

St Augustine's Contemplative Philosophy in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: The Cases of Time and Self-Examination

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Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to examine and unveil the Augustinian time process and self-examination in Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse." The latter is a successful (re)presentation of the interrelation between human consciousness and time "control". The self cannot be defined without time dimension. Woolf seems to confirm that time is more interior than exterior and is an essential part of human being: it is through it that human being is felt as a part of the world. There are some powerful statements of her characters that show strange similarities to Augustine's doctrine of time, memory and existence. This triad characterizes his works, mainly "Confessions." Woolf's characters are so contemplative. We find them looking outward in order to discover their inside. The internal and the external are the focus of time knowledge and self-discovery. They are dialogically interrelated and define one another. The self is an ever "IS" within the presentness of the present: the "was" (past) is only a memory ("the no-longer") and the "will be" (future) is only the "not-yet" that has to come in order to become a present. In Augustine's doctrine, the past and the future do not exist because they are absent in the present. Yet, their only existence is the present – the NOW. Consciousness preserves one's past within itself. The individual meets and examines himself through consciousness. Mrs. Ramsay in "To the Lighthouse" experiments these dimensions and tries to define herself through time.

Keywords: *St Augustine, Virginia Woolf, Self-examination, Time Dimension, Contemplative philosophy.*

Introduction

This modest contribution discusses two significant notions in St Augustine's philosophy: Time dimension and Self-examination. In his work, *Confessions*,

mainly Books IX, X, XI, and XII, Augustine relates time “control” to human nature via linearity and contemplation. The self cannot be defined without these intertwined poles. These internal and external aspects of time are essential parts of human being: it is through them that human being is felt as a part of the world. These twin poles are the wheel of knowledge and self-discovery. They are dialogically interrelated and define one another. The self is an ever “IS” within the presentness of the present: the “was” (past) is only a memory (“the no-longer”) and the “will be” (future) is only an expectation (the “not-yet”) that has to come in order to become a present. In Augustine’s doctrine, the past and the future do not exist because they are absent in the present. Yet, their only existence is the present – the NOW. Consciousness preserves one’s past within itself. The individual meets and examines himself through consciousness.

This philosophy of St Augustine of Hippo has got a great impact on philosophers, as Henri Bergson and Paul Ricoeur, and on writers, as William Faulkner, James Joyce and, mainly Virginia Woolf. This study singles out Virginia Woolf among her contemporaries and tries to see the type of impact, similarity or influence, St Augustine has with/on her. In other words, my paper sheds light on what Augustine claims in his philosophy and what Virginia Woolf constructs in her artistic creation. Two cases are put under study: the use of time with its three dimensions in Woolf’s work and the strange similarities that exist with Augustine’s horizontal and vertical times. The second case is self-discovery through inward and outward contemplation and its keen relation with Augustine’s self-examination. These two cases, time and self-discovery, are interrelated and define one another. That is, the self is only known through its/the dimensions of time, and no time is ever felt, or comes into existence, if there is no mind or memory to feel it, or at least record it, when it falls into forgetfulness.

Augustine’s Horizontal Time: Between “Distension,” “Now” and “Extension”:

How does Augustine conceive time? In his *Confessions*, he raises the following questioning: “What, then, is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know. But I confidently affirm myself to know that if nothing passes away, there is no past time, and if nothing arrives, there is no future time, and nothing existed, there would be no present.”¹ So, as the quote notifies, there must be a motion “that goes away,” a motion “that

¹ St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, 1991 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), XI, 14, 17.

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will come” and a motion that exists within the stillness – the instant. In other words, there must be Distension (distensions), Now (nows) and Extension (extensions) to make time possible. It is the instant that makes the past a past, the present a present and the future a future. According to Augustine, no time is ever possible if the now does not activate it. He extends further claiming that it is this now – the presentness – that makes the three dimensions of the horizontal time possible. He says:

Take the two tenses, past and future. How can they “be” when the past is not now present, and the future is not yet present? Yet, if the present were always present, it would not pass into the past: it would not be time but eternity. If then, in order to be time at all, the present is so made that it passes into the past, how can we say that this present also “is”? The cause of its being is that it will cease to be. So indeed, we cannot truly say that time exists except in the sense that it tends towards no-existence.²

In the words of M. B. Pranger: “The presence of time is related to the presence of the NOW (The Instant): the presentness of the present. Changes backward and forward stem from this common ground. What changes are the dimensions of past, present and future that originate in the concept of time as the presence of the now.”³ Put otherwise, what exists is the presentness of time, which makes the three dimensions happen: that is, we get the present-past, the present-present and the present-future.

John Spencer Hill compares time to a riddle, which has no practical solution; that is why according to him, St Augustine sees time as an imponderable mystery. A mystery he tries to solve and decipher. He writes: “Time is a riddle. The past does not exist, because it is no more. The future does not exist, because it is not yet. And the present, when we think about it, shrinks to an infinitesimal point, for only the smallest indivisible instant of duration can properly be called present.”⁴ Hill develops his quest within the Augustinian philosophy pointing out that Augustine wants to tell us that there is only one time: the present. This (mental) present, which occupies no space, because it has no duration, or has only a duration in the mind, incorporates the past (which is no more) and the future

² *Ibidem*, XI, 14, 17.

³ M.B. Pranger, *Eternity's Ennui: Temporality, Perseverance and Voice in Augustine and Western Literature* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 5.

⁴ John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature* (London and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 80.

