

PSEUDO-AUGUSTINE AND RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY  
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Julia D. Staykova

The publishing scene in early modern London was seething with printed compilations of Augustinian devotions. These travelled under the titles *St. Augustine's Meditations*, *St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, and *St. Augustine's Manual*, and were either issued together as a single volume, or sold as three independent publications. The material contained in these volumes aided the practice of private devotion by providing exemplary prayers and meditations on set topics, as well as sequences of confessional and homiletic material, prayer, and scriptural exegesis. The popularity of the collection is attested to by over eighty Latin and vernacular editions printed in the 1500s–1600s throughout Europe, and twenty-seven translated editions printed in England from the 1550s to the 1640s alone.<sup>1</sup>

What makes the story of the Augustinian triptych so curious is that it was not, in fact, written by Augustine. Its authorship is best defined as compilatory, as it brings together materials gathered from Augustine's *Confessions*, a number of medieval meditative sources, and the Bible. Yet this inauthentic devotional Augustine fashioned by the apocrypha played a significant role in the belated publication of Augustine's authentic works in translation. As it happened, decades before Augustine was introduced onto the English scene with the 1608 translation of the *City of God* and the 1620 translation of the *Confessions*, Pseudo-Augustine had not only achieved considerable popularity,<sup>2</sup> but managed to embroil itself in a

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<sup>1</sup> See *Index Aureliensis: catalogus librorum sedecimo saeculo impressorum*, part 1, vol. 2 (Baden-Baden, 1965–) and A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640*, 3 vols., 2nd ed. revised by K. F. Pantzer, W. A. Jackson, and F. S. Ferguson (London, 1976–91), catalogue numbers 924–54.

<sup>2</sup> On further evidence of the reception of the *Meditations and Soliloquies*, see Robert Sturges, 'Pseudo-Augustinian Writings,' in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollmann, etc. (Oxford, forthcoming); Julia D. Staykova, 'The Augustinian Soliloquies of an Early Modern Reader: A Stylistic Relation of Shakespeare's Hamlet?,' *Literature and Theology* 24 (2009), pp. 1–21; and Kerry McCarthy, 'Byrd, Augustine, and *Tribue, Domine*,' *Early Music* 32:4 (2004), pp. 569–75.

controversy that attracted the attention of prominent theologians, both Catholic and Protestant.

This essay examines the publishing history of the Pseudo-Augustinian compilation and the controversy surrounding its adaptation from Catholic sources to Protestantism. My interest is in demonstrating that Augustine beyond his books was intimately tied with devotional Pseudo-Augustine, to the point that for the early modern lay reader the two were hardly separable.

### *Authentic Augustine Meets His Apocryphal Relation*

To understand why Augustine came to be the accidental “author” of a collection of exercises in affective piety that he never wrote, we need to bear in mind that it was the product of a culture whose models of authorship vary significantly from our own. The apocryphal *Meditations*, *Soliloquies* and *Manual* illustrate an evolution of textual practices that separates our own perception of the author as a singular and authentic agent from medieval authorship by participation in a multi-centennial collective of contributors. Essentially, Pseudo-Augustine is the product of an age that valued continuity and promoted innovation by establishing ties with it with authority (fig. 1).

The *Meditations*, *Soliloquies* and *Manual* were compiled by anonymous thirteenth-century Augustinian monks. John Machielsen names as their principal sources Augustine’s *Confessions* as well as meditative, contemplative and devotional works by Hugh of St. Victor (*Soliloquium de arrha animae*, *De meditando*, *De contemplatione*), Anselm (*Meditation XVI* and *Proslogion*), Bernard of Clairvaux (Sermons ‘On Psalm 90,’ ‘Sermons on the *Song of Songs*’; ‘Sermons for the Whole Year’), Jean de Fécamp (*Confessio theologica*, *Supputationes*, *Meditation Theoretica*) and Isidore of Seville (*Florilegia*).<sup>3</sup> The anonymous compilers who wove a new textual entity out of this patchwork were superb literary critics, for what unites all the

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<sup>3</sup> J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, vol. 40 (Paris, 1887), pp. 863, 898–902, 950–1 and Johan Machielsen ed., *Clavis Patristica Pseudographorum Medii Aevi*, vol. 2B, pp. 699–705, in *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1994) are the major resources on the patristic and scholastic sources of the apocryphal compilation. Migne (p. 898) quotes several passages from the *Meditations* which echo closely phrases from the *Confessions* 1.1 and 12.15, but at this time textual parallels between the apocrypha and Augustine’s *Confessions* have not been comprehensively studied.