The Anamnesis of Literary Memory

Capote, Proust, Borges, Faulkner, Percy, Foote, and Eliot in the light of Aquinas

by Christopher Carson (July 2025)

The Nostalgia of the Infinite (Giorgio de Chirico, 1911)

I. Prologue — On Remembering Rightly

The Christian imagination, particularly as it reaches maturity in Thomistic metaphysics, regards memory neither as a mental scrapbook nor a purely emotional archive. Rather, memory is a theological organ—a mode by which the soul engages time in view of eternity. It is the inward echo of divine plenitude in the finite frame of human life. It is, in Aquinas's idiom, a power of the soul, shaped by grace and ordered toward beatitude.

This essay is a meditation on the recovery of that vision. Its purpose is not merely to analyze literature, but to read seven authors—Capote, Proust, Borges, Faulkner, Percy, Foote, and Eliot—as anamnetic pilgrims, each grappling with memory not only as theme but as structure, not merely as content but as sacramental form.

Capote's dreamlike reverie, Proust's involuntary epiphanies, Borges's recursive mirrors, Faulkner's ancestral trauma, Percy's existential yearning, Foote's historical reverence, Eliot's liturgical spiral—all of them grope toward the sacred. Some do so explicitly, others obliquely. But all, in their finest moments, participate in a deeper liturgy: the soul's attempt to remember its origin, its telos, and its beloved.

II. Thomistic Prelude — Memory as Theological Organ

Aquinas inherits from Augustine and perfects a view of memory as more than a psychological utility. In the *Summa Theologiae* (I, Q.79, Art. 6), memory is treated as a function of the intellectual appetite, linked not to imagination but to

rational recollection—the retention of intelligible species. But in the *De Veritate* (Q.10), he discloses its deeper role: memory is not merely a vessel for the past; it is the groundwork of hope. For Thomas, memory is the inner analog of divine foreknowledge. To remember rightly is to prepare the soul for its eschatological completion.

How can hope be rooted in memory? Because memory, properly ordered, retains not only events but covenants—it recalls the promise latent in being. Memory is where the mind rehearses the pattern of God's fidelity. Thus, to remember is not simply to look backward but to orient the will forward, in expectation of the eternal. In this light, memory becomes eschatological. It binds what has been and what shall be into the living present, and thus becomes a spiritual faculty, not a mental one.

This is why Aquinas places memory under the cardinal virtue of prudence (II-II, Q.49). Prudence is not cautiousness—it is right reason applied to action in time. And memory, for Aquinas, is one of the integral parts of prudence, because we cannot choose well unless we remember rightly. Just as liturgical anamnesis makes Calvary present in the Mass, so does memory, in the Thomistic view, make the providential shape of one's life present to the soul.

Hence, memory is not a backward glance but a sacramental faculty. And it culminates in the Eucharist—the supreme act of anamnesis.

In the liturgical tradition, especially in the Roman Rite, anamnesis is the very heart of the consecration. The priest speaks not in metaphor but in metaphysics: "Do this in memory of me." Here, memory is not interior sentiment. It is making-present. The Mass does not recall Christ's sacrifice as a past event; it participates in it, through the eternal priesthood of Christ who exists outside of time. This is memory as sacrament.

Each of the writers we examine in this work, knowingly or not, participates in this structure. Their acts of remembrance are not passive—they are performative, intentional, metaphysical. They do not merely chronicle the past. They attempt to inhabit it, to recover a hidden pattern, to locate the soul in a cosmos that still shimmers with meaning.

And each, in his own way, reveals that memory—like the Eucharist—ultimately points to Christ: the one in whom all things cohere, all time is fulfilled, and all longing is gathered into plenitude.

III. Capote — Memory as Elemental Sacrament

> *The true beloveds of this world are in their lover's eyes lilacs opening, ship lights, school bells, a landscape, remembered conversations, friends, a child's Sunday, lost voices, one's favorite suit, autumn and all seasons, memory, yes, it being the earth and water of existence, memory.* —Truman Capote, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*

This passage—lyrical and incantatory—appears early in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, yet it functions almost like a Eucharistic epiclesis: a calling-down of grace upon the ordinary. For Capote, memory is not primarily narrative, not moral, not even personal in the way Proust's is. It is elemental. It emerges from earth and water, and returns to them, like a liturgy composed of dust and rain.