(which is not yet), drawing them together into a trimodal unity and giving them a continuing existence in what Augustine calls his “attentive faculty.”⁵

Time is an issue that is embedded in the mind. It is felt more than defined. “The mind expects and attends and remembers, so that what it expects passes through what has its attention to what it remembers.”⁶ Memory is tied to the instant, which triggers the three dimensions of the horizontal time. “Just as remembrance and expectation are tied up to the present,” Pranger points out, “so memory in its purest disguise is the actualization of the present.”⁷ Memory, then actualizes the present and reactivates the past in relation to the attentions (that represents the lost, forgotten objects) of the present. Even time is measured within the mind: it is psychological, not scientific. St Augustine wonders: “But how do we measure present time when it has no extension? It is measured when it passes, but not when it has passed, because then there will be nothing there to measure.”⁸

Hill thinks that Augustine uses the mind as the source of this measurement, whose reference is the instant. He states: "Time measurement is a psychological phenomenon: it occurs only in the mind itself and consists in the present regard of a comparing consciousness that looks forward (expectatio) as well as backward (memoria)."⁹ Brian Stock adopts the same claim of Hill. He points out that time cannot be measured because it is in an on-going movement, whether the future that is to come or the instant that exists or the past that has gone. He writes:

*Each division of time contains within itself a smaller division, and, within each, one part is past and another is to come. Intervals can be compared, but time can be measured only while it passes: once it is past, we cannot measure it, because it no longer exists. By this reasoning, the past and the future can be said to exist in the present. But that present affords no opportunity for measurement.*¹⁰

Augustine seems to tell us that it is only the event that has beginning and end that could be measured, because it passes to the past. We do not measure time but the duration this event, or movement, takes place. He says: “I measure the duration of the movement, from the moment it begins until it ends.”¹¹

Time has a cosmological dimension and the measurement of rotation of a body is a measurement of the body, but not of time: we measure how length of its

⁵ *Ibidem*, 80-81.

⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 17, 34.

⁷ Pranger, *Eternity's Ennui*, 50.

⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 14, 17.

⁹ Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time*, 81.

¹⁰ Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 236.

¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 24, 31.

movement from the time it begins to the time it ceases.¹² And this measurement cannot be done if there is no “now.” In the words of W.J. Torrance Kirby: “It is the «present consciousness» of memory which measures the «stream of past events.»”¹³ These streams of the past are past and do no longer belong to the “now.” George Frank argues that when the “now” is no longer “now,” it goes to the past and remains within the object or the things that happened. He says: “Anything actual is present. Hence, there is no way of measuring the speed with which time passes. But that is not all. The speed with which time passes even seems to defy consistent definition.”¹⁴

This is for horizontal time; but what about vertical time? Augustine associates this kind of time with forgetfulness, mysticism, and transcendentalism. This time is felt through contemplation, which is a self-vindication and confession to God. Hill claims that St Augustine’s vertical time is within the soul more than the body. He writes: “Augustine’s exploration of time is an ‘inclination of the soul’ – an *intentio animi* – toward God as being at once the subject and source of all true knowing.”¹⁵ This kind of time is in itself a kind of timelessness because the present is contemporaneous. In the words of Augustine: “In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present.[...] Who will lay hold on the human heart to make it still, so that it can see how eternity, in which there is neither future nor past, stands still and dictates future and past?”¹⁶ In other words, this vertical time is a time of chaos and annihilation. It is an ascension to God and an escape from the sensation of life and the material world. Explaining Augustine’s doctrine of time and eternity, Hill maintains that: “God, who created time, is beyond time. God exists in simultaneity, an undivided reality where past, present, and future are all-at-once and inseparable.”¹⁷

Man does not only bring the past and the future together, but extends his vision and intentions towards eternity: he meditates. At this level, time becomes vertical: it transcends the horizontal three durational dimensions. John Peter Kenny

¹² Algis Mickunas, “Self-Identity and Time,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123.

¹³ W.J. Torrance Kirby, “Praise as the Soul’s Overcoming of Time in The Confessions of St Augustine,” *PRO ECCLES* VI, 3 (Summer 1999), 347.

¹⁴ Georg, Frank, “Time, Actuality, Novelty and History Some Facets of a Phenomenon Still Awaiting Comprehension,” in *Life and Motion of Socio-Economic Units*, ed. Andrew U. Frank et al. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 2.

¹⁵ Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time*, 79.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 11, 14.

¹⁷ Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time*, 80.

insists upon the present and claims that it is related to the soul mainly during the moment of meditation. He writes: “The present is also time in its most compressed form within the soul, an intense moment of contemplation (*contuitus*). In that respect the momentariness of the present within the soul resembles the simultaneity of eternity. In its fallen state, the soul is thus attenuated into time fully with its anxiety about the future and the burden of its past.”¹⁸ This is what Augustine claims in his Book XI. He brings into account the soul as the source of contemplation and the core of vertical time. He says:

*What is by now evident and clear is that neither future, nor past exists, and it is inexact to speak of three times – past, present, and future. Perhaps it would be exact to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things to come. In the soul there are these three aspects of time, and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation.*¹⁹

This state of being (contemplation) makes the soul move and transcend beyond “the elements of temporal succession” and all what is temporal and transitory.²⁰ Reaching this contemplation, the soul is elevated to the peak of contemplation and “enter(s) the everlasting present of unfallen time.”²¹ In other words, there is a kind of transmutation, where the body is not felt as matter and substance and where the soul is driven out of time and reaches the stage of timelessness – the annihilation of the horizontal time. This kind of transcendence can only exist and be promoted by love.

