mourning relies on the disturbance of this process.

<sup>8</sup> Among the common symptoms of mourning and melancholia Freud enumerates: “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment”.

cular feeling of being actively “persecuted”, as psychoanalysis would name that, by the external world (*ibid.*). Klein suggested that at the onset of the depressive position, both in early childhood and in mourning process later in life primitive guilt feelings manifest in a form of persecuting objects which are projected on reality<sup>9</sup>. Augustine says he felt, in a way, attacked by reality, by his town, his home, by “everything” and – “everywhere” (*ibid.*). It might be seen as a result of a process in which aggressive impulses which were initially directed unconsciously towards Augustine’s friend, now are too painful to accept, because of guilt, so they are projected, which causes an anxiety to arise. Instead of experiencing guilt because of the aggression towards the object, the self is afraid of the object’s aggression towards it. This dynamics causes the sudden and surprising change of the good, comforting places into the places that exist to torment him. Augustine also experiences internal persecution: he feels that a part of himself is troubling another part of him and is dialoguing internally with this part.

The persecution, however, is not extremely powerful and does not cause any paranoid-schizoid or manic defense mechanisms to appear in Augustine’s narrative. Actually, Augustine’s description of mourning his friend’s death seems to be almost typical. He loses interest in the external reality and focuses on his own self and seeks comfort in God, but, as he emphasizes from the perspective of over twenty years, his God was only an illusion and could not comfort him in any way. More real was the relationship with the lost friend at the time. Augustine is trying to find solace in God as a good object, but his inner image of God is weak and impotent in comparison to the pain of loss (and perhaps, in comparison, to the image of the persecuting object). The only comfort is weeping and crying which, as Augustine says, was a sort of a replacement for his lost friend (*ibid.*). It is intere-

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(Freud 1917, 244). The only symptom that is not present in normal mourning, but is essential to melancholia, is a loss of self-esteem. Freud says that “reality testing” makes it clear for the person grieving that the beloved object does not exist anymore and demands to withdraw libido from the object. It is a very difficult and slow process in which the energy is gradually taken away from all the images and recollections of the beloved person, so that the libido was free again and another person could be loved. From a different point of view, cf. Ferrari’s analysis of the symbolic “barren field” which represents the effects of sin (C. L. Ferrari, “The Barren Field in Augustine’s *Confessions*”, *AugStud* 8 (1977), 64–65). Psychologically, the barren field could be seen also as a symbol of internal emptiness of mourning, caused by the loss of an object.

<sup>9</sup> According to Dittes (1965, 134) Augustine was unable to feel true guilt and to take responsibility for aggressive impulses. Pruyser (1966, 288) observes that there is little directly expressed guilt in the *Confessions*. Woolcott envisions guilt solely in Oedipal terms and thinks it was unconscious, due to the severity of neurotic superego (1966, 278). Capps (1985, 119) observes that the *Confessions* are rather “shame than guilt oriented” which for him is an expression of narcissistic personality structure. In Kleinian terms it could be said that guilt in the grieving process takes a persecutory form, which means that it was probably hard to experience consciously. But, because of later reparative aspects, I would not say that Augustine entirely retreated from working through depressive guilt.

sting that tears are recognized by Augustine as the substitute for the friend. Klein observed that tears bring comfort only when love that has been "frozen" in the internal world is released and the process of reparation begins<sup>10</sup>. So Augustine's weeping is a sign that he is quite able to soften his unconscious aggression towards the friend by using love and hope (although the hope is not based on God). This release of love eases the pain, but Augustine shares also his fantasy that the tears symbolize the friend<sup>11</sup>.

The tears might be seen as a metonymy of the memories of the friend that make Augustine cry. Then, what he really says is that he realizes that the friend is gone, but still cherishes his memories which are painful, but, at the same time, also pleasant. The pleasure can be viewed as coming from the libido invested in the memories, while the pain as coming from detaching the libido from them. There is also an interpretive possibility that the tears themselves are a symbol of the lost object. The ability to use mature symbolic thinking is of the utmost importance in mourning and working through the depressive position. Hanna Segal observed that if a symbol of the lost object is used, it means that the self has accepted the reality of the loss and is trying to repair and restore the object in the internal world in the form of a symbol<sup>12</sup>. It is a mature way of dealing with depressive pain<sup>13</sup>. So Augu-

<sup>10</sup> "Persecution decreases and the pining for the lost loved object is experienced in full force. To put it in other words: hatred has receded and love is freed". (Klein 1940, 143). In her significant case study of Mrs. A.'s mourning over her son's death (where "Mrs. A." was Klein herself) she wrote: "In the first week after the death of her son she did not cry much, and tears did not bring her the relief which they did later on. She felt numbed and closed up, and physically broken". (Klein 1940, 138–139) Later on she describes the precondition for relief of tears: "If these [manic defenses] again diminish through the strengthening of the subject's belief in goodness – his own and others' – and fears decrease, the mourner is able to surrender to his own feelings, and to cry out his sorrow about the actual loss". (1940, 142) and an interpretation of the mechanism of that relief: "Through tears, which in the unconscious mind are equated to excrement, the mourner not only expresses his feelings and thus eases tension, but also expels his 'bad' feelings and his 'bad' objects, and this adds to the relief obtained through crying". (1940, 142).

