

# *SERO SANCTITAS:* AFFECTIVE CONVERSION(S) AS EFFECTIVE SELF- INVENTION



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## ABSTRACT

For centuries, humans have been afflicted with an existential fear that their lives are on the wrong track or that they would need multiple lives to experience the one, perfect life. Interweaving personal memoir with critical theory, this essay argues that St. Augustine of Hippo solves this dilemma by creating multiple versions of himself in his autobiography *Confessions*. Self-invention by way of affective confession is our unexpected yet productive methodology.

## KEYWORDS

affect, conversion, confession, self-invention, Augustine

“So, am I living too late?”  
—The Finches, “Nightswimming”

“Things take the time they take.  
Don't worry.  
How many roads did St. Augustine follow before he became St. Augustine?”  
—Mary Oliver, Felicity

## The Unbearable Tardiness of Being

I've been late my whole life. My first year teaching high school English when I was putting my then-husband through seminary, I remember my assistant principal calling me on the first day of school. I remember this phone call waking me up. I remember shooting upright as the realization washed over me that not only was I late to school, but that I was now the teacher and this meant that there were students waiting on me for their education. Never mind that I'd stayed late in my classroom the night before, cleaning and organizing—over-preparing for their arrival. I pictured my new students seated at their desks, glancing at the clock while tapping their pencils. I envisioned my new colleagues' raised eyebrows. And I wish I could say that the teacher learned her lesson and that I haven't arrived late to any more significant life events, but lately I have been wondering if I am significantly late to my own life and, additionally and even more sickeningly, I am wondering if we are always late to our own lives.

I am not the only one dealing with this existential dread. Milan Kundera's novel rebuttal to Nietzsche's theory of eternal return, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* argues that because we only live once and lack “a second, third, or fourth life in which to compare various decisions” we cannot know which of our decisions are good or bad (1999, 222); “We can never know what to want,” Kundera posits, “because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come” (1999, 8). Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* also thematically grieves our lack of time. If Kundera mourns our lack of time for experience, Woolf mourns our lack of time for reflection. *Orlando* illustrates lives that are too short to have both the experiences and the time needed to reflect upon those experiences. Margaret R. Miles uses Woolf's claim to autobiographically lament in *Augustine and the Fundamentalist's Daughter*, “[a]lert as we try to be in our short lives, we just can't figure it out fast enough” (2011, 83). All these theorists seem

fixated and frustrated by existential lack: Kundera claims that we lack other lives by which comparison and thus prevention of mistakes is possible, and Woolf maintains that we lack the experiences and the time required to reflect upon those experiences, both of which are necessary for accurate vision and a consequent good life. How should we proceed then if, according to Kundera and Woolf, we are already late to our own lives? And consequently, if we are existentially late, how do we confidently make decisions to/that affect our future?

In perhaps a strange return, antiquity provides a solution to this modern dilemma. In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine of Hippo models how to create a path forward. From his career to his conversion(s), Augustine makes his life decisions according to evolving affections. Although he prefigures the existential angst that Kundera and Woolf will later articulate, Augustine does more than anticipate: he navigates his own crises by creating and re-creating his sense of self. And if perhaps Augustine isn't unique in noting his own internal changes over time, he is exceptionally prodigious. Generous self-reflection allows us to track the eventual saint's evolving identity. Charting a life according to one's attractions and revulsions is a painful and sometimes contradictory process over the course of a lifetime. But Augustine writes himself/-ves by trial and error, as we see in the *Confessions*. Reading these autobiographical iterations is a complicated dance with time. M. B. Pranger notes in *The Artificiality of Christianity* that "the historian of antiquity and the Middle Ages faces the problem of literary immobility; time is bent, so to speak, and made curvilinear, so that it obeys the patterns and rituals of retardation and repetition" (2003, 21-22). Indeed, in Augustine's own words: "What is time? If nobody's asking me, I know. If I'm trying to explain it to somebody who asks me, I don't know" (2017, 11.17). Augustine sidesteps the time's inherent trickiness in *Confessions* by looking inward and then looping time to proceed.