The love Augustine seeks for is the love of God, not of the body. The love of the body is but an imprisonment of the soul bounded by instincts and earthly desires; whereas the love of God liberates the person from the “karmas” of the natural time and allows him ascend to Divinity. In his Book III, Augustine addresses God as follows: “As yet I had never been in love and longed to love; and from a subconscious poverty of mind I hated the thought of being less inwardly destitute. I sought an object for my love; I was in love with love, and I hated safety and a path free of snares.”²² Simo Knuuttila acknowledges that when the motion is absent, horizontal time ceases to exist, or at least ceases to be felt. So, we get timelessness. He says: “Necessary beings are *omni temporal*, but if there were only

¹⁸ John Peter Kenny, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 158.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 20, 26.

²⁰ Kenny, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity*, 159.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 159.

²² Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 1, 1.

such beings without motion, they would not be called 'omni temporal' because there would be no time in a world without motion."²³

So, contemplation is not an end in itself, but a means that conducts the soul to a new time beyond the horizontal time and a new life beyond what constitutes this horizontal time. In other words, the soul accesses to transcendence, which leads it to "unmediated knowledge of divine wisdom."²⁴ This kind of meditation for transcendence is very illustrative in the following quote from *Confessions*:

*But now, "my years pass in groans" (Ps. 30:11) and you, Lord, are my consolation. You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose orders I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entails of my soul, until that day, when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together to merge into you.*²⁵

David Ven Dusen suggests that Augustinian time is not only a matter of interiority residing within the mind, but, besides, it gives the soul a way out, an outing where it searches its identification with eternity to reach oneness through love. He points out: "Augustine's identification of tempus with a «distentio animi» does not resolve into an «interiority of the mind», but rather, into an outness of the soul. This «outness» is, indeed, co-given in and indicated by Augustine's selection of the term distentio, which depicts not a contraction, intension or recoil, but a dilation, refraction and spatialization of the soul."²⁶ Dusen extends further explaining that this dilatation is first of the mind then refracts itself to the soul: time distances to the soul through consciousness. This is actually what Augustine raises in his *Confessions*. He says:

*Who therefore can deny that the future does not yet exist? Yet already in the mind there is an expectation of the future. Who can deny that the past does not now exist? Yet there is still in the mind a memory of the past. None can deny that present time lacks any extension because it passes in a flash. Yet attention is continuous, and it is through this that what will be present progresses towards being absent. So, the future, which does not exist, is not a long period of time. A long future is a long expectation of the future. And the past, which has no existence, is not a long period of time. A long past is a long memory of the past.*²⁷

²³ Simo Knuuttila, "Time and Creation in Augustine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110.

²⁴ Kenny, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity*, 163.

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 29, 39.

²⁶ David Ven Dusen, *The Space of Time A Sensualist Interpretation of Time in Augustine, Confessions X to XII*, 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 17.

²⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* XI, 28, 37.

The extension of the soul beyond the present is very significant: it shows the verticality of time, which is beyond causality and past experiences. For Augustine, then, time “is not only a content of consciousness that abides when things with the temporal flux pass away, but also an activity in virtue of which we move from one state of consciousness to the next. This implies that time is a mental state that is both in and of the soul simultaneously, where the temporal content within the soul comes to be there because of an activity in which the soul is engaged.”²⁸

Roland J. Teske adopts similar position in his explanation of Augustinian time. He draws a tight relation between the mind in which time is embedded and the soul, which “verticalizes” it and makes it beyond the “now.” Time dilates from consciousness / mind to the soul / self. He states: “One might view the definition of time as distension of mind-soul as a definition of human or psychological time as opposed to physical time. On the other hand, when Augustine speaks of time as beginning with God’s creating heaven and earth, one might regard him as speaking of physical or objective time.”²⁹ This eternal time is the world-soul “by which God gave form to the world and with which individual souls are somehow one.”³⁰ For Michael Marder, Augustine’s doctrine of time is quite double: One is outer, the other is inner. He says: “The ambition of the Augustinian attention is double: to leap out of time, defined as distension, on one’s way to God and, stated somewhat heretically, to undo the intra-temporal and multiple order of creation.”³¹

Memory is based on forgetfulness. The latter makes the present things a past. These past things are kept and wrapped within a storehouse called memory. Augustine considers memory as a citadel where moments and durations, with their beginnings and ends, are preserved. He says: “Memory preserves in distinct particulars and general categories all the perceptions which have penetrated, each by its own route of entry. [...] Memory’s huge cavern, with its mysterious, secret, or indescribable nooks and crannies, receives all these perceptions, to be recalled when needed and reconsidered.”³² According to Antonio Colcogno, forgetting is the constitutive element of memory. It is “understood as a kind of annihilation,[and] allows differences to emerge – differences between self and

²⁸ Mickunas, “Self-Identity and Time,” 119.

²⁹ Roland J. Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of memory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 230.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 233.

³¹ Michael Marder, “Phenomenology of Distraction, or Attention in the Fissuring of Time and Space,” *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011), 410.

³² Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 8, 142.

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God, self and others, self and world, self and self. Forgetting is certainly one way to achieve the splitting that characterizes the two-in-one of thinking.”³³

So, forgetting and remembering are the cornerstone of memory, and no memory is ever possible if there is no now: the presetness of the present. It is the now that activates these two components.

