

# Beyond the Horizon Glows: A Poetic Reimagining of Augustine's Philosophy of *Memoria*

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# Research Topic

- *Confessions*: memory plays a deep role in articulating what it means to be a **timebound human** trying to know an **eternal God**.
- Memory: a deeper seeing and understanding of ourselves and the whole, defined as God's truth and design
- Augustinian framework: from personal recollection to exploring more abstract notions, such as memory, time, and creation
  - Explains how personal memory connects with the whole, how it serves as an entryway to a great distinguished thing

**Fig. 1.** "ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO  
DEPICTED IN STAINED-GLASS  
WINDOW IN PHOENIX."  
Photograph. Flickr, 12 June 2007.



# Research Questions

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- How can one understand the concept of “memory” without first understanding one’s own memories?
- How does retrospection act as a kind of pilgrimage to the very core of the human heart?
- What can memory tell us about the soul’s innate longing to orient itself to God?

*Augustinus Hipponensis Episcopus Ecclesiae D  
St. Augustine, bishop of the Church of Hippo in Africa  
Paris chez J. Morille rue St. Jacques aux Colonnes d'Henri*

**Fig. 2.** “Saint Augustine.” Photograph.  
Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia  
Britannica, 25 May 2016.

# Informing Poetics: Augustine's Philosophy of *Memoria*

- “[I]t is through the exercise of... memory that the individual—time-bound, imperfect, mortal—is enabled to know and recognize both him/herself and, most especially, Truth” (Fredriksen, “Augustine on God” 133).
- Memory as a “**re-seeing**”
  - Who we are as fallen humans, in a state of “forgetfulness” concerning the things of God
  - See beyond the appearance of things – understanding the memory of God imprinted both in the soul and on creation
- My Collection
  - Core thematic string is the idea of pilgrimage
  - Exhibits a movement from appearances to personal history to a deeper history
  - “Deep calls to deep” (*New International Version*, Ps. 42:7)



# Informing Poetics

Platonic sense of *anamnesis*:  
theory of recollection that  
explains knowledge as memory

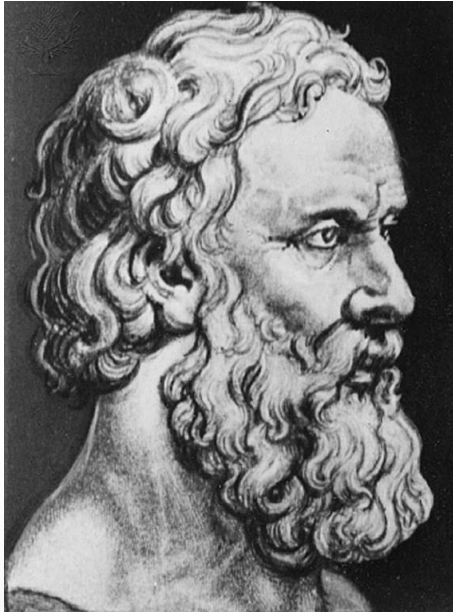


Fig. 3. “Plato.” Photograph.  
*Britannica ImageQuest*,  
Encyclopædia Britannica, 22  
April 2020.

C.S. Lewis’ “The Weight of Glory”:  
memory or nostalgia is not the meaning  
itself—it’s only the reminder of it



Fig. 4. “C S Lewis.”  
Photograph. *Britannica  
ImageQuest*, Encyclopædia  
Britannica, 25 May 2016.



# Methodology

- The poet discerns patterns between the **individual** and the **world** and explores deep relationships to establish who we are and what it means to live as we do.
- **Poetic voice:** my voice gives way to larger voices to explore the connection between the personal and collective nature of memory.
- **Imagery:** horizons and ocean
- Poetic **epithets:** echo the formulaic conventions of Homeric epithets that were used by poets to recite from memory. For example, “wind-tipped” in “The Thing Itself”

**Fig. 5.** “Reflections of white clouds and blue sky in the water of the Indian Ocean in the Maldives, Indian Ocean, Asia.”

Photograph. *Britannica ImageQuest*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016.

Then, I noticed the beginning thinness  
of the light, late afternoon, a glint of bronze  
on the leaves, corn stalks drooping like weary soldiers.

I was amazed at the silent wonder of passing time—  
clouds the size of hands moved on in the sky,  
casting shadows on the lap of the brown becoming world.

I tried to hold the parts of my life in that one glance,  
for to test the strength of a thing, you must look  
at the places where all its pieces fit together—

rain-soaked earth in September's early chill, the feel  
of knotted wool on the back of my grandmother's sheep,  
all manner of stillness and prayer, salt-deep ocean air

as thick as Scriptures, small hands like my mother's,  
a love for pretty weeds and for the deepness of blue,  
a hope my friends will forever see snowmelt on the hills,

and then, this was my life, woven moments crossing  
like grids in a city, empty but for the initial feeling.  
Smudge glows on a horizon, this snap-knowing of who I was,

like how voices always echo over the waters,  
how thunderbolts always settle into the soul,  
how bones always know the dust they were born from.

## “A Sudden Life on a Late Afternoon”

While still a child, I sensed only  
my name for I had no memories yet  
to tell me who I was,  
how the bark of a tree glows  
like a rain-soaked gravestone,  
how freshness recedes to cold,  
settling to a thick load in the bones.