<sup>11</sup> According to Paffenroth, Augustine cried so much after his friend died, because he knew that there is no hope for their reunion and the loss was total to him (K. Paffenroth, "Tears of Grief and Joy. *Confessions* Book 9: Chronological Sequence and Structure", *AugStud* 28, 1 (1997), 152). It was not the case in grieving after Monica's death. Oppel tries to prove that Augustine both in the *Confessions* and in the *City of God* essentially accepts tears in grieving. Yet, in the case of the dead friend, his tears were only a sign of his overly attachment (C. Oppel, "Why, my soul, are you sad?": Augustine's Opinion on Sadness in the *City of God* and an Interpretation of his Tears in the *Confessions*", *AugStud* 35, 2 (2004), 210–215).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H. Segal, "Notes on symbol formation", *IJP* 38 (1957), 391–397.

<sup>13</sup> Ferrari in a different context connects Monica's tears with the metaphor of the barren field, saying that Augustine's use of the word *rigare* suggests that his mother's tears transformed his heart into a fertile land (1977, 66). Ferrari, however, does not make a similar connection to Augustine's tears after his friend's death, which is understandable, since from a philosophical standpoint those tears were not "therapeutic" – they were just a symptom of sinful attachment.

stine's tears might be really something that "came after" after his friend died, replacing him in the unconscious fantasy world. The pleasure of crying could be, then, a pleasure coming from a loving contact with the image of the friend.

Right after that, Augustine comes back to the perspective of the one who is telling the story some twenty years later. He says that the wound healed with time. He already suggests that the mourning ended and that afterwards he was free to live on and love other people (4.5.10). What is interesting to Augustine is the source of pleasure in crying. He observes that he "has lost his joy" (*ibid.*) – a beautiful metaphor that deeply expresses Augustine's understanding of the loss. The libido was invested in the object so totally that when the object disappeared it was as if the joy itself disappeared from the world. Augustine's "reality testing", we could say, is intact: he accepted the loss and did not hope for reviving his friend and he did not pray for it either. It was precisely this acceptance that caused him so much pain.

By the internalization of the lost object in a form of a symbol the boundary between the external and the internal reality is established. If the symbol is not the object, then I can have only something that stands for the object, not the object itself. It means that I accepted that the object is really gone. Augustine experiences his tears as a symbol of the dead friend, and, more broadly, as a symbol of the good internal object<sup>14</sup>. Their presence is comforting, they are even loved or cherished as was the object, they become representations of the friend, but they are not entirely "equated" with him<sup>15</sup>. Interestingly, Augustine is not able to use his hometown of

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Yet, if my interpretation of tears as symbols of the repaired object is correct, they might have function in Augustine's unconscious fantasies as a water which makes his internal world fertile again. Some scholars were convinced that Augustine's emotionality was shallow due to his narcissism and that he was not capable of true intimacy and care for another human being (cf. Dittes 1965, 134, Baken 1965, 151 and Capps 1985, 122). Capps diagnoses Augustine as a typical narcissistic personality and wonders if he managed to "transform" his narcissism during his middle-life period in the way described by Kohut, only to conclude that among the five signs of such transformation (1. creativity, 2. empathy, 3. acknowledgement of the finitude of the self, 4. capacity for humor, and 5. wisdom) there is certainly no humor and no empathy. TeSelle (1986, 99–100) disagrees with such a view, maintaining that Augustine's relationships were much more complex and rich than Kohutian interpreters suggest. I agree with the latter opinion.

<sup>14</sup> I propose a different understanding from Klein's concept of weeping as evacuating bad parts of the object and the self (1940, 142), but it does not mean that Augustine's reported relief could not have been caused by the evacuation as interpreted by Klein.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that Augustine uses here the word *deliciae* to describe his love for his tears. In Vergil (*Ecl.* 4.2) it seems to be a technical word referring to a homosexual object of love, but in Catullus (2.1) it has a different meaning. Fitzgerald suggests the aspect of "the excessive self-indulgence" conveyed by the term in the context of Catullus' poetry (W. Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995, 35–36). The use of *deliciae* by Augustine does not exclude those various meanings, connected to the symbolized experience of the internal relationship with the (now lost) object of love. I do not think that Augustine had any conscious homosexual feelings towards his friend, even though

Thagaste as a comforting symbol in the same way. Initially, the town and the home turn into persecuting objects and Augustine is at pains to distinguish the symbol from the object, when he says that the places where he met with his friend are not talking to him. This personification can be seen as a sign of projection of persecutory objects on the external reality: the absent friend becomes a silent person who denies Augustine the comfort he needs. He is struggling to see the hometown and the places only as reminders, as symbols of the lost friend. But his later decision to leave Thagaste might be the result of the unconscious fantasy that the hometown is not only the symbol, but a magical object that is persecuting him.