Inwardness and Self-Discovery: The Other “I”

Inwardness and self-examination are developed and embedded within Augustine's narrative mode of his confessions. To confess is to reveal the inward reality to an outward Reality, to Divinity, to God. This is what characterizes almost all his inward examination. The latter is a kind of self-discovery and revelation through narrative expression: the word. In his Book X, Augustine writes:

*The objects themselves do not enter, but the images of the perceived objects are available to the thoughts recalling them. But who can say how images are created, even though it may be clear by which senses they are grasped and stored. I would not have spoken of them unless the mountains (which I have seen) and the ocean (which I believe on the reports of others) I could see inwardly with dimensions just as great as if I were actually looking at them outside my mind.*³⁴

The critic Pranger maintains that: “Both narrative and «religious» structures hinge on the fact that voice is arrogated vis-à-vis an inscrutable and elusive God who is part of Augustine's «narrative» from the beginning till the end. That linear storytelling does not work if one character violates all the rules is true enough.”³⁵ This inward-outward verticality steps beyond the bond of human time, mainly with its past and future: It breaks time of linearity and adopts time of transcendence in order to ascend to timelessness: Eternal time. Pranger adds that by “breaking that bond, having become excusable as part of the inner errancy of the soul, would no longer be a break, a promise would cease to be a promise as much as the giver of the promise would cease to be accountable.”³⁶

But the more we turn upward, the more we get deeper inward to discover and examine one's inner world. “We now have to turn to the immense world of the senses and have it sink down as it were into the cluster of memory and time, the

³³ Antonio Colcagno, “The Role of Forgetting in our Experience of Time: Augustine and Hannah Arendt,” *PARRHESIA* 3 (2011), 10.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 18, 23.

³⁵ Pranger, *Eternity's Ennui*, 17.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 59.

present and eternity. Even the wholeness of passion and the sense of belonging as suggested by the world of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste could no longer conceal the reality of a fake existence.”³⁷ This inwardness is a kind of self-knowledge, which is based on inner examination. It is a kind of soliloquy where the first person narrator is frequently used and where the confessor tries to reveal his interior to the other, who is, in Augustine’s doctrine, God: “This do I, Father, for this is all I know: but how to make my way to Thee I know not. Do Thou suggest it, make it plain, equip me for the journey.”³⁸ Stock considers this mode of revelation a discourse used in autobiographies and allows the speaker to speak out what is inside him: his interior. He writes: “[It is] a type of discourse in which a person and his rational spirit entered into debate in the interior of the soul on the preconditions and limitations of self-knowledge. In *Confessions*, the characters in the dialogue were changed, but the philosophical objectives remained the same.”³⁹

Augustine’s starting point in his self-examination is his own subjective experience. In other words, knowing one’s self through one’s existence is the source of his investigation in the nature of his self. “This proof,” Stock points out, “provided him with a firm foundation for inquiring into other aspects of his self-knowledge. He also reevaluated the role of personal memories in establishing the continuity of this knowledge.”⁴⁰ This self-knowledge is found in many instances in his prayer and soliloquies. In Books II of *The Soliloquies*, for example, he says: “Cause me, O Father, to seek Thee; let me not stray from the path, and to me, seeking Thee, let nothing befall in place of Thyself! If I desire nothing beside Thyself, let me, I implore, find Thee now; but if there is in me the desire for something beside Thyself, do Thou Thyself purify me, and make me fit to look upon Thee!”⁴¹

The self we know is different from the self that exists. The “now” or the present-present in narration verbalizes the self and makes it examine itself. Augustine claims that: “Those who narrate past history would surely not be telling a true story if they did not discern events by their soul’s insight. If the past were non-existent, it could not be discerned at all. Therefore, both future and past events exist.”⁴² Stock maintains that: “If the intentional role of narrative is to be realized,

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 92.

³⁸ St Augustine, *The Soliloquies*, trans. Rose Elizabeth Cleveland (Boston: Little Brown, and Company, 1910), I, 4, 8-9.

³⁹ Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 12.

⁴¹ Augustine, *The Soliloquies*, I, 6, 9.

⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 17, 22.

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the present is everything, since the anxiety about the possible unreality of the self is felt and relieved in the present. For Augustine, this is a meditative present, that is, a presence that absorbs and dissolves all fragmenting time zones."⁴³ According to Stock, self understanding and knowledge is both temporal and non-temporal. It is within the scope of horizontal time with its three dimensions, but it is also within vertical time and the absence of conscious time. He says:

*In Augustine's view, self-understanding is similarly based on the temporal, insofar as it uses language and the no temporal, insofar as it arises from our awareness that we are thinking. Through the cogito, we can say that there is something that we know for sure, whereas through the knowledge that arises from language, there is very little if anything that is not subject to doubt. Augustine, thus, agrees with previous thinkers who maintain that the mind is incapable of knowing itself in full. Yet, viewed positively, this limitation is proof that our minds have capacities that are not bound by the rules of our own thinking.*⁴⁴

Augustine acknowledges that: "When a narrative of the past is related, the memory produces not the actual events which have passed away but words conceived from images of them, which they fixed in the mind like imprints as they passed through the senses."⁴⁵ The critic Algis Mickunas acknowledges this fact and asserts that the self is permanent and recognizes itself in this permanence. He writes:

*The self must recognize itself at present and as no longer at present, and this "no longer" at present is a temporal distance that is immediately bridged by the identity between the present self and its being the same in memory. The sameness is a guarantee that the self is permanent and that the memories of what the self was, did, and thought are all present as belonging to the same self.[...]Indeed, strictly speaking, the soul avoids time altogether: the soul cannot see 'images' of time because time has no visible or audible characteristics.*⁴⁶

Examining oneself for the sake of purification makes the self forget about the world of horizontal time and embark on an upward direction of transcendence. This act is contemplation in itself. In the words of John Peter Kenny: "[This] contemplation is achieved to the extent that the rational soul can extract itself from the scattered world of time and space, moving resolutely into what transcends the lower world. It is then that a person is truly learned and is able to seek out divine things, not just as things to be believed, but as truth to be contemplated,

⁴³ Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text*, 34.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 56.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 18, 23.

