

## Pears before Swine : Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4.9<sup>1</sup>

The most momentous fruit-theft in the history of salvation still remains unexplained. Augustine gave his pear-theft (*Conf.* 2.4.9) pride of place in Book Two, yet the pinching of fruit, standard mischievous<sup>2</sup> behaviour for small boys time out of mind, seems insignificant for the weight attached to it<sup>3</sup>. Even Ennodius, only a few generations later, had to address the problem<sup>4</sup>. One wonders naturally whether it is a screen-memory, a symbol, a Biblical allusion, or a throw-back to Manichean prohibitions<sup>5</sup>. Failing scholarly explanation, did the event take place? Was it a calque of an episode from the life of Macarius?<sup>6</sup> “On a déjà tout dit – ou presque – sur ces pages très célèbres des

---

1. I gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae in Munich, who sent me a list of the *Zettel* for *pirus/pirum* and the comments of Tim Barnes, Sam Barnish, Gerard O'Daly, and Roger Tomlin. A version of this paper was delivered at the International Patristics Conference in Oxford in August 1995.

2. The young Drusus also played with pears – to even worse effect. See SUETONIUS, *Claudius 27 Drusum Pompeis inpuerem amisit, piro per lusum, in sublime iactato et hiatu oris excepto strangulatum*.

3. E. VISCHER, «Eine anstössige Stelle in Augustins *Konfessionen*», Harnack-Ehrung: *Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte* (Leipzig 1921) pp. 184-85 for Nietzsche's and Burckhardt's reactions to the passage. J. J. O' DONNELL, *Augustine, Confessions* (Oxford, 1992), v. 2 pp. 126-128 discusses some of the interpretations. For more bibliography on the passage see L. F. PIZZOLATO, G. CERIOTTI, & F. DE CAPITANI, *Le Confessioni di Agostino d'Ippona* (Palermo 1984) pp. 108-119.

4. ENNODIUS, *Ep.* 7.6. Vogel *doctorem Libycum adseritis sublata a se piri poma flevisse. merito lamentis expianda est, quod cum pudoris dispendio venter acquirit. vilia fuerint forte quae sustulit aut negligentia aut usu aut tempestate peritura. non fuit vacuus tamen iuxta apostolum raptor: carnem quam animam plus amavit*.

5. See L. FERRARI, «The Pear Theft in Augustine's *Confessions*», *REAug.* 16 (1970) pp. 235-37.

6. See J. B. COTELIER, *Monumenta Ecclesiae Graecae* 1 (Paris 1677) p. 533; also PG 65.277D-280A, below p. 48.

*Confessions*.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps not. Why a theft? Why a tree? Why a pear? The first two questions have been satisfactorily answered. Not, so far as I know, the third, which I will address in this note, by adducing a possible new source for the episode.

The Biblical background. Trees have long seemed a significant pattern in the *Confessions*. Just as the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis was counterbalanced by the Cross<sup>8</sup>, which redeemed original sin, so too in the *Confessions* the evil pear tree is paralleled by the fig tree in *C.* 8, under which Augustine's conversion takes place<sup>9</sup>. This structuring device was designated "arboreal polarisation" by L. Ferrari<sup>10</sup>. Augustine's pear is similar to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Augustine uses the theft of its fruit to represent sin, pure and simple, unmotivated even by need or greed. The boys steal for the love of theft, i. e. for the sake of evil, we are told at first<sup>11</sup>.

That the pear tree episode is to some extent patterned on the Bible is clear, when one examines the way Augustine introduces his story: *arbor erat pirus in vicinia nostrae vineae pomis onusta nec forma nec sapore inlecebrosis*<sup>12</sup>. How should this be rendered? E. Tréhorel and G. Bouissou translate, "Il y avait, à proximité de notre vigne, un poirier chargé de fruits que ni leur beauté ni leur goût ne rendaient alléchants." Chadwick translates, "There was a pear-tree near our vineyard laden with fruit though attractive in neither colour nor taste"<sup>13</sup>.