But the shadows are never neat, never tame.  
I need more than the memory of muscle and space  
because the birdbath in my grandmother's yard  
wafts like the frost-sloped waves of the sea  
when I stood on the beach for the first time.  
Have I come here too late?  
Have the shadows already passed  
with soft nods away?  
No, I hear my cousin's laughter  
while he plays with sparklers  
as though from some closed depth  
beneath me, spitting pinpricks  
of light, shining unattainable  
refractions, like the glow  
of jeweled flowers  
in a garden left long ago.

## “Securing the Shadows”



## “Securing the Shadows”

How to descend, to take the stick  
and beat away the thin film of web  
separating the nows and thens?  
A pilgrimage deeper than deep,  
past worn shoes and muted TVs,  
peeling barns with warm hay smells,  
beyond the pale faces of my friends  
and bowls of homemade jam—  
where there is a huge, ancient stillness,  
where every common bush flames with God,  
a lingering aftermath moving  
from stale light, cold smoke,  
to something unnamed, unknown,  
unnoticed, a ladybug on a sill,  
balancing at the edge of the world.

## “Eden”

The sun shines, thick and minted gold through the pines  
as the fluting of the wood thrush trails over cool rock.  
You ask yourself if you would love this if it could last,  
the summers roosting in the heat, the winters slipping away,  
but I tell you, you're still waiting for the world to begin.

Sometimes I see it in early spring, rising very far in the hills,  
white and hidden like a lily pressed into bedrock.  
Never again will life end. I remember still the colors  
all awake even in the darkness of my garden.

I didn't know my voice, if one were given to me,  
would be so full of grief, flickers of fire and dust.  
My garden is not your world, but you traveled far  
to reach here, and now my words stir the meadows  
like a wind—do you feel you are coming close to it?  
You must be, for even the ghost of paradise  
leaves things like you shuddering in its wake.

# “Eden”

It is like nearing the ocean for the first time:  
tasting something new in the air, dirt gives way  
to sand and grit, weeds shifting to thin horsehair.  
And the sound, the quality of echo, an almost hush  
that marks the end of the world left behind.  
A sense of opening, ancient pounding  
that curls and smooths in a swell of foam.

It's a warm finger between the shoulders  
to hear that resound like the voice of God.  
Don't resist the nostalgia. Let the soft wind  
unstitch your memory—let it not smell of ash  
or blood on the thorns, but soft tones of salt,  
the scent of my lost flowers in the place  
you know in another time, within your soul.

And here, why should your heart not dance  
near the foaming pastures beneath the moonglow  
with the old-new world and all of time before you?

# “The Thing Itself”

Today, I spent the afternoon walking on a bridge  
thinking of a friend who left long ago.  
He had gray eyes, smolders of iron,  
a sky sailing on water beyond the shadow poplars.

Each moment, I bury something I love:  
    the peach smudge in the clouds,  
    a preschool dress with its lacy collar,  
    the glisten of ice, the rhythm of numbers.  
Nothing decomposes, but I still live  
in the gulf between where I've been  
and where I have yet to be.

Yes, how to travel through time:  
    a night outside the car filled with the whirl  
    of snow, taste of stale coffee on my tongue,  
    remembering the voice of my mother  
    when she said it was okay to be tired.  
And tone blurs like tracks in the mud,  
but the end of the cavern,  
where my feet sink into soft water-sand,  
I will never plumb its bottom.

# “The Thing Itself”

The earth, it tells me of God,  
who often comes like the fireflies.  
I knew the way, through the ground,  
into the leaves, but it took me years  
to be still enough to see the memories  
lurching on the shore at dawn,  
quiet enough to hear the shadows  
on the cave walls whispering of Love.

The scent of green things always floats in  
from these unseen horizons.

The bite-pain of that fishhook in my toe.

Streetlights outside of school, ember-full.

Silver chimes. Spinning vinyl. Sunday choir.

All of it is only a remembering,  
a note of a horn blowing from a far-off country,  
and these bones, they are forever folding  
into the dust, for to return is like a bird  
with a blinding hunger to know the sky.

The water below the bridge is a field  
dotted with deep blue asters,  
rippling like wind-tipped waves—

listen now,  
the ocean is not far away.



# Conclusion

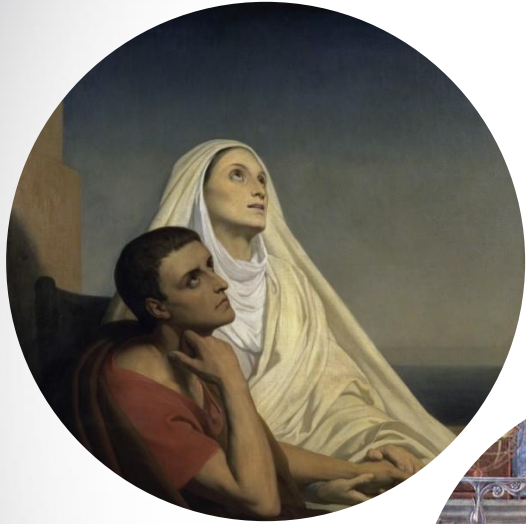


Fig. 6. “Saint Augustine and Saint Monica.” Fine Art. *Britannica ImageQuest*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016.



Fig. 7. “Algeria: Saint Augustine of Hippo Regius (Annaba), painted by Sandro Botticelli, 1480.” Photograph. *Britannica ImageQuest*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2 June 2022.

- Augustine’s *memoria* philosophy: memory is much more than storage for past moments or feelings.
- These poems follow this framework, embodying a relationship between the **highest** and the **innermost**.

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