⁴⁶ Mickunas, "Self-Identity and Time," 115.

understood, and retained.”⁴⁷ This ascendance is a travel beyond sense experiences to the contemplation of the upward matters, where the soul meets its knower, God, who is the Pure, the Absolute. In his Books VII of *Confessions*, Augustine writes:

*With you as my guide, I entered into my innermost citadel, and was given power to do so because you had become my helper. I entered and with my soul’s eye, such as it was, saw above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind—not the light of every day, obvious to anyone, nor a larger version of the same kind which would, as it were, have given out a much brighter light filled everything with its magnitude. It was not that light a different thing, utterly different from all our kinds of light.*⁴⁸

In the words of Kenny: “[The ascension allows the soul to] acquire abstract understanding of concepts such as pure nothingness, formless matter, body, spatial and temporal location, eternity, what is beyond time, etc.”⁴⁹ He details further Augustine’s doctrine of self-knowledge arguing that the senses of the soul are like the eyes, which are illuminated by God. He says:

*It is God who illuminates the soul, for Reason is to the mind as sight is to the eyes. But having eyes is not the same as looking nor is looking the same as seeing. The soul needs, therefore, to have healthy eyes, and it must look towards God, and finally it will see God. But for the soul to see God with the eyes of its mind, the mind must be cleansed from the stains of the body, that is, from the lusts for mortal things. [Souls] do not yet desire the light that they might come to see. Only love can supply a desire for that light to the soul.*⁵⁰

This visionary contemplative power that emanates from the inherent soul capacity finds its path to the Divine power that enlightens the darkness and the fall in/of the human time. “What could be hidden within me, even if I were unwilling to confess it to you? I would be hiding you from myself, not myself from you.”⁵¹ Or in another instance, “We derive our light from you, so that we ‘who were once darkness are light in you (Eph. 5: 8). If only they could see the eternal to be inward!”⁵² In the words of Roland Teske: “Augustine attempts to move beyond his memory in his search for God, though he is faced with the paradox that, if he finds God apart from memory, he is unmindful of him.”⁵³ Gareth B. Matthews maintains that reaching the light of God is ascending for illumination. He writes: “The doctrine is appropriately called a doctrine of divine illumination because

⁴⁷ Kenny, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity*, 49.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.10.1.

⁴⁹ Kenny, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity*, 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 78.

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX 2, 2.

⁵² *Ibidem*, IX, 4, 10.

⁵³ Teske, “Augustine’s Philosophy of Memory,” 152.

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Augustine tells us that it is the light of Christ, or the light of God, by which the mind is said to be able to discern the objects of intellectual vision.”⁵⁴ This light, who is God, is a referent to the soul, which wants to transcend to Divinity.

Virginia Woolf's Pattern of Time

Shifting backward and forward in time is the basis of Virginia Woolf's narrative structural conception. This time shifting, which goes to past from present and from present to future, seems to be similar to that of St Augustine's doctrine of the notion of time. No doubt, Woolf got acquainted with the stream-of-consciousness, a term coined by William James. Its use in fiction is to imitate the complete mental life as it manifests itself in the ongoing present.⁵⁵ Stream-of-consciousness presents the operations of consciousness and enables the reader to analyse, through the verbal expression, “the trace of an absence [...] about what is not there.”⁵⁶ This ‘what is not there’ is beyond language.

Woolf's representation of the mind is an interweaving of pasts and presents. It is the permanent transcendence of the present – the now that makes this representation possible. Woolf declares: “Let us record the atoms as they fell upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.”⁵⁷

Hermeneutically speaking, the object of perception is never naked. It is backed by the perception of the mind. The latter modifies it according to its own state of being. For Woolf, time is interior and part of human being, and it is through human being that it is felt, however, as a part of the world. That is, time is incorporated in experience, and experience is stored in the ego. In doing so, she confirms her sense of time and its effect on the individual. This new conception of time keeps pace with Augustine's perception that time cannot be explained, but it is felt by the self. Furthermore, it is the self that activates (horizontal time) “what is to come” and “what has gone” within the instant. In Book IV of *Confessions*, he writes: “Time is not Inert. It does not roll on through our senses without affecting

⁵⁴ Gareth B. Mathew, “Knowledge and Illumination,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118.

⁵⁵ Bruce F. Kavin, *The Mind of the Novel: Reflexive Fiction and the Ineffable* (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 233.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 235.

⁵⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader, Second Series* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), 105.

us. Its passing has remarkable effects on the mind.[...], and by its coming and going it implanted in me new hopes and other experiences to be remembering.”⁵⁸

Her view of the psychological basis of time frequently makes her draw on the possibility of making a minute seem a year. This notion is made explicit, when she writes that: “an hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the time piece of the mind by one second.”⁵⁹ Augustine claims that perception is the basis of measurement: time’s longer or shorter duration is psychological, and the way it is perceived is dialogically related the state of mind during the moment of its perception (perception of time).⁶⁰ Woolf realizes that the present moment is fleeting and there is a desire within the individual to preserve it and make it permanent. In her book *Moments of Being*, she writes:

*The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. [...] In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it passes so close that you can feel nothing else.*⁶¹

Woolf’s claim is similar to that of Augustine whose essential doctrine of time is based on the present: the now. The past comes because the present recalls it back: remembering of the forgetting. The wheel of time, fixed in its permanent now, makes the future and the past exist: distension – permanence – extension are the three major dimensions of this wheel.

