

BOOK TWO

2.1.1 It is not because I am still in love with my shameful past that I wish to recall the deeds I committed then, the sins of my body which corrupted my soul. Rather it is so that I may love you, my God. Out of love for your love I do this. With bitter regretfulness do I retrace the evil and unprofitable paths I have trodden, that you may fill me with your sweetness, O God my Sweetness, never deceiving, blessed and serene; that you may gather together the members that were torn apart and scattered piecemeal when I turned away from you, the One, and wasted myself in my pursuit of the Many. More than once in my youth I burnt to satisfy myself with the lowest things; with reckless daring I ran wild, overgrown and overshadowed by my various loves. And all the time I pleased myself and sought to be pleasing in the sight of men, *my beauty wasted away and I was foul* (Dan. 10.8) in your sight.

2.2.2 And what pleasure did I know except loving and being loved? But my love did not keep within the bounds marked out by the shining border of friendship, the affection of one mind for another. Around me lay the quagmire of carnal desire,¹ bubbling with the springs of pubescence, and breathing a mist that left my heart fog-bound and benighted; I could no longer tell the clear skies of love from the dark clouds of lust. The two swirled around me in confusion; and in my youthful ignorance I was quickly drawn over the cliffs of desire and sucked down by the eddying currents of vice. Your anger was heavy upon me, though I did not know it. I was deafened by the clanking chain of my mortality, the punishment for my soul's pride; I was straying further and further from you, and you let me. I was seething

¹ '... carnal desire'. Cf 1Jn 2.16. This is a key verse for Augustine's meditation on the false priorities of human life, and deserves to be quoted in full: 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.' Augustine discusses this verse at length in 10.30.41.

with fornications; overflowing, spilling out, boiling over. O my Joy at last! You said nothing then, as I wandered further and further from you, sowing more and more seeds that would yield no harvest but sorrows. I was haughty despite my humiliation; restless, yet listless.

2.2.3 But there was no one to temper the sufferings I endured, to turn to my advantage the fleeting beauties I found in the lowest things, and to set a limit to the pleasures I had from them; to see that, if it were impossible for the waves of my youthful passion to be stilled and constrained within the bounds of procreation, then at least they broke upon the shores of marriage. For this is what your Law prescribes, O Lord; you shape even our mortal progeny, and put forth a mighty but gentle hand to check the thorns that you have shut out of your Garden. In your omnipotence *you are not far from us* (Acts 17.27), even when we are far from you. I might at least have paid more attention to the rolling thunder of your clouds:² *They that marry will have affliction in their flesh, but I would spare you* (1Cor. 7.28), and: *It is good for a man to have no contact with a woman* (1Cor. 7.1), and: *The unmarried man considers the things of God, and seeks to please him; but the man under the yoke of matrimony considers worldly things, and seeks to please his wife* (1Cor. 7.32-3). If I had listened, I would have *made myself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven* (Matt. 19.12), and would have known a truer happiness as I waited for your embrace.

2.2.4 But I was wretched and seething with passion. I had abandoned you, and was drifting wherever the tide of my own desire took me. I had gone beyond all the limits set by your Law, and I did not escape your lash; for who among mortals can? You were always present with me, striking me in your mercy, and smearing the bitterest pains over all my illicit pleasures. This you did to the end that I should seek pleasure without pain; and where I found this, I should find nothing but you, O Lord; you, who *fashion pain in your instruction*,³ and *smite us, that you may*

² 'your clouds'. Those who preached God's word. Cf 13.15.18.

³ 'fashion pain in your instruction'. Vulgate Ps. 93.20, based on the Septuagint Greek, itself here a mistranslation of the Hebrew.

make us whole (Hosea 6.2); *who slay us, that we die not apart from you* (Deut. 32.39). Where was I in that sixteenth year of my fleshly life, how far was I exiled from the joys of your house (Micah 2.9), when I gladly surrendered myself to the rule of lust – a madness which man, even in his disgraced condition, regards as excessive, and which your laws regard as illegal? My family were not concerned to keep me from plunging headlong by marrying me off; they were concerned only that I should learn how to speak as well as possible, and to carry an audience with my eloquence.