Capote was only twenty-four when he wrote this novel, but he had already formed an aesthetic theology—perhaps unbaptized, but unmistakably sacramental. His "true beloveds" are not abstract ideals or Platonic forms. They are felt things: the

smell of autumn, the sound of school bells, a favorite suit. This is not sentimentality—it is incarnationalism. In each of these objects, Capote discerns the trace of presence, absence, and longing—the very same emotional grammar that the Church locates in the Eucharist.

Capote's language of memory is steeped in the sensual and the sacramental. Consider a passage from *A Christmas Memory*, his semi-autobiographical story of childhood spent with an eccentric cousin:

> *We huddle in the kitchen, and when the candlelight catches her face it makes her seem young again. The past is all lit up inside her eyes. 'Buddy,' she says softly, 'do you remember how we used to make those kites?'*

Here, memory does not passively occur—it enacts a moment of transfiguration. The kitchen becomes a sanctuary; the candlelight, a kind of glory; and the remembered kitemaking, a shared Eucharist of joy. Capote's prose performs what Aquinas would call participated being—the finite recollection becomes a signum pointing toward the infinite mystery of love, time, and the enduring soul.

Even more striking is Capote's description of the fruitcake-making ritual in the same story. The characters gather ingredients—some bought, some begged, some stolen—and then prepare cakes to send to people they admire but scarcely know, including President Roosevelt. The gesture is both absurd and sublime:

> *It's always the same: a morning arrives in November, and my friend, as though officially inaugurating the Christmas*

time of year, exclaims: ‘It’s fruitcake weather!’

This is more than quaint domesticity. It is ritual, and memory makes it holy. The act of recalling and repeating this ritual year after year makes the kitchen a liturgical space. The fruitcake becomes an oblation—imperfect, lovingly offered, absurdly generous. In Thomistic terms, this is a natural sacrament: an outward sign of inward grace, preparing the heart for divine love through the medium of human affection and memory.

Capote’s sensitivity to the frailty of joy is what elevates his memory-writing from nostalgia to metaphysics. In *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, memory is already tinged with the tragic knowledge that the beloveds of this world are passing. The boy Joel, wandering through a decaying Southern mansion and his own half-dreamt interior life, recalls lost scenes and sensations that are more real to him than the people around him. He experiences what Aquinas calls the *intensio animae*—the mind’s stretching toward things not presently before it, which, paradoxically, reveals their greater reality.

Capote’s emphasis on childhood memory is particularly Thomistic in this regard. For Aquinas, the soul’s first encounters with beauty, order, and affection leave indelible imprints. These early impressions are not easily dismissed; they form the foundation of the natural desire for God. Capote’s world is not overtly religious, yet it is marked by an unquenchable hunger for presence—for someone, somewhere, who will not disappear:

It’s odd, but when I think of us now, those afternoons, I can still smell the twine, the newspaper, the fresh-cold air. I can still see her face. And it makes me want to cry. But I don’t.

What is this but grief for Eden? A longing not just for the past, but for a permanence that memory can approach but never hold. Capote's restraint—"but I don't [cry]"—is not emotional deadness. It is reverence. It is the quiet ache of knowing that the beautiful must pass through death to be transfigured.

From a Thomistic standpoint, Capote's memory-vision can be understood as an echo of the sacramental structure of creation. He does not need to preach theology because he lives within the felt grammar of its truths: the goodness of the created world, the presence of divine mystery in the particular, the ache of loss as a prelude to redemption. His writing is haunted by the sense that every moment is a threshold, every memory a veil through which something—Someone—is trying to shine.

In this way, Capote becomes, almost unwittingly, a priest of the ordinary. His liturgy is domestic, his host is a fruitcake, his altar is the kitchen table, and his tabernacle is the human heart. But the logic is the same as in the Mass: this, too, is my body—do this in memory of me.

IV. Proust — Memory as Aesthetic Anamnesis

> *And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray … my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it. And all from my cup of tea.* —Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*

No discussion of literary memory can bypass the taste of the

madeleine. It has become a cultural shorthand, almost a parody of itself, but to reduce it to a symbol of nostalgia is to misunderstand its metaphysical force. What Proust dramatizes in this passage is not sentimentality. It is a theory of being. A metaphysics, even a sacramental ontology, disguised as a sensory epiphany.

The narrator's experience of memory here is not voluntary—and this is key. It is not a deliberate recollection, but an anamnesis in the deepest Christian sense: not merely a remembering, but a re-presencing—a return not to the idea of an experience but to the experience itself, in its full phenomenological and emotional reality. This involuntary memory collapses time and reinstates the self in its original form. It is a moment of ontological disclosure.