Augustine observes that he loved his life more than his friend, because he did not want to die. Suicidal impulses are usually the result of melancholia rather than healthy mourning, since suicide is viewed by psychoanalysts as an aggressive attack on one's own self in order to symbolically destroy the internalized object. The lack of suicidal impulses in Augustine's narrative is, nevertheless, replaced by a more subtle form of self-aggressiveness: he rebukes himself for not wanting to die. Augustine's guilt does not take a delusional, deeply depressive form of self-condemnation or self-hatred, but it is present nonetheless. His self-depreciation is not overly strong; he ironically observes that he is not a mythological hero, like Orestes or Pylades, who could die for his friend. If there is guilt in him, it is probably unconscious<sup>16</sup>. He reproaches himself for choosing to live, when his friend is dead. This choice is, however, crucial in working through grief. It means the victory of the life drive over the death drive, as Klein would have put it, and opens a possibility of reparation<sup>17</sup>.

Augustine is, again, a bit surprised that his feelings are completely opposite to what they should be. He is afraid of death (4.6.11) and his own explanation of that is that he hated death for taking away, for "devouring" his dear friend and he calls

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he seems to mention such feelings in another context (2.2.2, 3.1.1). Levenson does not mention homosexual feelings, but he writes that "the danger of friendship is passion. Two friends may become quite inseparable (...) The single possibility of being enjoyed with the friend becomes the only virtue in things. And this is what happens to Augustine. One friendship becomes for him a passion. His friend becomes the basis of the world, the beauty and meaning of the world".(Levenson, C. A., "Distance and Presence in Augustine's *Confessions*", *The Journal of Religion* 65, 4 (1985), 504). About friendship as passion, see also Schlabach (G. W. Schlabach, "Friendship As Adultery: Social Reality and Sexual Metaphor in Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin", *AugStud* 23 (1992), 132). Cavadini suggests that Augustine understands friendship, as well as other social bonds, as forms of a spiritual fornication, but in a wide sense of turning away from God, not in a literal, sexual sense. (J. C. Cavadini, "Book Two: Augustine's Book of Shadows", in: K. Paffenroth & R. P. Kennedy (ed.), *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, Louisville & London, 2003, 28).

<sup>16</sup> The general attitude of Augustine towards himself as based on self-reproaches was emphasized by scholars: e.g. Dittes 1965, 135; Bakan 1965, 149; Woollcott 1966, 278.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Klein's description of Mrs.A.'s dream in which she saw her son drown, but decided to stay alive, instead of drowning with him (1940, 141).



her an “enemy” who wants to devour all people (*ibid.*). Here again comes back the persecutory object in a form of the personified death. Augustine reveals also a mechanism that Klein observed in her patients, namely, that the more the object is hated, the more it is also feared, because the part of aggression is projected into the object which then becomes more hostile to the self<sup>18</sup>. Augustine says that he hated death and was afraid of it. Such powerful was this enemy that Augustine was surprised that it did not destroy all mankind.

Augustine uses also Aristotle’s and Vergil’s metaphors for a friend as “another self” or a “half of the soul” (*ibid.*)<sup>19</sup>. It can be seen as a symbolic expression of the internal good object, living in the ego<sup>20</sup>. Augustine’s surprise of the fact that he still lives, while his friend is dead, may come from the fantasy that the death of the internal object may also bring about the death of the self that is connected to the object. In the process of mourning the important thing is to realize that only the external object truly died, but the self can restore the internal object and continue on living. Augustine makes the unconscious choice to go on living, even though it makes him feel guilty. He also finds in himself another fantasy, a reparative one. If he died, then his friend would be truly gone, because the internal object would be dead too. So Augustine’s own understanding of his desire to live means that he is motivated by love to recreate the internal world, to repair the damaged object and in this way keep his friend alive in a way, as a part of himself. Love for the object

<sup>18</sup> “It is inherent in the feeling of persecution that it is fed by hatred and at the same time feeds hatred”. (1940, 143). It is also associated with oral-cannibalistic infantile fantasies of destroying the breast through devouring. About oral fantasies, cf. Dittes (1965, 133) and Miles (1982, 352). Miles refers to Klein’s notion of primitive envy, but it does not seem to be right, since what Miles finds in the *Confessions* is more similar to primitive greed, because there is no aspect of “spoiling” the good breast, just greedy emptying it. Fenn (1986, 88) also mentions oral dynamics, but in the context of the drive theory, and he writes about Augustine’s attempt to “restore his mother from the pangs of death”.