2.3.5 It was in that year that my studies were interrupted. I was recalled from the nearby town of Madaura, where I had gone to study literature and rhetoric, while the necessary funds were assembled to send me to Carthage, a greater distance away. This project was more in keeping with my father's paternal pride than with his resources; for though he was a citizen of Thagaste, he was not a wealthy man. – To whom am I telling all this? It is not to you, my God; rather it is from within you that I speak to my own kind, to my fellow-men, however few may come to read these words of mine. And why do I do so? So that I and any reader of mine may reflect upon the depths from which we must call upon you. For what is closer to your ears than a heart that confesses you, and a life *lived by faith* (Habakkuk 2.4, Rom. 1.17, Gal. 3.11). Everyone heaped praise upon my father because he spent beyond our family's resources to ensure that his son had everything he would need when he was pursuing his studies far from home. There were many citizens far wealthier than we were who took no such trouble on behalf of their children. My father, for his part, was not so worried about what sort of man I was growing up to be in your sight, or how I kept my chastity. He was interested only to see that my rhetorical powers bore fruit, while instead I grew rank and untended by you, O God, the one true and good *Lord of your field* (Matt. 13.24–30), my heart.

2.3.6 So it was that in my sixteenth year a period of leisure intervened. I was compelled by my family circumstances to take a holiday from all my studies, and to stay with my parents; and meanwhile the brambles of lust grew up over my head, and there

was no hand to uproot them. Indeed, when my proud father saw in the public baths that I was reaching puberty and had put on the restlessness of youth, he was as pleased as if I had already made him a grandfather; and, drunk with joy, he announced the news to my mother. Such is the way in which the world forgets its Creator and *loves your creation instead of you* (Rom. 1.24), drunk on the invisible wine of its own will, perverse as it is and bent on lower things. But within my mother's heart you had already *established your Temple, and laid the foundations of your holy dwelling-place* (1Cor. 1.16-17, Ecclesiasticus 24.14), while my father was still under instruction in the faith, and indeed had only recently begun it. My mother was full of holy fear and trembling (2Cor. 7.15); and though I was not yet a believer, she was afraid that I had already strayed into the tortuous paths walked by those who turn their back towards you and not their face (cf Jer. 2.27).

2.3.7 Do I venture to say that you, my God, kept silence all the time I was wandering further and further from you? Woe to me if I do. Was it thus that you were silent at that time? Whose words were they but yours that you whispered to me through your faithful servant, my mother? None of these counsels, however, sunk into my heart; I did not follow them. For she wanted me to avoid fornication, and most of all – and in some corner of my heart I remember how anxiously she admonished me – not to commit adultery. These warnings seemed to me just women's words, and I would have been ashamed to obey them. But they came from you, though in my ignorance I thought that you were silent, and it was my mother talking. You were speaking to me through her, and not keeping silent; and in despising my mother and *your maidservant*, I was despising you, *my Master* (Ps. 116.14 [Ps. 115.16]). But I did not know that it was your voice. So blind was I, and so precipitate was my fall, that when I heard my contemporaries boasting of their exploits, I felt ashamed that I had less to be ashamed of. The more immoral their actions, the more they would brag about them. They lusted for such acts, and not for the act alone; they lusted also for glory. What is worthy of censure, if not vice? I, however, was becoming more

vicious in order to avoid censure. And when my actions were not enough to put me on a level with these hardened delinquents, I would pretend to have done things that I had not. I was afraid that the more innocent I was, the more of a coward I would seem; and that the more chaste I was, the more contemptible I would be considered.

2.3.8 These were my companions as I roamed the squares of Babylon, rolling in its dirt as if it were *cinnamon and costly ointments* (Song of Songs 4.14). The unseen Enemy was mocking me, and thereby making me cleave more closely to the heart of that city; I was ripe to be misled, and he misled me. For her part, my mother, who had already *fled from the midst of Babylon* (Jer. 51.6), though she was going more slowly now she had reached the outlying parts – my mother after the flesh did not show the same concern to confine within the bounds of marriage (if it could not be cut back to the quick) that part of me of which she had heard from her husband, as she had done to urge chastity upon me. She perceived that it was already a peril to me, which might in future prove fatal, but she was afraid that the shackles of matrimony would be an impediment to my aspirations – not her aspirations for the world to come (for those she reposed in you), but rather my own literary aspirations; for both my parents were determined that I should be grounded in literature. My father, however, had no thought for you, and for me he had only vain ambitions. My mother, for her part, thought that the usual course of studies would not only be no hindrance to my reaching you, but might even be a help. So I surmise, recalling as best I can my parents' characters. The reins that held me were loosened; instead of being restrained by parental discipline, I was let loose to follow every random inclination. But, my God, wherever my inclinations took me, a dark cloud came between me and the clear skies of your truth; and *out of my abundance came forth my wickedness* (Ps. 73.7 [Ps. 72.7]).

