

# 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.