

Teaching Sin: Manuals for Penitents and Self-Examination Literature in England, 1150-1400

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Abstract

This dissertation offers the first full-length study of medieval England's literary tradition of manuals for penitents—texts describing the sins, and other essentials of the faith, that address penitents preparing for confession. This tradition includes works that were among the most popular in medieval England. Some of these—including the *Parson's Tale* and *Ancrene Wisse*, which is an important precursor to this body of writing—have been studied in depth, but the tradition in which they participate is still not well understood.

This dissertation shows that this tradition emerged in a significant way in the second half of the thirteenth century, although it took root in an existing body of self-examination writing. Insofar as it reflects a new emphasis on reading as a means of interrogating oneself rather than as a means of preparing oneself to interrogate others, the development of these manuals represents a widening range of reading practices and a shift toward private confessional education.

The first two chapters describe the characteristics of manuals for penitents, including their material and formal qualities. Among other contributions, the first chapter explores a feature of commentaries on the essentials of the faith that often goes unnoticed: that when they appear in manuals for penitents, they are not, as is often thought, digressive, impersonal, or strictly didactic, but instead encourage and promote self-reflection. The second chapter examines the implied and actual audiences of manuals for penitents. On the basis of this more precise characterization of these manuals, the final three chapters offer insight into three interlinked texts chosen from different stages of the development of these manuals: *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Compileison*, and the *Parson's Tale*. In addition to shedding light on these three texts, these concluding chapters highlight some of the tensions that emerged surrounding the shift to asynchronous penitential learning that was enabled by these manuals.

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“O quam dulcis vita fuit, dum sedebamus in quieti. . .inter librorum copias.”
“Oh how sweet life was when we sat quietly. . .amidst an abundance of books.”

- Alcuin

A Note on the Translation and Treatment of Texts

I have included translations for all passages written prior to the mid-fourteenth century, regardless of their original language of composition. I have relied on others' translations in cases where these were available. On a few occasions, all noted, I have modified others' translations to make them more closely reflect original readings. All other translations are my own. Quotations from *Ancrene Wisse* are from Bella Millett's EETS edition, which uses Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 as its base text; translations are from Millett's *Guide for Anchoresses*.

Given the present lack of a modern critical edition of the *Manuel des péchés*, I have taken quotations from this text from Wilhelm G. Busse and Barbara Dohm's transcription of the copy in Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm. 6.4. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Busse for providing me with this transcription and for granting me permission to reproduce parts of it here.

In titles of works, I have retained medieval spellings, except in cases such as the *Manuel des péchés* and the *Ayenbite of Inwyrt* in which the scholarship favours a modernized spelling. For titles in Latin and French, I have followed the capitalization rules for those languages.

In my own transcriptions, I have preserved all original punctuation, using a square bracket to indicate expansions and a slash to indicate the end of a line. My transcriptions from the *Compileison* were taken from Trinity College Cambridge, MS R.14.7, since this is the manuscript W. H. Trethewey uses as a base text for his edition. I have adopted Trethewey's system of foliation for these.

A Chronological List of the Main Texts Consulted in this Study

“Les Effets des sept péchés capitaux” (Dean. no. 652)	c. 12 th C	
<i>Vices and Virtues</i>	c. 1175-1200	
<i>Peniteas cito peccator</i>	before 1213	William of Montibus
“Poème sur le mariage, les vices et les vertus, par Henri” (Dean no. 623)	c. 13 th C/ unknown	Henry
<i>Speculum religiosorum</i>	c. 1213-1233	Edmund of Abingdon
<i>Summa confessorum</i>	c. 1215	Thomas of Chobham
<i>Summa de casibus poenitentiae</i> (<i>Summa de paenitentia</i>)	c. 1225	Raymond de Pennafort
<i>Ancrene Wisse</i>	c. 1220-1230	
<i>Perambulavit Iudas</i>	before 1235	Robert Grosseteste
<i>Notus in Iudea Deus</i>	c. 1235-1253	Robert Grosseteste
<i>Summa de vitiis</i>	c. 1236	Guilelmus Peraldus
<i>Summa de virtutibus</i>	c. 1236	Guilelmus Peraldus
<i>Quoniam</i>	c. 1236-41	
<i>Primo</i>	c. 1236-41	
<i>Omnis etas</i>	1240	Walter Cantilupe
<i>Miroir du monde</i>	c. 1248-1280	
<i>Compileison</i> (Dean no. 644)	c.1254-1274	
<i>Manuel des péchés</i> (Dean no. 635)	c. 1260	William of Waddington
<i>Qui vult vere confiteri</i>	c. 1260-74	Robert de Sorbon
<i>La Somme le roi</i>	c. 1279	Friar Laurent
<i>Summula</i>	1287	Bishop Quinel
<i>The Clensyng of Mannes Sowle</i>	late 14 th or early 15 th C	
<i>The Boke of Penance</i>	14 th C	
<i>Handlyng Synne</i>	1303-17	Robert Mannyng
<i>Ayenbite of Inwyt</i>	1340	Michael of Northgate
<i>Speculum vitae</i>	mid-14 th C	
<i>Livre de seynt medicines</i> (Dean no. 696)	1354	Henry, Duke of Lancaster
<i>Pore Caitif</i>	c. 1360-1400	
<i>The Parson’s Tale</i>	c. 1400	Geoffrey Chaucer

Introduction

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 placed an unprecedented emphasis on confession. In particular, Canon 21 of the Council required those who had reached the age of majority to confess their sins to a priest at least once per year. In the wake of this council, penitents—both clerical and lay—turned to a variety of texts to help them prepare for confession. Among these are a number of instructional guides that are concerned with self-examination, such as the *Manuel des péchés* (c. 1260), the *Somme le roi* (c. 1279), and the English adaptations of these two texts, including Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne* (1303-17) and the mid-fourteenth-century *Speculum vitae*, once ascribed to William Nassington.¹ We could also count Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* among these guides. Works such as these help a penitent prepare for confession by explaining the contours and attributes of sin, through statements such as: “Þe man wrapþyþ hym lyghtely, / For lytyl, as yn malyncoley, / Þat synne ne ys ryghte gref” (Mannyng I.118.3712-1.118.3714) (“The man who loses his temper easily, over little—as happens through an excess of black bile—that sin is not very serious”).

In the present study, I use the term “manuals for penitents” for texts such as these, which a) address penitents or explicitly announce that they could be used by penitents, b) contain a significant amount of material that could be used for self-examination purposes, and c) use third-person pronouns to describe the penitent. As I discuss at greater length below, I have borrowed this term from Lee Patterson, who uses it to describe a similar body of texts. In the present study, I delimit these manuals, based on the above characteristics, from a larger body of texts that could

¹ In his edition of the *Speculum vitae*, Ralph Hanna writes that, “The Nassington ascriptions, although they are universally accepted today, have. . . little to recommend them.” He declares the work “resolutely anonymous” (“Introduction” lx).

be used for self-examination.² In that they evoke a paradigmatic sinner using “he” or “she” and related third-person pronouns, these manuals are distinct from the “forms of confession” described recently by both Philip Durkin and Michael Cornett that give voice to the sinner using first-person pronouns. They are also distinct from the manuals and *summae* produced for confessors to guide them in their duties, such as Thomas of Chobham’s *Summa confessorum* (c. 1215), and Raymond de Pennafort’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, also known as the *Summa de paenitentia* (c.1225).³ However, as I discuss at greater length below, there is some overlap between these groups of texts.⁴

Manuals for penitents circulated widely. Indeed, one of these, the *Somme le roi*, which was written by Friar Laurent while he was in the service of Philip III, became one of the most popular religious texts of medieval Europe.⁵ In England, where the focus of this study falls, most of these manuals were written in English or Anglo-Norman, although some were written in Latin. They were copied in large numbers, some imported from the Continent and some composed locally. The *Somme le roi*, for example, was translated into English nine times in the fourteenth century (Francis xxii) and these various translations, taken together, survive in sixty-two different manuscripts (Veyseyre et al.). Some local compositions also circulated widely, including William of Waddington’s *Manuel des péchés*, which survives in twenty-eight manuscripts and fragments (Dean 349-51; no. 635). *Ancrene Wisse* (c. 1220-1230), an important

² I have chosen the term “self-examination” to describe this larger body of texts in lieu of the more commonly-found term “confessional” in order to distinguish this body of texts from works prepared for confessors about how to conduct the confessional interrogation.

³ For the dating of these works, see Payer 5. For the difference between priests’ manuals and *summae*, see Tentler’s *Sin and Confession* 113-14.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these distinctions, see pages 34 to 44.

⁵ Its editors term the *Somme le roi* “un des best-sellers de la littérature française au Moyen Âge” (Brayer, and Leurquin-Labie 23), and it appears on the list of *Œuvres Pieuses Vernaculaires à Succès* prepared by Veyseyre et others.

precursor to this body of texts, and a focal point of the present study, survives in seventeen copies and fragments, including three independent translations (Millett, *Guide* xxxvii).

Given their remarkable popularity, manuals for penitents represent, more than many other texts, the tastes and interests of medieval audiences. This alone should make them worthy of study. Moreover, as we shall see, understanding the tradition of manuals for penitents is valuable for shedding light on several canonical works of literature. Nevertheless, in general, the tradition has been neglected in medieval literary scholarship, and most of the texts participating within it have been sidelined.⁶

This neglect stems from diverse cultural attitudes that have shaped our understanding of what constitutes literature. Current approaches to what counts as literature, of course, are not based on medieval ones. Indeed, the term “literature” was not in use in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the closest medieval equivalent, *litteratura*, was not used for vernacular texts at all; Bella Millett has observed that in this period, *litteratura* was a category reserved for Latin texts and had connotations of learning and erudition (“Women” 86). So, while we might now think of the category of literature as encompassing texts like *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*—texts that, in the words of the editors of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, “claim special attention because of their formal beauty and expressive power”

⁶ So for example, there have been few significant literary studies of the *Manuel des péchés*, and Ulrike Schemmann has recently lamented that the text “has not yet found the interest it deserves” (3). Writing in 1984, Fritz Kemmler observed that, “Although Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne* has very often been referred to in various branches of literary and historical studies . . . there is still no adequate appreciation of his work in terms of either the historical context or of its literary features” (16). Since the publication of Kemmler’s study, a few short literary studies have emerged on *Handlyng Synne*, including those of Cynthia Ho, Kate Greenspan, and Robert Hasenfratz. Leo M. Carruthers describes an inverse, but equally bleak situation for the *Somme le roi*: “the *Somme le roi* (1279), is, regrettably, no longer studied other than by specialists” (190). The *Speculum vitae*, a Middle English adaptation of the *Somme le roi*, is, according to Hanna, “the least-known major poem in Middle English” (“Yorkshire Circulation” 279).

(xxxi)—these texts would not have been included in the medieval category of *litteratura*. This difference in terminology serves as a valuable reminder that modern approaches to literature are distinct from those of medieval England.

Moreover, the boundaries of the modern category of literature are constantly shifting, and it is widely recognized that the texts that a culture counts as “literary”—as opposed to, for example, “historical” or “utilitarian”—are generally those that reflect that culture’s own ideological moorings.⁷ In general, the ideological climate has not been favourable for religious texts from medieval England. A long-standing discomfort with medieval religion, stemming, in part, from a conviction that it is antithetical to subjectivity, and, in part, from the view that it is simply uninteresting to modern tastes, has resulted in the exclusion of texts with more overtly religious themes from the category of literature.⁸

Among medieval religious texts, manuals for penitents have suffered particular neglect due to a pervasive sense that they are of limited literary value. Although Frederick J. Furnivall, in his edition of *Handlyng Synne*, declared its author “the worthiest forerunner of Chaucer” (iv), this work, and most of its kind, are rarely granted such praise. Indeed, even some who do study these manuals question their literary merits; Matthew Sullivan, in his study of the *Manuel des péchés* and its derivatives, describes the Anglo-Norman manual as a “dry reformatory text”

⁷ David Richter, for example, writes that, since the 70s, literary scholarship has become increasingly conscious of the way that the separation between “literary” and “non-literary” texts is culturally determined (21-23). Seth Lerer has made a similar observation in the context of medieval literary studies: “We have been taught, of late, that literature is not an essentialist category, capable of definition according to set criteria. Instead, many have come to argue (or believe) that literature and literary canons are creations of distinctive times and places” (1252).

⁸ See for example, Aers’ “A Whisper in the Ear of Modernists” 195, and the discussion below, page 25. Katharina M. Wilson suggests that the exclusion of medieval religious texts from the modern canon is due to the view that orthodox religious literature will not interest modern readers (viii).

(142). This neglect has been compounded by a tendency among those working in English departments to overlook medieval England's Anglo-Norman literary tradition—the tradition in which many manuals for penitents participate.⁹

Moreover, for some of these manuals, a wide medieval circulation has actually impeded literary scholarship, since those surviving in a large number of copies are daunting to editors. A critical edition of the *Somme le roi* did not appear until 2008, largely due to the difficulty of establishing authority from so many copies.¹⁰ An edition of the *Manuel des péchés* prepared by Furnivall first appeared in 1862, and was reprinted in the early twentieth century, but it was limited to those parts of the *Manuel des péchés* that are translated in *Handlyng Synne*. It was, moreover, based on limited number of manuscripts, and a modern, critical edition is still wanting.¹¹

⁹ See, for example, Linda Georgianna, who examines how French and Latin works have been left out of the canon of English literature due to nationalistic interests. She writes that “in general we must expand the category of ‘English literature’ to include works [formerly] excluded as ‘non-literary,’ works written in Latin and French, the *other* languages of culture in England” (“Coming to Terms” 50). More specifically, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne describes how thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century *pastoralia* has been sidelined due to the neglect of England's French tradition: “The vernacular results of Lateran IV have been unproblematically accepted as arriving in the late fourteenth century in the form of an ‘efflorescence’ of late medieval devotional and doctrinal texts in Middle English, even though for the century and a half before that efflorescence it is French that is the dominant language of *pastoralia* and the formation of the self in England” (“Cest livre” 239).

¹⁰ Carruthers writes that, “Despite the number of French manuscripts of the *Somme le Roi* (there are over a hundred known copies in France, Belgium, Italy, England, and the U.S.A.), no critical edition of the work has been made, largely because of the difficulty of collating so many copies. An edition of one manuscript was made in 1940 in an unpublished thesis, and another manuscript was edited in two unpublished M.A. dissertations in 1949-51” (197). See also the discussion of the lack of complete edition of the *Compileison* on page 153.

¹¹ Matthew Sullivan writes that Furnivall's EETS edition was produced from “an extremely poor manuscript” (1). It is hoped that this situation will be resolved soon. As Schemmann notes, Wilhelm G. Busse and Barbara Dohm have completed a transcription of the copy in Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm. 6.4 (4), and Dr. Busse has kindly provided me with a copy of this transcription for the purpose of this dissertation, but it has not yet been published. The lineation of this transcription differs from that of Furnivall's edition.

For their own part, historians of confession have been less interested in works for interrogating the self than in those for interrogating others. The important post-Enlightenment historians in the field are unified in taking their evidence from conciliar records and manuals for confessors containing advice on interrogating others; among these historians are self-taught Protestant scholar Henry Charles Lea (1825-1909), who is credited with starting the modern debate on whether confession is a form of social control (Hamilton 10; Mansfield 6), Oscar D. Watkins (1848-1926), the Catholic historian who countered Lea, and Bernhard Poschmann (1878-1955), a Catholic priest.¹² More recent historians of confession, including Thomas Tentler, Leonard E. Boyle, and Pierre Michaud-Quantin, mention self-examination texts in their studies, but draw primarily on manuals for those interrogating others.¹³ While the past two decades have

¹²Henry Charles Lea writes, “I have not confined myself to standard theological treatises, but have largely referred to popular works of devotion in which is to be found the practical application of the theories enunciated by the masters of theology” (I.v). The “popular works of devotion” that Lea describes here seem to be manuals for priests, such as Alan de Lille’s *Liber poenitentialis* (c.1200) (I.150), and Raymond de Pennaforte’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, as well as sermons and monastic rules, such as that of St Benedict (I.184). Lea also draws on records of councils (I.25). Watkins, whose history of penance begins, rather ambitiously, with the beginning of the Christian Church, cites Biblical texts (I.3), early Church fathers, such as St Ambrose (I.247), and, for the later period, penitentials, such as that of Burchard of Worms, theological works by authors like Peter Lombard, and conciliar documents (II.723).