But the precise meaning is not that transparent, and the translation of the sentence depends on how one construes the phrase *arbor ... pirus*. Tree names appear in the following forms: 1. species alone (*pirus*), 2. *arbor*+species in genitive (*arbor piri*)<sup>14</sup>, 3. *arbor*+adjectival form of the species-name (*arbor*

7. So begins P. CAMBRONNE, «Le 'Vol des poires' (Augustin, *Confessions* 2.4.9-10.18)», *RÉL* 71 (1993) p. 228.

8. *RAC* 2. 24-25 "Baum". For the Tree of Knowledge traditionally opposed to the Cross, cf. AMBROSE, in *Ps.* 35:3; FIRM. MAT. *de errore* 25.2 *arbor ligni pestiferum deceptis pabulum praebuit: lignum crucis vitam immortalis conpage restituit* (ed. C. HALM, *CSEL* 2 p. 118.6 [Vienna 1867]); ORIGEN, *contra Cels.* 6.34.36.

9. *C.* 8.12.28 *ego sub quadam fici arbore stravi me nescioquomodo et dimisi habenas lacrimis et proruperant flumina oculorum meorum*. Also V. BUCHHEIT, «Augustinus unter dem Feigenbaum», *Vig. Christ.* 22 (1968) pp. 257-71 who interprets the fig as a symbol of sexual sin.

10. L. FERRARI, «Pear Theft», (above n. 5) pp. 233-41; followed by «The Arboreal Polarization in Augustine's *Confessions*», *RÉAug.* 25 (1979) 35-46 in which (p. 40) he also detects a polarisation of the good and evil trees in Matthew 7:17-20.

11. *C.* 2.4.9 *nec ea re volebam frui, quam furto appetebam, sed ipso furto et peccato.* *C.* 2.6.12 *quid ego miser in te amavi, o furtum meum, o facinus illud meum nocturnum ...*

12. *Conf.* 2.4.9.

13. H. CHADWICK, *St. Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford 1991).

14. See *TLL* sv. 'arbor' 426.38-45.

*ficulnea*)<sup>15</sup>, 4. *arbor*+ species in same case (*arbor pirus*)<sup>16</sup>. Species alone is common in Classical Latin. The second type appears in the Bible. Courcelle had already remarked that Augustine's use of *fici arbore* in C. 8.12.28 must echo John 1:48 and 50<sup>17</sup>. But in the Vulgate examples of *arbor*+species-name in the genitive or *arbor* plus species-name in the same case are far less common than the simple name of the tree<sup>18</sup>.

Augustine's usage is quite clear<sup>19</sup>. He uses the form *arbor*+species in genitive frequently – usually where he is discussing a Biblical passage where the words were cited in that form, e.g. *In Joh. Evang. Tract.* 7. par. 21.1 *arbor fici* (CCSL 36); *ibid. Tract.* 28. par. 11.10 *arbor fici, arbor pyri*; *Conf.* 8.12.28 *fici arbore*; *Enn. in Ps.* 94 par. 7.13 (CCSL 39) *arbor olivae*; *Enn. in ps.* 134 par. 7.7 *arbor olivae* (CCSL 40); *Adnot. in Job.* 29 (CSEL 28.2. p. 571.12) *arbor palmae*; *Serm.* 113.3 (PL 38.649.47) *arborem sycomori*. There are countless other *exx.* of this type, commonly citing the influential *arbor fici* of John 1.48. Occasionally he uses *arbor*+adjective, e.g. *arbor ficulnea* in *Serm.* 110 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* 1 p. 640.15-16); *De Trin.* 4.4, line 37 (CCSL 50 p. 171); *Serm.* 110.1 (PL 38.638). He also uses the species name alone, as in *Serm.* 61.9.10 *alius vermis mali, alius pyri* (PL 38.412) and *Serm.* 343 (ed. RB 66 [1956] p. 29.45-6 *sub qua arbore comprehendisset adulteros; respondit, sub lentisco ... sub ilice*; *De moribus manichaeorum* 2.17.57 *fico ... ficus ipsa*. So far I have found only one example of *arbor*+species name in the same case: *Serm.* 51 (ed. RB 91 [1981] p. 37.579) *arbore olea, vel lauro*. Therefore it seems to me that there is a good *prima facie* case for considering *pirus* a predicate noun in this passage.

I would consequently raise the possibility that the *est* here is the copula in enclitic position<sup>20</sup>, not the substantive verb that more regularly appears in initial position<sup>21</sup>, and that the phrase should be translated “The tree (in question) was a pear ...” as if beginning a story about trees that ought to be familiar. Augustine's narrative evokes the story from Genesis 3:6 (*vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile et tulit de fructu illius et comedit deditque viro suo*) in yet another

15. TLL sv. 'arbor' 426.46-51.

16. TLL sv. 'arbor' 426.32-38.

17. P. COURCELLE, *Les Confessions de St Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris 1962) p. 192. They reflect the pre-Vulgate text. The Vulgate has *ficu*.