This is where Aquinas becomes unexpectedly, perhaps startlingly, relevant. For Thomas, knowledge arises not only through direct apprehension (intellectus) but through a deeper participation in the form of the thing known. All created things are finite participations in the Divine Ideas—reflections, however dim, of the actus essendi purus that is God. The mind does not merely register these forms—it yearns for their plenitude, their claritas, their full intelligibility.

What Proust's madeleine reveals is this: the form of that childhood experience still exists within the narrator—not as a conceptual trace, but as a living structure, awaiting reactivation. The tea-dipped cake becomes a kind of natural sacramental—a *signum naturae*, as the medievals would call it—a material thing that unexpectedly discloses a higher truth. The mouth becomes, for a moment, the site of revelation.

He writes:

> *But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after*

> *the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered … the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time … bearing resiliently, on tiny and almost impalpable drops of their essence, the immense edifice of memory.*

Here, Proust is not simply recording an impression. He is constructing a cathedral of essence. The madeleine, dipped in tea, becomes a Eucharistic wafer, soaked in memory rather than wine, transubstantiated not into Christ's body, but into being itself—the fragile architecture of existence made momentarily radiant. This is not theology, and yet it is perilously close.

Aquinas insists that beauty consists in three properties: *integritas* (wholeness), *consonantia* (proportion), and *claritas* (radiance). The madeleine episode is beautiful precisely because it reveals, through the humble and the particular, something of the whole. It restores the integritas of childhood, the consonantia between past and present, and the claritas of emotional truth long buried.

Throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust will replay this structure—objects, gestures, scenes that act as triggers for profound memory: the clink of a spoon, the sound of a bell, the curve of a garden path. These are not plot devices. They are liturgical gestures, moments that unseal interiority and bring the soul closer to what it once was, and perhaps always was.

But Proust's memory, like all memory this side of Eden, is haunted by loss. It is only in the absence of things that their meaning is fully grasped. This is the condition of fallen time: we remember best what we cannot touch. And so the madeleine is both gift and wound. It returns the past, but also reminds the narrator—and us—that nothing in this world lasts. The essence that memory captures is real, but

ungraspable. It is given, then withdrawn.

This tension, too, Aquinas understands. The soul longs for being, for permanence, for communion with the source of all intelligibility. But it is trapped in time, in flux, in the fading of forms. And yet: grace pierces even here. Involuntary memory is, in Proust, a grace unasked for. It offers, however fleetingly, a vision of plenitude:

> *Perhaps the immensity which had opened before me was not infinite, but simply long in time.*

This is Proust's half-articulated intuition of *aevum*—Aquinas's term for the time of angels and beatified souls: not eternal like God, not temporal like man, but a middle mode of duration that touches the eternal. The madeleine opens a window onto this middle realm. Not quite eternity. But more than time.

If Capote's memory is elemental, Proust's is ontological. He does not seek to preserve the past—he seeks to penetrate it, to retrieve its form. And though he does not name Christ, the structure of his longing is unmistakably Christian. He aches for permanence, for transfiguration, for a moment that will not pass. He finds it, briefly, in memory. The question his whole novel raises—but never answers—is whether there exists a memory that does not fade.

Aquinas would answer yes. He would name that memory not only a person, but a presence—the Second Person of the Trinity, who is both Word and Memory, both Logos and Icon. In Christ, the memory of the Father becomes flesh. In the Eucharist, anamnesis becomes communion.

Proust never reached that sacrament. But he stood, if only for a moment, at its outer courts, with a madeleine in his hand,

and eternity on his tongue.

V. Borges — The Labyrinth and the Logos

> *I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.* —Jorge Luis Borges

and

> *I, who felt the shadow of a hawk over my body in the coolness of the Androgue, do not know whether I am that child who played in the patio or the copy of that child who has written this page. — The Witness*

If Capote sacralizes memory through tenderness and Proust through essence, Borges renders it haunted, recursive, and riddled with metaphysical doubt. He stands, paradoxically, as both the most cerebral and the most mystical of our writers—endlessly skeptical of metaphysical claims, yet unable to let go of their ghostly contours.

His fiction—compressed into philosophical fables, each one a little cosmos of mirrors, libraries, and knives—returns obsessively to the problem of memory and identity, but always at the edge of something greater: the Infinite Mind. His narratives are labyrinths not because they are confusing, but because they are architecturally analogous to the structures Aquinas calls *specula entis*—mirrors of being.