¹³ In his excellent but often overlooked study, Pierre Michaud-Quantin focuses on works for priests such as Burchard of Worms’s eleventh-century *Corrector et medicus* (16) and Raymond de Pennaforte’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (35). However, he uses the same term, “manuels de confession” (10), to describe both texts for examining the self and those for interrogating others (10). He thus includes, under this general term, a few works that he recognizes are written for penitents, such as Jean Rigaud’s early fourteenth-century confessional formula (55), and the *Manuel des péchés* (28). Leonard E. Boyle includes both “preparation of confession” manuals and “examination of conscience” manuals in a chart delineating the various types of *pastoralia* (“Summae confessorum” 231), but describes these categories only briefly (234), as his chart appears in a chapter about manuals for those charged with interrogating others. Describing his own methodology, Thomas Tentler writes, “The sources I have used come primarily from an ecclesiastical establishment. They are books and manuals written by the people who ran the church—or who spoke for those who ran the church—and who tried to get people to conform to the standards embodied in the ecclesiastical institutions” (*Sin* xiv). Here, Tentler makes no mention of his use of manuals written by priests for penitents. He does, however, discuss the

seen two historical studies of the form of confession, there is currently no equivalent for manuals for penitents.¹⁴

A pattern of excluding medieval texts that are focused on religious matters from the category of literature has started to change in a significant way in the past four decades or so. This change is reflected in developments to the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*—one of the most widely-read literary anthologies and, therefore, a useful one for gauging a text's canonical status. Many of the changes made to the medieval section of this anthology over the past four decades have involved the addition or expansion of texts with more overtly theological material. This process began in Abrams' fifth edition (1986) of the anthology, which introduced *The York Play of the Crucifixion* (viii), selections from *The Book of Margery Kempe* (ix) and an expanded selection of *Piers Plowman* (viii). Abrams did not include *The York Play of the Crucifixion* in his sixth edition (1993), but he did add two other mystery plays (ix), and an even longer selection from *Piers Plowman* (viii), and introduced selections from *A Book of the Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* (ix). This new emphasis on more overtly religious material was pushed even further in the seventh edition of the text (2000), which added an even longer selection of Julian of Norwich's work (ix-x), and introduced a short selection from *Ancrene Wisse* (viii).

The most substantial expansions to the two most recent editions were in the Anglo-Norman and medieval Irish selections, but both also expanded the anthology's more overtly religious offerings. The eighth (2006) reintroduced the "The York Play of the Crucifixion" (xii),

importance of self-examination, and acknowledges some texts written for this purpose, although he does not provide any vernacular examples (*Sin* 110-12).

¹⁴ See above, page 2. A study on the confessional interrogatory is also wanting, as Michael Cornett notes (5).

expanded the selection from *Piers Plowman* (xi), and reorganized some works from the previous edition into a section on “Christ’s Humanity” (xi). The latest (2012) introduced a newly-expanded selection from *Ancrene Wisse* (1).

These additions, and the changes to the canon that they represent, should be embraced. Perhaps the most compelling reason for welcoming these changes is that they bring a more complete picture of medieval textual culture to modern literary studies. Aside from having a different view of what constitutes literature, medieval writers did not draw clean distinctions between works of moral teaching and those of secular entertainment. The authors of manuals for penitents saw their works as having a complex relationship with more secular ones. In his *Handlyng Synne*, Robert Mannyng writes “Talys shalt þou fynde þer ynne / And chauncys þat haue happyd for synne” (131-32) (“You will find tales within, and happenings that took place due to sin”). By using the term *talys*, one that is used in works such as *Ancrene Wisse* to describe secular narratives, Mannyng gestures toward his works’ participation in the narrative forms used for secular entertainment.¹⁵

Even Chaucer’s Parson, who famously refuses to tell a “fable” (X.31), rejecting false forms of story-telling, nevertheless agrees to tell “a myrie tale in prose” (X.46). The author of the *Speculum vitae* distances his work from *chansons de geste*, insisting that he “wil make na vayne carpynge / Of dedes of armes ne of amours” (6; 36-37). But he says that he will instead “carp of mast nedefull thyng” (6; 50), and by using the same term, “carpynge,” to describe the method of tale-telling in *chansons de geste* and in his own work he signals his work’s association with

¹⁵ The author of *Ancrene Wisse* writes “Me seið upon ancren þet euch meast haueð an ald cwene to feden hire earen, a meaðeleð hire alle þe talen of þe lond” (“They say about anchoresses that practically every one has an old woman to feed her ears, a female chatterbox who passes on every story in the country”) (36).

forms of secular entertainment.¹⁶ Since authors of manuals for penitents saw their works as adjacent to, if not participating within, genres that are now considered literary, it is fitting to include these works among literary ones.

Moreover, some texts that have been granted literary status through inclusion in anthologies of literature, such as the *Parson's Tale* and the *Confessio Amantis*, make use of some of the techniques and forms of manuals for penitents. By breaking down current boundaries between these works and a larger body of manuals for penitents, extending literary status to all manuals for penitents allows us to better understand works that are already considered literature.

Finally, granting literary status to manuals for penitents is valuable because it encourages us to approach these manuals using the methods of analysis traditionally associated with literary studies, including the analysis of audience functions, rhetoric, and tone. In his *Check-list of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* in 1974, P. S. Jolliffe wrote of the “need for the study of the literary value of these writings” (7). He expressed an intention to produce such a study for texts written for those living under a rule (57). There have been a few literary studies of other texts in the *Check-list* in the interim, but many continue to be overlooked, and granting literary status of manuals for penitents will support further work in this area.

None of this is to say that these manuals have languished in complete neglect. Indeed, many are available in modern critical editions and translations. Nevertheless, it remains true that few have been the subject of sustained literary analysis and, moreover, the tradition itself remains obscure. Since editors generally have limited space in which to explore these texts' affiliations, the remarkable similarities between them often go unnoticed.

¹⁶ See the discussion of this passage below on page 212.

It is, however, worth mentioning two texts that have received a great deal of attention among literary scholars. *Ancrene Wisse*, which is, as already noted, an important precursor to manuals for penitents, has become a central text to English literary studies. Scholars from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries turned to the work for its philological value.¹⁷ Among them was J.R.R. Tolkien, who praised the version in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 for preserving what he saw as “a good living speech” left uncompromised by the Norman Conquest.¹⁸ A more significant proliferation of scholarship on *Ancrene Wisse*, spearheaded by Bella Millett, among others, began in the 80s, partly in response to growing interest in the literary lives of women. The work is now an essential text for students of English literature, women’s writing, and medieval theology, and selections can be found in many of the major collections of English literature, including the Norton, Broadview, and Oxford anthologies.

The *Parson’s Tale* has also become important to literary scholarship, although it has nevertheless received less attention than Chaucer’s other tales, and the consensus on the work among many might best be described by echoing Samuel Johnson’s famous words on *Paradise Lost*, that “None ever wished it longer than it is” (qtd. in Leonard 70). Its generic affiliations were largely misconstrued until Lee Patterson (1978) argued that it was a “clear instance of one

¹⁷ See, for example, the entries on pages 63-74 of Millett’s annotated bibliography, *Ancrene Wisse, The Katherine Group, and The Wooing Group*. Of the nineteen works on *Ancrene Wisse* published before 1900 listed in this bibliography, seven examine *Ancrene Wisse* with philological aims (items 5, 8, 10, 15, 17, 27 and 29), while an additional two attempt to determine the work’s authorship in order to examine its language (items 18 and 19). Only one of the works published before 1900 is concerned with the text’s female audience (item 30).

¹⁸ “It is not a language long relegated to the ‘uplands’ struggling once more for expression in apologetic emulation of its betters or out of compassion for the lewd, but rather one that has never fallen back into ‘lewdness’, and has contrived in troublous times to maintain the air of a gentleman, if a country gentleman. It has traditions and some acquaintance with books and the pen, but it is also in close touch with a good living speech – a soil somewhere in England” (Tolkien 106).

recognizable type, the manual for penitents” (339)—as opposed to a sermon or a manual for priests.¹⁹ Patterson’s classification of the manual is generally accepted, but much remains to be done in terms of contextualizing it within this tradition. So, the present study seeks to shed light on the tradition of manuals for penitents, and, through this, on some of the texts that participate in this tradition, including *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Parson’s Tale*.

In so doing, I will be contributing indirectly to the history of medieval confession, since manuals for penitents provide crucial, but often overlooked, evidence in this history. As already noted, the important historians of confession focus their studies on manuals for those charged with interrogating others, and a historical study of manuals for penitents is still wanting. These manuals can tell us much about how penitents experienced confession, since they contain confessional teaching as it would have been experienced directly by the penitent, and therefore offer a more grassroots perspective than manuals for those interrogating others.

But before manuals for penitents can be incorporated into either literary or historical studies, we must establish some of their characteristics, including their formal qualities, their authors, and their intended, implied, and actual audiences. This is one of the goals of the present study, especially of the first and second chapters. In particular, the first chapter considers how the contents of these texts were shaped by changes to the confessional interrogation. For evidence of these changes, it draws on episcopal constitutions—that is, the legislation passed at a diocesan level by bishops, such as Richard Poore’s Salisbury Constitutions of 1219. In the second chapter, I consider the intended audiences of these texts and the ways that these texts characterize audience engagement. I also use evidence from surviving manuscripts to consider

¹⁹ Lee Patterson was not, however, the first to notice that the text was a penitential guide. See below, page 178.

who actually owned and used these texts and how these audiences engaged with them. These questions are necessary for understanding this tradition and its associated works, but their answers can be complex and, at times, technical. Moreover, they provide only limited certainties, due, in part, to the problems posed by limited manuscript survival.²⁰

The approach outlined here relies heavily on book history, and it can be thought to reflect, and contribute to, what Wendy Scase, writing of the contributions to Gillespie and Wakelin's *Production of Books in England: 1350-1500*, calls "the new sense of the centrality of the history of the book as an endeavour in cultural and literary study" ("Afterword" 293). It also participates in a move toward what Scase terms "research programmes organized around questions to which answers can be right or wrong"—one which, Scase writes, "reflects renewed confidence in empirical research and a sense that adding definitively to our knowledge and understanding of the objects we have inherited from the past is a use of time and resources that will have many beneficiaries and many enduring benefits" ("Afterword" 293).

Book history, with its emphasis on the careful accumulation of reliable and objective bibliographical information, is nonetheless influenced by modern values and imbedded views of the past. Over the past two decades, medieval literary scholars have become increasingly sensitive to the ways in which any attempts to narrate the past are inevitably, and often problematically, shaped by the values and ideals of the present.²¹ But literary history—and, by extension, book history—remains an important way of approaching texts, and Georgianna has

²⁰ For scholars who describe some of the problems of using documentary evidence (such as ownership inscriptions and wills) to establish the "actual" audiences of a text, see Evans 112.

²¹ Linda Georgianna writes, for example, that literary theory "has laid bare the tropes of narrative literary history as fictions that constitute the past rather than explaining it" ("Coming to Terms" 33). Nancy Partner makes a similar observation about the role of history in literary interpretation (296-97).

argued convincingly, drawing on the work of David Perkins, that although literary history is a fiction, it is one we must keep writing: “All literary history remains provisional, a *retelling* of the past, undoubtedly a fiction but useful nevertheless so long as it recognizes its own provisionality” (“Coming to Terms” 34). It is therefore valuable to keep in mind that the examination of the historical contexts of these works below is inescapably mediated by contemporary values and views.

The present study focuses on the tradition of manuals for penitents as it developed in England. Some scholars have argued that the English Church placed a uniquely strong emphasis on confession following King John’s excommunication in 1209 and his subsequent reconciliation with the Church, and that England’s tradition of confessional writing was particularly rich.²² But is hard to say if the situation in England was, in fact, exceptional. It is true that many hold that the Anglo-Norman Church put a unique emphasis on reform and

²² Mary Flowers Braswell identifies a particularly strong confessional fervor in thirteenth-century England, and attributes this to the nation’s turbulent confessional history (15). Drawing on historical accounts of King John’s reign, she argues that spirituality in England suffered during the king’s excommunication in the early years of the thirteenth century. She writes that, “Mass, save at a few conventual churches, was practically nonexistent, and the only sanctioned church services were the baptism of infants and the hearing of confessions of the dying.” She adds that, “It is safe to assume that, during these years. . . confession, which was a voluntary act, would have ceased to exist, though perhaps the more scrupulous would have confessed to one another” (15). This decline in English religious practices, she argues, meant that the renewed emphasis on confession in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council was felt particularly strongly in the English Church (15). Similarly, Mary Dominica Legge writes that after the Fourth Lateran Council, “the need for reform may have been felt more strongly in England, as a result of the suspension of Archbishop Stephen Langton and the recent Interdict” (206). E. J. Arnould argues that the English tradition of confessional writing was uniquely strong. He speaks of “[c]ette vogue des *Sommes populaires* à travers l’Europe des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles, et plus particulièrement en Angleterre” (2) (“this fashion for popular *summas* throughout Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and especially in England”).

orthodoxy.²³ However, a thorough comparison between the insular and continental traditions of self-examination writing remains to be done, and until it is, we cannot declare the situation in England unique. While I focus on the insular tradition in the present study, I also consider the continental one at times; many important insular manuals crossed national boundaries and therefore require a transnational approach.

The Development of Self-Examination Writing

This study examines some of the changes that occurred between 1150 and 1400 to England's tradition of self-examination writing—here defined deliberately broadly as any text, or section of a text, that could help a penitent identify and reflect on his or her sins. Its chronological focus begins with 1150 in order to draw attention to some of the material written in the decades prior to the Fourth Lateran Council, much of which is neglected compared to that of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²⁴ By placing material written between 1150 and 1250 in dialogue with that written after 1250, this study highlights an important change that took place in terms of the shape of self-examination writing. Self-examination writing produced between 1150 and 1250 is most often found alongside discussions of the contemplative life, daily devotions, or other subjects. So, for example, *Ancrene Wisse*, which, as already noted, was written in the first half of the thirteenth century, contains a lengthy part on the identification of sin aimed at helping a penitent prepare for confession. It is placed among others on daily prayers, love, temptation, and other topics. It was only as the century progressed that larger manuals

²³ H. E. J. Cowdrey speaks of “the zeal for disciplinary legislation which marked the Anglo-Norman Church” (236). For a more recent look at Church reform under Anglo-Norman rule, see Harper-Bill’s chapter on “The Anglo-Norman Church,” especially at 170.

²⁴ See page 112.

focused primarily and, sometimes, exclusively, at self-examination began to appear—in other words, that the manual for penitents, as defined above, began to emerge. Self-examination had ceased to be a subsidiary topic and had instead become an important subject in its own right.

Compared to the kinds of self-examination writing that preceded them, the manuals for penitents that emerged in the second half of the thirteenth century address a wider variety of audiences beyond the clergy—in other words, they have a wider “implied audience.” Before discussing this change, some clarification is in order. When used within the context of the medieval Church, *clergy* can carry different meanings. The Middle English *clergie* carried connotations both of a position within the established Church (i.e. that of being ordained) and of attributes related to that position (i.e. possessing clerical learning or training). There was, moreover, what Nicole Rice describes as “slippage between these two categories” (14).

In modern parlance, *clergy* is often used to describe those whose professions fall primarily within the established Church. This works well enough for describing groups like monks, who were necessarily ordained and therefore meet both of the Middle English connotations of *clergie*, but it does not work as well for groups like anchorites. As Millett notes, anchorites occupied a complex position within the Church (“Life of Perfection” 65)—one which highlights the limitations of the broader modern use of the term *clergy*. As enclosed religious, anchorites would seem to fall under the category of *clergy*, and indeed, those who entered the anchorhold from monastic enclosure would count as clergy using the traditional definition of “one who is ordained.” But those who entered it from lay life, which was the case with the three well-born sisters addressed by the original author of *Ancrene Wisse*, would not count under this traditional definition. So, while I use *clergy* below to describe those whose professions fell within the established Church, I exercise caution when using the term to describe anchorites.

With this caveat in mind, it can be said that most self-examination material written in England between 1150 and 1250 was either addressed to, or used by, clerical audiences. An important shift begins to take place around 1250. This shift was heralded by *Ancrene Wisse*, which contains some self-examination material, despite being addressed to three sisters who entered the anchoritic life from a noble family and who were not, as already mentioned, *clergy* in a traditional sense (Millett, “Life of Perfection” 65). In the second half of the thirteenth century that authors began to address the laity—by which I mean those whose vocations fall primarily outside of the institutional church—in a significant way. As works that include layfolk among their implied audiences, the *Compileison* (c.1254-1274), the *Manuel des péchés*, and the *Somme le roi* stand as part of this new vanguard of manuals.²⁵

Another development, highlighted below, happened in terms of the content of self-examination writing. The seven deadly sins occupy a central place in this writing, but toward the end of the thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth, other essentials of the faith are increasingly found in manuals for penitents, including the Ten Commandments (the *Decalogue*), the Twelve Articles of the Faith (the Creed or *Credo*), and the need to guard the five senses. Often when these essentials—many of which are biblically-derived—appear in manuals for penitents, they are cast as frameworks for identifying sin. So, for example, the section on the Ten Commandments in the *Manuel des péchés* is not simply a list of the commandments. It advises the sinner on how to recognize his failures with respect to each commandment, and encourages him to beg for forgiveness. This aim is set out from the very first commandment:

C’est a saver, si par folur,

²⁵ For the audience of the *Manuel des péchés*, see below, pages 88 to 91. For the audience of the *Somme le roi*, see page 98. For the audience and date of the *Compileison*, see the discussion starting on page 156.

