

The He, She, and It of God: Translating Saint Augustine's Gendered Latin God-talk into English

Jennifer Hockenbery
Mount Mary College, Milwaukee

Augustine, in the *Confessions*, calls God the True Love who lifts him up when he is too low to see.¹ Augustine pants in the *Soliloquies* that God is the Wisdom whom he wishes to hold naked under the bed sheets.² Augustine's understanding of love is obviously tied to his understanding of God who loves him, whom he loves, and in whom he loves others. Thus, students of Augustine can learn about love by looking at Augustine's language about God. Who is this God whom Augustine loves and who loves Augustine? It is in regard to this question that I put forth the following paper discussing how best to translate Augustine's descriptions of God. For this is not a philological issue, ultimately, but a philosophical and theological issue that gets to the heart of understanding Augustine's God, and with God, love.

Currently, there is much ado about inclusive language and translation. Some classicists, and I am one, raise an eyebrow of concern when translators choose to change a literal translation of a gendered Latin or Greek term in an attempt to be more inclusive and welcoming than the original author intended in his or her native language. The danger is that the philosophical meaning of the text can be impaired by this well-meaning but not always well-reasoned change. The concern over translating gendered terms and pronouns is, also, raised

1. Augustine. *Confessions*. VII.x

2. Augustine. *Soliloquies*. I. xxii.

when translators choose to use less gender inclusive terms than the literal translation of the author would warrant. This is especially dangerous, as in the aforementioned situation, when the non-literal translation obscures the philosophical point of the original author. Yet, there is a glaring case of such non-literal translation in the English versions of Augustine's *Confessions*. While Augustine, in Latin, sometimes uses the feminine pronoun, "she" to refer to his God, this pronoun has been almost universally translated in English as "he" or "it." This article is an attempt to discuss the philosophical advantages and disadvantages of a more literal translation, concluding that there is philosophical as well as philological merit to rendering Augustine's original pronouns to their literal English counterparts.

As any elementary student of Latin knows, Latin is a gendered language, which means that the Latin student not only has to memorize the meanings and declensions of nouns, but also has to remember their gender and decline them and their adjectives and pronouns accordingly. Saint Augustine, as a child learned his gendered Latin easily "without any fear and torment, by way of the charming speech of my nurses, the jokes of smiling people and the joyful cries of playmates."³ Feminine nouns took feminine forms of adjectives and pronouns, and masculine and neuter nouns did likewise respectively. Thus, Augustine throughout his many books easily and correctly followed Latin's gendered grammar. This meant that God, when described by a feminine noun (like Truth or Wisdom) would be denoted with a feminine pronoun, while when described by a masculine noun (like Father or Lord) would be denoted with a masculine pronoun, and likewise with neuter nouns.

Herein lies the difficulty for the English speaker whose language is not gendered. The translator must decide how to translate into English those gendered pronouns that describe God. The translator must decide if they ought to be translated literally—calling God, She, He, or It when appropriate in Latin or if they should be uniformly changed into one consistent pronoun.

In order to describe the difficulties and advantage of the literal translation I would like to concentrate on one specific difficult passage from Augustine's *Confessions*, that being the description of his intellectual conversion to Christianity in Book VII section 10. The Latin of this passage is as follows:

3. "... sine ullo metu atque cruciatu, inter etiam blandimenta nutricum et ioca arridentium et laetitias alludentium." *Confessions* I.14. My translation. All Latin quotations are taken from Augustine. *Confessions I Introduction and Text*, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea duce te, et potui, quoniam factus es adiutor meus. intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem: non hanc vulgarem et conspicuam omni carni, nec quasi ex eodem genere grandior erat, tamquam si ista multo multoque clarius claresceret totumque occuparet magnitudine. non hoc illa erat sed aliud, aliud valde ab istis omnibus. nec ita erat supra mentem meam, sicut oleum super aquam, nec sicut caelum super terram, **sed superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea.** qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem. caritas novit eam. o aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas, tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte! et cum te primum cognovi, tu adsumpsisti me ut viderem esse, quod viderem, et nondum me esse qui viderem. et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore. et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: 'cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu metaberis in me.' et cognovi, quoniam pro iniquitate erudisti hominem, et tabescere fecisti sicut araneam animam meam, et dixi: 'numquid nihil est veritas, quoniam neque per finita neque per infinita locorum spatia diffusa est?' et clamasti de longinquo, 'immo vero ego sum qui sum'. et audivi, sicut auditur in corde, et non erat prorsus unde dubitarem, faciliusque dubitarem vivere me, quam non esse veritate, quae per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspicitur."—*Confessions VII.X*