2.4.9 Theft, O Lord, is certainly punishable under both your Law and under the law that is written on the human heart, that sin itself cannot erase. No thief can endure another thief with

equanimity, even if one is wealthy and the other is driven by poverty to crime. But it was not poverty that drove me to conceive the desire to steal, and to act upon that desire. I lacked only righteousness, and my stomach turned at it; I had grown fat on wickedness. What I stole, I already had in abundance, and of much better quality too. I did not steal so as to enjoy the fruits of my crime, but rather to enjoy the theft itself, and the sin.

There was a pear tree in the orchard next to ours, laden with pears, but not ones especially appealing either to the eye or the tongue. At dead of night, after messing around on some empty plots in our usual insalubrious manner, a group of us young delinquents set out, our plan being to shake the tree and make off with the pears. We carried off a vast haul of them – but not in order to feast on them ourselves; instead, we meant to throw them to the pigs. And though we did eat some of them, we did so only for the pleasure we had in tasting forbidden fruit. Such was my heart, O God; such was my heart, on which you showed your pity in the depths of the abyss. Let my heart now tell you what its purpose was; why I was gratuitously evil, and why there was no reason for my evil save evil itself. My evil was loathsome, and I loved it; I was in love with my own ruin and rebellion. I did not love what I hoped to gain by rebellion; it was rebellion itself that I loved. Depraved in soul, I had leapt away from my firm foothold in you and cast myself to my destruction, seeking to gain nothing through my disgrace but disgrace alone.

2.5.10 For there is indeed beauty in physical objects; in gold, silver, in all things. Where physical contact is concerned, harmony of form counts for much; the other senses, too, each derive their own sort of pleasure when they perceive something harmonious and well-proportioned. Temporal honour, the power to command and to dominate, also has its own glory, and for this same reason men are so avid for freedom. But in striving after these things, we must not depart from you, nor stray from the path of your Law. Even the life we live here has its own charm, proportionate to its own limited glory and in accordance with lower beauties it possesses. Human friendship too is sweet,

binding in a bond of affection many souls into one. But all such things may be occasions for sin, when we incline towards them more than we ought; when, seeing that these lower things are good, we abandon the things that are higher and more excellent – you, O Lord God, and *your truth and your Law* (Ps. 119.142 [Ps. 118.142]). It is true that these lesser things have their delights, but none like my God, the maker of all things; for *in him the righteous delights, and he is the joy of the upright in heart* (Ps. 64.10 [Ps. 63.11]).

2.5.II When we investigate a crime and ask for what reason was it committed, it is generally thought that there must be some obvious motive; either the hope of gaining or the fear of losing one of those things that we have set down in the class of lower goods. These things are indeed beautiful and fair, though lowly and slight compared to the ones that are higher and more blessed. – Let us suppose that someone has committed a murder. We may then ask: why? Perhaps it was because he coveted his victim's wife, or his land; perhaps he hoped to steal something, and to live on the proceeds of his crime. Perhaps he was afraid that his victim would deprive him of something of this sort; perhaps he had suffered some injury, and was burning for revenge. But who would believe that the murderer had killed without a cause, just for the joy of killing? It has been said of a man utterly savage and inhumane that he 'preferred to be wicked and immoderately cruel for no purpose';⁴ but the writer does first give a reason – 'lest hand or courage be dulled by disuse'. If we ask again, why? there is an answer: so that once Rome was in his power, his training in vice should enable him to amass titles, offices and riches, unhindered by the fear of the law or by the financial embarrassment occasioned by his 'strained domestic circumstances and the guilty awareness of his crimes'. Not even Catiline himself, then, loved the crimes he committed, but the things he hoped to gain by them; which is something else entirely.

4 "preferred to be wicked . . . dulled by disuse". The description of Catiline, Roman politician and failed revolutionary opposed by Cicero, given by his contemporary biographer Sallust (*Catilinarian Conspiracy* 16.3); a very common school text in late antiquity.