Take "Funes the Memorious," where Borges recounts the tragedy of a young man, Ireneo Funes, gifted—or cursed—with total memory. He cannot forget a single leaf, cloud, or gesture. Yet the story concludes with an irony: because Funes cannot forget, he cannot think. His mind is paralyzed by data. He has no categories, no concepts, no analogical reasoning. Every thing is simply itself, in isolation.

> *He remembered the shape of clouds at all moments of dawn on all days of his life. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his thoughts. Two or three times he reconstructed an entire day.*

What seems at first like omniscience quickly collapses into ontological suffocation. This is Borges's great insight: memory without abstraction becomes madness, because it lacks analogia—the capacity to perceive likeness within difference, the very principle Aquinas enshrines at the core of his theology. For Aquinas, all language about God must proceed analogically: God is not wise in the way we are wise, but neither is He wholly unlike our notion of wisdom. There is similitude, not identity. Funes lacks this. He is trapped in a univocal universe, and so he cannot ascend from memory to meaning.

In this, Borges is not rejecting theology—he is, in his own ironic register, pointing toward its necessity. His stories illustrate what the world looks like without a metaphysics of participation: dazzling, infinite, and finally meaningless. Borges's most despairing stories are not bleak because they are dark—they are bleak because they are closed systems. His libraries have no center. His mirrors face each other infinitely. His characters walk mazes that do not lead upward, only inward.

And yet—there is always a faint outline in Borges's work of something else. Something radiant. In "The Aleph," a man witnesses, for a fraction of a second, the totality of existence:

> *I saw the teeming sea; I saw daybreak and nightfall; I saw*

> *the multitudes of America; I saw a silvery cobweb in the center of a black pyramid; I saw the shattered labyrinth that is now my life; I saw all the mirrors on earth … I saw my face and my bowels, I saw your face, and I felt dizzy and wept.*

This is not the horror of Funes. It is awe. The Aleph reveals total memory, but not as paralysis. It is, for a moment, vision—almost a Beatific one. The narrator feels the presence of something he cannot contain. The moment passes. But it leaves a mark. And in that mark, we hear Borges's almost-confession: that true memory, rightly ordered, is not a trap but a path. It leads to God—but only if it is filtered, ordered, analogized, loved.

Borges, who called himself a heretical theologian, is in many ways a master of the *vestigia Dei*—the traces of God in fallen reality. He never steps inside the cathedral, but he walks its perimeter endlessly. His stories of identity and memory are less about retrieving the past than about discovering whether the past itself was ever real, or if it was simply an echo of the Logos—a reflected pattern we half-perceive in the fog of consciousness.

In "Borges and I," one of his most haunting parables, the narrator divides himself in two:

> *I am not sure which of us it is that's writing this page.*

This doubling—reminiscent of Augustine's *inquietum cor meum* (the restless heart split between flesh and spirit)—encapsulates Borges's final insight: that memory is not just epistemological. It is ontological. The "I" that

remembers and the “I” remembered are never identical. There is a gap. A yearning. A rupture. Aquinas would call this potency—the distance between the creature’s present state and its telos in God.

Borges never bridges that gap. But he names it with precision. And in doing so, he performs a kind of negative theology, a literary via negativa. He never says, “God is this.” But his work consistently suggests, “Whatever this maze is, it is not enough.” His best stories end not in answers but in gestures: toward something infinite, not reducible to memory, time, or language. That something, Aquinas tells us, is not a concept. It is a Person. It is the Logos—not just the Word made flesh, but the Memory of God, in whom all mirrors are reconciled, all names known, all labyrinths gathered into one center.

Borges never stepped into that center. But he drew its outer walls better than anyone.

VI. Faulkner — Time, Guilt, and the Eucharist of History

> *The past is never dead. It’s not even past.* —William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

and

> *Clocks slay time. Time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life. —The Sound and the Fury*

If Proust yearned for essences and Borges circled the edge of the infinite, Faulkner lived in a haunted liturgy. His memory is not aesthetic revelation nor intellectual recursion. It is burden. It is blood-thick, tangled in race, incest, and guilt, and layered like Southern soil in which nothing decays cleanly. In Faulkner, memory is not only personal—it is

tribal, even liturgical. A sacrament of suffering, often without benediction.