<sup>19</sup> Wetzel suggests that Augustine’s mourning as a whole is something pretentious and inauthentic, which he interprets as Augustine’s guilt for not loving his friend in a real way (J. Wetzel, “Book Four: The Trappings of Woe and Confession of Grief”, in: K. Paffenroth & R.P. Kennedy (ed.), *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions*, Louisville & London, 2003, 59–65). The theme of illusion is also dealt with by Schlabach, but not in such a strong way (Schlabach 1992, 126–129). A different view has Oppel who in the tears of Augustine sees the proof of the authenticity of his love for the friend (Oppel 2004, 232). Nevertheless, she also compares friendship as depicted in book 4 to Adam’s fall and the consequences of this sin (228). Wetzel rejects the possibility that Augustine loved his friend instead of God or too much (for Wetzel there is no such thing as loving too much), but he did not love his friend at all. He loved only „the creature of... fears and desires” (Wetzel 2003, 69). According to Wetzel, Augustine condemns just his in *Retractationes* (2.6.2) when he distances himself from those *dimidium animae* images (Wetzel 2003, 61; in: *Retract.* Augustine mentions in this context the sentence about his fear of death from 4.6.11).

<sup>20</sup> Dittes (1986, 57) describes this friendship as a kind of “fusion”.

comes from the life drive and is a love for life itself. That is why Augustine's desire to live is also the desire to lovingly reconstruct the object within.

And yet, Augustine still suffered because of the presence of the introjected dead object. Klein described patients fantasizing about dead or damaged objects inside them, hurting themselves and drawing them to death, which are sometimes defensively projected into the world, causing paranoid anxiety. Augustine recalls something similar happening to him, only in a much lesser degree. He describes his soul as "split up and bleeding", difficult to "bear" (4.7.12). Here the soul seems to refer, again, to the internal object which before was rebuking Augustine, who now views himself as wounded and cut in two<sup>21</sup>. He also speaks about the internal object as a "dead weight" (*ibid.*). In one of his deep psychological insights Augustine notices that he wanted to escape from the object, but realized that he could not escape from himself<sup>22</sup>. Augustine loses also interest in external things and pleasures that are not associated with his dead friend. They do not comfort him, but bring him anxiety instead (*ibid.*). We could say that the internal persecutory object was projected into those external objects, causing feelings of persecution and restlessness. The persecution is a primitive form of guilt, since Augustine's enjoyment of sensual pleasures would mean that his friend is really gone and that his libido has been transferred to other objects.

Augustine finally escapes Thagaste, even though he is aware that he cannot escape himself (*ibid.*). On the conscious level he knew, of course, that his hometown is only a symbol, not the real thing, but on the unconscious level the familiar places "attacked" him, causing anxiety that was impossible to bear at the time<sup>23</sup>. Then the mourning comes slowly to an end. With time Augustine is filled with other hopes and other memories (4.8.13), other than his friend. This process of an investment of the libido in new objects is a sign of the ego finishing the process of mourning. Augustine comments that after that he already started to plant new seeds for further pain, becoming overly attached to other people and things. He describes the source of his suffering in a powerful metaphor of "spilling his soul on the sand" (*ibid.*). From a purely psychoanalytic point of view, this happens always when we love someone deeply. The libido, which Freud viewed as something similar to a liquid, is poured into the object, so perhaps not "spilt on the sand". But when the vessel is destroyed, the liquid, eventually and inevitably, is spilt. Another Freudian metaphor, also resonating with Augustinian imagery, is of the libido as something that can be "glued" to the object, causing great pain when it has

<sup>21</sup> Ferrari sees in it the image of the soul wounded by the "thorns" of sin in the barren field of the fall (1977, 64).

<sup>22</sup> Freud's comments are also relevant here, especially his famous: "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" (Freud 1917, 249).

<sup>23</sup> Woolcott (1966, 277) interprets this escape as an unconscious attempt to gain autonomy and masculinity out of Monica's reach.

to be “ripped off” of it. Augustine and Freud would agree on that, although Freud did not see any way to change it, while Augustine did<sup>24</sup>.

The final stage of mourning is the company of other Augustine’s friends who help him come back to life and the enjoyment of it once again. The importance of friendship, love and the presence of other people helps reconnect with reality<sup>25</sup>.

