

The Language of Cosmogony:
Literary Experimentalism and Metaphor in
Plato's *Timaeus* and Augustine's *Confessions*.

Guy Carney

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Abstract.

Literary critical discussions of cosmogony usually examine ideas and assumptions about authorship and poetic creation which are formed in light of inherited models of the world's creation. Far less attention has been paid to actual representations of the world's creation, the literary theory and practice of those discourses on cosmogony which influenced later philosophical and literary thought. This thesis contributes to the task of filling that critical gap by analysing two foundational Western discourses on cosmogony: Plato's *Timaeus*, and Augustine's *Confessions*.

In analysing these two texts, the thesis makes two main arguments: first, that the problem of ineffability inherent to cosmogony prompts an author's recourse to experimental literary methods, to new ways of deploying narrative, genre, and style; second, that the theory and practice of metaphor in these accounts bring into focus the constitutive role of language in "creating" rather than merely reflecting knowledge about this difficult subject.

If classical and late antique works such as the *Timaeus* and the *Confessions* show a noticeable metalinguistic consciousness, then perhaps subsequent works which engage with a model of the creation show similar tendencies. The thesis pursues this idea by highlighting how the concept or myth of divine creation tends to demand, or is frequently invoked in, attempts to rethink or critique human creativity. I read Dante's *Commedia* as an exemplary instance of this phenomenon. The continued importance of these foundational cosmogonies is evident in that a discourse of divine creation is deployed in modern discussions of liminal types of knowledge and the "limits" of human creativity.

Declaration.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Guy Carney

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A Note on Primary Texts and Referencing Style.

Where possible, references to primary texts (original and translated) will be to the original paragraphing, rather than to the page number of a particular edition.

Translations are not my own but refer to standard and accepted editions.

References to the *Timaeus* are to: Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, translated by Henry Desmond Pritchard Lee, Penguin Classics, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977). References to Lee's introduction and notes are by author-date-page number. References to the original Greek are to: Plato, *Timaeus*, edited by R.D. Archer-Hind, (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1888). Citations are in the customary manner, referring to the page numbers of an early edition, Stephanus, printed in the margin of the translation (1578).

References to the *Confessions* are to: Augustine, *Confessions*, translated with introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Citations denote in order: book in capitalised Roman numerals, medieval paragraphing in small Roman numerals, and modern paragraphing in Arabic numerals, for example *Confessions* XII.ii.3. References to Chadwick's introduction and notes are by author-date-page number. References to the original Latin and to James J. O'Donnell's commentary on the *Confessions* are to Augustine, *Confessions, Latin Text with English Commentary*, James J. O'Donnell. 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); online at <<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/conf>>. Because O'Donnell's notes follow the organisation of the *Confessions* (and the online version only reflects organization of the text), my references reflect this structure, using Arabic numerals instead of Roman numerals, which I use for the *Confessions* itself; for example: (O'Donnell 1992, 7.9.13). Where relevant, I will also include the particular word or phrase O'Donnell discusses, such as: (O'Donnell 1992, 7.9.13, *quendam hominem*).

References to the original Italian and to the English translation of Dante's *Commedia* are to: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, edited and translated with a commentary by Charles S. Singleton. 6 vols. 2nd print., with corrections ed, *Bollingen Series; 80*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1971-75).

Secondary material is referenced by author-date-page number, for example: (Vance 1986, p.3). Where a website is used, I cite the author and the date, for example: (Johansen 1998).