The sentence from Requiem for a Nun—"The past is never dead. It's not even past."—has become one of the most quoted lines in American letters. Yet few reflect on its full weight. It is not a metaphor. It is a metaphysical axiom. Faulkner is asserting that time, in the South, is not linear. It is recapitulative. Every present moment is an echo chamber of unresolved histories—of slavery, betrayal, war, and kin-sins that bleed into the next generation like an unbroken Eucharistic chalice passed among the damned.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, this temporal fracture is rendered stylistically. The novel's first section, narrated by Benjy, a cognitively disabled man, unfolds as a stream of sensory impressions untethered from chronology. Smells, voices, trees, shadows—everything coexists, jarringly, as if the mind cannot bear to impose order on a world so violated by time. This is Faulkner's phenomenology of memory: it is not reconstructed; it is suffered.

"I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire … I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it."

This is despair masquerading as transcendence. And yet, paradoxically, it is here that theology enters. For Aquinas, time is not evil, but it is fallen—the condition of mutable creatures who long for stability. It is not surprising, then, that Faulkner's prose aches with the desire for a time that redeems, a time that heals, a time that saves. His characters may be prisoners of causality, but their stories pulse with the unspoken hope that memory might not only recall, but absolve.

Consider Quentin Compson in Absalom, Absalom!—a Harvard

student, scion of a crumbling Southern dynasty, who is obsessed with understanding the sins of his ancestors. Quentin's monologues are fragmented, recursive, mythic. He tries to narrate Sutpen's rise and fall, his father's apathy, his sister's suffering, his own guilt—and he cannot. He drowns in the river. But the narrative continues after him. Time, in Faulkner, outlives the narrator. Memory moves on. It does not forgive, but it remembers on behalf of the dead. The memory is often communal, ancestral and suffused with tragedy; in *Intruder in the Dust*, the narrator writes, Pickett's death-charge against the federal forces of Gen. Meade at Gettysburg in 1863 resounds like the Lost Cause in miniature:

> *For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863 … the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready … and it's all in the balance, waiting only for him, the boy, to give the word.*

This famous passage is no mere regional romanticism. It is a metaphysical theater of memory, a Southern eucharistic reenactment. Pickett's Charge becomes a mythic still-point—a moment of suspended time into which every Southern male psyche projects itself, forever delaying the irrevocable. Faulkner recognizes that memory can become idolatrous when it replaces the eternal with the merely ancestral. But he also intuits that this inherited memory is liturgical in structure—it repeats, re-performs, and seeks absolution. What is the imagined reliving of that charge but a longing to rewrite the Fall? A Thomist might say: memory rightly ordered leads to penance; memory clung to as identity becomes pride.

This is key. In Thomistic theology, the Eucharist is a

sacrifice made present across time. The Mass does not repeat Calvary—it renders it present. In Faulkner's South, this theological structure is inverted: the sins of the past are not symbolically repeated—they are liturgically re-lived. The South becomes a dark Mass: ancestral guilt eternally made present, yet without a true priest to transubstantiate it into grace.

But even in America's most tragic landscape, the American South, Faulkner glimpses redemption for the reader.

In *Go Down, Moses*, the story "The Bear" presents a character, Isaac McCaslin, who renounces his inherited plantation as a repudiation of slavery and original sin. In the wilderness, he encounters something vast—nature, memory, God?—and for a moment, silence becomes sacramental:

> *He could see the shape of the old bear now, and the dog beside it … standing beside it, and then both were gone.*

This is not just nature mysticism. It is a vision, a glimpse of a reality that precedes and outlasts sin. The bear becomes a totemic Christ, and the wilderness a kind of unfallen liturgy. Isaac fails to convert his family or society, but his memory bears witness to a different order—a Thomistic plenitude hidden in the ruins.

Faulkner's prose style itself mimics anamnesis. His recursive syntax, endless subordinations, and page-long sentences do not merely describe memory—they perform it. Each clause layers over the previous like a palimpsest, the past breaking through the present like blood through a bandage. This is not stream-of-consciousness as modernist experiment. It is a kind of theological realism, enacting the memory of sin, history, and hope as something liturgically binding.

Aquinas teaches that time, properly redeemed, leads to eternity—not through erasure, but through transfiguration. Faulkner never quite reaches that. But he knows the need for it. He knows that time must be saved. That memory must be gathered into something greater than itself. His South is still waiting for a resurrection.

If Borges circled the Logos with mirrors, Faulkner gropes toward it with bloodied hands, bearing not paradox but witness. In his greatest moments, he does not merely narrate the past. He offers it. He lifts it up like an unclean oblation. He stands as a priest of a broken Eucharist, pleading for a grace he does not name, but whose shape he knows by heart.