Seemingly, Woolf focuses on the apparent dichotomy between two kinds of time of two differing worlds: on the one hand, the world of the linear time (External/Horizontal/Human): time of past, present, and future, in which we are subject to unremitting and uncontrollable flux; on the other hand, the world of the mental time (Internal/Vertical/Non-human), an inner world of thought and imagination, in which the chaotic flow of experience, derived from our life in linear time, is reduced to order and unity and in which we are therefore liberated.

Woolf steps further claiming that time does not exist. By annihilating the existence of time, Woolf confirms the concept of time as eternity. This is also similar to Augustine’s transcendental time, where time of ascension escapes time

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 8, 13.

⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), 98.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 16, 21.

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, 1976, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London and New York: The Hogarth Press and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 98.

of the fallen body. He says: "Your Today is eternity"; "If they (times) were permanent, they would not be time. [...] If the present were always present, it would not pass into the past; it would not be time but eternity."⁶²

This notion of eternity, or timelessness, is frequently manifested in the moments of vision in Woolf's novels. In their moments of being, Woolf's characters feel that they are in some sort of timeless state – or they are outside natural time living in a world of never-never time and never-never land: eternity. This timelessness, according to Hartocollis, is "the defensive purpose of suppressing the awareness of the passage and the breaking image of death,"⁶³ and "a defence against the overwhelming instinctual drives and the danger of ego disintegration."⁶⁴ Hill underlines this point and claims that time is subjective. He states: "Time was a subjective reality and its value depended on what one made of the opportunity, on how one chose to employ the duration afforded for self-discovery."⁶⁵ Augustine's prayer illustrates this concern: "What could be hidden within me, even if I were unwilling to confess it to you? I would be hiding you from myself, not myself from you."⁶⁶

Woolf's use of time as an element of self-examination and discovery resembles that of Augustine. For Augustine, time and mind are inseparable: they define one another. "The mind expects and attends and remembers, so that what it expects passes through what has its attention to what it remembers."⁶⁷ Existence in this human time must be confirmed through motion and activity, i.e., duration. In the words of Chen:

*Augustine's emphasis on the human mind is a significant point at which the mind and its understanding of time are both highlighted and required for the further pursuit of the understanding of the self. Augustine's valuable contribution to the study of time is his clear implication that indicates that the conjoining nodal point of time and mind constitute the core of one's sense of self.*⁶⁸

Woolf's return to time within, or memory, is a kind of movement from the external to the internal. In other words, it is a movement to the inner life, which

⁶² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 12, 16/ 14, 17.

⁶³ Peter Hartocollis, *Time and Timelessness* (New York: International Universities Press, 1983), 73.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 80.

⁶⁵ Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time*, 96.

⁶⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, 4, 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, XI, 27, 34.

⁶⁸ Hsiu-Yu Chen, "Romantic Dialogues: Writing the Self in De Quincey and Woolf" (PhD thesis, Department of English Studies, Durham University, 2013), 102.

contradicts and contrasts the fluctuations and vicissitudes of reality. Chen states that: “Human understandings of reality follow our perception of time. An overthrow of the supremacy of external reality results in a different interpretation of what reality is on an individual level. Woolf overlooks the factual report of reality and shows more favour over individual imagination and meditation.”⁶⁹

Woolf’s time seems to be more inner, less patriarchal and historical. Time as history is predominated by men, who control it. Chen points out: “The sense of reality is always related to historicity; women in this instance do not have their reality because women do not have their history – not the measurement of time nor the language of communication. However, women’s time is eternal, repetitive, immortal and continuous, due to women’s uneventful and repetitive social upbringing and domestic lives.”⁷⁰

The inner intense perception of time makes Woolf remember past events and moments that make her out of time. In *Moments of Being*, she writes: “I often wonder – the things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our mind; are in fact still in existence?... I see it – the past – as an avenue lying behind... There at the end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery.”⁷¹ Though Woolf rejects the “true” time, the time that exists outside human being, her novels, mainly *To the Lighthouse*, support Augustine’s claim that subjective structure of human beings functions differently from that of eternal time.⁷² Though Woolf is labeled by critics as agnostic, her thoughts are full of the relics of religion. B. Erica Willis assumes that: “Although atheism was popular among the modern writers, they had not removed God from their discourse; rather, they seem to have been just as obsessed with the idea as Augustine. Though Woolf’s use of the God concept opposes Augustine’s, the use of theology to advance ideas is a strong commonality between the two.”⁷³

Time versus Identity in “To the Lighthouse”

Woolf fuses, artistically, between time as a process of change and narrative mode as a process of movement of events. Lived time goes away sliding as in a dream. Trance is everywhere and is complement to the conscious time. Her protagonist, Mrs Ramsay, slips from the natural real time of everyday life to the

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 144.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 152.

⁷¹ Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 81.

⁷² Erica B. Willis, “The Philosophy of Time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*” (MA Thesis, Department of English, the State University of New York College at Brockport, 2006), 9.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 10.