18. Jdc 9:10 *arborem ficum*; Ct. 8:5 *sub arbore malo (mali)*; Mt. 21:19 *fici arborem*; 24:32 *sub arbore fici*; Lc. 13:6 *sub arbore fici* and 19:4 *arborem sycomorum* seem to be the only examples.

19. I have greatly benefited from using CETEDOC in order to search Augustine's works for *exx.* of *arbor*.

20. See J. N. ADAMS, *Wackernagel's Law and the Placement of the Copula Esse in Classical Latin* (Cambridge 1994) pp. 59-68.

21. If *erat* is used in a substantive sense at the beginning of a story it appears in initial position. See O. MÖBITZ, «Die Stellung des Verbums in den Schriften des Apuleius», *Glotta* 13 (1924) p. 119 on the substantive verb *esse*.

way: *nec forma nec sapore illecebrosis* parallels the appearance and taste mentioned in *Genesis*.

Common Biblical influence may explain the similarity of Augustine's fruit-theft to another patristic one. Vischer pointed out that the story also had a parallel in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*<sup>22</sup>. Makarios of Egypt had stolen figs when he was a boy, and regretted the misdeed the rest of his life: εἶπεν ὁ Ἀββᾶς Παφνούτιος ὁ μαθητῆς τοῦ Ἀββᾶ Μακαρίου ὅτι ἔλεγε ὁ γέρων, ὅτι, ὅτε ἤμην παιδίον, μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων παιδίων ἔβοσκον βοῦδια καὶ ἀπῆλθον κλέψαι συκίδια, καὶ ὡς τρέχουσι, ἔπεσεν ἐν ἐξ αὐτῶν καὶ λαβῶν ἔφαγον αὐτὸ καὶ ὅτε μνημονεύσω αὐτοῦ, κάθημαι κλαίων<sup>23</sup>. Boys and fruit-theft, yes, but no tree, pears, or pigs.

The episode, one might have argued, may have had some factual foundation, simply because the tree was a *pear* tree, and not some other type. The pear is mentioned only twice in the Bible, and neither passage can be wrenched into having the slightest connection<sup>24</sup>. Ferrari had a *lucus a non lucendo* solution: that the tree of sin should be a non-Biblical one<sup>25</sup>. Courcelle pounced on his "arboreal polarisation", and denied its existence, unless it could be proved that the Tree of Knowledge was a *pear*, and that it had received exegesis as such at the hands of Christian commentators<sup>26</sup>. O'Donnell took Courcelle to task, but missed his central and valid point: that the pear is in some sense "marked", and requires explanation<sup>27</sup>. In agricultural writers the pear and apple are often paired, and were sufficiently compatible to be grafted<sup>28</sup>. Had Augustine constructed the episode, how much more effective it would have been for him to have despoiled an apple-tree, and exploited puns on *malum* and *mala*<sup>29</sup>. But he did not, and we know that he did not care about the species of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil<sup>30</sup>. The pear remained one of those tantalising

22. Vischer p. 186 citing *Macarii Aegyptii Epistolae, Homiliarum loci, preces*, ed. H.J. FLOSS (Köln-Bonn-Bruxelles 1850) (Latin only) who cites the edition of the alphabetic *Apophthegmata Patrum* in J.B. COTELIER, *Monumenta Ecclesiae Graecae* v. 1 (Paris 1677) p. 546.

23. *Apophthegmata Patrum* in PG 65.277D-280A.

24. 2 Sm. 5:23 and 24 and 1 Par. 14:14-15 both of which instances are translated by "balsam tree" in the Revised Standard Version.

25. See "Pear theft," p. 241.

26. P. COURCELLE, «Le jeune Augustin, second Catilina», *RÉA* 73 (1971) p. 141.

27. O' DONNELL, *ad loc.* p. 127 characterises Courcelle's objection as "flatly absurd".

28. See CATO, *Agr.* 41.1 *pirorum ac malorum insitio* and 48.3 *ad eundem modum semen pirorum malorum serito tegitoque*, and PALLADIUS, *De insitione* 77-78 *Insita proceris pergit concrecere ramis/ et sociam mutat malus amica pirum*.