### **Mourning Mother’s Death (9.12.29 – 13.37)**

The death of Augustine’s mother is certainly not similar to the death of the unnamed friend. She was already in an age when her death could not be considered unexpected or unnatural and Augustine spent with her the period before her death. She saw him a converted, “Catholic Christian” (9.10.26), which was the greatest desire of her life. She did not fear death nor did she want to live any longer. Augustine describes her dying as peaceful and saintly. On the other hand, there is a similarity between what happened to Augustine after she died and after the unnamed friend’s death. The moment Monica closes her eyes, Augustine is overcome by powerful sadness (9.12.29). Yet, in this case, he is not alone, but surrounded by others and immediately starts to suppress his feelings in order to refrain from crying (the motif that was absent when he mourned his friend over ten years earlier)<sup>26</sup>. Augustine is trying to convince himself that he has no reason to cry, since there was nothing unhappy in his mother’s death and she did not die completely (*ibid.*)<sup>27</sup>. Augustine must have had strongly ambivalent feelings towards Monica, because she was his mother. Psychoanalytically speaking, he had unconscious, aggressive impulses towards her internal *imago* and in the moment of her death tho-

<sup>24</sup> TeSelle (1986, 96) points to this interestingly “Freudian” dimension of Augustine’s theory of sinful attachment, especially in terms of the importance of desire and habit, by saying that Augustine “might have welcomed the term *cathexis*”.

<sup>25</sup> It was emphasized by Melanie Klein in her classical article on mourning (Klein 1940, 140). For Freud it is a sign that someone came out of mourning healthy and able to love other people.

<sup>26</sup> Paffenroth sees here “striking differences” between grieving in book 4 and 9 (1997, 146). Augustine’s “understanding” of grief was deeper when Monica died, so he did not experience despair (which is disputable, at least, at the first moment). Paffenroth suggests that Augustine was able to cry a lot after the friend’s death and not after his mother’s death, because in the first case the loss seemed total to him, while in the latter – not: “If tears mean hopelessness, then Augustine’s refusal to shed such tears at Monica’s death would surely make sense”. (1997, 152).

<sup>27</sup> This “objective” and reasonable perspective is, however, impossible to reconcile with psychoanalytic understanding of what happens when we lose someone we love. Freud emphasized the fact that loving someone means investing the energy in this person and that withdrawing this energy is very painful. Pain, therefore, is natural due to the libidinal economy and psychological processes. Klein observed that there is not only pain and sadness, but also anxiety and guilt, because every relationship is ambivalent. Fenn sees here certain fetishism of language, magical and ritualistic use of words and an obsessive nature of Augustine’s speech. According to him, Augustine tries to avoid mourning and melancholia by such magical, fetishist and obsessive use of language, as if he was able to “undo” his mother’s death in this way (1986, 82).

se fantasies in a way came true, because she really died. From a point of view of reality it is, of course, irrational to suppose that our aggressive impulses and fantasies can do harm, let alone kill someone, if they are not acted upon. But the unconscious has no contact with reality and does not think rationally, so it easily believes that it can kill the object in fantasy.

Augustine says that the pain was caused simply by ending the sweet living together (9.12.30). "Living together" is an expression used by Augustine also in 4.6.11, referring to the beloved friend. It is another common feature in both accounts of mourning<sup>28</sup>. There Augustine used metaphors of "another self" and "a half of the soul" to emphasize the death of the internal object, a part of himself. Here he comes back to this, experiencing it again with his mother's death, describing it in terms of one life and one soul he shared with Monica (*ibid.*). The death of the external object causes immediately a fantasy of the object dying within the self<sup>29</sup>.

Then Augustine starts to remember the kind words that Monica said to him before her death, reassuring him that he was always a good son to her (*ibid.*). It is worth noting how strongly Augustine wants to convince himself that his mother believed that he *never* said anything unkind to her in his whole life. Augustine does not seem to believe that, since it was an act of love and a compliment for him on her part, not the truth. Augustine tries to find comfort in what his mother says, but the guilt is stronger. The guilt here appears to be a consequence of all those harsh words that have come from his mouth towards his mother (*ibid.*), but the unconscious does not express aggression in words, but in sadistic fantasies of destroying the loved object. Those unconscious sadistic attacks cause powerful anxiety and guilt, reactivated at the moment of Augustine's mother's death.

He already starts to reproach himself, comparing his love for her with her love for him. Augustine again described the symbolic way in which he possessed the wounded object in himself and the result of it is, besides self-reproaching, the feeling of being split in half (*ibid.*). Augustine describes how hard he tried not to show any pain, in which he succeeded, since others did not notice his suffering (9.12.31). Here, I will not discuss neither cultural factors, nor philosophical, religious and spiritual ideals of Augustine at that time, that surely influenced this attempt at complete self-control. From a psychoanalytic perspective, even though Augustine seems to be primarily ashamed (afraid that others will see his weakness), there is also a deeper guilt because of aggressive impulses.

