In the often-cited first sentence of Conf. 3.6.10, Augustine describes the Manichaeans as 'arrogant fools, very carnal and garrulous in whose mouths were the devil's snares and birdlime concocted with the addition of syllables of Your name and of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Paraclete, our Comforter, the Holy Spirit.' The words 'devil's snares' (laquei diaboli) and 'birdlime' (uiscum) refer specifically, it seems, to the allurement of Manichaean teachings and their well-known strategy of persuasion and 'seduction' (cf. Conf. 4.1.1) by means of words and names that they knew were religiously familiar and alluring to their various audiences. What I find particularly interesting is that Augustine himself in this sentence appears to employ a communicative technique very similar to that so effectively used by the Manichaeans. As has been convincingly argued by Annemaré Kotzé in recent work, most passages in Augustine's Confessions concerning Augustine's time as a Manichaean, and not least the lengthy passage in the third book (3.6.10–3.10.18), are protreptics directed at the Manichaeans and not exclusively or primarily polemics against them. Augustine repeatedly attempts to connect with his former brethren in faith, penetrate their defenses and enlighten them, by speaking their language or, more precisely, by skilfully and frequently using words, phrases and imagery which he knew would readily attract their
attention and make them reflect. Augustine had, of course, been exposed to and rehearsed the Manichaean techniques of persuasion and argumentation. He knew the words of their ‘numerous and huge tomes’ (*libris multis et ingentibus*), which he—with (in my opinion) deliberate reference to the Manichaean daily meal *ritus*—describes as ‘dishes’ (*fercula*) on which were ‘served the sun and the moon’ and other ‘splendid hallucinations’ (*phantasmata splendida*) (*Conf.* 3.6.10)\. And as a Manichaean Hearer he ‘sang (their) songs’ (*et cantabam carmina*) (*Conf.* 3.7.14).

Johannes van Oort has cited and discussed the passage on many occasions,\(^4\) and his overall contribution to the research of possible and probable Manichaean elements in the *Confessions* and other writings of Augustine is, of course, both major and significant. In a paper delivered at the Third International Congress of Manichaean Studies in 1993, Van Oort discussed *Conf.* 3.6.10 at length. He identified some instances of the snare motif in the Coptic Manichaean *Psalm-Book* and made the point that Augustine in his *Confessions* was engaged in a controversy with the Manichaeans and, at the same time, deliberately ‘played on words by making use of their own vocabulary’.\(^5\) As I shall very briefly attempt to demonstrate in this small footnote to Van Oort’s work, the bird-catching imagery in the first sentence of the passage may well derive from or allude to Manichaean imagery. Other sources of inspiration are, however, also possible.

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