Par aventure u par pour
Deu reneast u nut u jur,
C'est de tuz pechez le greynur.
Si entaunt avet trespassez,
Merci de fin quer ly priez! (869-74)

It is to be known that if by folly, by chance, or by fear, you renounce God, either during the day or at night, that is the greatest of all sins. If you have trespassed to this extent, pray to Him for mercy wholeheartedly!

The *Decalogue* is also cast as a framework for identifying sins in *Handlyng Synne*, a text derived from the *Manuel des péchés*:

Of þyse þan ys my sawe,
þe comaundementys of þe olde lawe.
þyse ten were fyrst vs 3euyn,
And fyrst we weyln of hem be shreuyn.
Yn what poyntys þat we falle
Yn opon synne a3en hem alle (Mannyng 13-18)

This [*lit.* of this], then, is my aim: the commandments of the old law. These ten were given to us first, and we will be shriven of them first, in each of their points in which we fail [*lit.* fall], in open sin against them all.

This association between basic doctrine and confession grew organically out of the confessional encounter itself. As I show at length below, medieval confessors used many of the essentials of the faith as frameworks for interrogating penitents about their sins.²⁶

The full spectrum of basic doctrine was incorporated into manuals for penitents, with some essentials of the faith cast as frameworks for encouraging virtue. This is especially true of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuals. The cardinal virtues are a common subject in these, but other essentials appear, including the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the *Pater noster*, a prayer which Laurent and many others described as a powerful corrective against vice.

Scholars often consider medieval commentaries on biblically-derived essentials of the faith like the *Pater noster* aids for instruction in basic doctrine, aimed at teaching these essentials rather than asking readers to reflect on them in a personal way.²⁷ These essentials are, therefore, often viewed as digressions in manuals for penitents.²⁸ However, as I show here, the focus on individual reflection and personal transformation in these commentaries means that they actually support the aims of the manuals in which they appear.²⁹ As Boyle observes of pastoral guides more generally, “from the 1280s onward the theme of ‘the extirpation of vices’ gives way to that of the ‘fostering of virtues’ and the soul comes to be seen as something to be cultivated with virtues and not just kept clear of weeds” (“Fourth Lateran” 36). Through tracts that discourage vice and those that promote virtue, manuals for penitents aim at inciting a full transformation in their audiences.

²⁶ See the discussion starting on page 51.

²⁷ See the discussion starting on page 64.

²⁸ See footnote 71.

²⁹ See page 63.

Introduction to the Key Texts

The present study explores the tradition of manuals for penitents and uses the findings of this exploration to shed light on texts from three different stages in their development: *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Compileison*, and the *Parson's Tale*. I have chosen these texts for their importance to modern literary scholarship and for their relationships to each other. As discussed at greater length in the paragraphs that follow, each shares some material with the one that preceded it. Each is therefore linked to at least some degree with its predecessor, although, as we shall see, the precise nature of the relationships between these texts is not completely understood.

The first text, *Ancrene Wisse*, does not meet the definition of manuals for penitents given above, because although it contains a lengthy exposition on the seven deadly sins and the conditions of a good confession, these are not the primary focus of the text. However, the text's interest in self-examination makes it an important precursor to these manuals. It was composed to guide in spiritual matters (such as how to guard the heart against temptation), and in more pragmatic ones (such as the potential litigation that could arise from owning a cow). At the centre of this work is what Robert Hasenfratz has termed a "miniature treatise on penance" (443), which includes part 4, on sins and temptation, part 5, a guide on the sixteen conditions of a good confession, and part 6, on penance. In part 5, the author explicitly draws a connection to the preceding section:

Bigin earst ed prude ant sech alle þe bohes þrof as ha beoð þruppe iwritene, hwuch
falle to þe; þrefter alswa of onde; ant ga we swa duneward rawe bi rawe aþet to þe
leaste, ant drah togedere al þe team under þe moder

Begin first at pride and go through all the branches as they are written out above, to see which might apply to you; then do the same with envy; and so let us go downwards line by line as far as the last, and collect all the offspring together under the mother (127)³⁰

By recommending that the reader go through the sins “as ha beoð þruppe iwritene” (“as they are written out above”), the author points back to part 4, where he describes the seven deadly sins, and the passage therefore underlines that the two parts are connected.

Although most of the guide addresses female anchorites, part 5, on the conditions of confession, had other implied audiences. So, for example, one of the confessional statements in this part is cast as a possible utterance for a nun, a wife, or an unmarried woman (120). The author acknowledges these different implied audiences when, toward the end of this part, he states that the preceding guidance “limpeð to alle men iliche” (“is relevant to everybody alike”) (129). After this admission, he gives some sins that he considers particular to anchoritic life (129-30). Evidence from its earliest copies suggests that the text initially reached an anchoritic audience, and, within about fifty years of its composition, was circulating among layfolk whose professions fell outside of the Church (Innes-Parker 149-55).

In the second half of the thirteenth century, almost all the material in *Ancrene Wisse* reappeared in an Anglo-Norman manual for penitents, now entitled the *Compileison*, and this text serves as the second focal point of the present study. The *Compileison* addresses a different audience than *Ancrene Wisse*, one that includes layfolk outside of the Church more consistently. Current consensus holds that the Anglo-Norman text is an adaptation of *Ancrene Wisse*, but, as

³⁰ Quotations from *Ancrene Wisse* are from Millett’s EETS edition, which uses Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 as its base text; translations are from Millett’s *Guide for Anchoresses*.

Alexandra Barratt notes, it is possible that the two were derived from a shared ancestor (“Spiritual Writings” 355). The *Compileison* draws either directly or indirectly on a number of *summae* for priests, including those of two Dominicans: Guilelmus Peraldus’ *Summa de vitiis* and *Summa de virtutibus* (c.1236), and Raymond de Pennaforte’s early thirteenth-century *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (Trethewey xxi). According to Germaine Dempster, “the debt to Peraldus is small. . . that to Pennaforte is more extensive” (727 n. 3). The *Compileison* also contains a nearly complete translation of the *Perambulavit Iudas*, a self-examination text written by Grosseteste before 1235 (Dean 366; no. 671).

About a century later, the *Compileison*, or a text very closely related to it, was used as a source for Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale*, which serves as my final case study. The *Parson’s Tale* also has parallels with several priests’ *summae*. Like the *Compileison*, it has passages in common with Peraldus’ *Summa de virtutibus* and Raymond de Pennaforte’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (Cooper 400), but Dempster, in her study of the sources of the *Parson’s Tale*, writes that “the *Compileison* is definitely not in the line of transmission between Peraldus or Raymond de Pennaforte and Chaucer” (727 n.3). Moreover, in the case of Peraldus, Chaucer seems to have borrowed in part through one or more intermediaries. Wenzel has found closer parallels in two unique adaptations of Peraldus’ work—*Primo* and *Quoniam* (both c. 1236-41) (“Notes” 237-38)³¹—although the *Parson’s Tale* shares passages with each that are not found in the other, so neither could be its direct source (Cooper 400). Richard Newhauser and Nicole Smith have both shown that the *Parson’s Tale* is closer to Peraldus’ original in some places than to either of these sources (Newhauser, “The Parson’s Tale” 532-33; Smith 498). The treatment of the virtues has much in common with the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, also derived from Peraldus

³¹ For the dating of *Primo* and *Quoniam*, see Smith 498.

(Wenzel, “Introduction” 2). As Helen Cooper notes, “no work has been found, in Latin or any vernacular, that would serve as a single source for the Tale as it stands,” and, speaking of Raymond de Pennaforte’s *summa* and the two adaptations of Peraldus, she writes that “so far as is known, it was Chaucer himself who combined these three works” (401). But it is of course possible that Chaucer found them already combined, and it remains, as Dempster described it, “an open question” (725).

As Patterson has demonstrated, the *Parson’s Tale* is a manual for penitents, and it meets the criteria for these used here, as set out in chapter 1, but it is unusual among these in that it is cast within a fictional framework.³² It is also unusual among its contemporaries for being a written text cast, through Chaucer’s framing narrative, as an oral performance. These qualities make it a particularly interesting point of inquiry.

The shifting audiences of self-examination material, witnessed in the various audiences of *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated works, remind us that those dedicated to a religious life, including anchorites, monks, and those responsible for interrogating penitents, were for a long time the primary recipients of teaching about self-interrogation. This makes sense, since even as confession was becoming increasingly common for those outside of the Church, those dedicated to a religious life were still generally expected to confess more frequently. It should not surprise us that confessional education was not universally accepted or supported among religious audiences. Like their lay counterparts, some clerical penitents experienced anxiety about confession, resisted it, and debated its merits.

³² That the *Tale* is addressed to penitents is clear from passages such as “Thou shalt considere what thow art that doost the synne, wheither thou be male or femele, yong or oold, gentil or thral, free or servant, hool or syk, wedded or sengle, ordred or unordred, wys or fool, clerk or seculeer” (X. 960-65).

In fact, as we shall see, the dissemination of manuals for penitents among lay audiences caused pressing concerns for high-ranking members of the Church. These were part of the wider “anxieties of outreach” that Wogan-Browne finds attendant on the growth of *pastoralia* in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council (“Time to Read” 77). Concerns that the practice of interrogating a penitent could inadvertently spur new or previously unknown types of sin are voiced in many priests’ *summae* of the thirteenth century, like that of Peraldus. Pierre Payer finds that, where they surface in confessors’ manuals, most of these concerns circle around sexual sins (60). Since these could be committed in secret, knowledge of them could, in theory, be kept restricted in a way that was not possible for other types of sin. As I show here, manuals for penitents, which gave first-hand, and potentially unmediated, access to confessional material, appear to have been shaped by these same concerns.

Tensions surrounding these manuals took on a new shape when the emergence of the Wycliffite movement prompted increased concern over vernacular texts.³³ Early followers of Wyclif were eager to suggest that the Church aimed to limit access to translations of biblically-derived material such as the *Pater noster*. If these claims were true, manuals for penitents, with their commentary on biblically-derived instruction and prayers, would surely have become targets for the Church. But while it has been shown that ownership of vernacular prayer commentary was sometimes associated with heterodoxy by the time of Arundel’s Constitutions in 1409, there is no evidence to suggest that the same is true of the earlier Lollard period (here loosely defined as the last quarter of the fourteenth century) and, indeed, the surviving texts from this period indicate that the Church widely encouraged such commentary. The evidence, then, suggests that during the early Lollard period, Wyclif’s followers were eager to cast themselves as

³³ These ideas are explored at greater length starting on page 197.

the defenders of these texts, although in reality, translations of biblically-derived frameworks were being promoted by Wycliffites and the established Church alike.

Implications for the Study of the Medieval Subject

Although not a focus of this dissertation, one of the areas of study illuminated by an understanding of manuals for penitents is the history of the subject—a matter that became particularly important to English literary scholarship with the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980). In a more general sense, it rose to importance among Post-Enlightenment historians who cast medieval religion as antithetical to individualism, an important Enlightenment ideal. Prominent among these was Jacob Burckhardt, who famously suggested that a “free personality” first emerged in the Renaissance, in contrast to the “common veil,” “woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession” under which the medieval period slept (143).

Though challenged repeatedly over the course of the twentieth century,³⁴ a Burckhardian periodization of a “free personality,” based on a simplified view of medieval religion, persisted

³⁴ Although he did not engage directly with Burckhardt's periodization of individuality, Charles Homer Haskins, in his *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, posed an indirect challenge to Burckhardt by identifying in the medieval era many of the “modern” elements that were generally understood by his contemporaries as innovations of what was then termed the Renaissance. He argued, for example, that, “The twelfth century left its signature on higher education, on scholastic philosophy, on European systems of law, on architecture and sculpture, on the liturgical drama, on Latin and vernacular poetry” (vi). Walter Ullmann posed a more direct challenge to Burckhardt by arguing, in his *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages*, that self-awareness increased gradually from the medieval period to the Renaissance. So, for example, in his 1969 *L'éveil de la conscience dans la civilisation médiévale*, Marie-Dominique Chenu situates the awakening of the conscience, described as the sum of a man's moral and psychological forces (11), in the medieval era, with Peter Abelard serving as “le premier homme moderne” (32) (“the first modern man”). Following Chenu, Colin Morris refuted the notion that individuality emerged in the Renaissance. Caroline Walker Bynum (1980) added nuance to this

in certain fields of literary study, perhaps most influentially in Greenblatt's book (*Aers*, "Whisper" 185-93). David Aers observes that this view is tied to a belief that medieval religious practices limited subjectivity ("Whisper" 190). Aers shows that this reductive appraisal of medieval religious practices was bolstered by scholars such as D.W. Robertson, under whom, "Centuries of Christian traditions, an extraordinarily diversified, complex and profoundly adaptive culture of discourses and practices," was "turned into a homogeneous, static uncomplicated monolith" ("Whisper" 178).

Greenblatt did distance himself somewhat from Burckhardt. Influenced by the resistance to institutional control that emerged in the wake of the Vietnam War, he spoke not of a "free personality," but of "self-fashioning"—a term that reflects somewhat his greater emphasis on the role of oppression in the development of the self.³⁵ Self-fashioning, as Greenblatt depicted it, emerged as a response to authority and was virtually inextricable from it.³⁶ Greenblatt spoke of the "well-documented limitations" of Burckhardt's work (161). Yet he nevertheless echoed Burckhardt in insisting that a new relationship to the self emerged in the Renaissance, claiming, for example, that "in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2). The implication, of

view by showing that the twelfth century's discovery of the individual must be understood within the context of the twelfth century's increasing awareness of the self as a member of a group.

³⁵ Stephen Greenblatt writes that the controversy around conscription and America's involvement in the war prompted him to consider ways of overcoming authority, and became central to his view of the subject; he writes, "I held teach-ins and joined in endless public discussions of the nature of America's imperial power and the possibility of subverting it. . . it thoroughly conditioned my intellectual life" (xv).

³⁶ Greenblatt speaks, for example, of the "self-presentation" that emerged due to social alienation, "Theatricality, in the sense of both disguise and histrionic self-presentation, arose from conditions common to almost all Renaissance courts: a group of men and women alienated from the customary roles and revolving uneasily around a center of power, a constant struggle for recognition and attention, and a virtually fetishistic emphasis upon manner" (162).

course, is that “self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity” was relatively lacking in the medieval period.

Greenblatt’s interest in this kind of self-consciousness was in some ways similar to that of Foucault, who was writing around the same time as Greenblatt, but who arrived at very different conclusions. These conclusions are complex, so much so that I cannot do justice to them here, but it is worth surveying them in brief, since it is here that the subject dove-tails into that of medieval confessional practices.³⁷ In *La volonté de savoir*, published in 1976, Foucault explored what we might call self-knowledge. In particular, Foucault was interested in self-knowledge as it is formed in discourse about sex—what Foucault termed the “interplay of truth and sex” (*History* 57). Foucault viewed confession as a central step in the historical development of this kind of self-knowledge: “The confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex” (63). But for Foucault, a desire for “true discourse on sex” does not contradict the prohibition against sex; rather, it is inextricably tied to it: “Suppose the obligation to conceal it was but another aspect of the duty to admit it” (61).

This brief examination of Foucault’s views on the “interplay of truth and sex” might seem to have taken us far afield from the discussion of self-consciousness about identity, but for Foucault, discourse on sex has become central to a larger kind of self-knowledge.³⁸ Foucault writes, for example, that “a knowledge of the subject” has developed out of our relationship to

³⁷ A well-developed discussion of Foucault’s views as they pertain to confession can be found in Chloë Taylor’s *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault*.

³⁸ Foucault writes, for example, that “sex gradually became an object of great suspicion; the general and disquieting meaning that pervades our conduct and our existence. . . We tell it its truth by deciphering what it tells us about that truth; it tells us our own by delivering up that part of it that escaped us.” (69).

the “interplay of truth and sex” (70). So, in Foucault’s model, confession, by demanding that individuals put their truths into discourse, contributes to a kind of self-knowledge.

Foucault’s work would not become available in English (as the *History of Sexuality Volume I*) until 1978, so at the time that Greenblatt was writing, the impact of Foucault’s ideas had not yet been felt in English departments. While Greenblatt cited Foucault’s *History* (270; n. 26), he did not engage with the philosopher’s ideas at any length, nor acknowledge that, for Foucault, medieval confession was a crucial step in the development of the modern “knowledge of the subject.”