My translation, using the literal meaning of the pronouns describing God, reads:

And having been admonished to return to myself, I entered into my inner self with you as leader, and I could do this, because you were my helper. I entered and I saw such as it was with the eye of my soul above the eye of my soul, above my mind, an unchangeable light: not this common light seen by all flesh, nor something of the same type but greater, as if this was shining more and more clearly and having such magnitude as to occupy everything. No this was not that but another, completely other than all of these. Nor was this light above my mind, as oil is above water, nor as the sky is above the earth, but superior, because **she made me**, and I was inferior, because **I was made by her**. Whoever knows truth, knows **her**, and whoever knows **her**, knows eternity. Love knows **her**. O eternal Truth and True Love and Lovely Eternity, you are my God, to you I sigh day and night! And when I first knew you, you lifted me up so that I might see that there was something to be seen and that I was not yet a person who could see. And you beat back the weakness of my eyes, shining on me vehemently, and I trembled in love and fear. And I perceived that I was far from you in a region of dissimilitude, just as I heard your voice from on high: "I am the food of great people: grow strong and you shall feed on me. You will not change me into you, as common food is changed into your flesh, but you

will be changed into me." And I knew, just as you rebuked humanity for iniquity, you made my soul to waste away like a cobweb, and I said: "Is nothing the truth, since it is not diffused into space, finitely or infinitely?" And you shouted from far away, "No, indeed, truly, I am that which is." And I heard, as one hears in the heart and there was no use for doubting, and I would easier doubt that I live, than [believe] that truth, which is seen intellectually through those things which are made, is not.

The literal translation of this passage, in many ways, sounds shocking in English, because the feminine pronoun is used to speak of the Light that created all things, the Light that is the Truth and Love and Eternity that Augustine calls God.

As I admitted from the start, there is a difficulty in deciding how to translate a passage like this. Before explaining my proposed solution, I must first explain the difficulty and why all solutions are going to be somewhat problematic. To begin, Augustine's word for God, *Deus*, is a masculine noun and is thus denoted by masculine forms of pronouns, which are translated in English as "He," "Him," "His" or "Himself." Thus far there is no problem. Many Christian English speakers also tend to use the masculine pronoun to denote God. The problem comes when Augustine uses other forms of address to denote God, which he does often as the reader sees in the above passage. In the short chapter describing his intellectual conversion, he uses eight different names for God: *Dux* (Leader), *Adiutor* (Helper), *Lux* (Light), *Veritas* (Truth), *Aeternitas* (Eternity), *Caritas* (Love), *Cibus grandium* (Food of great people), and *Ego sum qui sum* (I am that which is).⁴ In other passages Augustine uses words like *Sapientia* (Wisdom), *Magister* (Teacher), *Pater* (Father), *Verbum* (Word), *Principium* (Beginning), and *Dominus* (Lord). Because Latin is a gendered language, depending on which noun Augustine uses the accompanying pronoun used to denote God changes gender. The masculine nouns (Lord, Father, Leader, Helper, Teacher, Food) are denoted with the masculine pronoun making an easy translation for English speakers who think of God as masculine. But the feminine nouns (Light, Truth, Eternity, Love, Wisdom) and neuter nouns (Word, Beginning, I am that which is) are denoted with the feminine and neuter pronouns respectively. These changing pronouns cause the difficulty for the translator rendering the text into English.

4. For an excellent analysis regarding this phrase which is usually rendered "I am who I am" see Etienne Gilson *Philosophie et Incarnation Selon Saint Augustin* (Montreal: Universite de Montreal, 1947). Gilson explains the philosophical force of the phrase which implies that the god of Abraham is also Being itself.