29. RUFINUS, trans. *Orig. in cant.* 3 p. 180.4 ff. *B ne ... simpliciores aliqui arborem mali malam arborem putent et a malitia dictam, dicamus nos arborem meli, graeco quidem nomine utentes, sed simplicioribus quibusque Latinorum notiore quam mali*.

30. See *Enarr. Ps.* 70.2.7 cited by A. Weische in the *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. MAYER, s.v. 'arbor' 438.

problems, like Monica's ruler. The ruler (*regula*) seemed clear, but why precisely a wooden one? Trees for primal sins make sense. But why a pear?<sup>31</sup>

An interesting passage in Augustine mentions a pear in connection with Manichean prohibitions against fruit-picking. As far as I know, it has not been discussed in relation to this passage of the *Confessions*:

*Si quis enim per morbum corpore dissoluto, fessus ab itinere, ac peste semianimis in via iaceat, nihil valens amplius quam utcumque verba proferre, cui prosit ad stringendum corpus pirum dari<sup>32</sup>, teque transeuntem ut subvenias oret, atque obsecret ut de arbore proxima, a qua nullo humano, nullo denique vero iure prohiberis, pomum afferas homini, post paululum nisi feceris morituro; tu vir Christianus et sanctus transibis potius, et hominem sic affectum precantemque deseres, ne arbor ploret dum fructus demitur, et tu signaculi dissolutor ad poenas manichaeias destineris. O mores et innocentiam singularem! (De Moribus Manichaeorum 2.18.58, PL 32.1370.*

Augustine has been using *reductio ad absurdum* arguments to poke fun at the logical inconsistencies in Manichean attitudes to the vegetable world<sup>33</sup>. They permit Akousmatics to pick fruit for the consumption of the Elect, but they would not allow the fruit to be plucked to save an ill and helpless traveller from death. Augustine emphasises that no law, human or otherwise--and the allusion must be to God's prohibition in *Genesis* -- prevents the Manichee from doing this. The tree here is a pear indeed -- and there is a good reason why it should be<sup>34</sup> -- but there are no pigs or boys.

In the Roman world the pear plays many roles. In Early Latin it appears in quasi-proverbial contexts<sup>35</sup>. It should adorn the healthy country table<sup>36</sup>. It was used as a cure for diarrhoea, poisonous mushrooms, mouth-ulcers, and receding gums<sup>37</sup>. Many agricultural writers discuss the proper time and circumstances for planting pears<sup>38</sup> and their grafting<sup>39</sup>. Grammarians harp on

---

31. A. WEISCHE in the *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. MAYER, s.v. 'arbor' 433-441 fails to discuss the problem.

32. Translated "Suppose that a pear would fortify him" by D. A. and I. J. GALLAGHER, *Saint Augustine: The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life* (Washington, D. C. 1966) p. 105. The use of *stringendum* is peculiar, perhaps "to pull together", but the sense of the passage is clear: the pear would save the man from imminent dissolution.

33. For a discussion of the treatise see F. DECRET, *L'Afrique manichéenne* (IV<sup>e</sup>-V<sup>e</sup> siècles) v. 1 (Paris 1978) pp. 24-36.

34. See below pp. 52-53.

35. PLAUTUS, *Most.* 559 and *Poen.* 484-85; See also A. OTTO, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig 1890) p. 280 s.v. 'pirum.'

36. MARTIAL 1.43.5 and 5.78.13.

37. See CELSUS, *De Med.* 4.26, 5.27.12, and 6.11.1, and 6.13.

38. CATO, *Agr.* 9.4 and 37.1; PALLADIUS 3.25.

39. VERGIL, *Georg.* 2.34; PROPERTIUS 4.2.18; CALP. SIC. *Ecl.* 2.42; PALLADIUS 3.25.6-7 and 15.78 (*de insitione*).

its gender and forms<sup>40</sup>. The pear seems to lack sinister associations. Veranius included it among the *arbores felices*<sup>41</sup>, and Christian sources praise it too<sup>42</sup>. There were many different kinds of pear<sup>43</sup>. It rarely had any sexual significance<sup>44</sup>. The pear showed up in place names<sup>45</sup>. But none of this helps to elucidate Augustine.

As it turns out, the pear may indeed be a literary allusion, and the answer may lie in the pagan Roman literary tradition. Various studies have enumerated Augustine's use of Horace<sup>46</sup>. Augustine had quoted Horace's *Odes* to express the joys of friendship and the pain he felt at the loss of his friend<sup>47</sup>, and he turned to *Epistles* 1.7 for source-material to illustrate the perversion of desire.