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conscious/internal one. That is, there is a complete elimination of time as a dimension of experience. Such escape, from the factual, natural time, is a remedy to the hopeless and lamentable life she spends. In other words, *To the Lighthouse* is an attempt to differentiate between time we live in and time we live with. Edwin Muir explains further such point. He maintains that: "The time she evokes has hardly anything to do with individual human life at all, except accidentally like evolution, for example, it is so much too powerful that it seems to have no effect at all, like an electric charge with, multiplied a thousand times, passes through one's body without one's feeling it, whereas, reduced to the right voltage, it would act devastatingly."⁷⁴

Linear/natural time has done its effect. It has devastated and dilapidated houses, because of rain, wind and dust. Its powerful act has destroyed everything: "What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature? [...] It had wavered over the walls like a spot of sunlight and vanished. She [Mrs McNab] had locked the door; she had gone. It was beyond the strength of one woman, she said.[...] The place was gone to rack and ruin."⁷⁵

Woolf's characters appear to be more thoughtful and serious, when they respond to the effects of time — its effects of change. When time passes, tragedy comes; there is death and devastation: Mrs Ramsay dies, Prue dies in childbirth, and Andrew dies at war. Life is changing continuously; there is no stability. There is experience and human being goes on living, despite the tragedy of such experience. All the characters of the story are trying to make sense to life through its contradictory elements:

*"And even if it isn't fine tomorrow," said Mrs Ramsay, raising her eyes to glance at William Bankes and Lily Briscoe as they passed, "it will be another day..." she said.*⁷⁶

Time is seen as a tragedy. It affects not only human being, but also Nature. Such tragic events, time has brought about, go to the past and remain in the memory of living. Thus, when these events become past, they no longer remain in the present. Though Mrs Ramsay passed away, she remains alive in the minds of people. She is immortalized in Lily's art and lives in the hearts of children. "Human hopes," Hooper assumes, "are renewed: individuals may be gone, but

⁷⁴ Edwin Muir, "Virginia Woolf," in *The Truth of Imagination: Some Uncollected Reviews and Essays*, ed. P. H. Butler (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 22.

⁷⁵ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 1964 (Harmondsworth and Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), 157.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 31.

their values, spirit and strengths are eternal. They are part of the pattern of time as a whole.”⁷⁷

Woolf’s characters develop through time; and time progressively develops in them. The more they grow up, the more they become conscious of their lives, their past, present and future. People are no longer prisoners of their present or past; they are able to go at will, with their thoughts, from past to present to future without any constraint. Mrs Ramsay frequently goes to the past with her thoughts. The scenes and events of the past are more secure and more ordered, probably for her. It is the unknown future that holds fear and threat for her. The past is passed; thus, it becomes familiar, whereas the future is full of the unexpected, and therefore, it enfolds anxiety and restlessness:

*[As] she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature “I am guarding you — I am you support”, but at other times,...like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one thing of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea. [...] This sound which had been obscured and concealed under other sounds hiddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror.*⁷⁸

Artistic Image and Self-Representation in “To the Lighthouse”

The artistic image is a representation of a sensation, a sensibility or a reality. The image, according to Austen Warren and René Welleck: “is a sensation or a perception, but it also «stands for», refers to, something invisible, something «inner».”⁷⁹ In the words of Augustine: “We do not draw images through our senses, but discern them inwardly not through images but as they really are and through the concepts themselves.”⁸⁰

Virginia Woolf’s novels flow with images through metaphors and symbols. She fuses objects and subjects together in a close relation aiming at expressing her self, and poetically her inward, to the external world. In “The Preface” of his book *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, Harvena Richter writes: “The character’s inner world is externalised through mental processes, which abstract, concrete, or

⁷⁷ Perdita V. Hooper, *Notes on Virginia Woolf’s “To the Lighthouse”* (London and Sydney: Pan Books, 179), 201-21.

⁷⁸ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 9-20.

⁷⁹ René Welleck and Austen Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 1956 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), 188.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 10, 18.

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compress feeling into image, metaphor, and symbol, and so explore areas of submerged emotion usually glimpsed only by the dreaming mind.”⁸¹

The light of the lighthouse is central and significant to Mrs Ramsay. The more she looks at it, the more she forgets her linear time and reacts with joy to the beams of the third stroke of light. Her fascination with light, the lighthouse generates, makes her become that light: “Often she found herself sitting and looking... until she became the thing she looked at – that light.”⁸² This is actually what Augustine assumes eternity is: it is the light, God, who is the sense of order that annihilates the natural time – time of the fallen body. He says: “When, then, light did not yet exist, the presence of darkness was the lack of light.”⁸³ Or in other instances: “As I speak, so is my heart. You, Lord, «will light my lamp.» Lord, my God, «you will lighten my darkness.» (Ps 17: 29)”, “Heal my eyes and let me rejoice with your light.”⁸⁴

Both Mrs. Ramsay and the lighthouse form a unity. Mrs Ramsay responds more acutely to the lighthouse beams. She accords and even shapes her innermost sense of identity through the beams of light it emits.

Being a source of generation and power, L.A. Polesky associates the lighthouse to God. Such revitalization, that the three strokes give to the spirit, is paralleled to the within power that the self generates as a response to the beams of light of the lighthouse. In the words of Polesky, the lighthouse “represents God within the self.”⁸⁵ This is equally similar to that of Augustine, who finds pleasure in praising God. He says: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”⁸⁶ Or in Books X: “Light itself is one, and all those are one who see it and love it.”⁸⁷

The third stroke emitted by the lighthouse is very significant. Mrs. Ramsay identifies herself with it. She sees her self through it. In other words, the lighthouse stimulates Mrs. Ramsay. It makes her introspect. She, unlike her husband, has the capacity to see what lies behind the darkness. She can see the core of her self and the depth of her identity. This is also very similar to Augustine’s confession to

⁸¹ Harvena Richter, “Introduction,” *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), VIII.

⁸² Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 96.

⁸³ Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 3, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, XI, 25, 32/31, 41.

⁸⁵ Louise A. Polesky, *The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novel* (Toronto and London: University of Delaware's Press, 1981), 129.