Augustine shows his pain only to God, but still rebukes himself for feeling it. In fact, he starts to torment himself in a specific way: the dead object inside him

<sup>28</sup> It is worth mentioning that Augustine also points out the presence of his friends (9.12.31: *cum eis*) in his mourning, which is also similar to what he experienced after the death of the friend (4.8.13).

<sup>29</sup> Gay (1986, 75) sees in Augustine's idealization of Monica a narcissistic fusion with her and, at the same time, with God as a self-object.

is reproaching him for suffering, and the more he suffers, the more he feels persecuted for this suffering (*ibid.*). The first pain here is the authentic pain of loss, the other – the pain caused by the bad object attacking the weak self, unable to refrain from feeling sad and crying<sup>30</sup>. During the burial ceremony Augustine does not cry, he seeks comfort in taking a bath, but to no avail. The important moment that Augustine describes is when he was lying alone in his bed, recalling one of Saint Ambrose's hymns. Then his pain is lessened and he starts to develop idealized fantasies about Monica. It is in contrast to the way Augustine perceived God over ten years earlier. Then he was only an illusion to him and could not give him any solace. Now Augustine's relationship to God brings him peace. God became a powerful good object in Augustine's internal world, an object that can be used to weaken the force of destruction activated by the death of Monica. Internal sense of persecution comes from the anxiety that the damaged mother within is seeking revenge on the self. The more aggression towards the object, the greater the fear and guilt. Yet this aggressive relationship is counterparted by the loving relationship with God, which is symbolized by Ambrose's hymn. Augustine uses symbol to revive the good object within and this leads to the powerful release of the life drive.

Augustine remembers Monica, her goodness, piety, gentleness. At the same time, the acceptance of losing such a good object causes much pain to Augustine. The sudden release of the force of love brings tears and the tears bring comfort (9.12.33). At first, Augustine could not weep over the loss of Monica. Apart from other reasons, it might be due to the unconscious struggle between love and hate. Hate seemed so powerful that, instead of sadness and healthy guilt, Augustine experienced loss of life and self-depreciation. The image of the good object (God) released love for the mother and made it possible to restore her good image within and thus find pleasure in tears (symbolizing, as earlier, his good mother). Augustine juxtaposes a persecutory image of the others who could reproach him for weeping (*ibid.*) and a good and loving image of God who allows him to cry without criticizing his weak, vulnerable self. It is an excellent example how in the internal world of fantasies love can overcome hate in the process of reparation. The mechanism of splitting good and bad object images is lessened and the good object is restored<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Oppel (2004, 216) writes about a sort of a "theory of crying" in Augustine's times, according to which the grief over earthly attachments should be the object of another grief, because of its sinful origins. That could be the philosophical context for Augustine's *duplex tristitia*. From a psychoanalytic perspective, of course, there is a dimension of shame/guilt of another origin.

<sup>31</sup> Paffenroth points out that the image of Monica after her death is much more realistic than everywhere else in the *Confessions*. Because such Monica is more similar to Augustine, it enables him to cry freely: "Only with this realization that Monica too required a repentance instigated and sustained by God's action can Augustine experience his tears rightly, not as signs of despair or weakness, but as signs of both grief and joy, proper expressions of a proper love" (1997, 154). Oppel suggests that Augustine, going against the Christian tradition that

Then Augustine experiences still something different. He starts to pour tears of another kind (9.13.34), praying to God to have mercy on Monica. He says that he cannot say that not even one word passed her lips contrary to God's law (*ibid.*). This expression has a striking similarity to what he earlier remembered Monica saying to him. There he was afraid that it is not true that he did not say anything unkind to her, now he is afraid that it is not true that she did not say anything against God's law<sup>32</sup>. We can see the severity of his superego and anxiety caused by it. When Augustine restored the good image of his mother, he begins to be afraid that this image might be destroyed by other persecutory objects. The struggle between love and hate continues, when Augustine wonders whether Monica is saved. Such fantasies usually point to unconscious aggression towards the object:<sup>33</sup> Augustine imagines that Monica could sin and could be punished for that. A part of him would sadistically enjoy this, but another part of him is scared to death that his mother can be destroyed by the bad object. What comforts him is the goodness of God and his mercy, but paranoid anxiety still colors his prayers to a certain degree<sup>34</sup>.

He creates the internal image of a merciful Monica and a merciful God, restoring the good objects. At the same time, he is afraid of the devil, the enemy (who functions in a similar way as personified death in the process of grieving over his friend) who will accuse Monica before God, trying to destroy her. Finally, Augustine places his faith and hope in Christ who is the savior and is able to save Monica (here, on the unconscious level, it is not about saving in theological sense, but in a psychological one).