On one hand, to denote God as "She" in Augustine's writings is going to strike the English reader's eye and ear more than Augustine intended. The average English speaker is not accustomed to using the feminine pronoun to denote God. Whether the reader or listener likes or dislikes the idea, the reader is going to be jolted by its use in a passage by the fourth century African doctor. Augustine, himself, is simply using correct Latin. From childhood, Augustine, whether he was talking about common light or the Light of the world, would denote the object with a feminine pronoun. Indeed, this is clear in the passage above. The common light that is not at all like the Light of God, is denoted with the feminine form of "that" (*ista*). No translator would translate this literally as "she" in such a context. This common light is an "it" in English, for in English the use of "she" implies personhood, and a simple or common light, such as that from a lamp in the hall, does not have personhood.

However, translating the pronoun denoting the uncommon Light is more complicated, because this Light does have personal characteristics for Augustine. Herein lies the flip side of the difficulty. While the translator can, without argument, translate gendered Latin pronouns for inanimate objects as simply "it," the translator must think more deeply about her translations for those pronouns which denote God. Unlike a common light, Augustine's Light which created him and loves him doesn't seem to be an "it." Denoting the Light of the world as an "it" will, also, strike the reader's ear as odd, although the neuter pronoun may be less bothersome to some English speakers than the feminine pronoun. The translator is in a bind. On one hand Augustine effortlessly denotes the Light as "She" just as he denotes every light as "she," and such is usually rendered into English as "it." On the other hand, this Light is God who in English is usually denoted by "He." Yet, the translator must wonder if she is, indeed, being faithful to the text, if she changes Augustine's "She" to "He." After all Augustine rebels against the idea of God as physically male⁵ and uses as much feminine imagery to describe the Deity as he does masculine.⁶ The translator is in a dilemma, not wanting to make too much of the feminine pronoun and, yet, not wanting to make too little of it either.

5. For example, see Augustine's discussion against the Manichean idea of a material God in *Confessions* VII.i; VII.xiv.

6. See Robert O'Connell, *Imagination and Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1986), 23. "Not only Father and Doctor, He—or She: Augustine is even brave enough to raise that question—has been Mother and Nurse to us, lifting us up when we could not walk, carrying us when we could not run, suckling and caressing and anxious only the we be 'little ones' enough to accept and confide totally in that maternal care." See also O'Connell, *Soundings in St. Augustine's*

In the many available translations of the *Confessions*, there seems to be a standard solution to translating Augustine's gendered pronouns. Bourke, Chadwick, Pine-Coffin, Pusey, Sheed, Warner, Watts, Blaiklock, Outler, Ryan, Pilkington, and now Boulding, while translating the masculine pronouns used for God as "He," translate the feminine pronouns used for the Light in this passage as "it." At first glance these translators seem to have found a logical solution. After all, many of the masculine nouns used for God are the names of people—Lord, Father, Teacher, Leader, Helper. Thus, a case can be made for denoting these with a pronoun that suggests personhood. Contrarily, many of the neuter and feminine nouns are the names of abstract ideas—Light, Wisdom, Truth, Love, Word, Beginning. The corresponding pronouns can be translated more impersonally as "it." Thus, the solution most commonly used is to substitute "He" when Augustine denotes God with a word that is a person (Lord, Teacher, Father, etc.) and to use "it" when Augustine denotes God with a word that represents a thing (Light, Truth, Wisdom, Love).

However, this solution is not as workable as it seems at first glance. Even the translators who choose it often find it difficult to use consistently. Most of the translators stray from this formula from time to time. For example, in passage VII.xviii, Augustine writes ". . . *quoniam verbum caro factum est, ut infantiae nostrae lactesceret sapientia tua, per quam creasti omnia . . . verbum enim tuum, aeterna veritas, superioribus creaturae tuae partibus supereminens, subditos erigit ad se ipsam.*" This literally reads, ". . . because the Word was made flesh, so that your Wisdom, by which all was created, might turn to milk for our infancy. . . . Indeed your Word, the Eternal Truth, surpassing even the most superior of your creatures, raises those who were cast down up to herself." In this passage, a translator who is using the above formula would use neuter pronouns to refer to *Verbum* (Word), *Sapientia* (Wisdom), and *Veritas* (Truth)—all abstract terms. Of the translators listed above Pusey, Pilkington, and Warner do so. The others all break from the formula. Watts translates the passage, "For the Word was made flesh, that by thy wisdom, by which thou createdst all things, **he** might suckle our infancy. . . . For thy Word, the eternal Truth, being so highly exalted above the highest of thy creatures, reaches up those that were cast down, unto **itself**." In the first sentence, Word, a neuter noun along with Truth, a feminine noun, is given the