⁸⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1, 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, X, 34, 52.

God. In Book IX, He says: “You pierce my heart with the arrow of your love, and we carried your words transfixing my innermost being.”⁸⁸ This identification with the third stroke makes Mrs Ramsay illuminate the core of darkness and, symbolically, the self within such core:

*[T]here she looked out to meet that stroke of Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, that last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things we saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. [...] It will end, it will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the hands of the Lord.*⁸⁹

This quote echoes Augustine’s submission and praying to God: “My weakness is known to you. I am a child.”⁹⁰

This third stroke, which has a great effect in Mrs. Ramsay’s self, could be associated with the Divine Light of the Holy Spirit. The absorption of this light revitalizes Mrs. Ramsay’s soul: “She looked upon over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into the mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any life.”⁹¹ So, this third stroke, with which Mrs. Ramsay is identified, becomes an element of strength and purity. Light, which penetrates her self, sanctifies her of any sin and gives her courage of searching what is within herself: what is beautiful and right: “She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching; she was beautiful like that light.”⁹²

So, this third stroke is the third step of ascending up to eternity. It does not depart from past, present and future, this is, the linear time, but it comes from the depth of the innermost and goes up to the Absolute. This cannot be done without the element of the pure love, which is bodiless and immaterial. Augustine’s doctrine of ascension to the Divine cannot be possible without the light of God, and no light is ever possible without the real love of Divinity. He says: “Come Lord, stir us up and call us, kindle us and seize us, be our fire and our sweetness. Let us love, let us run. Surely many return to you from a deeper hell of blindness than Victorinus. They approach and are illuminated as they receive light.”⁹³

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, IX, 2, 3.

⁸⁹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 96-7.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 4, 6.

⁹¹ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 97.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 97-98.

⁹³ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, 4, 9.

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Woolf's characters seem to be in eternity and experience a kind of enlightenment they could not explain. They seem, by the annihilation of time, to be living in a mystical world: "a token of some real thing behind appearances."⁹⁴

Renunciation of what the body desires is associated with the pure perception that distances from all what is desirable – all what belongs to human time. Renouncing this type of time is making you ascend to a world where the past and the future are annihilated. Kirby points out that: "In the divine vision of such temporal occurrences as the natural motions of the physical world or the actions and lives of men there is no before and after or, as Augustine terms it, no «distention» of time. From the viewpoint of eternity there is no succession but only an everlasting «now.»"⁹⁵ In the words of Augustine: "No time is wholly present. It will see that all past time is driven backwards by the future, and all future time is the consequent of the past, and all past and future are created and set on their course by that which is always present."⁹⁶ Or: "It is not in time that you precede times. Otherwise you would not precede all times."⁹⁷

Being and Living are not the same; yet, they are interconnected: the self learns from living, from human time. But it equally learns from insights and inner examination. Such mode of self-discovery makes the self transform into eternal life, out-there beyond desires and bodily instincts. In this never-never time world, there is a "complete transformation into eternal life. Temporal life is forgotten and the soul passes into the perfect form, which is made in the image and likeness of God. [It is a] moving from the externally focused soul through increasing levels of interiority to complete transcendence."⁹⁸ In the words of Augustine: "You are so high among the highest, and I am low among the lowest. A mean thing. You never go away from us. Yet we have difficulty in returning to you. Come Lord, stir us up and call us back, kindle and seize us, be our fire and our sweetness."⁹⁹

Mrs Ramsay tries to transcend the earthly world, which does not satisfy her, due to its desirability. She is absent-minded looking out-there at the lighthouse, till she becomes the light it generates.

The hesitation and the inability to confirm oneself in the horizontal, linear time hints to the presence of a power that we are in need of – A power beyond the

⁹⁴ Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 72.

⁹⁵ Kirby, "Praise as the Soul's Overcoming of Time in The Confessions of St Augustine," 336.

⁹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 11, 14.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, XI, 13, 16.

⁹⁸ Kenny, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity*, 109.

⁹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII 3, 8/4, 9.

human one: the power of the absolute: God. This idea echoes St Augustine's prayers to God to ascend out of the chaos of earthly time. In *Confessions*, he writes: "In seeking him they find him, and in finding they will praise him. Lord, I would seek you, calling upon you – and calling upon is an act of believing in you."¹⁰⁰

Woolf rebels against the rigid structures of time, as recognized by society and made up by patriarchy. Mrs Ramsay constructs her own time through memories and consciousness. The mode of time, chosen by Woolf, is rather philosophical and keeps pace with Augustine's.

Conclusion

Both, St Augustine and Virginia Woolf, are obsessed by time and its ebbs and flows in ordinary life. The only way to leave its linearity is to travel and transcend physicality. The permanent impression of loss in *Confessions* and *To the Lighthouse* signals their awareness that time causes irreparable damage not only to what human beings construct, but also to their psyches – moral defection.

Woolf's horizontal time is the one that makes events significant and possible through its duration. These events are moments of being, where Mrs Ramsay exists in making sense to her presence confined within a space. But in the way Augustine does, her response to these events makes her more inner and absent from time duration. This is what Woolf considers as internal time, which encloses memory. This inner time, as Augustine's, alters consciousness toward mysticism / Light. These moments of transcendental reality are the outcome of the pressure of everyday constraints. They unite and harmonize what time has already fragmented and dissipated. Mrs Ramsay's fusion with the light of the lighthouse is a kind of travelling, which liberates her soul from the karmas of desirability. In St Augustine's philosophy, it is a travel from the city of men to the city of God.

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¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, I, 1, 1.

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