Here are the two texts:

#### C. 2.4.9

*arbor erat pirus in vicinia nostrae vineae pomis onusta nec forma nec sapore inlecebrosis. ad hanc excutiendam atque asportandum nequissimi adolescentuli perreximus nocte intempesta, quousque ludum de pestilentiae more in areis produxeramus, et abstulimus inde onera ingentia non ad nostras epulas, sed vel procienda porcis, etiamsi aliquid inde comedimus, dum tamen fieret a nobis quod eo liberet, quo non liceret.*

#### Horace, *Ep.* 1.7. 13-21

*non quo more piris vesci Calaber iubet hospes  
tu me fecisti locupletem. "vescere sodes."*

40. PRISCIAN 5.4 "haec pirus, hoc pirum." Also *Gramm. Lat.* 5. p. 163.30 and p. 346.2 Keil.

41. See MACR. *Sat.* 3.20.2. Priscus, however, listed the *pirus silvaticus* among the *arbores infelices*. *Ibid.* 3.20.3.

42. *Didascalia Apostolorum* 76.20 *Benedicatur quidem fructus, id est uva, ficus, mala grania, oliva, pyrus ...* It is mentioned in Ambrose, *Hex.* 3.8.33 (trees bear according to kind) and 3.14.58 (pears are dried in the sun).

43. See for example MACR. *Sat.* 3.19.6 = PLINY, *NH* 15.53. For a guide to the passages in Pliny see *Naturalis Historia*, ed. L. JAN (Leipzig 1898) v. 6 pp. 310-11.

44. See A. HAUSRATH, «Ποῖρος-pirus in der Bedeutung *ramus, mentula* ?» *Glotta* 26 (1938) pp. 8-10 and *Glotta* 27 (1939) p. 144. The passages are very late and include the Aesop-Romance, *Lidia* 510 ff., and BOCCACCIO, *Decameron* 7.9 imitated by Chaucer, *merchant's Tale* 2217 and 2331 ff. See also J. N. ADAMS, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London 1982) p. 29.

45. See Luciano BOSIO, *La Tabula Peutingeriana* (Rimini 1983) p. 124 citing *piro torto* (*Tab. Peut.* 4.1), *ad pirum* (*Tab. Peut.* 5.5), and *ad pirum Filumeni* (*Tab. Peut.* 4.2).

46. Paul KESELING, «Horaz bei Augustin», *Phil. Woch.* 51 (1931) col. 1278-80; H. HAGENDAHL, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2 vols. (Göteborg 1967).

47. *Carm.* 1.3.8 is cited in *Conf.* 4.6.2. On this see now J. PUCCI, «The Dilemma of Writing: Augustine, *Confessions* 4.6 and Horace, *Odes* 1.3», *Arethusa* 24.2 (1991) pp. 257-81.

*"iam satis est." "at tu quantum vis tolle." "benigne."  
 "non invisā feres pueris munuscula parvis."  
 "tam teneor dono, quam si dimittar onustus."  
 "ut libet; haec porcis hodie comedenda relinques."  
 prodigus et stultus donat quae spernit et odit:  
 haec seges ingratos tulit et feret omnibus annis.*

*Ep.* 1.7 is about gifts and the relationship between giver and receiver<sup>48</sup>. Horace refuses an unspecified gift from Maecenas, and illustrates his philosophy with four parables: the Calabrian host, the little vixen, (alluded to by Augustine elsewhere, so we know that he was familiar with this epistle)<sup>49</sup> Telemachus and Menelaus, and Philippus and Volteius Mena. The parable of the Calabrian host illustrates insensitive giving. The boorish host urges his pears, hardly rare or prized fruit<sup>50</sup>, on an unwilling guest: "Eat, take as much as you want," "Take some home to the kids," "If you don't eat them, they'll go to the pigs." The final clause undermines the value of the gift. The phrase of the guest, *tam teneor dono quam si dimittar onustus*, politely touches on the central theme – the extent to which a *donum* binds the receiver. The episode ends with a moral in which the foolish and prodigal giver is compared to a field that has produced and will produce ungrateful people<sup>51</sup>. Horace puts a nice twist on the tale. For modern men ungratefulness is an unpleasant trait of the receiver; here as in Hellenistic ethics the foolish giver is likewise inculpated<sup>52</sup>. A sense of the gift's value or else its use would have made it a good gift that the giver sacrifices to show affection, or else gives, because he knows that the recipient needs or wants it.