By close-reading Augustine as he's written himself in his spiritual memoir, we find a way into the future. If Kundera argues we need more lives and Woolf says we need more reflection, Augustine's solution to angst is more selves. When encountering conflict in the outer world, Augustine looks inward to determine what he believes (and desires to believe) and who he can then become. When there is no theological solution at hand, he invents a rhetorical one. For example, as Phillip Cary reminds us in his book *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, when struggling with the tension of the soul versus the body, Augustine reunites the soul *with* its body; whereas, previous church fathers had located the soul inside of the body (2000). Fusing them together then raises flesh to the soul's level of value. And by citing three critical Catholic doctrines: creation, incarnation, and resurrection, he succinctly and brilliantly justifies this rhetorical choice (2000, 115). In so doing, he also invents a way to justify his personal decisions. More

specifically, as Augustine chronicles in his book, he struggled, as a young man and on into middle age, to resolve the tension between the lusts of his flesh with his desire to live a pure and spiritual life. And although Catholic clergy were allowed to partake in holy marriage, Augustine views even sacred union as fleshly entanglement. Thus, there is often a personal context to general exhortation. In this way, if we remember that Augustine was first a formally trained rhetorician before becoming a theologian and philosopher, we recognize *Confessions* itself as rhetorical invention. By way of confession, St. Augustine invents and reinvents himself, modeling a way for us to do the same. To accomplish this, he requires neither Kundera's multiple lives nor Woolf's additional time for self-reflection. What he needs, and ultimately finds, are his own invented selves. Over his lifetime, desires coalesce into fidelities, and these fidelities guide major life decisions. Major life decisions result in evolution of the self. Through his affective *Confessions*, Augustine effectively models that conversion itself is self-invention.

## *Confessions*

"In the last fifteen years or so of Continental philosophical reflection," write John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon in their edited volume *Augustine and Post-modernism*, "God has been making a comeback among continental philosophers, and, along with God, (who, if the truth be told, was doing just fine without the philosophers), one of the West's most passionate and God-filled men, Augustine of Hippo" (2005, 2-3). We might question Augustine's resurging popularity. If Augustine's renewed and continuing significance is true, then his autobiography, *The Confessions*, deserves our renewed attention. Caputo and Scanlon argue that "Augustine's great achievement was to see that confession could be self-constructive rather than self-repudiation" (2005, 13).

In *Seducing Augustine*, Mark D. Jordan claims, "After he had been seduced three times over by Christian speeches, Augustine wrote two books about word and bodies. *Confessions* was the second of them, a sequel better than the original" (2010, 33). This sequel is better than the original, in my opinion, because *Confessions* offers what *On Christian Doctrine* lacks—a reliably unreliable narrator. Augustine is not the same voice in both books. And what I—and many others, I would guess—relate to most is his confessional voice of indecision and doubt.

Written centuries ago and rediscovered since by generations of scholars across fields, *Confessions* has taken on multiple functions over the years: for many people it is a primer on church doctrine, for some it is a precursor to spiritual memoir, and for others it is a cultural critique of a rival popular religion. Peter Brown, in his biography *Augustine of Hippo*, writes that “*Confessions* are quite succinctly the story of Augustine’s ‘heart,’ or of his feelings—his *affectus*” (2000, 163). Jean-Luc Marion, in his book *In the Self’s Place*, argues that “the model of the *confessio* [...] operates as an erotic reduction” (2012, 55). Margaret R. Miles, in *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine’s Confessions*, understands *Confessions* as a “text of pleasure” in Roland Barthes’ terms. She posits that although *Confessions*’ main concern is to “how to get—and keep—the greatest degree of pleasure,” the book also reproduces “strains, anxiety, and energy of the life they narrate” (1992, 9–10). From a meta perspective, Miles claims that “unresolved contradictions in a text create a pleasurable tension; they function to invite the reader into the text as a conversation partner” (1992, 64, 67). For me, reading the *Confessions* was an internal and ongoing conversation with someone I felt might understand my growing hunger and eventual loss.

I first encountered Augustine’s *Confessions* as a reading assignment in my History of Rhetoric seminar in graduate school. After reading it, I couldn’t stop thinking about how Augustine had abandoned his mistress and son to join the clergy, sending his family away to North Africa without money or provision. Even though he would later reunite and co-author with his son, I couldn’t imagine separating from my young daughters for religious reasons. In spite of my initial revulsion, over the next four years, I felt a deepening sympathy with Augustine. I couldn’t vilify the ancient Church father. His dualism, his Gnosticism, felt familiar to me. I, too, had been brought up in a religious home. I, too, had been taught to dissociate from my body. Moreover, I found, articulated in clear, precise language, the same interrogations that were taking shape in my own heart: Which career should I pursue? What do I believe? Who am I?

