

And afterward, repenting

by [Jeanne Murray Walker](#) in the [January 27, 2009](#) issue

Wasn't it Augustine who said, evil is matter
out of place? He kisses his love
as he pivots from the brothel gate,
his ardent heart already gritty
with guilt. I imagine the big A
trying to shake sin from himself
as I haul our red rug out and shake it.
Dear God, what we track in, how sin sifts
like fine silt into our deepest grooves!
And once inside, the dirt forgets
that it's our backyard. We keep tracking
the outside in, sweeping it out again.

Or that's what I get from *The Confessions*.
How love, like soil, is out of place for, maybe,
half its orbit. How sinning and repentance follow
one another like all the circles on this fickle
earth, rain taken up by clouds, then falling
on us again. Maples spinning whiffs
that grow to seedlings. Children begetting
children. And every insult you bestow
whirring like graying underwear
in some dryer of regret.

Way back in Christianity's kindergarten,
Augustine had it figured out. He guessed
our remorse and longing as he closed
the brothel door, seeing a woman
gaze at the sooty outline on her white sheet
of a tall blacksmith the morning after.