2.6.12 But you, my theft, the crime I committed that night of my sixteenth year – what was there in you that I was so wretched as to love? You had no beauty, being a theft. Are you indeed anything at all, that I can address you in this way?⁵ The pears that I stole were indeed beautiful, for you, O God, had created them; you, the creator of all things and of all things the most beautiful, the good God, the highest Good, my true Good. The pears were beautiful; but it was not them that my soul so pitifully desired. I had plenty of pears, and better ones too; the ones I picked, I picked only in order to steal. Once I had picked them, I threw them away; I feasted only on the wickedness that was the fruit of my theft. If any morsel of pear entered my mouth, it was the crime of stealing that gave it spice. And now, O Lord God, I would know what it was about the theft that gave me such delight. There was no beauty in it; not the beauty that we find in justice or in wisdom, nor the sort we find in the human mind, in our memory, our senses, or in the very pulse of life; not even such as we see in the stars, each shining in its proper place, or in the earth or sea, teeming with life that is reborn as each generation passes. There was not even the appearance of beauty that vices possess, imperfect and shadow-like as it is; for vice always falls short of its aim.

2.6.13 Pride imitates exalted status, whereas you alone are exalted as God above all things. Ambition seeks nothing but honours and glory, whereas you alone are worthy of honour above all things, and your glory endures for ever. The savagery that waits on power seeks to be feared; but who should be feared save God alone, and who or what can ever strip him of his power or detract from it in any way? The sensualist seeks the charms of love; but there is no charm greater than your love, nor anything that we may more profitably love than your Truth, more lovely and radiant than all things. A shallow and inquisitive nature affects a desire for knowledge, but your knowledge of all

⁵ 'Are you indeed ... in this way'. The first appearance in the *Confessions* of a key Augustinian teaching. God is both supreme Good and supreme Being; in so far as something is evil, it ceases to participate in goodness, and hence also in being. Thus pure evil is non-existent.

things is supreme. Ignorance
 selves with names of simplicity
 pler than you may be found, or
 their own works that are the en
 aims for a kind of repose, but
 Lord? Extravagance would be
 you are the fullness and unfa
 able. Profligacy makes a preter
 your great riches bestow upon
 a multitude of possessions, but
 for supremacy; what is suprem
 what Avenger is more just th
 shies away from circumstances
 vourable to the things it loves, a
 to its security. But what is unfa
 unforeseen? *Who can separate*
 8.35). And where is there any l
 sullen nature is consumed with
 on which it had set its heart; i
 from it, just as nothing can be t

2.6.14 Thus the soul is unfaith
 from you and seeks outside you
 and unmixed form until it retur
 and set themselves up against yo
 tion of you; but by their very imi
 the creator of all that is, and her
 where they can go from you. Wh
 I loved? In what way was the th
 my Lord – even the most perverse
 Did I take pleasure in breaking ye
 not do it by my own authority?
 your omnipotence in doing with
 So might a prisoner aspire to an
 escape his master to gain a shadow
 distortion of a life! What an abyss
 found pleasure in tasting forbidd
 than that it was forbidden?

things is supreme. Ignorance and stupidity would shield themselves with names of simplicity and harmlessness; but what simpler than you may be found, or more harmless, inasmuch as it is their own works that are the enemy of the wicked? Idleness, too, aims for a kind of repose, but what true Rest is there beside the Lord? Extravagance would be called sufficiency and plenty, but you are the fullness and unfailing source of pleasure incorruptible. Profligacy makes a pretence of generosity, whereas you of your great riches bestow upon us all good things. Avarice desires a multitude of possessions, but you possess all things. Envy vies for supremacy; what is supreme over you? Anger seeks revenge; what Avenger is more just than you? A timorous disposition shies away from circumstances unfamiliar or unforeseen or unfavourable to the things it loves, and seeks to anticipate any threat to its security. But what is unfamiliar to you, what circumstance unforeseen? *Who can separate you from what you love?* (Rom. 8.35). And where is there any lasting security, if not in you? A sullen nature is consumed with resentment, if it loses the things on which it had set its heart; it wishes to have nothing taken from it, just as nothing can be taken from you.

2.6.14 Thus the soul is unfaithful to you, when it turns away from you and seeks outside you the things it cannot find in pure and unmixed form until it returns to you. All who forsake you and set themselves up against you, are acting in perverse imitation of you; but by their very imitation they confess that you are the creator of all that is, and hence that there is nowhere at all where they can go from you. What was it, then, in my theft that I loved? In what way was the theft of the pears an imitation of my Lord – even the most perverse and vicious kind of imitation? Did I take pleasure in breaking your Law by deceit, since I could not do it by my own authority? Did I find a dim reflection of your omnipotence in doing with impunity what was forbidden? So might a prisoner aspire to an illusion of liberty, or *a slave escape his master to gain a shadow!* (Job 7.2). What a hideous distortion of a life! What an abyss of death! Could I indeed have found pleasure in tasting forbidden fruit, for no other reason than that it was forbidden?