Initially, I was enamored of Augustine for his questions. But as I read and then re-read the *Confessions*, I began to see that when he encounters the eternal questions, Augustine rhetorically invents answers—solutions that work mainly for his own experiential dilemmas. That is, the answers he offers aren’t unearthed from Biblical texts or inherited from previous church fathers. Rather, he invents solutions that *feel* right based on his own lived experience, solutions perhaps meant to be generalized and extrapolated for others but still clearly personal and specific. Although St. Augustine’s answers would later be taken as religious dogma, we would do well to remember that they are at their core affective rhetorical inventions—created by and for a man embedded and embodied in a particular historical context and

designed to make him feel a certain way about his life. Thus, personal context often leads to general exhortation. But confession does more than effectively invent solutions to problems; it's affectively more constraining. Let us remember that Augustine was first a formally trained rhetorician before becoming a theologian.

## Confession as production

In *Confessions*, between young rhetorician Augustine and elder theologian St. Augustine, there are many Augustines. Additionally, because Augustine is human, these Augustines sometimes contradict one another. He confesses his life in four longings: guilt, belief, critique, and struggle. Most obviously, confession is an admittance of guilt. Catholic confession serves to absolve the sinner of guilt and also as a catalyst to welcome him back into the community. Alternately, confession is sometimes an affirmation of belief; we publicly confess our collective belief in Catholic doctrine and church teaching. Augustine's *Confessions* is a record of both his personal guilt and his religious beliefs as they evolve over time. Confession additionally functions as cultural critique. We can understand confession as a declaration, not of personal guilt, but rather as declaration of the guilt of a group. In this context, the confessor creates a new network rather than rejoining the old community. Augustine embraces and then later critiques Manichaeism for its dualism. Collectively, these three types of confessions confess a life, and in his holistic confession, Augustine's evolution models how we might approach our own salvation, that is, with great struggle.

This last connotation of confession has the ability to produce, to transform. In "Composing 'Circumfession,'" Jacques Derrida writes that the function of Augustine's *Confessions* is "a matter of changing oneself, of transforming oneself. That's what perhaps Augustine calls 'to make the truth.' Not to *tell* the truth, not to inform—God knows everything—but to *make* the truth, to produce the truth" (2005, 23). Agreeing with Derrida's proposed function of confession, Virginia Burrus writes in *Seducing Augustine*, "As Jacques Derrida notes, the truth of a confessional declaration or avowal 'is not a truth to be known or ... revealed.' It 'does not consist only in lifting a veil.' It is, rather, a truth to be 'made' or 'done' (*facere*), as Augustine famously puts it, proclaiming to his God, 'I want to make truth in my heart before you in confession, and in my book before many witnesses'" (2010, 13). Making truth is not the same as discovering it. And making truth before an audience that includes deity seems more daunting still.

I felt Augustine's long reach across the centuries in my professional research on guilt and female bodies, but I felt it even more poignantly in my personal life. In Sarah Ruden's 2017 translation of *Confessions*, Augustine exclaims, "And where was I myself, when I was looking for you? You were right in front of me, but I had left myself and couldn't find me" (5.2). Later, in Book 8, he writes, "I had nowhere to go to escape from myself" (1963, 8.7), and, reading this, I identified with his contradictory nature. In graduate school, I simultaneously couldn't find and couldn't escape from myself.