VII. Percy and Foote — Memory as Pilgrimage and Historical Witness

> *The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be on to something. Not to be on to something is to be in despair.* —Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*
>
> *The past is not only not dead, it is not even past. But what is past is prologue, and if we do not understand it, we cannot understand ourselves.* —Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*

Where Faulkner plunges into ancestral recursion, The Roman Catholic Walker Percy lifts his eyes and asks whether memory might become a road forward, rather than a maze. His characters—Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer*, Will Barrett in *The*

Last Gentleman—do not suffer under the sheer mass of memory. Rather, they suffer from its absence. Theirs is not inherited guilt but existential vacancy—the flattened, anesthetized consciousness of mid-20th century America. “For some time now the impression has been growing upon me that everyone is dead,” said Bolling, to no one in particular.

For Percy, this forgetfulness is not innocent. It is a spiritual condition, one Aquinas would recognize as acedia: the sloth of the soul, a metaphysical disinterest in its own final end. Percy’s memory is interrupted, fractured by modernity’s shallow distractions—movies, brands, rituals emptied of meaning. Yet beneath this surface flatness lies a yearning for something like anamnesis:

> *“To be on the search,” Binx says, “is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is despair.”*

Binx Bolling is not literally mourning the past—he’s mourning the absence of presence. He’s living in a world that no longer remembers how to remember. The “search” he undertakes is a search for significance, and Percy knows that true memory is not a catalog of events but a posture of receptivity to reality’s deeper pattern.

In this, Percy’s project aligns with Aquinas’s concept of natural desire—the inborn longing in every human soul for the beatific vision. Percy’s characters are alienated not because they are irreligious, but because they have no language for their longing. Memory, in Percy, becomes a sacramental capacity that modernity has forgotten how to use. His characters are hungry for grace but do not know what hunger is.

Enter the liturgical moments: Binx kneeling in a ruined

church; Will Barrett watching a young girl pray. These are interruptions of immanence—moments where memory is jogged not by nostalgia, but by grace. They are not unlike Proust's madeleine, but more explicitly Eucharistic. Percy gestures implicitly toward a sacrament that has gone underground, yet still pulses beneath the surface.

But to Percy, ever the tragedian of modernity, nothing in memory, or even its ellipsis, is peaceful: his greatest gift is to reveal that the absence of memory is not an epistemic lapse but an ontological wound. Binx doesn't merely forget God; he forgets how to remember Him. His "search" is a broken anamnesis—an instinct that something has been lost that once made life intelligible. Aquinas might say that Percy's characters suffer from a dislocation of final causality, a loss of memory not just of the past but of the telos. Their dis-ease is metaphysical, and the cure lies in a memory that transcends nostalgia and becomes Eucharistic.

Shelby Foote, in contrast, is not existential but historical. His *Civil War: A Narrative* is not fiction, yet it is written with the rhythmic reverence of liturgical testimony. Foote's project is not to escape history, but to consecrate it: to render the dead intelligible, not through abstraction, but through memory shaped as human story. Foote like his dear friend Walker Percy, was also a tragedian, as anyone contemplating America's own Passion Play must be:

> *It's one of the great tragedies of life – that things done cannot be undone.* (Interview with C-SPAN Booknotes, 1994)

This is Foote's Eucharist: to recall the particular with reverence, to remember the blood without romanticizing it. His prose is never clinical. It is filled with moral weight, yet never sermonizes. He understands that memory must be

faithful, which is to say,loving, capable of honoring the dead without whitewashing the sins of the past.

In this, Foote fulfills a historian's priesthood. Like a confessor, he listens to the wounds of the past and tries to give them shape. His narrative form mimics Aquinas's own: orderly, respectful of hierarchy, deeply committed to truth as correspondence, not only with facts, but with the moral structure of reality. History, for Foote, is not cyclical but pilgrimage. And the historian, like the pilgrim, must walk it penitentially through the entire memory-soaked culture, as did the protagonist in the fictional *Jordan County:*

> *They burnt crosses every night all around us, and a man who'll burn what he prays to, he'll burn anything.*

And in *Follow Me Down*, rivers and summers too, carry memory:

> *Generally the first week in September brings the hottest weather of the year, and this was no exception. Overhead the fans turned slow, their paddle blades stirring the air up close to the ceiling but nowheres else*.