There are unmistakable parallels, both in words (boys, pigs, loads, and pears) and in situation, between Augustine's account of his momentous theft and *Ep.* 1.7: *nequissimi adolescentuli // non invisā feres pueris munuscula parvis*<sup>53</sup>. *et abstulimus inde onera ingentia // tam teneor dono quam si dimittar*

48. For a recent discussion of the Epistle (text and full commentary) see N. HORSFALL, *La villa sabina di Orazio: il galateo della gratitudine* (Venosa 1993).

49. See H. HAGENDAHL, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2 vols. (Göteborg 1967) v. 1 p. 187 c. *mendacium* 13.28 (CSEL 41: 509.2) *nec apud auctores tantum saecularium litterarum, ut apud Horatium, mus loquitur muri et mustela vulpeculae, ut per narrationem fictam ad id quod agitur verax significatio referatur*. See also testimonium 417 p. 189.

50. PLAUTUS, *Poen.* 2.38 *Tam crebri ad terram accidebant quam pira* and LUCR. 5.965 *vel pretium, glandes atque arbata vel pira lecta*, the humble offerings of the primitive seducer, all suggest that pears were cheap. So too Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 2.944-5 *ergo piris mensas silvestribus inplet arator!* *Poenus* and Palladius 15.105 on the wild pear. Horsfall p. 46 problematizes the precise nature of their defect excessively: they are simply the ancient equivalent of too many zucchini in August.

51. See HORSFALL p. 49 for parallels.

52. E. FRAENKEL, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) p. 331 on true *beneficia* in which the nature of the gift is involved as well as the giver.

53. See HORSFALL p. 48 "meno 'bassi' che 'giovani.'"

onustus. *non ad nostras epulas sed vel proicienda porcis/ etiamsi aliquid inde comedimus / /vescere sodes/ ut libet: haec porcis hodie comedenda relinques.* In Horace the fruit is offered, but not accepted. The gift of the insensitive host is of questionable value. An unlimited amount is offered to the receiver; it could go to the boys, but is refused politely, and presumably ended up with the pigs. In Augustine the fruit is stolen, not offered. It is valueless; a large amount is stolen, and is actually taken by the boys, but ends up being thrown to the pigs. Augustine steals something that is of no value to him, and does not even eat it. This sin is a sin, because it is meaningless, a choice of nothing. Need might have excused Augustine's theft, or at least a desire to enjoy the fruit. Instead it is a pointless action.

Another possibility needs to be discussed: a lost or unrecognized third source. I note that the pear appeared in quasi-proverbial contexts., e.g. *Poen.* 484-5 *tam crebri ad terram accidebant quam pira* and *Most.* 559 *Tam facile vinces quam pirum volpes comest.* In both passages the pear is cheap and available food<sup>54</sup>. And the form *tam ... quam* suggests that the passages are proverbs<sup>55</sup>. The commentators on Horace, *Ep.* 1.7 are not forthcoming or helpful on the subject of the Calabrian host. The epithet is allegedly inserted for verisimilitude or as a childhood reminiscence<sup>56</sup>. None of this can be proven<sup>57</sup>. But the adjective 'Calaber' has no particular significance, unless Calabrians were known for meanness, or the *Calaber hospes* was himself, as I suspect, a proverbial figure: "As generous as a Calabrian with his pears". All the same, although there may have been a lost proverb or proverbs about Calabrians, pears, and pigs, the traces are very tenuous<sup>58</sup>. And there remain the numerous precise verbal links between Horace and Augustine and A.'s demonstrable knowledge of this epistle to indicate that Horace was indeed A.'s source<sup>59</sup>.

Thus, although the pear-tree episode owes something to Genesis and the fact that it is balanced by a fig-tree has structural significance, it may well have begun as a meditation on Horace's ideas about *beneficium* – and its opposite. Horace explored the graceless and useless gift with a rustic fable that

---

54. Pears are mentioned in Diocletian's *Price-Edict* 6.63 and 64, sold in units of ten and twenty, depending on size, but the price is lost.

55. Cf. SUET. *Oct.* 87 *celerius quam asparagi coquantur*; PLAUTUS, *Mil. glor.* 664 *leniorem dices quam mutum est mare*; SENECA, *Apoc.* 10 *occidebat homines tam facile quam canis adsidit.*

56. E. FRAENKEL, *Horace* p. 329 n. 3.

57. For a list of multiple uncertainties, see Horsfall pp. 46-47. "Il poeta non ci incoraggia a ricercare un retroscena volutamente eliminato".