Imagination (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 93. ". . . for the God Whom we deserted never deserts us. He—or is it She?—is like a mother anxiously fretting over her straying child; her care pursues him tirelessly, stubbornly, no matter where he wanders." See *Confessions* VII.xiv, for Augustine's description of a maternal doctor who soothes and heals him.

masculine pronoun even though the verb (*lactesceret*—to turn to milk) is one that requires Christ to be thought of in feminine imagery. The feminine *ipsam* in the second sentence is changed to a neuter. Blaiklock translates the pronouns in the same way. Boulding, Pine-Coffin, Sheed, Ryan, Bourke, and Chadwick change the feminine *ipsam* in the second sentence to the masculine equivalent in English—"himself."

The reason these translators have broken from the formula may be because in this passage these abstract words refer to a specific person, Christ, who is not simply an "it." The Word is not an impersonal abstraction, but the second person of the Trinity. Thus, these translators used a pronoun that implies more personhood in English than "it." Truly, for Augustine, none of the three persons of the trinity is impersonal. Indeed, the key to Augustine's theology and philosophy is that God is personal. God has a loving relationship with Augustine. In the first passage, the Light, the creator and sustainer, lifts Augustine up, beats back his weakness, speaks in a maternal voice claiming to be the food that sustains, and cries out like the burning bush claiming to be Being qua Being, a Being which is personally interested in Augustine and in all of us. In the second passage, the Word suckles human beings with the milk of wisdom and picks them up to cherish them. It is understandable, theologically, why these translators balked at using the word "it" to denote such a Being. Yet, I maintain, that it is not accurate to change all these pronouns that denote God to "He" when Augustine uses all three gendered pronouns and uses corresponding gendered imagery with them. After all, something is surely lost when a translation reads "he might suckle our infancy."

As a solution, I suggest that despite potential problems the best translation is a literal one when choosing pronouns to denote Augustine's God. The obvious problem is that such a translation might cause the reader to think that Augustine intentionally denoted God as masculine at times, feminine at other times, and neuter the rest of the time, when in fact he was simply using the grammatically correct pronoun. However, this is no more dangerous a threat than that posed by the standard translations. These could cause a reader to believe that Augustine thought of God as a male person most of the time, and as an impersonal and neuter Platonic form at other times, when again Augustine was simply following the rules of Latin grammar. This is evident perhaps most clearly in Boulding's new translation which titles Chapter 7 of the *Confessions* "Neo-Platonism Frees Augustine's Mind." A close reading of the text shows that Augustine believes a personal and maternal God frees

his mind, not the books of Platonism or the impersonal neuter Being that those books describe.

A careful look at Augustine's philosophy shows that while literal translations of Augustine's text might shock some readers more than Augustine intended, the benefit of the literal translation far outweighs that danger. First, it is inclusive in the same way Augustine was inclusive. Second, the literal translation more accurately portrays Augustine's very broad and complex view of God. Finally, such a translation, by personalizing rather than neutering the feminine abstract nouns brings forth the notion of a personal God of grace and love, a notion that is central to Augustine's thought.

Today, a great many Christians are coming to believe that the constant use of the masculine pronoun to denote God in some ways gives a false sense of God as a masculine being. Contemporary theologians such as Rosemary Ruether, Elizabeth Johnson, and Mary Daly have persuaded many believers that exclusively male language has influenced our image of God to the point of distorting our understanding of what God truly is. To remedy this, some liturgists are replacing all pronouns with a repetition of the word God, while some who are even more daring are keeping the masculine pronoun in some places and using the feminine pronoun in others. This is problematic, as many scholars have explained, when Biblical texts and commentaries are revised to seem more inclusive than they really were. However, Augustine, with his gendered Latin, actually does use inclusive language. And if it is misguided to mistranslate, in order to be politically correct, those who do not use inclusive language, it is equally misguided to mistranslate Augustine who is inclusive despite his lack of a feminist political agenda. In addition, for those seeking to write new liturgies and prayers, Augustine gives a model for talking about God that is personal, relational, paternal and maternal.