In recent years, historians have questioned the developmental model of the subject described by Foucault. As Abigail Firey relates of the authors in her *New History of Penance*, “Those writing about late antiquity and the early Middle Ages see all sorts of evidence for curiosity and solicitude about the inner life of the penitent, and those writing about the later Middle Ages and the early modern period are intrigued by the external postures and conformity to prescribed norms” (“Introduction” 7). Many historians of the medieval era have rejected as progressivist any attempt to produce a master narrative of subjectivity, favouring instead approaches that consider important moments for subjectivity in isolation.³⁹

³⁹ See, for example, chapter 3, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?”, in Bynum’s *Jesus as Mother*, and Aers’ “A Whisper in the Ear of the Early Modernists’.” More recently, Miller (1995) has interrogated other medievalists’ periodization of selfhood by considering depictions of it in Icelandic Sagas, while also arguing that the search for an originary moment of selfhood is problematic insofar as it seeks to define modernity against a past “other” (191). Barbara H. Rosenwein pushes this idea further by suggesting that a search for the origins of the individual may be a vain endeavour, quoting from Alain Boureau, who suggests that the individual may be an ahistorical phenomenon: “la catégorie d’individu [est] hors de l’histoire, considérant que la relation de l’individu au tout (naturel, social, cosmologique) constitue une forme a priori de saisie du monde” (42) (“the category of the individual is outside of history, considering that the relationship between the individual and the whole (natural, social, cosmic) constitutes an *a priori* form of knowing the world”).

Many others have rejected earlier attempts at describing the development of subjectivity through literary studies. Yet, although few now agree with Foucault's developmental model, many still find his ideas useful for thinking through the relationship between social control and medieval confession. Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland take a somewhat Foucauldian approach to confessional literature in their chapter for *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, writing that Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council "invests social power and profound spiritual authority in the individual priest" (392), and they even cite Foucault as the progenitor of this idea (392; n. 74). We can also recognize Foucault's related idea that the control imposed through confession actually helped to form the subject in their statement that "the actual practices of pedagogy and confession contained their own mechanisms for relief from – and perhaps even subversion of – the containing power of the systems" (406).

Some continue to examine the way that confessional literature controlled the subject. We could count among these Geraldine Heng, who considers part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse* in her chapter of the *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, and, quoting from Tentler, argues that *Ancrene Wisse* is part of a wider group of texts that "enforce 'medieval techniques of control' "(65). Heng does not cite Foucault directly, but we can hear echoes of him in her argument that, compared to the system of self-interrogation outlined in part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*, "the former Kremlin's or current CIA's interrogators would not be as surgically, relentlessly comprehensive" (64).

On a broader scale, interest in the relationship between confession and the subject might lie behind the proliferation of studies that explore how confessional literature contributed to a new emphasis on the psychology and inner states of literary characters. Cornett provides a good

overview of these studies (23). To his list could be added Jennifer Bryan's *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England*.

My interest here is not in determining whether confessional practices helped to create literary representations of interiority, nor whether the social control they represented came accompanied by what Woods and Copeland term a "mechanism of relief." I hold that, before we can use manuals for penitents to answer these questions, we need a better understanding of how these manuals were used and how they functioned for their audiences. Nevertheless, at this early stage of exploring manuals for penitents, it is worth stating that the conclusions of the present study generally support the view of Firey and other contributors to her collection that medieval penitents possessed "curiosity and solicitude about the inner life" ("Introduction" 7), and that, given the proliferation of these manuals beginning in the second half of the thirteenth century, this curiosity was very much present in this period.

Overview

The first chapter sets the parameters for the analysis that follows by defining manuals for penitents. It then examines the development of these manuals in light of the changes to confessional practices that occurred between about 1150 and 1400, drawing especially on diocesan constitutions for evidence. In so doing, it highlights a change that often goes unnoticed in studies of confessional practices: that, in the centuries following the Fourth Lateran Council, confessors experimented with different frameworks for identifying sin, many of which were based on various essentials of the faith. So, a penitent of the late thirteenth century would be asked about the seven deadly sins, but also, potentially, about sins against the Ten Commandments, or the five senses. At the same time, commentary on these essentials of the

faith was being incorporated into manuals for penitents, like the *Somme le roi* and the *Manuel des péchés*. I hold that the strong connection between these essentials and the confessional encounter in the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council suggests that when the former appear in manuals for penitents, they are not, as is often thought, digressions, but actually support the broader aims of the manuals. It also suggests that when they appear in manuals for penitents, these essentials were not designed exclusively to fulfill didactic aims, but were also to be used in the same penitential—and, therefore, transformative—way as tracts on the seven deadly sins.

I explore how these manuals were read in greater detail in my second chapter. Here, I consider the actual and implied audiences of these manuals. This chapter focuses on the three most popular insular manuals for penitents, judging from manuscript survival—the *Manuel des péchés*, the *Speculum vitae*, and *Pore Caitif*, the last of which participates only partially in the tradition. I find that all three count both the clergy and the laity among their implied audiences. Moreover, I find that all three reached actual audiences comprising both the clergy and the laity. This finding serves as a valuable corrective to two recent studies that emphasize the clerical owners of these texts—one by Kalpen Trivedi, on *Pore Caitif*, and one by Matthew Sullivan, on the *Manuel des péchés*. This chapter also shows that some of these texts imply that their audiences will have intimate or physical contact with their books, which implies individual use. The emphasis on intimate handling in these texts, considered alongside the *mise-en-page* of their manuscripts, suggests that they were intended to be read in a self-directed manner. Others could have been read either individually or with the help of a lector.

After making these general observations about manuals for penitents and their audiences, I turn, with my final three chapters, to more specific studies, each focused on one key period.

The first of these, which begins with 1150, examines the kinds of self-examination writing that were produced before the Fourth Lateran Council and, in so doing, offers a corrective to the tendency to emphasize the late thirteenth-century tradition. I show that, prior to the late thirteenth century, most—but not all—of this writing had an intended or actual audience of those dedicated to the religious life, although several also contain passages that imply lay audiences. I use some of these findings to shed light on the self-examination material in part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*, one of the most popular insular texts of the decades following Lateran IV.⁴⁰ In particular, I use Walter Ong’s concept of the “fictionalized audience” to explore the way that audiences are constructed in the text. I find that the complex implied audiences in part 5 work to depict the anchoritic audience as sharing with others both a propensity to sin, and an inclination toward specific sins.

With the fourth chapter, my focus shifts to the period between 1250 and 1350—one that saw a flourishing of self-examination writing, and the first true manuals for penitents, in the sense of manuals that meet the criteria outlined above. The emergence of these coincided with a new focus on lay audiences, and this chapter elucidates the link between these developments. A key text for exploring this link is the *Compileison*, since it preserves vestiges of the process through which it was adapted from *Ancrene Wisse* (or a similar text), and it therefore provides rare insight into how such manuals were constructed. After exploring how this text developed, I argue that manuals of the second half of the thirteenth century that address lay audiences, including the *Compileison*, register a concern that they might inadvertently teach penitents previously unknown sins, and they therefore suggest a tension over the increasing decentralization of control.

⁴⁰ Yoko Wada calls *Ancrene Wisse* “a best-seller of its day” (“Preface” xii).

New tensions surrounding manuals for penitents arose in the second half of the fourteenth century, the period that serves as a focal point of the fifth chapter. I follow the thread of the *Compileison* from my previous chapter to a work that borrows from it and that has become one of the best known medieval manuals for penitents: the *Parson's Tale*. In this chapter, I seek to contextualize the *Parson's Tale* within the wider tradition of manuals for penitents. I find that manuals for penitents in this period put a powerful emphasis on vernacular commentary on essentials of the faith—essentials which were, in some cases, derived from the Bible. Some of these vernacular commentaries became sites of tension during Wyclif's life, with his followers insisting that vernacular commentary on these essentials was being withheld by the Church, while the Church, for its own part, was eager to disseminate it widely as a means of preventing heresy. Against those who would read the Parson's refusal to speak on the *Pater noster* and *Decalogue* as subversive, I hold that this refusal constitutes instead an act of self-censorship. The Parson's silencing on the subject of the *Decalogue* and *Pater noster* represents a concern that the vernacular commentary in manuals for penitents was under attack. This position serves as a warning against the kinds of oppression that could be expected should the established church go too far in persecuting Wyclif's followers.

The present study offers only a limited analysis of the tensions surrounding these widely-popular manuals, and much remains to be done in this direction. But it is hoped that, by shedding light on the characteristics of these manuals, their implied and actual audiences, and their uses in medieval culture, this study will pave the way for future literary studies of them. By exploring these texts further, we stand to learn more about some of the most widely-copied works of medieval England, and about the traditions behind some of the most enduring works of medieval literature.

Chapter 1 - Background: Self-Examination Writing, Manuals for Penitents, and their Contents

The author of *Ancrene Wisse*, echoing a sentiment shared with many of his contemporaries, insists that “Schrift ah to beon biþoht biuore longe” (“Confession ought to be thought out well beforehand”) (129). It was important to come to confession prepared since, as contemporary priests’ *summae* stressed, there were significant risks involved with accidentally omitting something from one’s confession.⁴¹

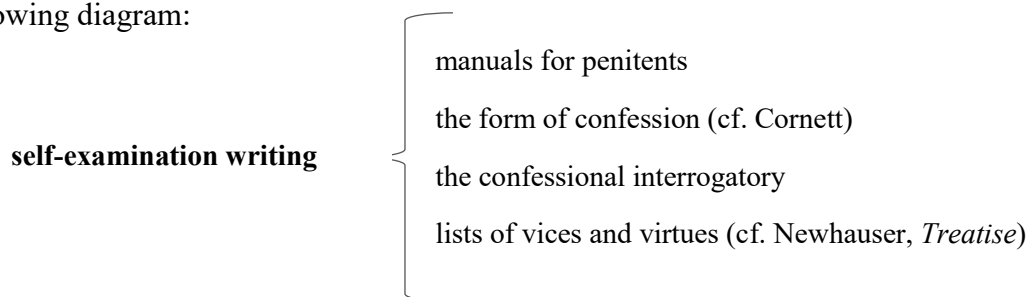
Medieval penitents turned to written works to help them examine their consciences in preparation for the sacrament. Some of these explicitly announce that they are for those examining their consciences. So, in the *Somme le roi*, at the end of the section on the seven deadly sins, Laurent writes, “Et qui bien s’estudieroit en cest livre, il i porroit mout profiter et aprendre, et counoistre toute maniere de pechié, et a soi bien confesser” (270) (“And he who studies well in this book, he can greatly profit [from it] and learn, and know all types of sins, and how to confess well”). Similarly, in the foreword to one translation of the *Somme le roi*, the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (1340), the author, probably Michael of Northgate, states that he writes to help men prepare for their confessions: “þis boc is ywrite . / uor englisse men, þet hi wyte / hou hi ssolle ham-zelue ssriue, / and maki ham klene ine þise liue” (5) (“This book is written for English men, so that they know how they should shrive themselves, and make themselves clean in this life”). Works such as these aimed to help a penitent understand himself by encouraging him to identify his own failings using lists of possible sins. Given this aim, it is not surprising

⁴¹ For the importance of making a complete confession in the medieval Church, see Tentler’s *Sin and Confession* 109. Patterson finds that, “The requirement that the sinner must prepare for confession with a careful self-examination is stressed by virtually every writer on penance” (337).

that some authors of these texts describe their works as mirrors, a metaphor taken up by the author of the *Speculum vitae*, and the author of the *Compileison*, among others.⁴²

Like Books of Hours, self-examination writing circulated widely and was used for personal devotion—that is, for supporting believers in their religious observances. Moreover, both types of texts became increasingly popular over the course of the thirteenth century—a pattern laid out with respect to Books of Hours by Claire Donovan in her excellent monograph on the De Braile Hours. But here the significant similarities between the two types of texts end. As Roger S. Wieck describes, a Book of Hours was a “prayer book” and a typical example includes: “1) a Calendar; 2) the four Gospel Lessons; 3) the Hours of the Virgin; 4) the Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit; 5) two prayers to the Virgin known as the ‘Obsecro te’ and the ‘O intemerata’; 6) the Penitential Psalms and Litany; 7) the Office of the Dead; and 8) numerous Suffrages” (27-28). Self-examination writing, by contrast, covers topics such as the deadly sins, the Ten Commandments, and the five senses. Moreover, Books of Hours were used for daily devotions at the canonical hours, while self-examination material helped penitents prepare for confession, and could be used more or less often depending on one’s requirements.

Self-examination writing can be usefully divided into different types, as illustrated by the following diagram:



⁴² The relevant passage in the *Compileison* and its translation are printed in Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s article on the text (45). Cornett traces the use of mirror imagery in first-person penitential works (41-61).

The first category of self-examination writing, and the focus of the present study, is the manual for penitents. As noted in the introduction, texts in this category use third-person pronouns to refer to the sinner and contain a significant amount of material that could be used for self-examination. These manuals are either addressed to penitents or declare directly that they can be used by those examining their consciences.

This category includes texts like the *Somme le roi* and the *Ayenbite of Inwynt*, both of which, as noted above, declare their suitability for penitents. We can add to these the *Manuel des péchés*, since it explicitly states that it can be used by those who wish to amend their sins:

Pur ce nul trop hastivement
Cet escrit lise nomeement.
Deu fez le deit rehercer
Ky s'alme vodra amender,
La ou il trovera divers peché,
Sicum il iert perograffé. (51-56)

Therefore no one too hastily / Should read this book in particular; / He must go
through it twice / Who would wish to cure his soul, / There where he will find
different sins / As it is divided in paragraphs. (Schemmann 307)

We can place its English translation *Handlyng Synne* in this category, since it also announces its suitability for penitents; Mannyng states that he writes so “lewde men” “kun knowe þer ynne / þat þey wene no synne be ynne” (43, 55-56) (“the unlearned” “can recognize in it what they think is not sinful”). The author of the *Speculum vitae*, a work which is indebted to the *Somme le roi*, describes his text in similar terms, but with an added emphasis on reform:

Whaso wil rede it ouer and loke,
It es na vertu vnnethes ne synne
þat he ne sal fynde it wryten þarinne.
þan may he knawe and se þarby
Of what synne he es mast gilty
And what remedy es þaregayne (531; 16044-16049)

Whoever will read it over and look [at it], there is hardly a virtue or sin that he will not find within it. Then he [who reads the work] will know and see thereby of which sin he is most guilty, and what remedy there is against it.

A number of insular texts meet these criteria, many of which are in Anglo-Norman or Middle English. As already noted, some of these have been edited, and some have been described in terms of their pastoral functions, but few have been subject to literary analysis or considered in terms of their shared penitential function. It is this dearth of scholarship that has motivated me to focus this study on these texts in particular. I use the term “manuals for penitents” for this category of writing to distinguish guides that refer to the sinner using third-person pronouns from other types of self-examination writing, and from priests’ *summae*. A single term to describe manuals that share the above characteristics is useful since the imprecise labelling of self-examination works has obscured some of the profound differences within this general category

of texts.⁴³ I have chosen this term in particular because Patterson uses it to describe a similar body of texts (338).⁴⁴

Patterson's term is appropriate only if we keep in mind that many of these manuals for penitents contain material that is generally considered catechetical in nature. Although the main tool for self-examination in these manuals is the list of the seven deadly sins and their offshoots, they also contain commentaries on other essentials of the faith—such as the Lord's Prayer (or *Pater noster*), the Ten Commandments (or *Decalogue*), and the enumeration of the five senses. Often in manuals for penitents, this commentary appears alongside commentary on other essentials—such as the seven heavenly virtues, and various arrangements of the works of mercy—that could assist a penitent in his attempts at self-improvement and behavioural reform. As already noted, Boyle observes that in pastoral guides more generally, fostering virtue became an increasingly prominent theme after about 1280, and this is certainly true of manuals for penitents.

Given the broad pastoral programs of these manuals just described, it may seem preferable to term them “catechetical works.” But there are problems with using this term in this context. Of course, the medieval Church did not use the term “catechism” to describe any of its pastoral works, a finding that has led Eric Leland Saak, in his overview of the concept, to write that, “There was no catechism in the later Middle Ages, but there was a plethora of catechetical works” (xi). Catechetical works, according to Saak “had as their primary intent to instruct their

⁴³ So, for example, speaking of one type of self-examination text, the form of confession, Cornett describes the “proliferation of medieval rubrics and modern terms” that have been used to describe it and concludes that “it is no wonder that the genre has remained obscure, one ingredient in a big kettle containing much undifferentiated medieval penitential writing” (10).

⁴⁴ Patterson does not specify that the term is intended for texts that refer to the sinner with third-person pronouns, but all of the examples he gives do this.

audience on the proper understanding of the foundational doctrines of the Christian religion and how to put such teaching into practice” (22-23). The function of Catechisms as they emerged at the Reformation was similarly “to ensure that the faithful learned the fundamentals of the faith” (1). In short, catechetical works are concerned with *teaching* the essentials of the faith. Manuals for penitents, on the other hand, since they explicitly announce that they could be used by people examining their consciences, are concerned with moral transformation. Moreover, some of these manuals transform works that are traditionally understood as impersonal didactic tools into tools for self-reformation.⁴⁵ As explored below, manuals for penitents could be used for teaching these essentials, but their expressed purposes go beyond this use.