58. There is certainly a trace of the proverbial attitude towards pig-fodder and feeding, see MARTIAL 10.11.4 *dignus es ... porcus pascere Pirithoi.* (A. OTTO, *Sprichwörter* 1450). The alliteration, *pueri, porci, piri* may also be significant. The context of feeding the pigs again involves giving in Martial 10.11. 5 ff. '*Donavi tamen*' inquis '*amico milia quinque/et lotam, ut multam, terve quaterve togam. Quid quod nil umquam Pylades donavit Orestae? qui donat quamvis plurima, plura negat.*

59. See above p. 51 with n. 49.

highlighted the behaviour of the giver. Augustine took a criminal and meaningless theft and explored it from the point of view, not of the giver or receiver, but of the taker. In both cases boys and pigs get pears, in neither does either derive any good from the fruit. The stories are two different reflections of the similar facts.

How did Augustine come to associate the fable of the Calabrian host with Genesis? Any reconstruction of his thought-processes must be largely imaginative, but the following hypothesis may explain why he used this particular literary model in this context. Augustine detected a certain similarity between his situation, the Bible, and Horace. Horace's epistle is a lecture on *beneficium* written from poet to patron. Augustine's *Confessions* could also be described as a sort of letter from poet to patron, but one in which Creation (C. 1.1.1 *aliquid portio creaturae*) addresses Creator and speaks of the Creator's *beneficia*. Like the Calabrian host, God too had a garden – one with live-in guests<sup>60</sup>. Like the Calabrian host, God offered fruit to the guests: *praecepitque ei dicens, "ex omni ligno paradisi comede; de ligno autem scientiae boni et mali ne comede."*<sup>61</sup> The Calabrian host, unlike God, was not a good giver: he gave what was worthless. God gave what was good: and could be said to have made man rich (*fecisti locupletem*). The *seges* of false *beneficium* is paralleled by the *paradisus voluptatum*, where the true *beneficia* are.

For a contrast to the Calabrian host, it is amusing to observe a careful later Roman bishop, Ruricius of Limoges, negotiating the *politesses* of giving large quantities<sup>62</sup> of pears. In a brief letter to Vittamerus<sup>63</sup> he wrote: *Familiares nos vobis facit vestra dignatio, dum hoc quod a nobis libenter offertur a vobis gratanter accipitur ... Itaque salutatione depensa <...> quia centum pira sublimitati vestrae, alia centum filiae meae destinare praesumpsi, quae si forte displicuerint saporis gustu, placebunt, ut confidimus, transmittentis affectu*<sup>64</sup>. The fruit might not be valuable or delicious, but it was the thought that counted.

But this was not all. The essential fact about pears is that they were proverbially cheap. This was so in Horace; the same applies to the *De Moribus Manichaeorum*<sup>65</sup>. The following stemma illustrates the literary sources of Augustine's pear-theft. A proverb determined the type of fruit in Horace, who seems to have added the boys, the pigs, and the abundance (*onustus*). On the Christian side, both the Bible and Manichaean ethics linked fruit and theft. In

---

60. Genesis 2:8 *plantaverat autem Dominus deus paradisum voluptatis a principio in quo posuit hominem quem formaverat*. Genesis 2:9 *produxitque Dominus Deus de humo omne lignum pulchrum visu et ad vescendum suave*.

61. Genesis 2:16.

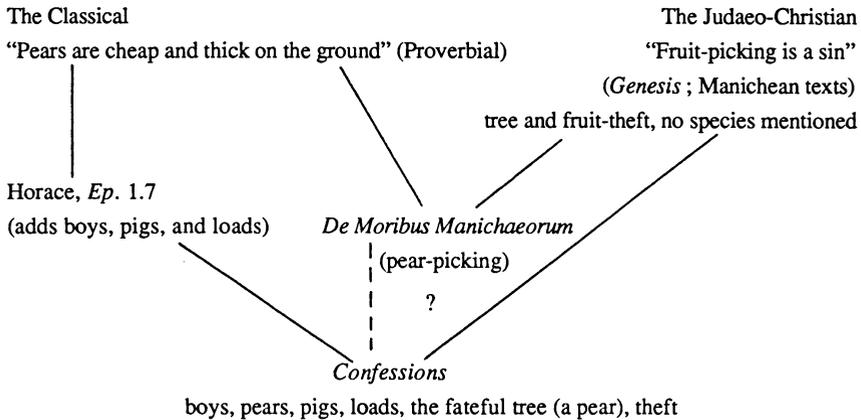
62. Since the *filia* is presumably Vittamerus's wife, two hundred pieces of fruit went to the same household.