Augustine's model flows from his theology, which surely was influenced by his language, just as our theology is influenced by the language we are given to describe God. Augustine never used exclusive language. For Augustine God is not a He, a She, or an It. These pronouns correspond with the words which denote God, not with God qua God. Because the Latin writer is forced to change the gender of the pronoun with the gender of the word to which it corresponds, the Latin reader is less likely to pin a gender on God and more likely to see such gender roles as part of the language rather than the metaphysics of the divine being. This is important for Augustine who was

against the materialistic view of God as a physical man in the sky⁷ and who believed that God honored both sexes as creations *imago dei*.⁸

Thus, the need for such inclusive language, the need not to give priority to the masculine traits of God, is a theological need for Augustine whose complex understanding of God is one of the primary reasons Augustine had so many different names and corresponding pronouns for his deity. For Augustine, God is not just a Lord or Father, though He certainly is these. God is, also, the mother who suckles the infantile human at her breasts⁹ and calls the childish prodigal into her lap.¹⁰ God is the Physician who heals wounds and mends broken sight.¹¹ God is the Light which shines like the Platonic Good,¹² but then lifts the human seeker into her arms like no disinterested Platonic Form ever could.¹³ God is the

7. Again, see *Confessions* VII.1. See also Sermon 52.15–16; 117.5. All sermon quotes and reference numbers are taken from *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, N.Y.:New City Press, 1990).
8. For example, see Sermon 184.2 “Let men rejoice, let women rejoice. Christ has been born, a man; he has been born of a woman, and each sex has been honored.” See, also, Sermon 190.2–3 on the subject that God created both sexes, and redeems and resurrects both sexes. See, also, Sermon 52.17–18 on the subject that it is the mind and not the gendered flesh which is *imago dei*.
9. Besides *Confessions* VII.xviii, see *Beata Vita* I.4 and *Contra Academicos* I.I.3 and I.I.4 where Augustine recounts seeking refuge and nourishment at the bosom of Philosophy. I agree with O’Connell that Philosophy is another of Augustine’s “code-words” for the second person of the trinity. (See O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996.), 34: “. . . to understand Augustine, we must learn how to capitalize a number of key terms in his writings—especially the terms which are his code-words for the Eternal Christ: words like Philosophy, Reason, Intellect, Order, Truth—and Wisdom.”
10. See *Confessions* VII.14; see also O’Connell’s description of this passage in *St. Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 36. “Back now he comes, content to climb upon her waiting lap; for one last protest he looks back upon the way on which he ventured forth so hopefully in the morning brightness. This is her moment: with tender maternal hand she caresses his fevered head, gently turns his eyes away from what has been the cause of his complaining, places his head against her breast.”
11. See *Confessions* II.vii; IV.xii; X.xxviii; and Sermon 87.14.
12. See, besides the passage in *Confessions* VII.10, *Soliloquia* I.3: “O God, the Truth, in, by, and through whom all truths are true; the Wisdom in, by, and through whom all are wise who are wise . . . the Intelligible light, in, by, and through whom all intelligible things are illumined.” Trans. J. H. S. Burleigh in *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).
13. I do not deny that there are passages in the works of Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Iamblicus, and others in which the Good seems to have some property of grace or care. But I believe that there is no comparison in any of these writers to the prevalence of metaphors of grace and care in Augustine. It is, after all inconceivable to image Plotinus commanding the One to “Open my ears and say to my soul, I am your salvation.” (*aperi eas et dic animae meae: salus tua ego sum* (*Confessions* I.v)). As Dodds famously said, “Plotinus never gossiped with the One, as Augustine

Wisdom who seduces us,¹⁴ the Truth who bids us find her,¹⁵ the Word that created us,¹⁶ and the Being by which all things are that are.¹⁷ In Augustine's poetic language God takes on the persona of a mighty Lord who disciplines us and a loving Mother who comforts us, while still being Being-itself by which all that is, is. Augustine's language gives a broad understanding of God and God's many attributes, some masculine, some feminine, some neither. Augustine's language requires the reader to forego a one-sided description of his God.