It is important to note that contemporaries of these texts rarely, if ever, used the term “manuals for penitents” to describe them. Medieval documents label texts like the *Somme le roi* and the *Manuel des péchés* with a variety of terms. So, for example, A. I. Doyle finds that, because of its *Pater noster* framework, the *Speculum vitae* is often described as a “Pater Noster” in its manuscript copies (I.87).

In the sense that they contain a significant amount of material that could be used for self-examination, manuals for penitents are similar to the form of confession—a genre first identified by Durkin and subject to a more comprehensive study by Cornett—but there are significant differences between the two types of texts. First, rather than the third person, most forms of confession refer to the sinner in the first person, cast in the voice of a confessing penitent; Cornett writes that the form of confession “voices through a first-person speaker the manifold variety of sins that might be acknowledged by the penitent” (Cornett 5). Many examples of this latter genre open with a characteristic formula, “I sinful creature knowleche me gilty and sinful

⁴⁵ See below, page 51.

& schryue me” (“I, sinful creature, acknowledge myself as guilty and sinful, and shrive myself”).⁴⁶ Moreover, unlike manuals for penitents, forms of confession do not generally declare their suitability for those examining their consciences. Cornett notes that the genre served “as a mirror for self-examination” (5), that “could be put on for this solemn occasion, like one’s best attire” (29). But he also finds that “priests could use the form of confession to verse themselves in what they should be hearing from penitents” (29). Cornett speaks of the remarkable popularity of this genre throughout Europe; he finds that “the form of confession survives in prose and verse from ca. 1200 to ca. 1500 in over 440 copies of 198 different Latin, French and English texts” (4), and this does not count those in the European vernaculars that he does not consider in his study (229).

Cornett argues that, by using a first-person voice, “the form of confession is able to do something that other texts can’t: it can reflect the actual beholder using the text as a particular sinner (not anyone but himself)” (64).⁴⁷ In this way, Cornett argues, “the first-person rhetorical mode literalizes the mirror function of the genre” (63-64). In contrast, manuals for penitents, by referring to the sinner using third-person pronouns, ask their audiences to understand their lapses relative to those of an abstract other sinner. Although some temporarily borrow the voice of the form of confession by supplying ready-made confessions, they demand, for the most part, that the penitent formulate his confessional utterance himself. Rather than trying on confessional statements, then, the penitent must identify his own sins from a list and formulate his own confessional statements in response to these. Since the penitent cannot borrow a ready-made

⁴⁶ This example is taken from item 36 in section C of Jolliffe’s *Check-list* (73).

⁴⁷ Cornett writes of the former, “There is no other kind of pastoral literature that came as close as the form of confession to representing what was to be said by the penitent in the practice of confession” (5).

confessional statement from a list, but must, instead, create one himself, manuals for penitents can encourage more personalized confessional statements.

Less popular than the form of confession but equally important for our understanding of medieval self-examination texts is the confessional interrogatory.⁴⁸ Representative texts in this category use the second-person voice to pose questions to the penitent, voicing the priest's interrogation, or they offer conditional statements. So, for example, Robert Grosseteste's confessional interrogatory in the *Perambulauit Iudas* (written before 1235) helps the penitent identify his sins against ire through a conditional statement: "Si erga aliquem per iram nimiam motus fuisti" (160) ("If you were moved too much by ire by anyone"). Most representatives of the confessional interrogatory are in Latin. Cornett notes that although Boyle classifies this type of text among works for conducting confession, some of these texts, such as Grosseteste's interrogatory, are explicitly addressed to penitents (6). Since they certainly would have been useful for penitents preparing for confession, they are counted among the self-examination works here.

There were, of course, many other types of texts that could have been used for self-examination purposes. The "treatise on vices and virtues" studied by Newhauser is the most relevant to the discussion here. As Newhauser describes it, these treatises focus exclusively on sins and their remedies. Representatives can be found incorporated into manuals for penitents, but some circulated independently.⁴⁹ It is important to note, however, that some of those that

⁴⁸ Cornett notes that we have fewer remaining witnesses to the confessional interrogatory than the form of confession (5).

⁴⁹ Richard Newhauser describes the difference between the "treatise on vices and virtues" and texts like *Handlyng Synne* as follows: "The exclusiveness of the genre's [i.e. the treatise on vices and virtues] concentration on vices and virtues also makes it apparent that it cannot be equated with the late-medieval catechetical and penitential manuals which developed, as it were, by

circulated on their own could have been used for identifying one's own sins or for interrogating others (*Treatise* 89).

Aside from the texts falling into these specific categories, there are also numerous lists of sins that, like the form of confession and the confessional interrogatory, might not necessarily announce their utility for those examining their consciences, but which nevertheless may have been used for self-examination. We could count among these the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman work that Paul Meyer entitles the “Effets des sept péchés capitaux,” and that Ruth Dean entitles “The Effects of the Seven Sins” (Dean no. 652). This work does not address penitents or declare its suitability for those examining their consciences, but it does describe sins in a way that could have been helpful to a penitent preparing for confession: “Orguil fet hume: avancer sei de benes ki il n’at pas en sei” (Meyer 40) (“Pride makes man promote himself through goods that he does not truly have”).

The arrangement of texts that I am proposing here, based loosely on the distinctions that Cornett uses, should not be taken as one fixed in medieval minds. As already noted, authors and compilers used a variety of different terms to describe their texts. Moreover, any categorization of self-examination texts will inevitably come up against the difficulty that Jolliffe finds with the classification of medieval texts more generally. Jolliffe writes that “it is quite impossible to obtain a logical classification in which the categories are mutually exclusive” (36). This is, according to Jolliffe, because it is often not possible to determine “the kind of writer who composed or compiled each tract; or the class of reader for whom each was intended; or the type or *genre* to which each belonged” (36-7).

accretion, putting together smaller forms into a conglomerate, and of which the discussion on vices and virtues normally formed only one part among many” (*Treatise* 83-4).

We must therefore note that a text that is addressed to penitents, or that declares its suitability for penitential preparation, could have been used by a confessor, not only to examine his own conscience, but to examine those of others. This possibility is suggested by two works: the *Clensyng of Mannes Sowle*, a late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century text on penance addressed to the laity, and *The Boke of Penance*, a rhyming poem of the fourteenth century that is found in several manuscripts containing the *Cursor mundi*. Although both are chiefly addressed to penitents, both also contain what Patterson describes as “material relevant not to the penitent but to the confessor, such as *Clensyng*’s discussion of various canonical issues and *The Boke*’s account of the office of a priest” (340). This finding would seem to suggest that the authors of both expected priests to use them for conducting confession, although the evidence is hard to read since, as discussed below, we cannot assume that a text’s implied audience—i.e. that suggested by internal evidence—is a reflection of its actual audience, or of the actual audience for which an author wrote.

It is also important to keep in mind that some texts will not fit cleanly into one of the categories described above. Cornett lists several self-examination texts that place a first-person interrogation alongside a second-person one (5). The *Compileison* is, for the most part, a manual for penitents, but it also contains some elements of the confessional interrogatory. Most statements are in an explanatory tone: “Gule est trop desir de manger. e / beiuere.” (fol. 19b) (“Gluttony is an excess of [*lit.* too much] desire to eat and to drink”).⁵⁰ However, it also contains,

⁵⁰ Where possible, I have taken quotations from the *Compileison* from Trethewey’s partial edition in *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwe*. Passages that Trethewey does not print (such as this one) I have taken from the manuscript that Trethewey uses as a base text for his edition, Trinity College Cambridge, MS R.14.7. For these transcriptions, foliation follows Trethewey’s system, with the first column on the recto side of a folio labelled “a,” the second labelled “b,” and so on.

as already noted, a near-complete translation of Grosseteste's confessional interrogatory, the *Perambulauit Iudas*, which means that it also provides questions to the penitent: "a/uez uirgine despucelee de soen pucelage" (fol. 72c) ("Did you take a virgin's virginity?").

The anonymous Middle English *Vices and Virtues*, written in the decades preceding the Fourth Lateran Council, may have been used by penitents preparing for confession.⁵¹ Yet it does not fall cleanly into any of the categories described here. With obvious parallels to the later *Confessio Amantis*, it takes the form of a dialogue between "Reason" and a "Soul." The "Soul" confesses his sins, but his dialogue is not a confession in any straightforward sense, because he also offers advice about how to recognize a sin. In the section on pride, for example, the "Soul" confesses, "ic am neðer and unmihti, forðan ic habbe (ȝeben) prud and modi, and michel ilaten of me seluen" (I.5) ("I am low and powerless, because I have been proud and haughty, and have thought much of myself") (I.4). He then provides a description of pride that would not be out of place in a manual for penitents:

Dies dieð ðe manne ðe ðurh hire is beswiken ðat he twifealdeð his senne; alswo ðe man ðe haueð islaȝ anne mann aȝeanes godes forbode, ðanne ȝelpð he ðat he is wel iwreken of his unwine; oðer ȝif he hafð beswiken an maiden, oðer an riche lafdi ðe is bewedded, ðar of he lat ðe bett of him seluen, and swa he wurð beswiken. (I.5)

[Vain glory] makes the man who is deceived by it double his sin; just as the man who has slain a man against God's prohibition, boasts then that he is well avenged on his

⁵¹ See the discussion of this manual below, page 121.

enemy; or if he has deceived a maiden, or a noble lady who is wedded, thereby he thinks all the better of himself, and so becomes deceived. (I.4)⁵²

Since some texts, like *Vices and Virtues*, do not fit into the categories outlined above, and since there are other limitations to categorizing medieval texts, this study does not limit itself to manuals for penitents; it will also examine other types of self-examination writing, especially the form of confession.

Current Classifications of Self-Examination Writing

The classification I am proposing here is aimed at adding greater nuance to existing classifications of medieval devotional texts. In the most influential of these, we find texts that declare their suitability for penitents placed in divergent categories. So, for example, in Robert R. Raymo's catalogue of "Works of Religious and Philosophical Instruction" in Hartung's *Manual* (1967), Middle English versions of the *Manuel des péchés* (2257-58) are listed under "Long Compilations of Religious Instruction" among works like *Book to a Mother*, a text in which the author's mother is urged to follow the example of Christ (2267-68).⁵³ Similarly, in Jolliffe's *Check-list* (1974), the *Somme le roi* and its associated texts, which, as we have seen, announce their suitability for self-examination, are listed in Class A, "compilations of doctrinal material

⁵² The last sentence has been adapted slightly to better reflect the original.

⁵³ Raymo groups texts initially by their compendiousness, then either by source or by content. The two primary divisions are thus "Long Compilations of Religious Instruction" (2255) and "Translations, Paraphrases, and Expositions of the Individual Elements of the Faith" (2279). The first section is subdivided into sections such as "Versions of *Somme le roi*" (2285) and "Works Derived from *Somme le roi*" (2261), while the second section is subdivided into sections such as "Pater Noster" (2279), "Ave Maria" (2282) and "Creed" (2282).

intended for spiritual instruction” (37), and are described as “large compilations of doctrinal material” (37).⁵⁴

Within the field of English literary studies, the first to describe manuals for penitents as a unique tradition at any length was Patterson (1978).⁵⁵ Patterson’s interest was in identifying the tradition in which the *Parson’s Tale* participated, and he argued that the *Tale* was not, as scholars once thought, a sermon, but a manual for penitents: “It is an instance of a clearly defined and recognizable genre, the manual intended exclusively for penitential use” (339). Patterson noted that in the medieval period, “There were several kinds of written aids to . . . self-reflection,” and that these enabled penitents to prepare for confession: “Prior to visiting his confessor the penitent is expected to engage in a thorough self-examination that discovers both the sins to be confessed and the circumstances that determine their gravity” (337). Patterson provided what is, to my knowledge, the first extensive listing of these texts, “three dozen or so treatises” described as “manuals for penitents” (338). Most of these, such as the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* and the *Somme le roi*, refer to the sinner using third-person pronouns and are explicitly addressed to penitents, so

⁵⁴ In Jolliffe’s classification, manuals for penitents as described here could fall into class A “compilations of doctrinal material intended for spiritual instruction” (37), Class B, “Pore Caitif” (39), Class D, “forms of confession” (44), Class E, “tracts which are concerned with the sacrament of confession” (45) or Class F, “on sin and sins” (46). The *Somme le roi* and its related texts, which, as we have seen, address penitents, could therefore just as easily belong in Class E or Class F.

⁵⁵ Prior to Patterson, Pfander provided an “arbitrary selection” of “medieval manuals of religious instruction” (243) but did not distinguish between those addressed to priests, such as William of Pagula’s *Oculus Sacerdotis* and those that declare their suitability for penitents, such as the *Manuel des péchés*. Morton Bloomfield had described a number of these texts, such as the *Somme le roi* (125), and the *Manuel des péchés* (144), in his *Seven Deadly Sins*, but he took these as evidence for contemporary views of sin and did not place them beside each other in a category. W. A. Pantin had grouped together many of these texts, including the *Manuel des péchés* and the *Somme le roi*, under the general heading of “Religious and Moral Treatises on the Vernacular” (220-25). However; Pantin’s list is not nearly as comprehensive as Patterson’s, and it is not exclusively concerned with guides for penitents.

Patterson's understanding of manuals for penitents is roughly aligned with the one outlined here, although his list also includes works without any such declaration, such as Pierre D'Abernon of Fetchem's *Lumere as lais* (1267)(338).

Unfortunately, Patterson's approach to these manuals was not widely influential. But a decade or so after Patterson, Boyle contributed to the re-discovery of self-examination writing more generally while charting the various types of *pastoralia*—a “very wide term indeed” in Boyle's estimation which

embraces any and every manual, aid or technique, from an episcopal directive to a mnemonic of the seven deadly sins, that would allow a priest the better to understand his office, to instruct his people, and to administer the sacraments, or, indeed, would in turn enable his people the readier to respond to his efforts in their behalf and to deepen their faith and practice. (“The Inter-Conciliar Period and Manuals” 46)

Boyle's chart is valuable for illuminating the link between literature for preaching and that for confessional preparation—two subjects he considered complementary: “To the Fourth Lateran Council, preaching and penance went hand in hand” (“*Summae confessorum*” 233). In the chart accompanying his chapter, Boyle distinguished between “preparation of confession” and “examination of conscience” manuals (231). Boyle's interest in producing his chart, however, was in elucidating priests' *summae*, so he mentions these other types of writing only briefly (234). In a subsequent study, he provided some examples of “preparation of confession” and “examination of conscience” works, but did not explore either of these categories in any depth (“Fourth Lateran” 43).

Following Boyle, the next prominent scholar to consider medieval self-examination writings was Eamon Duffy. Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars* (1992) is rightly criticized for its

mystification of the power structures behind medieval religion, but it nevertheless offered valuable new insight into pastoral education in England.⁵⁶ Duffy discussed self-examination writing in some detail while surveying pre-reformation lay education (61). Here, he focused on the “Form of Confession” (61), and later in his study, while situating *A Werke for Householdors* (1530) within its wider literary context, he noted that the work contains “an examination of conscience for confession” (87).

Soon after, Newhauser (1993) described manuals for penitents briefly while discussing the generic boundaries of what he terms “the treatise of vices and virtues” (*Treatise* 84). As we have seen, Newhauser noted that texts of vices and virtues were often incorporated into what he terms “penitential manuals,” but, since his concern was with those works on vices and virtues that occur independently, his treatment of “penitential manuals” was cursory. Indeed, he viewed these latter works as less complex than those on virtues and vices, arguing that they serve a “practical” function, while treatises of the vices and virtues serve a more “contemplative” or “analytic” function (88).

In their overview of medieval religious education, Woods and Copeland (1999) examined self-examination texts in some depth. They distinguished these from manuals for conducting confession: “By the mid-thirteenth century the production of manuals and treatises on confession resolves itself into two genres: instructions to priests on conducting confession and prescribing penances, and instructions to lay people on preparing for and making confession” (391). They did not, however, distinguish the various types of self-examination texts from each other. Yet their chapter offers the most comprehensive overview of self-examination texts to date. Aside from articulating that texts dealing with self-examination are distinct from those for examining

⁵⁶ One of the most direct criticisms of Duffy is Aers’ “Altars of Power.”

others, Woods and Copeland described the content that was typical of these and outlined in brief how pastoral reforms, such as Pecham's 1281 Constitutions, discussed below, informed this content (396-97).⁵⁷ In its consideration of self-examination writing as distinct, and in its analysis of the changes brought by these reforms, this chapter made a significant contribution to the study of self-examination works.

Although the different types of texts used for self-examination are rarely treated individually in the studies hitherto mentioned, one specific type of self-examination writing, the form of confession, has been treated individually and has received some attention in recent years. As already noted, both Durkin and Cornett have examined this type of writing. The present study follows the more focused approach of these studies by looking at one distinct type of self-examination writing, and, in so doing, contributes to the rediscovery of self-examination literature.