It is interesting that, at the end, Augustine does not only restore the good internal image of Monica, but also of her husband and his father, Patricius. His father is not depicted in a very good way in the *Confessions*, especially in comparison to Monica<sup>35</sup>. Here Augustine seems to restore also the good image of his father, accepting all his weaknesses. Melanie Klein describes the importance of the reparation of the internal good parental couple in the depressive position. The parental couple symbolizes fertility of good objects, the possibility of creating life and go-

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does not allow to grieve after a good death, expresses Pauline "freedom of spirit", allowing himself tears (2004, 215–220).

<sup>32</sup> According to Fenn, since Monica is threatened by damnation due to sins of speech, Augustine tries to use words to magically reverse her damnation or extinction (1986, 83).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pruyser 1966, 287 and Capps 1985, 123.

<sup>34</sup> Any psychoanalytic treatment of religious phenomena is, from my point of view, an extremely delicate and difficult issue. Personally, I do not think that religious and spiritual phenomena can be satisfyingly explained by psychoanalysis, although Freud and most of his followers seem to be more or less sure about it. My interpretations are not meant to be reductive. I would see it rather as an analysis of a psychological component of religious phenomena that can be looked at from different perspectives (theological, philosophical, sociological, cultural etc.).

<sup>35</sup> The image of Patricius in the *Confessions* seems devaluated to several authors (Woollcott 1966, 276; Miles 1982, 354; Rigby 1985, 99; Dittes 1986, 60–61), but to Pruyser it is the mother who is oppressive, while the father is "weak, but probably friendly" (1966, 285).

odness through love. Augustine's prayer for his mother and father, after he had to work through the loss of Monica with whom he had a quite complicated relationship, shows that he was able to recreate his good objects in a powerful way. The first time, Augustine could not benefit from his relationship to God in mourning. This time, however, his love for God most likely helped him finally overcome aggression towards his (internal and external) mother and restore the good image of his parents, loved by God in the heavens. Augustine speaks also about God as his Father and the Church as his Mother, and all his fellow Christians as his brothers. In this powerful vision, the whole internal world is restored in the act of successful reparation<sup>36</sup>.

## Conclusion

If we look at Augustine writing the *Confessions*, we can see how the depressive position is again reactivated, when he describes the death of his friend. There is a certain freshness of emotions in his language and there is another kind of reparation he accomplishes. In his youth the reparation was accomplished unconsciously through the community of Manichean friends who helped him through grief. But tears are the only symbolic factor we can link to the process of restoration of the internal good object. When he writes the *Confessions*, however, as an adult man in the middle of his life, he once again recreates the good object by the account of his friend's conversion. In the narrative it is he, Augustine, who tries to destroy the good object (the friend) by laughing at the baptism he received while unconscious and by an attempt to draw the friend away from true Christianity. But Augustine's aggression cannot damage the friend's soul – God saves him and his friend dies in the state of grace. Augustine does not understand that *then*, but *now* he does and is thankful to God for that. The friend becomes a truly good ob-

<sup>36</sup> Rigby notices the phenomenon that I would describe as the reparation of the parental couple, especially in terms of its fertility. Rigby focuses on the father in the Oedipal context and for him the ending of book 9 is a solution to the Oedipus complex, at least, a partial one. He notices how God and the Church replace Patricius and Monica, and how the image of the father is changed: "Here Augustine recognizes Patricius, the rejected father of capricious bodily desire, primarily as a member of the ethical life of the concrete" (1985, 99) and later: "Augustine recognizes his father 'as spouse of the spouse' and accepts the sexuality of his parents and their belonging together (...) What is recognized, however, is not the individual father but fatherhood freed from Patricius who is a fellow-citizen for whom one prays and a parent 'in this transitory life' (9.13); fatherhood itself is recognized in God as father". (1985, 105–106). Other authors are less optimistic about the image of the parental couple. Dittes interprets that the solution to the conflict between autonomy/dependency and activity/passivity ends in Augustine's passivity and submission (1985, 135). Also Bakan (1965, 151) sees at the end of book 9 a rather negative image of Patricius and Monica, where the latter suffers, masochistically submitting to the husband. Woollcott emphasizes the aggressive image of the couple and claims the Oedipus complex unsolved (1966, 276). Miles notices Augustine's ambivalence towards both parents in the *Confessions* (1982, 353).

ject "in God", lost forever in this world, but living in Augustine's heart as another saved soul in the *Confessions*.