Jean-Luc Marion emphasizes the idea of self as a place: "I inhabit a place, myself, where I do not rediscover myself, where I am not at home, where I am not myself. Exiled from the inside, I am not there. Where I am. I am without myself, late and lagging behind myself" (2012, 79). He quotes Augustine from *The Confessions*: "I remained for myself a *place* of unhappiness, *where* I could not settle, and from *where* I could not leave. Toward *where* could my heart flee my heart? *Where* could I take flight from myself? *Where* would I not always follow myself?" (2012, 283, emphasis Marion). This perception of self as place is more than a metaphor; it is a feeling of unease with the person he cannot escape—himself. I felt uneasy with both my old and new selves. I stood, liminally, in the middle of myself, looking back and forth and wondering which was really me. I understood, theoretically and experientially, that if Augustine could escape himself, he would not *be* himself. The double-bind for Augustine is that he addresses himself as a wholly unified self, when, in fact, his affectual experience is that he is fragmented, disunified selves. And these inward, plural selves are necessarily parts of his external, singular self. Thus, he is at once a self and selves. He is a place he recognizes and wishes to remain, but also a place he cannot escape, try as he might. I longed to feel once more at home with myself while simultaneously yearning for reprieve from my selves.

Paradoxically, I become more myself through learning new ideas, yet I could not find myself in graduate school. As my then-husband began to settle into a career, I became unmoored. I wanted stability, but, more than that, I wanted to remain free to keep growing. From my assigned readings, I learned that *history* was really *histories*. I took a seminar on Islamic Architecture, a concept of cultural intersections that I had never before considered. During summers while watching my daughters swim at the neighborhood pool, I tried to teach myself basic Latin.

Even worse than losing myself, while reading *Confessions*, I recognized myself as Augustine's foil: a woman, a mother, a lay-theologian-turned-rhetorician, a de-convert of sorts, arrived at through many de-conversions, just as Augustine became a convert after many conversions. Indeed, our biographies share further profound inversions. Augustine left an academic job in "the science of rhetoric"

(2017, 4.2) to become a member of the clergy. I left a position in the ministry and pursued an academic career as a rhetorician of science. Augustine left his family, his long-time mistress and their son, to become a leader in the Catholic church. I left the ministry because I gave birth to a daughter and wanted to raise her outside the strict control of Christianity and its abuses. Augustine left a fifteen-year partnership in efforts to live authentically, and I eventually left a fifteen-year marriage. For us, the challenge of becoming ourselves has required unanticipated risk and unexpected loss.

## Conversion(s)

In *Augustine and the Fundamentalist's Daughter*, Margaret R. Miles reminds us that, theologically and historically, we have attempted to explain the conversion experience by two very different models: a cat-carrying model and a monkey-carrying model (2011, 131-133). In the cat-carrying model, God, himself, chooses the believer and constrains the conversion much like a mother cat carries a limp kitten in her mouth. Here, the kitten experiences neither distrust nor struggle. On the other hand, in the monkey-carrying model, the believer continually struggles in the conversion experience, similar to the way a baby monkey hangs onto its mother's back for dear life as she runs.

Although Augustine's conversion has been previously received and understood as the cat-carrying model with God as mother cat and Augustine as her kitten, Miles argues that it is more in keeping with the monkey-carrying model (2011, 130-145). To be sure, focusing on Augustine's climactic conversion in the garden at Ostia overlooks the aggregate *Confessions*, including Augustine's tortured language post-Ostia. Selectively remembering this singular Ostia moment when God-as-mother-cat picks up the limp Augustine-kitten in her mouth is neither an accurate nor complete description of his conversion experience(s). Miles underscores that "the *Confessions* is all about the gradual cumulative shift in his intellectual, emotional, and erotic attractions;" moreover, she insists that "the work of converting went on, as he narrates in detail, long after the climactic moments in the garden at Ostia" (2011, 144-145). While it might be, perhaps, literarily and theologically easier to label Augustine's conversion as a single event, his own language suggests it was a series of events and feelings that led up to Ostia. And additional events and contradictory feelings continued long after his Ostia conversion.

Furthermore, Augustine's affective language describing the Ostia conversion in Book 8 of *Confessions* feels more like a baby monkey gripping its mother's back than it does a carried kitten. We might especially remember his self-descriptions from Book 8 that resonate on both emotional and physical registers: "I wasted away with gnawing anxieties, compelled to put up with all sorts of things which I did not want" (1963, 8.1). Augustine describes himself as a "self against self," before admitting, "I was sick and in torture" (1963, 8.11). Additionally, he stresses that his conversion process was a continual struggle: "I tried again and I was very nearly there; I was almost touching it and grasping it, and then I was not there, I was not touching it, I was not grasping it" (1963, 8.11). This internal tension manifested externally, that is, physically: "I tore my hair, beat my forehead, locked my fingers together, clasped my knee.... I gave free rein to my tears" (2011, 133). If Augustine's conversion process were more kitten-like, we might expect his language and self-description to read a bit more like Martin Luther's famous prayer, "I am yours. Save me." But, as readers, we are unsurprised by Augustine's stress manifesting physically. Gravitationally speaking, we feel Augustine's weight, a heaviness he describes even after Ostia, "I was frightened.... The pack of this world was a kind of weight upon me" (8.5). Rather than feeling lifted up with so much support, he seems supremely aware of the possibility of falling, failing.