Pastoral Reform and the Content of Manuals for Penitents

Manuals for penitents cannot be understood without recourse to the injunction to confession of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Canon 21 of the Council, commonly known by its opening words *Omnis utriusque sexus*, required men and women who had reached the age of discretion to confess their sins to a priest at least once per year. Those who failed in this practice were threatened with excommunication. Although the requirement of annual confession that Innocent III established at this council was not an innovation, confessional legislation of this

⁵⁷ This observation, that pastoral reforms shaped confessional texts, had been made by Eamon Duffy some years earlier, but Duffy did not distinguish between the impact of pastoral reforms on manuals for penitents and the impact on *summae* (*Stripping of the Altars* 53-4).

scale was unprecedented, and it brought with it a new need for tools for self-examination for the laity and clergy alike (Boyle, “The Summa” 128).⁵⁸

In recent years, the early history of confession has been illuminated by a series of re-evaluations. Scholars once held that the only type of penance in the early Church was public, in which a penitent was turned away from, and then reconciled with, the Church over the course of the Lenten season. In this model, public penance gave way, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to private, (or solitary) penance, in which a single penitent confesses to a priest. This shift was thought to be accompanied by an increased emphasis on the emotional and psychological state of the sinner.

This view, however, has been modified in recent years. Central to this re-evaluation is the work of Mary C. Mansfield, who demonstrated that public and solitary penance co-existed in France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁵⁹ Yet the early history of private penance is still

⁵⁸ It is not known how commonly the laity confessed prior to the Fourth Lateran Council. Boyle, surveying episcopal constitutions in the years leading up to the Fourth Lateran Council, stresses that, from an administrative standpoint, the canon was grounded in tradition (“The Summa” 128), and notes that the confessional *summae* of Robert Flamborough (c.1210) and Thomas of Chobham (c.1215) show that these practices predated the Fourth Lateran Council (126). It is generally agreed that, in the decades before the Council, confession was practiced among the clergy and lay religious, and several scholars find evidence of confessional practices among the laity. A.E. Redgate summarizes the current consensus, which is that, prior to the eleventh century, “penance was part of both religious and political culture, though exactly how often the laity generally confessed remains unknown” (223). Cornett, drawing on the work of Alexander Murray, suggests that confession could not have been common among the laity prior to the thirteenth century (15). Even those who stress the continuity of confessional practices admit that a change took place around the twelfth century (Firey, “Introduction” 9). In recent years, a number of regionally-focused studies have begun to highlight some of the remarkable local variation in the emphasis placed on confession, and we can therefore expect to find significant differences in confessional practices at a national, episcopal and even parochial level, studies of which are still wanting. In general, however, it is accepted that the Fourth Lateran Council reflected, as well as promoted, an emerging confessional awareness.

⁵⁹ Sarah Hamilton furthers Mansfield’s argument. Hamilton observes that private and public penance co-existed and, at times, overlapped. She exemplifies this latter point using the penance

not fully understood. Its roots are often situated in the sixth-century Irish church, but, as Sarah Hamilton notes, scholars have identified a contemporary continental tradition of secret penance which seems to have developed independent of the Irish one (4). Although much remains to be done to elucidate the early history of confession, these recent reassessments suggest that, by the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, confessional practices had been around, in some form, for at least six hundred years (Payer 21).

This change in thinking about the origins of confession is part of a wider movement toward rejecting a model that casts the shift from the eleventh to twelfth centuries as one from “epic” to “romance.” W. P. Ker argued famously that in the twelfth century, epic writing was “succeeded and displaced” by romance (3). R. W. Southern extended Ker’s model, arguing that the dawn of the twelfth century brought with it an “urge towards a greater measure of solitude, of introspection and self-knowledge” (227)—one which was accompanied by new types of writing, characterized through their “warmth and intimacy” (228). The rejection of this developmental model was articulated perhaps most directly by Robert M. Stein (9), but it is also present in the work of scholars, including Sarah Kay, who stress the temporal and formal overlap between the categories of “epic” and “romance,” and in that of the numerous scholars, including those described by Firey, who stress the importance of various types of introspection in early medieval thought (“Introduction” 7).

There is no doubt, however, that the thirteenth century saw a new emphasis on confession, which was accompanied by a greater focus on pastoral education. As Duffy writes

imposed on members of William’s invading army after the Battle of Hastings, which had both public and private elements (87).

while describing the changes brought about by Lateran IV in an English context, the requirement of annual confession provided a powerful opportunity for educating the laity:

[it] put into the hands of the parish clergy an immensely valuable pastoral and educational tool, for the priest in confession could explore not only the moral condition of his parishioners, but also their knowledge of Catholic faith and practice. Confessors were to examine each penitent in the articles of the Creed and on their ability to recite the Lord's Prayer. (*Stripping of the Altars* 54)⁶⁰

The link between pastoral education and the confessional encounter that Duffy describes here helped to shape self-examination writing. This becomes clear when we examine this body of literature alongside both contemporary priests' *summae* and diocesan constitutions regarding pastoral education.⁶¹ The first constitutions that are important in this context are those established by Richard Poore, first in Salisbury in 1219, and then in Durham in 1228, after he

⁶⁰ But it is important to recognize that the tradition of teaching elements of the faith during the confessional encounter can be traced back far further. As Allen J. Frantzen writes, "Even the earliest Irish handbooks, written in the sixth century, preface the confessional inquiry with moral instruction; ninth-century Frankish and tenth-century English penitentials include an *ordo confessionis* used to test the penitent's faith and so to prepare him for confession and penance" ("Tradition" 25). Bloomfield notes that the idea of assigning the *Pater noster* as penance in particular, may be "of Celtic origin" (*Sins* 84). In some areas, the *Pater noster* was recited as penance during the confessional encounter itself; Hamilton describes a manual for confessors from the eleventh century that specifies that after a penitent has confessed his sins, both priest and penitent should prostrate themselves and sing the *Pater noster*, along with the *Kyrie* (169). Catherine Rider notes that the idea of testing a penitent on his knowledge of the *Pater noster* and Creed was common in the eleventh century, although, in England, this practice "disappeared from episcopal legislation in the twelfth century" (333).

⁶¹ Andrew Reeves examines the powerful connection between diocesan constitutions and pastoral education in the thirteenth century. Reeves focuses primarily on education in the Articles of the Faith. Reeves finds that constitutions in the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council put a powerful emphasis on education in the essentials of the faith, and that Pecham's Constitutions reinforced this emphasis. Since Reeves has studied these changes in depth, and since my interest here is in confessional education, I focus on those elements of pastoral education that pertained to the confessional inquiry.

had changed dioceses. Poore asked priests to teach their parishioners the *Pater noster*, Creed and a form of the *Ave*, which, according to Cate Gunn, “was probably the ‘short, biblical’ form of the *Ave*, without the later petition prayer that was ‘enjoined upon the faithful’ by the Synod of Paris of c. 1210” (*Ancrene Wisse* 670-78).

About a decade after Poore drafted his constitutions, Raymond de Pennaforte insisted that, during the confessional encounter, priests should test penitents on their knowledge of biblically-derived essentials like the *Pater noster* and the Creed. In his *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, Raymond advised priests that if their parishioners were wanting in knowledge of these, they should be taught them, or encouraged to learn them.⁶² Alexander of Stavensby put a similar emphasis on education in essentials of the faith in his 1237 statutes for the diocese of Coventry, although he did not specify which essentials should be taught (Reeves, *Religious* 67).

In the constitutions he circulated for his own diocese of Lincoln around 1238, Grosseteste, a friend of Stavensby (Reeves, *Religious* 47), was more specific. Grosseteste writes that a priest “eademque populo sibi subiecto frequentur predicet et exponat” “decem mandata legis mosaice” (Powicke and Cheney II, 1:268) (“should frequently preach and explain to the people subject to him” “the ten commandments of the law of Moses”) (*Letters* 183). Grosseteste insisted further that priests should teach the laity the form of baptism and the seven deadly sins, in addition to “orationem dominicam, et symbolum, et salutationem beate virginis, et crucis signaculo se recte consignare” (qtd. in Powicke and Cheney II, 1:269) (“the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin, and to make the sign of the cross correctly”) (*Letters* 184). Grosseteste’s statutes were widely influential (Reeves, *Religious* 37), and similar

⁶² “Debet enim, in primis, interrogare paenitentem, utrum sciat *Pater noster*, *Credo*, *in Deum*, et *Ave Maria*; et, si nesciat, instruat eum, vel saltem moneat ut addiscat” (831).

constitutions were issued by those in his circle. For example, Joseph Goering and Daniel S. Taylor find that Walter Cantilupe issued a similar educational program for his diocese of Worcester, and that these may have been based on Grosseteste's (Powicke and Cheney II, 1:304 qtd. in Goering and Taylor 590).

For Grosseteste, the confessional encounter was an opportunity to teach these essentials; he asserted that:

quia, ut audivimus etiam quidam adulti hec ignorant, precipimus ut cum laici ad confessionem accedunt, diligenter examinentur utrum scierint predicta, et secundum quod expedit in eis a sacerdotibus instruantur. (qtd. in Powicke and Cheney II, 1: 269)⁶³

because, or so I have heard, even some adults are ignorant of these [i.e. the *Pater noster*, Creed and *Ave*] I am ordering that when people come to confession they are to be carefully examined as to whether they know them and be instructed in them when appropriate by their priests (*Letters* 185)

That confession was an opportunity to teach the essentials of the faith is well known. But what is often overlooked is that these essentials became a means of identifying sin. Penitents were advised to prepare themselves for confession by considering their sins against each Commandment. As discussed below, using the Ten Commandments as a framework for identifying sins seems to have been a novelty in this period, and Grosseteste was among the

⁶³ Grosseteste's insistence on teaching these concepts during the confessional encounter are echoed by Walter Cantilupe, who, as Joseph Goering and Daniel S. Taylor describe, recommends that priests "teach the penitent, either in his sermons or in the confessional itself, to consider each of the commandments in turn to determine if he or she has sinned in some way against God's law" (586).

earliest to use them in this way. This approach emerges in his *Notus in Iudea Deus*, a Latin form of confession that he wrote toward the end of his life, and that he may have intended for his own episcopal community (Goering and Mantello, “Notus” 254). After treating the seven deadly sins, Grosseteste describes sins against the five senses, the Sacraments and, finally, the Ten Commandments (Goering and Mantello, “Notus” 256). Sins in this latter category include stealing wax from candles, which is described as a sin against the fifth commandment (Maynooth 143).

In his *Omnis etas* (1240), Walter Cantilupe, bishop of Hereford, followed Grosseteste in describing the Commandments as a means of identifying sin. In their overview of this work, Goering and Taylor write that, “The priest is first to learn the commandments and the ways that they are often broken. He is then to teach the penitent, either in his sermons or in the confessional itself, to consider each of the commandments in turn and determine if he or she has sinned in some way against God’s law” (586). Goering and Taylor provide an extract in which Cantilupe gives advice about how to interrogate about sins against the first commandment:

Videat etiam si periuraverit nomen dei, maxime inspectis sacrosanctis vel tactis sicut sepe fit in assisis, et ibi doceantur mala periurii, vel si iuraverit sine causa, maxime nominando caput vel cetera menbra Christi, et hoc ex consuetudine (Powicke and Cheney II 2:1063 qtd. in Goering and Taylor 586)

Let the penitent also consider if he has forsworn God’s name, especially while looking upon or touching relics (*sacrosanctis*), as often happens in secular assizes. And here let them be taught about the evils of perjury. And [let the penitent consider]

whether he or she has sworn without reason and habitually, especially by the head of Christ or his other members. (586)

Cantilupe also recommended that confessors use the five senses to inquire about sins, a structure that had been used for this purpose for many centuries, as Barratt describes (“Five Wits” 18-20).

In casting the *Decalogue* as a framework for identifying sin, Grosseteste and Cantilupe were in line with their contemporaries across the channel. The Parisian Hugh of St Cher, in his guide for priests (c. 1231-2), recommended interrogating penitents about their sins using “the ten commandments, the five senses, thoughts, the seven sacraments, and the articles of faith” (38-9 qtd. in Payer 62). It would seem that comprehensive interrogations about sins against the Ten Commandments were a novelty in this period; Payer writes that the anonymous *Cum ad sacerdotum*, written around the same time as Hugh of St. Cher’s guide, “provides one of the first extended accounts of sins against the commandments” (62).

In 1281, under the guidance of John Pecham, the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury, the educational programs that had been developing through the local constitutions described above became a wide-scale project. Pecham’s Constitutions, instituted at the Council of Lambeth, are often considered the most influential ones for the development of pastoral literature. They required priests to teach all members of their parishes a set program four times a year: the fourteen articles of the faith, the Ten Commandments, the two precepts of the gospels, the seven works of mercy, the seven deadly sins with their progeny, the seven principal virtues, and the seven sacraments. These concepts were to be expounded in the vernacular, “without any fanciful and subtle compositional art” (Trans. Wenzel, *Latin* 232).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ “In quorum remedium discriminum statuendo precipimus, ut quilibet sacerdos plebi presidens, quater in anno, hoc est, semel in qualibet quarta anni, die una sollempni vel pluribus, per se vel per alium exponat populo vulgariter, absque cuiuslibet subtilitatis textura fantastica,

Priests continued to teach these essentials during the confessional encounter, and they continued to use the *Decalogue* as a structure for identifying sin. So, in his *Summula* (1287), which was based on Walter Cantilupe's earlier *Omnis etas* (Goering and Taylor 584), Bishop Quinel claimed that many sins could be categorized according to the Ten Commandments.⁶⁵

The constitutions outlined thus far indicate that in this period the *Decalogue* was increasingly becoming understood as a means of identifying sin. It was being used to the same end in self-examination writing of this period. The *Compileison* (c. 1254-74), urges the penitent to confess according to both the seven deadly sins and the Ten Commandments (Trethewey xxii). Writing around the same time, William of Waddington used the Commandments as a framework for identifying sin in his *Manuel des péchés*. So, he begins describing the fourth commandment through the different kinds of sins against it: “Cuntre ce funt premereme[n]t / Ceus ke ne sunt obedient / A fere, ke unt comaudé / Pere e mere sons peché” (1493-1496) (“Firstly, against this [commandment] are those who are not obedient in doing that which is commanded by a father or mother, without sin”).

Contemporary manuals for penitents from across the channel also contained diverse frameworks for identifying sin. Like the earlier *Manuel des péchés*, Laurent's *Somme le roi* recommends examining one's sins using the Ten Commandments. After a brief explanation of the first, “Tu n'avras mie divers dieux,” Laurent gives an example of a sin against it:

quatuordecim fidei articulos, decem mandata decalogi, duo precepta evangelii, scilicet, gemine caritatis, septem etiam opera misericordie, septem peccata capitalia, cum sua progenie, septem virtutes principales, ac septem gratie sacramenta” (qtd. in Powicke and Cheney II, 2:900-901).⁶⁵ “Et quoniam ad transgressionem decem dictorum mandatorum tota reduci potest criminum multitudo, dicta mandata scire tenentur et penitentes et penitentias iniungens” (Powicke and Cheney II, 2:1062, qtd. in Kemmler 33).

Contre ce commadement pechent cil qui trop aiment leur tresor, or ou argent ou autres choses terriennes, qui en ces choses trespasanz metent tant leur cuer et leur esperance que il en oblient leur Createur et lessent (99)

Against this commandment sin those who love excessively their treasure, gold or silver, or other earthly things; who dedicate [*lit.* put in] so much of their hearts and their hopes in these transitory things that they forget and abandon their Creator

Laurent also gives instructions on how to recognize sins of the five senses (289-90).

Early fourteenth-century translations of these manuals followed their sources in casting the Ten Commandments as a framework for identifying sin.⁶⁶ This is true of *Handlyng Synne*, the Middle English translation of the *Manuel des péchés*, where, for example, the treatment of the first commandment explains how it could be used to identify sin:

Be fyrst askyng ys yn oure boke:
Ȝyf þou euere god forsoke
Any tyme as for nede
Or for folý or for drede,
Or ouþyr chaunce þat þou weyl wost
Forsoke fadyr & sone & holy gost,
For þys ys one þe most synne
Þat any man may fallyn ynne.
Ȝyf þou haue synnyd þus gretly,

⁶⁶ Bloomfield makes a similar observation, that, by the fifteenth century, the Ten Commandments were often placed alongside lists of sins (*Sins* 99).

Wyþ sory herte þou aske mercy (153-62)

The first question in our book is whether you ever forsook God at any time—for instance, through need, or through foolishness, or through fear, or for another reason that you know well [you] forsook the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For this is the greatest sin that any man can fall into. If you have sinned this greatly, ask mercy with sorry heart.