Most importantly, theologically and philosophically, Augustine's multi-dimensional understanding of God includes the dimension of grace and love. It is Augustine's understanding of God as loving that most warrants a literal translation of Augustine's pronouns. This is shown in the first passage above, VII.x, which describes Augustine's intellectual conversion to Christianity. In this section, Augustine speaks of glimpsing the Light that has created him. This Light, which is above his soul, has many of the qualities of the Platonic Sun that shines outside the cave in Plato's *Republic* making all things what they are and allowing the human mind to classify and understand what all things are. In the usual translation, this parallel is even more striking. Pine-Coffin translates part of the passage,

What I saw was something quite, quite different from any light we know on earth. It shone above my mind, but not in the way that oil floats above water or the sky hangs over the earth. It was above me because it was itself the Light that made me, and I was below because I was made by it. All who know the truth know this Light, and all who know this Light know eternity. It is the Light that charity knows. Eternal Truth, true Love, beloved Eternity—all this, my God, you are, and it is to you that I sigh by night and day.

This Light seems disinterested, metaphysically floating over Augustine's soul. But when translated literally as I did earlier, the same passage becomes more personal:

No this light was not that, but another, completely other than all of these. Nor was she above my mind, as oil is above water, nor as the sky is above the earth; but superior, because she made me, and I was inferior, because I

did." Dodds, "Augustine's *Confessions*," *Hibber Journal* 26 (1927-28) 471 in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 167.

14. See Sermon 23.10; 56.4; *Confessions* III.iv; X.ii; X.xxvii.

15. See *Confessions* I.v; IV.v; V.xii; X.xxiv; and Sermon 28.5.

16. See *Confessions*, VII.xviii.

17. See *Soliloquia* I.3; *Confessions*, VII.x.

was made by her. Whoever knows truth, knows her, and whoever knows her, knows eternity. Love knows her. O eternal Truth and True Love and Lovely Eternity! You are my God, to you I sigh day and night.

In the literal passage, the Light—denoted by 'she' rather than 'it,' does not appear as a disinterested neuter Platonic form. Rather, the Light, sharing the feminine pronoun with Wisdom, Love, and Eternity, evokes images of maternal care.

Indeed, Augustine's ability to conceive of a Light of Truth which is interested in the seeker of Truth, may well have been bound to his native language attributing gendered pronouns to things and abstractions as well as people. Truth, Wisdom, and Light were feminine in gender, and perhaps this gave rise to his vision of these as maternal and, sometimes, bridal figures reaching out to comfort him. These feminine images worked with the masculine images that arise with words like Father, Lord, Teacher, and King, and with the less personal images connected to neuter words like Beginning and Word to create a multi-dimensional understanding of God. All these images together form an idea of a God who is, indeed, Being itself—the creator and sustenance of all that exists, but who at the same time is interested, loving, and caring in a way that surpasses both masculine and feminine metaphors. To fully convey his deep understanding of God, I believe that literal translations of his gendered pronouns are needed.

Crucial to the argument is the fact that Augustine was first a rhetorician. He knew and taught the importance of the use of words. His account of his intellectual conversion from a despairing skepticism to a hopeful Christianity is done in beautiful and poetic Latin. His language not only describes his own experience but seeks to lead the reader to a similar experience. His rhetorical skill entices and lifts those who might still be lost in doubt. The beauty of the language is not a mere decoration but crucial to the reader or listener's understanding and persuasion.¹⁸ Thus, it is of the utmost importance to translate such a passage with skill and integrity. While there are dangers of reading too much into Augustine's use of feminine as well as masculine and neuter pronouns to denote God, there are equal and greater dangers in not reading enough into his gendered Latin. The view of a maternal and paternal Being-itself who loves us is implicit in Augustine's writings. I believe that using literal translations of Augustine's Latin pronouns best conveys this complex view of God and divine love in Augustine's text.

18. See *De Doctrina* IV.2.3.

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