In May 2017, I graduated with a Ph.D. in Rhetoric, Communication, and Information Design. This degree took me four years to complete. I had previously supported my then-husband through twelve years of seminary to earn a Ph.D. in Theology with the first year of my studies overlapping with his last. During the last year of my degree, he relocated to a city in a different time zone for a new job that promised more money and better opportunities for growth. Although I supported his decision, suddenly, I found myself alone with two young children to care for and a ninety-minute (one-way) commute to my academic institution. I still needed to finish my degree and secure a job while teaching two sections of American Literature each semester and shepherding my daughters through preschool and kindergarten. The stress of too much to do with not enough time to do it manifested physically. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. I had migraines and stomachaches and panic attacks. My skin felt itchy all over my body, and no matter how hard I scratched, I couldn't find relief. My daughters' father wanted me to move with him, but I knew I had to finish. How could I get everything done—write the dissertation, graduate, and find a job? Should I just sell the house and join him, as he wanted me to? I lost twenty pounds. My friends said I looked great. I felt I was dying, disappearing. With big decisions to make and lagging behind myself, I was running out of time.

With Augustine's unbearable weight of conversion in mind, let us return to Kundera's complaint of a lack of lives and then to Woolf's lives of lack. I want to draw a perhaps non-intuitive connection here between the "lightness of being" and the cat-carrying model. Lacking in weight, this type of conversion would seem easy. And isn't that the promise of all kitten conversions? The convert will be freed of his burden (a term I intentionally use here to emphasize its heavy physical connotations). Yet, Kundera, in his novel, goes to great lengths to suggest that lightness is not the preferable mode of being. Indeed, his heroine Tereza is arguably the heaviest character in the book, emotionally speaking. The sensation of being easily carried versus tightly holding on is an important conjuring. We recall Tereza's vertigo and feel its inverse effect on Augustine—his perpetual fear of falling from Mother Monkey's grace. His affective language lacks the stability and security in being lifted up and moved by a mother cat. Rather, mother monkey moves her baby with frightening forward momentum to a new place in time and space. The baby monkey is terrified of falling and enjoys none of the security of being carried into its future. For the kitten, there is no awareness of the dangers of falling, but for the baby monkey, there is only that fear. Woolf's lament of lateness feels all the more urgent: if only we had the time to reflect on our experiences so that we would not repeat the same mistakes and so that we could prevent future ones!

## Conversion as self-Invention

In his provocative book *You Must Change Your Life*, Peter Sloterdijk argues that Nietzsche enjoys a special temporal condition: he is allochronous, untimely, or, we might theorize, anachronistic. Sloterdijk makes his case by locating Nietzsche's true date as antiquity, but an antiquity that transcends our modern construct of linear time:

It is rather a kind of constant present—a depth time, a nature time, time of being—that continues underneath the theatre of memory and innovation that occupies cultural time. If one could show how recurrence defeats repetition and the circle makes a fool of the line, this would not only demonstrate an understanding of the point of Nietzsche's decisive self-dating; it would also fulfill the precondition for any judgement [sic] on whether, and in what sense, Nietzsche is our contemporary, and whether, and to what extent, we are or wish to be his contemporaries. (2013, 32)

I use Sloterdijk's constant present to bypass cultural time so that I may consider Augustine my existential contemporary. In *Augustine and Postmodernism*, Hent

de Vries uses Jean-François Lyotard's summary of confession "as a journey that goes backward so as to move forward" to similarly locate the ancient Augustine (2005, 85). De Vries' justification comes from Lyotard's posthumously published *The Confession of Augustine*, "The chase after the future through the past that drives and troubles the *Confessions* is only *possible* if, in the evanescence of these times, something withholds, is maintained, immutable" (2005, 85 italics original). Although a thorough exploration of what this persistent, transcendent time might be is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that the ancients self-located and have been located by others as our existential contemporaries. This reminds us of Kundera's and Woolf's complaints.