One of the Middle English translations of the *Somme le roi*, the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, follows its source in using the Ten Commandments and five senses as a framework for self-examination (5-11; 176-9). Many of these manuals for penitents also include commentary on the *Pater noster*, but rather than casting it as a means of identifying sin, these manuals cast this prayer as a means of fostering virtue.⁶⁷

Summae of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries continued to stress the importance of using essentials of the faith like the *Decalogue* for identifying sin; in his *Astesana*, the Franciscan Astesanus of Asti (c. 1317) recommends that confessors use the seven deadly sins, Ten Commandments and five senses to interrogate about sins (Tentler, “Summa” 115). The possible tools became more expansive still throughout this period. At some point between 1309 and 1312, the French Franciscan Jean Rigaud composed a form of confession encouraging penitents to examine their consciences through the five senses, the deadly sins, the Ten Commandments, the works of mercy, the sacraments and the seven virtues (Michaud-Quantin

⁶⁷ See, for example, the tract on the *Pater noster* in the *Somme le roi* (206-26).

56). The idea of sins against the virtues and works of mercy is particularly striking, and represents a significant expansion in the tools that could be used for interrogation.⁶⁸

Jean Gerson speaks to how long the confessional encounter could become. In his fourteenth-century *Opus tripartitum*, Gerson provides only two different frameworks for identifying sin: the Ten Commandments, and the seven deadly sins (Tentler, *Sin* 137). But, while discussing the seven deadly sins, he hints that methods for interrogating penitents had become far more extensive. He insists that the sins he describes are all a penitent will need, as they encompass all the sins against the five senses, the works of mercy, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments (Tentler, *Sin* 137).

A similar tendency toward expansiveness was taking hold in England. The breadth of possible questions for interrogation is registered in three late Middle English texts described by Raymo in Hartung's *Manual* (no. 88). The first of these, a confessional interrogatory in St John's College, Cambridge, MS 257, includes interrogations based on "the seven deadly sins, Ten Commandments, seven deeds of bodily and spiritual mercy, five inner and outer wits, seven principal virtues, virtues opposed to the seven deadly sins, the beatitudes, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost" (2300). The second, a guide that contains advice both for those examining themselves and for those examining others, preserved in British Library, MS Sloane 1584 and British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A.xxv, indicates that confessors may have used some interrogations as a last resort. It recommends that if a penitent is reticent about his sins, "the priest should examine his conscience with a series of interrogations on the seven deadly sins, Ten

⁶⁸ Tentler notices this change in confessional interrogations and attributes it to "moral reformers" who "felt that if charity—giving alms to the needy and feeding the hungry—was to be commanded effectively, lack of charity somehow had to make its way into the lists of sins and become matter for confession" (*Sin* 139).

Commandments, fourteen articles of the faith, seven works of bodily and spiritual mercy, seven sacraments and five wits” (2301). Finally, a short guide about conducting confession contained in the early fifteenth-century collection Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D. 913 seems to suggest that sins against the essentials of the faith were the typical subjects of a confessional encounter; it urges that “if the penitent does not confess his sins by the Ten Commandments, seven deadly sins, seven works of mercy, and five wits, to interrogate him according to these points” (2301).

We can get a sense of how closely these essentials of the faith had come to be associated with penance from the will of John of Gaunt (1340-1399), Duke of Lancaster and son of King Edward III of England. John asks for a series of candles to be placed around his body to mark the various ways he has sinned, and these are to be arranged to correspond with the Ten Commandments and other frameworks:

Item jeo devise en ciere pour arder entour mon corps le jour de ma sepulture,
primerement dis grosses cierges, en nom des dis commandementz de nostre Seigneur
Dieu, contre les quelz j’ay trop malement trespassez, suppliant a mesme nostre
Seigneur Dieuz que ceste ma devocion me puisse remedier de tout cela que
encountre les ditz commandentz ay moult sovent et trop malment fait et forfait; et
que desuis yceulx dis soient mys sept cierges grosses, en memoir de sept eovres de
charite, es queulx j’ay este necgligent, et pour les sept mortiels peches; et dessus
yceux sept je vueiulle que soient mys cynk cierges grosses en l’onor des v plaies
principalx nostre Seigneur Jehsu, et pour mes cynk scens, les quelx j’ay moult
negligemment despendu, dount jeo prie a Dieu de mercy, et tout amont yceulx
cierges jeo voille que soient mys trois cyerges en l’onor de la Benoitte Trinitee, a le

quele je me rende de trestoutes les malx que fait ay, en suppliant de pardon et de mercy pour la mercie et pitee que de sa benigne grace il a fait pour la savacion de moy et d'autres pecchours. (225)

Item: I set down in wax, to burn around my body the day of my burial, first: ten large candles, in the name of the Ten Commandments of our Lord God, against which I trespassed wrongly, entreating to that same Lord, our God, that this devotion of mine can deliver me from all that I have very often, and wrongly, done, and transgressed against the Ten Commandments; and that above these ten are put seven large candles, to mark the seven works of charity, in which I have been negligent, and for the seven deadly sins; and above these seven I wish to be put five large candles in honour of the five principal wounds of our Lord Jesus, and for my five senses, those that I have so negligently misspent—for which I beg mercy of God—and all above these candles I wish to be put three candles in honour of the Holy Trinity, to which I surrender all the harms that I have done, begging for pardon, and for mercy—for the mercy and pity that in his benign grace he granted for my salvation and for that of other sinners.

The late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century *Clensyng of Mannes Sowle* shows how a penitent could be expected to prepare for a penitential encounter using these frameworks. In his table of contents, the author explains:

The sexth [part] tellith of xij articles of þe feith; and how a man may wurche in hem goostly; and whiche ben þe seuene dedely synnes; & whiche ben þe ten comaundement3; which ben þe fyue wyttes; whiche ben þe seuene dedes of mercy;

and of alle whiche a man schuld confesse him, 3if he fynde him coupable in eny of hem. (qtd. in Liddell 260)

The sixth [part] describes the twelve articles of the faith, and how a man may work in them spiritually, and which are the seven deadly sins, and which are the Ten Commandments, and which are the five senses, [and] which are the seven deeds of mercy. And all of these a man should confess, if he finds himself guilty in any of them.

By the fifteenth century, almost any of the essentials of Pecham's syllabus could be used for self-examination. Durkin's survey of forms of confession highlights the variety. In one fifteenth-century form of confession that Durkin describes, the first-person voice of a sinner lists the seven deadly sins, in addition to sins against the Commandments, the bodily and spiritual works of mercy, and the articles of the faith (25; no. 11).⁶⁹ Another lists sins against the Ten Commandments, the articles of the faith, the three theological and four cardinal virtues, the seven sacraments, and the seven deadly sins (35; no. 34). Another lists the waste of God's gifts as a potential site of sin, alongside the Ten Commandments, seven sins, and five senses (42; no. 51).

Of course, accounts of actual confessional interrogations are rare, but we can get a sense of how extensive these could become from a 1536 report, in which John Stanton accused his confessor of promoting Catholic practices:

⁶⁹ Sins against the works of mercy are also included in no. 13, 38, and 47. Sins against the articles of the faith are included in no. 13, 18, and 34.

First the said John Stanton said Benedicite, and the priest said Dominus. And then the said John said Confiteor, and afterwards rehearsed the seven deadly sins particularly, and then the misspending of his five wits. And then the priest said, Have you not sinned in not doing the five [sic] works of mercy? The said John said, Yea, forsooth, for the which and all other I cry God mercy and beseech you, my ghostly father, of forgiveness, and give me penance of my sins. (Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars* 61)

What emerges from this evidence is that through a connection between parochial educational programs and the confessional encounter, essentials such as the Ten Commandments, and the seven works of mercy were increasingly used by priests in this period to interrogate penitents.⁷⁰ When they are included in manuals for penitents, then, commentaries on essentials like the *Decalogue* support the overall aims of these guides by helping penitents prepare for the kinds of personal questions they will be met with during their penitential encounters. When found in this context they are not, therefore, digressions, as is often suggested.⁷¹ Rather, these essentials of the

⁷⁰ Others have made similar observations with respect to smaller groups of self-examination texts. Tentler, for example, while describing the form of confession—a genre he terms the “General Confession”—writes: “This popular genre is usually organized, like the [confessional] interrogations, according to the five senses, seven deadly sins, Ten Commandments, and so on” (*Sin* 111). Duffy arrives at a similar conclusion by considering patterns of tracts in self-examination texts from the sixteenth century: “it is clear that the framework of sins, commandments, works of mercy, and bodily wits did form the basis not only of clerical enquiry in the majority of confessions but of lay examination of conscience in preparation for confession” (*Stripping of the Altars* 61). Pierre Payer recognizes that essentials of the faith like the Ten Commandments could be used during the confessional encounter itself: “Although the capital sins constituted the bulk of most confessional interrogatories, questions were also asked from other points of view” (62). E. A. Jones notes the link between the confessional encounter and education in the essentials of the faith, although he does not mention that these essentials could be used as frameworks for interrogation (26).

⁷¹ For example, speaking of works like the *Speculum vitae*, Vincent Gillespie describes the “*ad hoc* manual of pastoral and catechetical material, similar in kind but narrower in focus than the Latin miscellanies” (318). Patterson considers commentary on the Ten Commandments, even

faith are an integral part of manuals for penitents, and it is therefore not surprising or accidental that they recur in so many of these texts. Moreover, their penitential function in these manuals suggests that, at least in the context of these manuals, they are not intended exclusively for instruction in basic doctrine. Since they are cast as frameworks for identifying one's sins, they call for a deeply personal type of engagement.

This is an important point because of its implications for how we view and approach commentary on the essentials of the faith. These implications become obvious when we consider Jolliffe's reason for excluding this kind of commentary from his list of works of spiritual guidance. Jolliffe writes that collections such as *The Lay Folk's Catechism* were "clearly intended for impersonal instruction rather than for spiritual guidance, either individual or

when it appears alongside self-examination writing, "primarily catechetical" which he contrasts to penitential material: "For while *Handlyng Synne*, like many of the treatises, 'developed from the tradition of the confessional inquiry,' it also includes, as does its source, the *Manuel des péchés*, a substantial amount of material that is primarily catechetical. This includes discussions of both the ten commandments and the seven sacraments" (337). Describing *Pore Caitif*, which contains the Creed, *Pater noster*, *Decalogue* and other devotional tracts, Jolliffe claims that "there is no continuity between the tracts or any impression of a deliberate pattern and arrangement" except "the common purpose . . . to lead man to God" (39). Michaud-Quantin also expresses a conviction that these tracts reflect wider devotional interests when he questions the *Manuel des péchés*' inclusion among penitential works on the grounds that it contains the articles of the faith, and a discussion of the sacraments, which, he argues, render it a more general guide about Christian living: "Faut-il considérer comme un ouvrage pénitentiel le *Manuel des Péchés* . . . ? La réponse affirmative ne fait guère de doutes pour les derniers auteurs qui ont étudié cet ouvrage. Il serait possible d'élever des objections de principe: il contient en effet un livre sur les articles de foi . . . et un autre sur les sacrements sans compter le dernier qui porte sur la prière et l'on serait en conséquence tenté de le considérer plutôt comme un ouvrage général de formation chrétienne dans lequel une place importante est faite à la confession" (27 qtd. in Kemmler 26) ("Should we consider the *Manuel des péchés* a penitential work. . . ? The most recent scholars to study this text affirmed that it was [a penitential work], with little doubt. It would be possible to raise objections in principle: it contains, in effect, one book on the articles of the the faith. . . and another on the sacraments, without counting the last which pertains to prayer, and, as a consequence, it would be tempting to instead consider it a general work of Christian edutation, in which confession occupies an important place"). Michaud-Quantin does, however, recognize that some tracts, such as expositions on the Ten Commandments, could be penitential in nature (96-7).

general,” and that these texts “are to be distinguished from the much longer treatises or compilations discussed below which deal with sins and their remedies, virtues and their pursuit, and the sacrament of penance” (28). In particular, Jolliffe argues that “expositions of the Decalogue” are not included, partly because “they are moralised writings on the commandments, intended to expound them rather than apply them to the needs of the individual” (28-29). Similarly, he excludes most tracts on the *Pater noster* because they “simply expound the meaning of that prayer: it is unusual to find a tract of this type containing anything but a brief, impersonal exposition which is not directed to the needs of the individual and is of little assistance to him while praying” (29).

The assumptions here are plain: commentaries on the essentials of the faith are “impersonal,” and, therefore, do not belong among works aimed at providing individuals with spiritual guidance. Scholars are rarely so explicit about the view that such commentaries are impersonal. But commentaries on the essentials of the faith are typically excluded from the major collections of literature, and it is likely that a view that they are impersonal lies behind this, since, as already noted in the introduction, devotional texts in general have been excluded from the canon partially due to a belief that they are antithetical to subjectivity. Since literary canons, and the ways that they are studied, continue to be touched by a legacy of ascribing literary merit to texts on the basis of their promotion of subjectivity, it is important to recognize that many of these commentaries served as frameworks for identifying sin—and were, therefore, intended to be used in a deeply personal way. It suggests that such commentaries deserve consideration alongside other works designed for personal guidance, such as *Ancrene Wisse*, or the *Scale of Perfection*.

Chapter 2 – The Design and Audience of Manuals for Penitents

Concerned with the moral education of the future Charles VII, Jean Gerson wrote to the dauphin's confessor with a number of recommendations. His letter, written sometime between 1408 and 1410, enumerates study strategies for fostering virtue and repelling vice. Toward the end of it, Gerson lists books that he considers essential for the prince's collection ("libri quos neccessario fac habeas") (Gerson, "Texte" 48). Among these is a "tractatus de viciis et virtutibus in galico, qui dicitur *Summa regis*"—likely the *Somme le roi* dedicated to the prince's ancestor, Philip III (49).⁷² It is listed among twenty-two other texts, including some on the saints, some on pastoral concerns, such as a "tractatus de viciis et virtutibus in latino" which the editors of Gerson's letter identify as Peraldus' *Summae de vitiis* and *de virtutibus* (49), and some on statecraft, such as *De regimine principum* (50)—a manual for princes addressed to Philip IV (Mazour-Matusevich, and Bejczy 229). These are arranged in order of importance, and, coming fourth, the *Somme le roi* has a place of significance, preceded by only the Bible, the *Postilles* of Nicolas de Lyra, and Peraldus' *Tractatus* (Gerson, "Texte" 48-49).

Gerson also gives instructions for the dauphin's study. Yelena Mazour-Matusevich and Istvan Bejczy summarize these as follows: "he should compose an extensive library, read at fixed daily hours, concentrate exclusively on serious and decent writings, and translate his readings into moral conduct" (224-25). Gerson's approving nod to the *Somme le roi* suggests that he considered it among the "serious and decent writings" that he hoped the young dauphin would read in an active, transformative way (i.e. by turning his "readings into moral conduct"). Its place beside another book of vices and virtues also suggests that Gerson understood it as a tool for

⁷² Carruthers notes that the *Somme le roi* was dedicated to Philip III (191).

fostering right behaviour. It was to teach the king the essentials of the faith, but also, and importantly, to actively promote his moral reform.

Gerson's call for transformative reading was not unusual for the time he was writing. Indeed, a similar one appears in many contemporary manuals for penitents—those devotional guides that, as set out in the previous chapter, contain lists of sins, and, often, other material for fostering virtuous behaviour, and that explicitly announce that they could be used by those examining their consciences. Across the channel, where confessional fervor may have taken on a particular urgency, and where the focus of this study falls, we find authors of manuals for penitents making their own calls for active reading, self-reflection, and reform.⁷³ They express a desire to help the penitent change his ways and identify his sins—the kind of forethought that medieval priests thought necessary for a good confession.⁷⁴

The present chapter explores how authors of manuals for penitents construct their implied audiences, and how members of their actual audiences characterized their uses of them. It also examines the physical layout and dimensions of copies of these works as a means of determining how they were used. As noted in the introduction, and as Derek Pearsall points out with respect to Middle English Romance, questions of actual audiences and ways of reading yield limited certainties (45), but we must nevertheless ask them if we are to understand the roles of these texts within medieval culture. The present goals, however, are hindered somewhat by the mass of evidence available; even a study limited to insular manuals would have to contend with the multitude of translations of *Somme le roi*—which, as already noted, together survive in a remarkable sixty-two manuscripts—and almost all of the “three dozen or so treatises” listed by

⁷³ For a discussion of the particularities of confessional practices in England, see the introduction, page 13.

⁷⁴ See above, page 33.

Patterson (338). To focus this task, then, I have concentrated on three texts and their manuscript histories: William of Waddington's *Manuel des péchés* (c.1260), the mid-fourteenth-century *Speculum vitae*, and the mid-fourteenth-century *Pore Caitif*. I have chosen these for being the most popular of the relevant insular texts, judging from manuscript survival. The *Manuel des péchés* survives in twenty-eight manuscripts (Dean 350), the *Speculum vitae* in forty-five (Hanna, "Yorkshire Circulation" 279), and *Pore Caitif* in fifty-six (Trivedi 49). Where possible, I draw on existing studies of these manuscripts, adding and revising where appropriate.

