



BOOK III: Augustine's Taste for Drama

Confessions 3.2.2 - 3.3.5; Boulding Translation, pp. 43-45

Passage Summary

Augustine questions the pleasure he gets by suffering through watching tragedies that show the grief of others.

App Integrations

- Digital Highlighting & Annotation
- Synchronized Audio
- In-app commentaries
- In-app teaching tips

Learning Objectives

- Analysis and discussion
- Listening comprehension
- Close reading of primary texts
- Annotation of text
- Use of secondary source(s)

Further Connections

Confessions: In paragraph 9 of book IV, Augustine is tormented by the death of a friend. There he writes, "I had become a great enigma to myself, and I questioned my soul, demanding why it was sorrowful and why it so disquieted me..."

Augustine and Culture: Rousseau's *Lettre à M. d'Alembert* also critiques the role of theater, which is commented on in Rousseau's *Confessions*. The performative nature of human life is on display in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Students might benefit from asking the question: is "confession" also a performative act, and what distinguishes it from theater?

In-App Commentaries: In addition to Michael Hollinger's commentary noted above, students might benefit from reading Carol Harrison's notes on singing in the context of Augustine's larger works (book X, Brown 4-5).

Out-Of-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Read Augustine's account of his enjoyment of tragedies in Book III.
- Open the Teaching Tip (Purple 1) and think about its question: Do you agree with Augustine about the appeal of tragedies?
- Highlight one sentence with which you most relate or best understand.
- Using the App Annotation feature, write down what you think about the irony of the pleasure the perceived tragedy of others can bring to us.
- Now listen paragraph 2, 2 aloud. How does hearing the paragraph performed perhaps play upon this same note on the appeal of drama?
- Read Hollinger's commentary (Brown 2) on manipulation of human empathy. Can theatre serve to manipulate human emotions for Good?

In-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Ask about the relation between the "scandalous love-affairs" of the first paragraph and the tragedies of the second. What do they have in common? How do they relate to the youthfulness of students?
- Invite students to share their responses to Augustine's own reaction. Did they agree about the power of drama to move people? Or not?
- Why we are willing to watch others suffer on stage (or screen)? Why do we enjoy it when we would not want to suffer like that ourselves?
- Have students list tv shows in which they enjoy watching others' suffering. Share. How do they feel about their taste for such shows?
- Why we enjoy feeling sad when we (supposedly) all seek happiness? What does Augustine mean at 3.3.3 about mercy entailing sorrow?