If Kundera requires multiple lives for comparison and Woolf requires more time for reflection, what Augustine via Miles' re-reading of his 'conversion' offers is an idea as beautiful as it is simple: our lives are not unbreakable linear timelines, but fragments of contradiction. Very few, if any, of us enjoy an existential signpost that we are ever aware of and continuously traveling towards. Rather, we anachronistically circle around loyalties—allegiances to family, institutions, careers, ideas, and values. Michael J. Scanlon reminds us that "[f]or Augustine, to live is to love—what is needed is the right ordering of love" (2005, 167). Jeffrey L. Kosky translates Augustine's thoughts on love, "Nemo est qui non amet: sed quaeritur quid amet. Non ergo admonetur ut non amemus, sed ut eligamus quid amemus," as "There is nobody who does not love. The only question is what does he love. We are not summoned to not love, but to decide what we love" (2012, 96).

I loved my daughters' father. I loved the idea of helping others by being in the ministry. I loved my daughters. I loved the new theories I was encountering in graduate school. I loved the safety of my old beliefs, but I also loved the shimmering, opening world. These loves felt at odds with one another. How could I remain the same and hold on to what I loved (my husband, my faith, my church) while also growing and learning to love these new possibilities (a career, new beliefs, the chance to raise daughters to have more experiences and opportunities than I'd been given)? The question was not how to stop loving, but which love deserved my deepest loyalty?

And further, what happens when loyalties change? As my values shifted, my loyalties evolved. I disagreed with the hierarchical, patriarchal values I'd been forced to adopt growing up in a religious family. And after I witnessed children and female abuse victims denied justice by the church, I could not maintain a leadership role in Christian culture. What if my daughters were someday the victims of abuse?

I knew their voices, innocent but small, would not be heard, would not be given weight. When Augustine remembers sending his mistress away, he writes, “The woman I’d been accustomed to sleeping with was torn from my side, because she was supposed to be an obstacle to my marriage. My heart, which had fused with hers, was mutilated by the wound, and I limped along trailing blood” (6.25). But I wasn’t a woman sent away with a child; I was the woman tearing myself away for my children. Still, I limped along and, in truth, am limping still.

A shift in belief and values has been sometimes understood as a de-conversion, but, I argue, that it could also be called a conversion. I extend Miles’ re-reading of Augustine’s conversion to *every facet* of our lives. Conversions are not only religious in nature. A contemporary reader might be tempted to dismiss Augustine’s *Confessions* as an outdated, outmoded religious autobiography. But this ancient rhetorician-turned-theologian can help us reframe the way we think about our own lives as they evolve and require change. Indeed, Augustine through his *Confessions* reminds us that life *is* change. And his solution to our lack of lives and to our lives of lack is confessional, anachronistic self-invention.

If Augustine’s answer is simple, it is not easy. My present self looks very different from my previous iterations, even as I feel that, like Augustine, my core identity remained the same. Growth entails risk. Augustine returned to his mother’s religion, but lost his son. I left my mother’s religion, but gained the freedom to raise my daughters in the way I thought best. Augustine sent away those he loved so that he could join the church. I left loved ones when I left the church because I couldn’t, in good conscience, hold those values anymore. I am all-too-aware that my internal questions—Who am I? Whom do I love? Which loves, ethically, deserve my deepest loyalty?—were never seen. And indeed, I did not want to be seen until I had invented authentic answers. My ‘de-conversion’ might seem like a singular Ostia moment, yet it is anything but. Externally, my family and friends asked me, “Why did you leave [your own life]?” And I could only answer, “I’m late.”

What does it mean to be late to your own life? For me, it meant a heart-rending divorce: finishing a dissertation, selling a house, finding a job, buying a house, and starting over in a new city with two elementary-school-aged children, largely on my own. I had outgrown the values I’d been born into and had once held. I

had changed. And this tardiness felt like shooting up in bed on the first day of school as a teacher with still so much to learn—or, perhaps, like a baby monkey, hanging on for dear life as time jostles her forward.

I return to myself, an inverse Augustine, struggling toward salvation.

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