2.7.15 My soul can recall these things and yet not be afraid; but *how shall I repay the Lord* (Ps. 116.12 [Ps. 115.12]) for this? I shall love you, O Lord, and give you thanks; *I shall confess your Name* (Ps. 54.6 [Ps. 53.8]), for you have forgiven my many sins and shameful deeds. You have *made my sins melt away like ice* (Ecclesiasticus 3.17), and this I ascribe to your grace and your mercy. To your grace I ascribe also all the evil deeds I have not done; for if I could love to sin even without a cause, what might I not have done? All these things I confess that you have put far from me; both the evil deeds I did at my own behest, and those that with you as my guide I did not do. Who indeed, after reflecting upon his own weakness, would venture to attribute his purity and integrity to his own strength? Whoever did so you would love the less, as if he had less need of the mercy in which you forgive the sins of those who turn to you (Ps. 51.13 [Ps. 50.15]).

I now make an open account and confession of my sins; if my reader is one whom you have called, who has followed your voice and avoided the same sins, let them not laugh at me as they read my account. I have been healed by the same Physician whose care has kept them from falling ill at all, or at least not so severely. Let them love you not less, but more. Let them see that it is through you, who have saved me from the sickness of my sins, that they too do not suffer to the same degree from the sickness of their own.

2.8.16 But what profit did I ever have (Rom. 6.21) from the sins I now blush to recall, and least of all that theft of mine? Wretch that I was! I loved nothing about it save the theft itself, and that too was a nothing – and moreover made me more wretched still. If, however, I remember clearly my state of mind at the time, I am sure I would never have done it had I been by myself. Was it, then, the company of my partners in crime that I loved? Is it true, after all, that I loved nothing but the theft? No; it is all the more true, for their company too was nothing. What is the truth of this? Who can explain this to me? Only the one who *sheds light on my heart* (Ecclesiasticus 2.10), whose eye can pierce its shadows. What is it that gives me the notion of enquiring into my actions, of debating and pondering them in this way? If

I had stole
them, I c
I could h
the pleas
desire by
pleasure
This wa
gave m
2.9.17 V
to be p
Who un
joke to
trickin
had no
disple
that I
when
own;
with
laugh
neve
God
I w
I w
Wh
I c
bec
no
in
h
2
t
I
a

I had stolen the pears because I loved them and wanted to enjoy them, I could have done so by myself. If that had been all, I could have committed my crime alone, and so have obtained the pleasure I sought. I did not need to scratch the itch of my desire by having other minds to share my secret. But my real pleasure did not lie in eating the pears but in stealing them. This was the pleasure that the company of my fellow-sinners gave me.

2.9.17 What was my state of mind that night? Certainly nothing to be proud of, and woe to me for having it. But what was it? *Who understands his own offences?* (Ps. 19.12 [Ps. 18.13]). It was a joke to us; it tickled our fancy to think of the people we were tricking – the parents, teachers, the owner of the fruit – who had no idea what we were doing, and would have been most displeased if they had known. Why, then, did I enjoy the fact that I was not doing it by myself? Is it because no one laughs when they are alone? No one, that is, laughs readily on their own; though it is possible for some individuals to be overcome with laughter, if they see or think of something eminently laughable, even though there is no one else present. But I would never have stolen those pears had I been on my own. *Behold, my God, the living recollection of my soul is before you* (Num. 10.19). I would not have stolen them by myself, and it was not what I was stealing that enticed me, but the fact that I was stealing. What hateful friendship, leading my mind astray along paths I cannot retrace! What had started as mere fun and games became an appetite for destruction, a desire for another's loss not driven by a passion for my own gain, or for revenge for some injury; but when my friends said, 'Let's go and do it,' I would have blushed to appear unblushing.

2.10.18 Who can unravel this twisted bundle of knots and tangles? It is repugnant; I do not wish to see it or think of it. It is you that I want, O God, Righteousness and Integrity, fair and lovely, a beacon of goodness. You satisfy our longing, and we long for you still. In you there is rest and life untroubled. Those who enter into you, *enter their master's joy* (Matt. 25.21); all is perfect for them in you, the Perfect One. I abandoned

you, my God, and went astray; in my youthfulness I wandered from your upholding arms and became to myself a *land of famine* (Lk 15.14).