In the case of his mother, Augustine seems to have more problems<sup>37</sup>. The relationship with Monica is obviously different from other significant bonds. Augustine is unable to cry after her death. Also his self-directed aggression is stronger: he imagines the others scolding him for his weakness, he reproaches himself for being unkind to Monica, and the devil, act as a dangerous enemies of her salvation. But this time, Augustine can rely on God more than before and in his presence he is able to cry and restore the good image of Monica. In the end Augustine manages to recreate a good internal image of his mother. She seems to be symbolically identified with the Church, the Mother and the spouse of God, which in a powerful way recreates the good image of the parental couple within. The fertility of this couple is infinite. But it is also Patricius who is now seen as a good man and "married" to Monica once again in heaven. The end of book 9 can be seen then as a complete reparation of all the objects damaged in fantasy: the friend, his unnamed common-law wife, his son, Adeodatus, his friend Nebridius and all the others that Augustine loved and who died before him<sup>38</sup>.

I am referring here to Hanna Segal's concept of the creation process as an essentially depressive phenomenon and the work of art as the symbol of the good object<sup>39</sup>. Segal believed that a writer through his/her work is dealing with depressive anxieties, pain and guilt. In her view it is the form of a literary piece that brings about an integration and reparation of all the destructive and painful content that is expressed through the form. Augustine's description of mourning in the *Confessions* can be seen as a symbolic restoring of the object, letting go of it again and establishing it in the internal world in a form of a symbol. Most generally, the whole narrative of the *Confessions* could be viewed as an attempt to reconstruct and recreate the object within Augustine's ego damaged by sin: the source of reparative love is God himself<sup>40</sup>. But in this narrative the two astonishing passages, expres-

<sup>37</sup> The ambivalence and difficulties in the relationship between Augustine and Monica are often observed by scholars (Clark 1965, 147; Pruyser 1966, 285; Woolcott 1966, 277; Miles 1982, 352–357; Capps 1985, 123).

<sup>38</sup> Paffenroth points out that Augustine describes in a similar fashion the deaths of Patricius, Adeodatus, Nebridius, Verecundus and the friend in book 4, by emphasizing his belief that they are now saved. The author takes this as a sign of Augustine's love for them (1997, 145–146). It is also a sign of reparation, as well as a more realistic image of the mother, which appears, according to Paffenroth (1997, 154), towards the end of book 9.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. H. Segal "A Psycho-Analytical Approach to Aesthetics", *IJP* 33 (1952), 196–207.

<sup>40</sup> Woolcott interprets the *Confessions* as a way of dealing with internal conflicts through their objectifying and getting them „out of his system" in an obsessive way. Creativity is seen by him primarily in the Oedipal context (1966, 282–283). Burrell, who first used the psychoanalytic approach of the studies published in fifties and sixties for theological analysis, suggests that creativity of Augustine is considerable and that instead of conflict between autonomy and dependency, it would be useful to see them as two sides of one coin (D. Burrell, "Reading



sing so freshly Augustine's grief over lost loved ones, play a particularly important role, because he comes back to the time of grieving, not only remembering the pain, but also reconstructing, reinterpreting and symbolizing it in a most refined way.

The *Confessions* are, primarily, a philosophical work about the fall, sin and conversion through grace. We can see all the conscious and intentional work of Augustine: his rhetorical skills, his literary genius, his philosophical acumen, his religious passion and so on. I think that any attempt to "explain it away" by an analysis of the unconscious forces that could *determine* Augustine to feel and think in this way would be an unnecessary reduction. It is perhaps more useful to think of it, as if below the surface of the conscious dimension of Augustine's narrative, autobiographical as well as philosophical, existed another realm, the realm of dream, in which Augustine works through universal anxieties, fantasies, dilemmas, and, above all, through the essential conflict between aggression, destruction and hate on the one hand, and life, creativity and love on the other. The incredible symbolic expression of this conflict in the *Confessions* may be one of the factors that have fascinated the readers of this work through ages.

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the 'Confessions' of Augustine: An Exercise in Theological Understanding", *The Journal of Religion*, 50, 4 (1970), 341). Capps sees the creativity of the *Confessions* as a sign of the "transformed narcissism", caused by Augustine middle-age recognition of the limits of his self (1970, 124). For Gay the act of writing is the act of establishing a relationship with a self-object: "My general thesis is that *Confessions* is written for an audience which Augustine uses as self-objects. That is, we, his imagined audience, are a crucial, underlying element in his work and our (imagined) responses help him reconstitute himself to feel coherent in time and space. This 'narcissistic' reading of the text, following Kohut and Winnicott, suggests that the earlier Oedipal interpretations of *Confessions* overemphasized issues of sexual conflict and therefore the basic anxiety which *Confessions* was meant to solve". (1986, 65). For Fenn Augustine's use of the words is magical and primitive in nature (1986, 82).