Augustine: How much more you’ll wobble when I wound you really seriously! Anyway, she, the one you praise to the skies, to whom you claim to owe everything, she is the one destroying you.

Franciscus: Good God, by what means can I be persuaded of that?

Augustine: She has alienated you from love of heaven and turned your desires away from the Creator toward the creature created by Him. This has always been the fastest way to death.

Franciscus: Please, I beg you, no hasty judgment. Surely loving her helped me to love God.

Augustine: No, it inverted the order of things.

Franciscus: In what way?

Augustine: While the whole of creation is to be loved out of love of the Creator, you went against the rule. You were captivated by the allure of a creature and loved the Creator in an inappropriate fashion. You wondered at her Maker as if He had made nothing more beautiful, when physical beauty is the lowest form beauty can take.

Franciscus: I call on Truth here to be my witness, with my conscience as co-witness, that, as I said earlier, I have never loved her body more than her soul. That will be evident to you from the fact that, the more mature in years she has become—and age inevitably undermines physical beauty—the stronger I have felt my attachment to her. Although her youthful bloom has visibly faded with the passage of time, her inner beauty has increased with the years. It was that which gave my love its start, which made me persevere with it once it had begun. Of course, if I had been running after her body, the time to change direction would have come long ago.

Augustine: Are you making fun of me? Would you have been attracted to her in the same way if the same inner person had dwelled in a grisly, misshapen body?

Franciscus: I don’t dare to say exactly that. The inner being is not directly discernible, and a physical exterior of that kind would not have encouraged me to imagine that it was as I have described. But if it were visible, I would certainly love the beauty of the inner person, even if it had an ugly dwelling-place.