Foote's fictional prose holds the same reverence for lived memory that saturates his historical work. Memory is not imposed upon events; it wells up from them. The boy in *Follow Me Down* comes to know not through instruction but through trauma. Memory in Foote is bodily—it stains the skin, it clings like humidity. Yet, unlike Faulkner, there is in Foote a desire to understand the past—not merely to suffer it. Foote's narrative arc is not circular like Borges, nor spiral

like Eliot—it is a slow, grave pilgrimage through suffering toward understanding.

Together, the boon companions in life, Percy and Foote, offer two complementary visions of memory: Percy shows us the soul adrift in modernity, aching for anamnesis, fumbling through ordinary life for signs of the Real.

Foote offers the counterweight: the soul rooted in historical fidelity, bearing the memory of blood, war, and moral complexity, hoping that by remembering rightly, something might be redeemed in the individual and even in the spirit of the Southern people.

Both, in their way, are preparing the soul for the Eucharist, not necessarily in the liturgical sense, but in the ontological one: a desire for presence, for truth, for love *made particular*. For a past that is not dead, but transfigured, glorified.

Aquinas would recognize in both the structure of Christian hope: that memory, illumined by grace, does not trap the soul, but pilots it toward its final cause. That even a fractured memory, when ordered by charity, can become a viaticum: the bread we carry with us toward the Beatific Vision.

VII. Eliot — Liturgical Memory and Triune Time

> *Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past.* —T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Eliot's *Four Quartets* is not a poem—it is a cathedral, built in verse. Each of its four movements (Burnt Norton, East Coker, The Dry Salvages, and Little Gidding) corresponds not only to place and season but to an element, a liturgical

phase, and a modality of time. Together, they form the most sustained act of poetic anamnesis in modern English literature: a sacramental reckoning with memory, time, history, and eternity, undertaken under the gaze of Trinitarian plenitude.

If Faulkner gives us Deep Time as swamp and sorrow, and Percy gives us broken modernity as alienation and search, Eliot gives us liturgical time—time not as entropy, but as *ordo amoris*, ordered toward Love. He begins "Burnt Norton" with a proposition as daring as Augustine's in Confessions: that all times coexist in God, and that memory is not about the past, but about presence:

> *Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past. / If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable.*

This is not mysticism for mysticism's sake. It is metaphysics—specifically, Thomistic metaphysics. Aquinas teaches that God alone possesses aeternitas, the nunc stans: an eternal present without before or after. Created beings dwell in time. Angels inhabit *aevum*, a sort of stable duration. But the soul, touched by grace, can begin to participate in eternity—particularly through anamnetic acts, which lift memory toward the Eternal Now, which is a kind of mystical dance in which only the dance is known:

> *At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless; / Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is… Except for the point, the still point, / There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

This is precisely what Eliot's poetry enacts. His quartets are meditations of remembering rightly—not recollection for pleasure or sentiment, but as a movement of the soul toward the divine. He does not use memory to recover the past, but to sanctify the present. In this, his project aligns perfectly with Aquinas's idea that memory, illumined by faith and ordered by charity, is a pathway to contemplation.

The "still point" is Eliot's poetic expression of the *nunc stans*—the eternal now of the Divine. It is the center that holds the dance of time, memory, and desire. It is also the Eucharistic moment, the "Do this in memory of me" re-presented at every Mass wherein this Memory of Christ becomes, in some ineffable way, Christ Himself, forever, in His Real Presence. Eliot's conception of time as spiraling inward toward this center is profoundly Thomistic. For Aquinas, memory is not the container of time but the vehicle through which time becomes intelligible. And when suffused with grace, it becomes not just recollection but union with the Divine.

In "East Coker," Eliot returns to his dance metaphor for that Augustinian time-outside-of-time sensate immersion:

> *In my beginning is my end… The houses are all gone under the sea, / The dancers are all gone under the hill.*

Here, memory becomes eschatological. What begins in decay ends in transfiguration. The image of houses "under the sea" evokes baptism, while dancers "under the hill" suggests burial, yet these images are not despairing. Rather, they are Paschal—death as precondition for rebirth. He continues:

> *The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.*

This is Thomistic humility, born of acknowledging our contingency, our rootedness in a created order *we did not make*, and yet which we may, through memory and love, begin to understand.

