OF CYDER AND SALLETS: THE HORTULAN SAINTS AND  
THE GARDEN OF CYRUS  

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It was seemingly beyond dispute that ‘for one poore Apple’ our first parents lost the banquet of Eden’s other dainties.\(^1\) But when Thomas Browne decided to investigate ‘What Fruit that was which our first Parents tasted in Paradise?’ (3.10) his conclusion was not so sure.\(^2\) This *quaere* is one of many vegetable enquiries in his tract “Observations upon Several Plants Mention’d in Scripture”, and it is followed up with a related discussion of the fig and of fig-leaves. Strikingly, Browne never once names the fatal fruit of the Edenic narrative as the apple.

Instead, he considers at length various biblical cruces arising from imperfect translations of Middle Eastern botanical names. In some cases, he says, there simply are no local English equivalents of the original plants, and the species given are only vegetables ‘of good affinity unto them’; in other cases, the biblical name is ‘rendered by analogy’ with a vernacular word (3.10). In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, where he also considers the fruit of the tree of knowledge, he notes that if the Greek word for apple ‘comprehendeth Orenges, Lemmons, Citrons, Quinces, and […] such fruits as have no stone within’ (*PE* 1.538),\(^3\) the *apple* as the forbidden fruit and vegetable agent of man’s fall must be in considerable philological doubt.

Browne chastises those who make out the apple from its suggestively wicked Latin botanical name as the lapsarian *malum*, merely ‘because that fruit was the first occasion of evill’ (*PE* 1.536). Although other authorities designated the forbidden fruit as a vine, as the Indian fig tree, as a kind of citron, as the *arbore vitae*, as the elder, and even as the banana, he returns to the fact that ‘there is no determination in the

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\(^2\) References to Browne’s works other than *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* are to Browne T., *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. G. Keynes, 2nd ed., 4 vols (London: 1964) and will be given in the text.  
\(^3\) All references to *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* are to Browne, T., *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. R. Robbins, 2 vols (Oxford: 1981) and will be given in the text, identified by the initials *PE*. 
All that we have ever known about the fruit of knowledge is that it was both beautiful and tasty, ‘in which regards many excell the Apple’ (PE 1.537). ‘After this fruit[,] curiosity fruitlessly enquireth’, he comments drily; ‘we shall surcease our Inquisition, rather troubled that it was tasted, than troubling our selves in its decision’ (PE 1.539, emphases added). In other words, to make a botanical fuss about the forbidden fruit is really only a vulgar error propagated by the Devil to distract us from the true meaning of the event in Eden.

Contemporary horticulturalists concurred: for them the practical promulgation of fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, and of orchard-craft more broadly, was the antithesis of error, as cultivation in general achieved a moral, philosophical, even learned, status. ‘We were present & stoode by’, say the pious fruit trees of Ralph Austen’s Dialogue (1676), ‘when thou, and thy wife, did both of you, transgresse the Command of our Creator [. . .] which we never yet did, nor ever shall; though we are much inferior to mankind’.4 Austen (c. 1612–1676), a renowned Puritan orchardist, produced spiritual meditations upon his trees as well as practical fruit and cider manuals. For him, as for other georgic experts, cultivation was an act of devotion by which man’s lost innocence could be at least in part restored. The poets went further, and imaginatively reversed the consequences of the fall by selecting apples to heal the lapsarian injury. In Andrew Marvell’s (1621–1678) garden, apples conveniently drop down upon him along with various other fruits, nature’s sponte sua and insistent agency replicated by nectarines and peaches as they oddly and reflexively ‘reach themselves’ into his hands; he falls, it is true, but only on grass, having been tripped by an inconvenient melon (or, perhaps, a malum). The Royalist Abraham Cowley (1618–1667), playing on and then rejecting the apple as the lapsarian fruit, elaborates the orchard as a redemptive place of knowledge and proclaims: ‘The Orchard’s open now, and free [. . .] Behold the ripen’d Fruit, come gather now your fill’.5

Browne’s scholarly exoneration of the apple from lapsarian guilt would particularly have pleased contemporary orchardists, ciderists, and enthusiasts of vegetable diets, experts like Austen who were writing extensively about the virtues, spiritual and practical, of this fruit. But

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4 Austen R., A Dialogue or Familiar Discourse and conference betweene the Husbandman and Fruit-trees (London: 1676) 2–3.