63. *PLRE* 2 Vittamer, otherwise unknown, perhaps an official at the Visigothic court.

64. *Ep.* 2.60 (*MGH* 8); *Ep.* 2.61 (*CCSL* 64).

65. See above p. 49.

the *De Moribus Manichaeorum* the tree was a pear, cheapest of fruits, to magnify the Manichees' cruelty. When Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, he seemed to have worked from Horace and the Bible, but we cannot rule out the possibility that the choice of a pear may have been overdetermined. The *De Moribus Manichaeorum* dates to 388. And there is evident contamination of the commonplace about pears' cheapness.



Augustine's mixture of the pagan and the Christian is not unique. Even when Christian authors tried to avoid pagan texts or deliberately rejected them, the deep-rooted associations would surface. I would like to end with a strong methodological parallel in Jerome's *Ep. 22.30*, the description of his dream in the desert near Antioch<sup>66</sup>. Jerome had been fasting, but only to break down and read Cicero. He had trying to avoid pagan authors and read the prophets, but finally gave in and read Plautus (*Plautus sumebatur in manibus*)<sup>67</sup>. When he was near death he was haled before a nameless judge<sup>68</sup>, who interrogated him like a Roman magistrate. Jerome gave the martyr's answer: *interrogatus conditionem Christianum me esse respondi*<sup>69</sup>. The judge replied "Ciceronianus es, non Christianus". This silenced Jerome. They began to beat him (*inter verbera – nam caedi me iusserat*). He called out and begged for mercy: *miserere mei, miserere mei. Haec vox inter flagella resonabat*. It is interesting to note the passage's resemblance to a famous Ciceronian set-piece, the end of

66. There is a good treatment of the dream in A. de VOGÜÉ, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1993) v. 1.1 (356-385) pp. 285-287.

67. Note the interesting use of the passive voice. Somehow Plautus found his way into Jerome's hands.

68. The phrase *subito raptus*, perhaps echoing 2 Cor. 12.2 *scio hominem in Christo ... raptum huiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum* or 2 Cor. 12.4 *quoniam raptus est in Paradisum* suggests that the eminent figure is God. So too the light emanating from the judge's court.

69. Cf. *Pass. Perpet.* 6.3; *Pass. Scillitanorum* 13-14.

the *Second Verrine* (161-63)<sup>70</sup>, an account of the public flogging of the wretched Publius Gavius, the man who hoped that his *condicio* as a Roman citizen would save him: *nulla vox alia illius miseri inter dolorem crepitumque plagarum audiebatur, nisi haec, "Civis Romanus sum."*<sup>71</sup> The situations are parallel, the phrasing not dissimilar, and the psychological motivation quite clear. The judge was clearly right to punish Jerome. Cicero had been on his mind.

Danuta SHANZER  
Classics, Cornell University

ABSTRACT: This article reexamines the literary form and sources of Augustine's pear-theft in *Confessions* 2.4.9. It concludes that the form and structure of the episode – regardless of its factual reality – go back not only to *Genesis*, but also to Horace, *Ep.* 1.7, the fable of the Calabrian host. The central point underlying the choice of the pear is that it was a cheap and common fruit. The episode shows a deep contamination of the Classical and the Christian, but in this it is no different from the famous dream of Jerome (*Ep.* 22.30).

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article réexamine la forme littéraire et les sources de l'épisode du vol des poires relaté par Augustin (*Conf.* 2.4.9). Il en tire la conclusion que sa forme et sa structure – sans tenir compte de sa réalité factuelle – renvoient non seulement à la *Genèse* mais également à Horace, *Ep.* 1.7 (fable de l'ennemi calabrais). Le choix de la poire s'explique par le fait qu'il s'agit d'un fruit bon marché et commun. L'épisode témoigne de la profonde contamination des chrétiens par la culture classique, et en cela n'est pas très éloigné du fameux rêve de Jérôme (*Ep.* 22.30).

---

70. For Jerome's knowledge of the *Verrines*, see H. HAGENDAHL, *Latin Fathers and the Classics* (Göteborg 1958) p. 285 and p. 287.

71. *In Verr.* 2.162.