But perhaps nowhere is Eliot more sacramental than in "Little Gidding," the final and most overtly theological quartet. Written during the Blitz, amid fire and ash, it becomes a poetic Eucharist:

> *The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror / Of which the tongues declare / The one discharge from sin and error.*

This is Pentecost. But it is also anamnesis. The Holy Spirit descends not only to inspire, but to make present the mystery of Christ's redemptive act. Memory, here, is no longer bound by time. It is swept into eschaton, by none other than the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. And then, in perhaps the most beautiful stanza of the entire work, Eliot completes his poetic liturgy:

> *We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.*

To Eliot, this is not metaphor. It is anagogical truth. The

structure is Paschal: descent, wandering, return, transfiguration. In Aquinas's metaphysics, knowledge begins in sense, rises to intellect, and culminates in contemplation—the beatific vision. Eliot's poem traces this same ascent. The "place" we return to is not only childhood, nor England, nor a garden—it is Being Itself, received finally as Gift.

His vision is explicitly Trinitarian. He moves through past, present, and future, not as a linear sequence, but as an icon of the Threefold Unity:

> *The Father, source of time and order;*
> *The Son, embodiment of time as Incarnation;*
> *The Spirit, sanctifier of time, who breathes fire upon history and memory alike.*

The Quartets thus become a kind of poetic Mass: each part echoes the rhythm of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Glory. Memory, in this schema, is not only psychological—it is sacramental. It is the means by which the finite soul is lifted into participation with the eternal. It becomes contemplation in action, or what Eliot calls "a condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)."

And that simplicity is Christ. He is the place we return to: The "Ground of our Beseeching." The name beneath every name. The Logos who orders time, transfigures memory, and draws all searching, broken pilgrims—Faulkner, Borges, Proust, Capote, Foote, Percy—into Himself. Eliot's Four Quartets is not a meditation on memory. It is memory fulfilled.

VIII. The Thomistic Convergence — Plenitude, Longing, and the Sacred Person of Christ

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* —John 1:1

The arc has been long, but the structure is classical. Capote's elemental sacraments, Proust's epiphanic forms, Borges's paradoxical mirrors, Faulkner's ancestral liturgy, Percy's existential viaticum, Foote's historical reverence, and Eliot's poetic Eucharist— each gesture toward some aspect of memory as more than recollection. Each one performs a kind of anagogy: the soul's upward turn toward meaning. And each, in its finest moment, hints at something that memory cannot hold but must point to—the Logos.

In Thomistic metaphysics, Christ is not only Redeemer, but *Principium intelligendi*—the principle of all intelligibility. He is the Logos through whom the world was made, the form of all forms, the exemplar in whom every particular created thing reflects the Divine Idea from which it sprang. All memory, properly ordered, is a mode of participation in this form. Memory is not just how we recall the past—it is how we seek union with the eternal pattern of our origin.

To remember in the Christian sense is not to retreat into the past. It is to enter into the eternal. The Eucharist reveals this. It is an act of memory—"Do this in memory of me"—but that memory is not mere symbol. It is anamnesis: the re-presencing of Christ's once for-all sacrifice in time, for all time. It is the moment when time itself is transfigured, and memory becomes communion.

So too with literature, at its highest. When Capote mourns the lilacs and childhood Sundays; when Proust tastes essence in a soaked pastry; when Borges glimpses the Aleph; when Faulkner renders blood as syntax; when Percy searches in shopping malls; when Foote narrates the blood-soaked American

catechism; when Eliot reaches the still point—all of them are participating, however dimly, in the anamnetic longing for the Christic center. The One in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). This is why memory, when rightly ordered, must lead to Christ. Because He is not only the fulfillment of time, but the sanctifier of it. He is not merely a content within memory, but its transcendent form. He is the One who gathers the scattered shards of human experience and says: "Gather up the fragments, that nothing may be lost." (John 6:12)

In Him, Capote's sensual longing is not erased by time but redeemed. Proust's essence is no longer elusive. Borges's recursion finds its referent. Faulkner's sin finds a Cross. Percy's alienation is addressed by presence. Foote's bloody witness is washed. And Eliot's liturgical spiral comes to rest in the Beatific Vision.

Christ is not just the final paragraph. He is the *grammar of memory* itself. This is the eschatology of memory: that all things remembered in love will not be lost. That the form of every life, once consecrated, will be gathered back into the eternal remembering of God—a memory that is not passive, but creative, loving, and everlasting. Everything that rises must converge. And everything that remembers rightly, rises.

Notes

Walker Percy: Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 13.

Shelby Foote: Shelby Foote, *Jordan County* (New York: Dial Press, 1954), 45.

William Faulkner: William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Random House, 1948), 154.

T. S. Eliot: T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets: Burnt Norto*n (London: Faber & Faber, 1943), lines 1–5, 38–42.

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