The last of these texts fits only roughly among manuals for penitents; it does not announce that it could be used by those examining their consciences—one of the key criteria for inclusion—and it is more focused on promoting virtue than on describing types of vice. It does not, for example, contain a tract on the seven deadly sins. Nevertheless, other sins are treated in the text, such as those against the articles of the faith; it consequently meets some of the requirements outlined above, and its remarkable popularity makes it important in this context.

Self-examination had to be extremely thorough for it to be effective, according to the author of the *Ayenbite of Inwyte*:

Efterþan huo þet him wisliche wyle ssriue / he ssel mid wylle þenche ane his zennes
auore þet he come to ssrifte / and al his herte zeche / and his inwyte / hou he heþ god /
and his yblyssede moder / and his halȝen ywreped. and mid greate drede al his lyf
bepenche. (172)

Afterwards, he who would wisely shrive himself must voluntarily think on his sins before he comes to confession, and search his whole heart and his conscience for

how he has angered God, and his blessed mother, and his saints, and with great fear think of all his life.

A penitent would consult one of these manuals at home, or in the cloister, in order to reform his soul, and to come to confession with his sins memorized. This is, at least, the impression we get from the author of the *Clensyng of Mannes Sowle*, who tells his readers that he has subdivided each of the seven sins into those of thought, word, and deed, so that “ȝe schal haue ȝour synnes bettir in mynde when ȝe come to confessioun.”⁷⁵

It follows that using a manual for the purpose of careful preparation and moral transformation involved reading that was frequent and engaged—in the sense that it required reflection on oneself. And indeed, William of Waddington calls for this kind of reading in his *Manuel des péchés*. In a passage already discussed, William insists that careful re-reading is necessary for the moral transformation he offers:⁷⁶

Pur ce nul trop hastivement

Cet escrit lise nomeement.

Deu fez le deit rehercer

Ky s'alme vodra amender,

La ou il trovera divers peché,

Sicum il iert perograffé. (51-56 qtd. in Schemmann 307)

⁷⁵ Sarah Wood supplies this extract from her examination of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 923 (fols. 73v- 74 qtd. in Wood 63).

⁷⁶ For the most comprehensive and recent examination of the question of the authorship of the *Manuel des péchés*, see Schemmann 228-63.

Therefore no one too hastily / Should read this book in particular; / He must go
through it twice / Who would wish to cure his soul, / There where he will find
different sins / As it is divided in paragraphs. (Schemmann 307)⁷⁷

By calling for reading aimed at reforming one's soul, this passage promotes engaged reading.

The passage also calls for frequent reading.⁷⁸ Sullivan observes that in nine witnesses of the *Manuel des péchés*, “deu” is replaced with “dis”—a scribal error, but one that suggests some copyists did not find entirely impractical a specification that the text be read ten times (22). In the English translation, *Handlyng Synne*, Mannyng also calls for frequent reading: “Wyþ ofte redyng, mayst þou lere. / Þou mayst nouȝt wyþ onys redyng / knowe þe soþe of euery þyng. / Handyl, hyt behouyþ þe, ofte syþys: / To many maner synnys hyt wryþys” (126-30) (“You can learn [it] by reading it often. You may not, through only one reading, know the truth of every thing. Handling it many times is a benefit to you, for the many manners of sin which it touches on”).⁷⁹ Here, as above, repeat reading is essential, and is linked to moral reform.

“Handyl” in this passage, points to a physical—and, therefore, almost necessarily individual—experience of the book. Mannyng’s explanation of his title, a translation of the title

⁷⁷ The only complete published edition of this text is Furnivall’s, and it has well-documented limitations (Sullivan 1-2). Given these, and the want of a modern scholarly edition, I have cited passages from Wilhelm G. Busse and Barbara Dohm’s transcription of the copy in Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm. 6.4 (4). I am very grateful to Dr. Busse for providing me with a copy of this transcription for the purpose of this dissertation. Since Schemmann draws on this same transcription for her monograph, I have endeavored, wherever possible, to cite the transcription through her monograph.

⁷⁸ William repeats his call for frequent reading again at lines 903-16 (qtd. in Schemmann 325).

⁷⁹ A different call appears in the *Compileison* where, after listing the remedies for wrath, the author explains that these should be considered often: “I cestes remedies e cestes medicines en contre ire isci deuant tuches souent en u[ostre] memorie remenbrez e pensez” (fol. 13c) (“And these remedies and these medicines against wrath, touched upon here above, often in your memory call them to mind and think of them”). The author does not, however, imply that repeat reading is needed for this kind of reflection.

of the *Manuel des péchés*, also signals physical interaction with the book: “Men clepyn þe boke handlyng synne. / Yn frenshe þer a clerk hyt sees, / He clepyþ hyt manuel de pecchees. / Manuel ys handlyng wyþ honde” (80-83) (“Men call the book ‘Handlyng Synne.’ When a cleric sees it in French, he calls it the ‘Manuel des péchés.’ ‘Manuel’ means ‘handling’ with a hand”).

Both *Handlyng Synne* and its source imply that readers will engage with them on their own, as opposed to through a lector. In this respect, they were the ideal material for the private spaces that became, as Jennifer Bryan describes, increasingly common in the late medieval period in the homes of the wealthy, and in religious houses, due to new architectural developments (12). Few other manuals call so explicitly for individual reading, although a similar call does appear in one form of confession (Durkin 37; no. 40), the related genre discussed above.⁸⁰ As we shall see, most of these manuals would accommodate either individual engagement or reading through a lector.

Before considering the expectations of engagement implicit in these and other manuals, we must pause for an important caveat. As with any information about audience within a text, we cannot necessarily take the expectations for how an audience should read in either the *Manuel des péchés* or *Handlyng Synne* at face value. As discussed at greater length in chapter 3, a description of how a text is supposed to be read might not be a record of how it actually was read, or even how an author expected it to be read. For example, the *seigneurs* addressed in a *chanson de geste* might not be a record of who actually read the text, or even of who the author expected would read it. Any characterization of audience within a text—what Ruth Evans terms an “implied” audience—will be, to some extent, a fiction, and we can not therefore make use of such characterizations to make claims about actual audiences or actual reading practices in any

⁸⁰ For the differences between manuals for penitents and the form of confession, see page 38.

straightforward way. Yet characterizations of audience such as these may be records of actual audiences. Moreover, even those that are fictional can help to shape the way actual audiences engage with a text, and they are therefore worth considering here, while keeping in mind their limitations as evidence.

Returning to the subject at hand, then, it is worth noting that some of the more popular manuals for penitents contain hints of an expectation of individual engagement similar to those that we have seen in *Handlyng Synne*, while many also welcome the possibility of reading through a lector. The *Manuel des péchés*, which served as a source for *Handlyng Synne*, also calls for physical engagement through an explication of its title: “‘Le Manuel’ serra apellé / Kar en meyn deit estre porté” (41-42) (“It will be called the *Manuel* / because it ought to be carried in hand”). The format of the book is intended to support this kind of reading:

L’escrit est petit fet de gré

K’en lisaunt nul ne seit grevé;

E pur ce sons ennuy seit lu

E en memoyre bien retenu. (11521-4 qtd. in Schemmann 230)

The book is done in a small format purposely / So that none would be distressed
while reading; / And therefore it can be read without vexation / And well kept in
memory. (Schemmann 230)⁸¹

⁸¹ The second last line of the translation has been amended to more closely reflect the Anglo-Norman. Sullivan thinks that “l’escrit” here means ‘the style of the writing’: “The style of the writing, the Epilogue-author continues, is ‘willfully small,’ so that no one should feel aggravated when reading it, since it will be better remembered if it does not bore readers. This probably alludes to the *Manuel*-poet’s consistently concise expression and orderly layout of topics . . . and perhaps also to his limited subject matter (namely, broadly speaking, the sacrament of Penance), rather than to the overall length of the text” (72-73). However, Schemmann’s interpretation, in

Here, a concern about the material experience of the book creates the expectation that the audience will hold it. William also implies that his audience will have direct visual experience of his text by repeating that his work is in “perograffes” (71, 78 qtd. in Sullivan 22).

The reading practices described by Mannyng—which we might call the “intended” reading practices—find support in the layout of copies of the *Manuel*.⁸² An elaborate system of running titles preserved, as Sullivan finds, in most copies supports the eye scanning the page. Sullivan suggests that these were integral to the text early in its transmission history, and suggests that they would have facilitated selective reading (22). Since it supports a visual experience of the page—one that would have required some proximity to the book—this layout might suggest that whoever produced it—whether author or one or more copyists—expected individual reading, which seems to support William’s call for physical interaction with his book.

Of course, it is important to recognize, as Ulrike Schemmann does in her extensive study of the *Manuel des péchés*, that this layout would have been just as useful to one reciting the text to others, and, within the text, William seems to make some allowance for this possibility (323). Schemmann even identifies one passage that, she claims, is a “direct address to a potential mediator” (312). Here, William expounds on the meaning of the Eucharist, and then writes:

Ky de ce dust parler as clers,

Mettre le purroyt en treys vers,

which “l’escrit” refers to the format of the text, is the more convincing of the two. In most of the examples for “escrit” in the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, the term describes a body of writing (a “text”), or the material volume that contains the writing, as in a “written document.” This suggests that “petit” is describing either the physical dimensions of copies of the *Manuel* or the length of the work itself. Either of these possibilities—a small volume or a short text—would make the volume less vexing to one holding it.

⁸² I use “intended” reading practices here to describe practices explicitly described by the author—in the same way that the “intended” audience is described by the author. The concept of the “intended” audience is described below, page 132.

Ces set propretés de l'ublé

K'est en l'auter de prestre sacré! (7267-70 qtd. in Schemmann 312)

He who should have to talk about it to clerics / Could put it into three verses / These
seven characteristic qualities of the unconsecrated wafer / Which is consecrated on
the altar by the priest! (Schemmann 312)⁸³

In some copies, this passage is followed by the seven properties of the Eucharist in Latin. These are printed in Furnivall's edition: "Candida, triticea, tenuis, non magna, rotunda, / Expers fermenti, non mixta, sit hostia christi" (II. 7424-25) ("White, of wheat, thin, not big, round, / Without ferment, unmixed shall be the host of Christ") (Trans. Kemmler 211). Schemmann's interpretation of this passage is brief, and it is not entirely clear why she interprets it as an address to a mediator. She seems to assume that it is addressing both one who talks to clerics and, by including the Latin properties of the Eucharist, one of these clerics, who is reading the text to the former.⁸⁴ Yet the Latin properties are omitted in some copies of the text, including that in Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm. 6.4, and even where these properties do appear, they could just as easily be used by one reading the text alone, so they do not necessarily suggest a mediator.

Other evidence for the text's expectation of mediated recitation is scarce and difficult to interpret, as Schemmann points out (312.). Nor does William's occasional use of *oier* help here. As Schemmann argues, since William switches between describing the audience's engagement

⁸³ The second line of the translation has been amended to more closely reflect the Anglo-Norman.

⁸⁴ The only explanation that Schemmann offers for this conclusion is: "Here the author takes into consideration that someone might talk to a clerical audience about a topic, which makes it appropriate to add a Latin summary of what has been said before" (312).

through *oier* and through *lire*, and since reading in this period was still linked to vocalization, “one cannot, from a study into the frequency of the verbs *lire* and *oier*, draw a conclusion as to the mode preferred by the author” (319).⁸⁵ We can conclude that the text depicts a reader’s engagement with it as intimate, although the text could have been used by a lector reading to others as well.

A similar type of engagement is suggested by copies of the *Speculum vitae*. Vincent Gillespie finds that most surviving manuscripts contain running titles, and concludes from this that these were probably authorial (333). These would have supported visual engagement with the text. They also would have supported selective engagement, in the sense that they highlight the major divisions of the work, and therefore help a reader locate specific passages. On the basis of this “quasi-diagrammatic (visual) progression of the *Speculum*,” Doyle counts the text among those that attest to the growth of private reading in the fourteenth century (*Survey* I.80), but, as with the *Manuel*, we cannot assume that this structure suggests private reading exclusively, since it could have been equally useful for a lector reading to others. Doyle notes, moreover, that the author occasionally writes with an eye to oral recitation (*Survey* I. 79).

The size of its manuscript copies provides some guidance toward determining how actual readers experienced the text. Gillespie finds that most are relatively compact (333). This would have made them suitable for individual study, since a small volume can be carried on one’s person, and can be read comfortably without designated physical supports. But of course, such

⁸⁵ Although Sullivan makes a case for silent—and, therefore, private—reading alone, I agree with Schemmann that his evidence is, on the whole, unconvincing (323-25). Sullivan supports his claim by reading “oir” figuratively: “While it is possible that the author is referring to the apparent medieval practice of sounding out words while reading, it would seem far more likely that he is simply instructing his readers to pay attention when they read” (32). However, Sullivan provides little support for this claim, as Schemmann points out (324-5).

volumes could also be read to others. Moreover, Doyle observes that a few of the surviving copies are larger, and he suggests that these may have been used in shared reading situations (*Survey* I.84). And the donor of one volume—Cambridge, University Library, MS li.i.36—envisages either type of engagement: “Ȝe þat rede þis boke or here it redde I pray ȝow praith for sir Roberte soule and alle cristen soules þat gaf þis boke to þis place” (Hanna, “Introduction” xxi) (“You who read this book, or hear it read, I pray you, pray for the soul of Sir Robert, who gave this book to this place, and for all Christian souls”). As Doyle notes, “The alternative (read or hear) is noteworthy” (I.85). All we can say with certainty, then, is that the text itself implies both individual and shared reading situations, and that many copies would have been suitable for either individual study or reading through a lector.

Like the *Speculum vitae*, *Pore Caitif*, the other popular work considered here, is almost always found augmented by a visual apparatus that emphasizes its structure, although we find great variation among its copies. Gillespie notes of the witnesses that are most complete, “the majority are uniformly small, pocket-sized volumes, written in single-columns in professional book-hands, with running titles for each tract and marginal identification of the authorities cited in the text” (332).

In his dissertation on the subject, Kalpen Trivedi identifies several specific patterns within this general one through an examination of thirty-four out of the surviving fifty-six copies and fragments of *Pore Caitif*—the most comprehensive to date.⁸⁶ Trivedi finds that, where the text appears alone, it tends to be fitted with tools that aid selective reading; these copies contain simple textual divisions, marked by illuminated initials or section breaks in red and blue (194).

⁸⁶ Kalpen Trivedi focuses on copies that appear in “miscellaneous manuscripts,” but he does include some stand-alone copies in his investigation (49-50).

The same can be said of most copies in what Trivedi terms the “Three Arrows group” (manuscripts in which *Pore Caitif* appears with one or more of the following associated works: *The Three Arrows of Doomsday*, the *Mirror for Sinners*, the *Meditation of St Anselm*, and the *Meditation to Say Alone*). It is also true of those associated with Walter Hilton’s works.⁸⁷ Copies in these last two groups also tend to be small and therefore portable.⁸⁸ As above, these features would all support both an individual reading the text and a lector reading it to others.

Like texts in the groups already described, those in the “group of early Lollard manuscripts” that Trivedi identifies feature a pattern of textual divisions that support selective reading (226). Five of these are touched with gold, which is unusual for copies of *Pore Caitif* (226)—a point discussed below. These “early Lollard manuscripts” are even smaller than copies in the “Three Arrows group”; Trivedi finds that “a typical volume would be in the region of 5 ½” x 3 ¾” or 141 mm x 96 mm” (227). Trivedi concludes, apparently from the size of these volumes, that they were “very probably priests’ books” (226), although here, as before, it is best to exercise caution when using books’ dimensions to guess their owners.

⁸⁷ Trivedi finds in representatives of the former group the apparatus that we might take as evidence of a visually-oriented text: “Textura-grade script, rubrication, illumination and decoration of the text” (189). All of the representative texts of the latter group are also marked by textual divisions; see Trivedi 111, 113, 116, 119, 125, and 133, and the text in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 699. This latter text also contains a textual apparatus, although Trivedi does not mention it in his description (117-8).

⁸⁸ Trivedi notes of the former group that “a number of these volumes (measuring between 6”x4” and 4 ½” x 3”) . . . have the dimensions of priests’ holster books” (188). Although Trivedi does not go into further detail, the implication is that their size suggests that they would have fit easily into a saddlebag, and therefore were used by travelling priests. Trivedi is certainly right that a volume of this size is portable, but his subsequent conclusion that these were designed for priests must be taken lightly in the absence of any other evidence. Andrew Taylor has found that the idea that books of a certain size were used in holsters is based on very tenuous evidence. He notes that, while narrow manuscripts could indeed fit into a holster, there are many reasons why a volume might have been prepared with these dimensions. Moreover, he finds that there is no material evidence to support the idea that books were carried in holsters (56-57). There is no reason for assuming that a portable volume was used by a priest.

Trivedi's findings suggest that most copies were designed to aid the eyes on the page, and their size makes them suitable for individual reading. Among the thirty-four copies examined by Trivedi, there are only four that do not have the apparatus that suggests visual reading, and these are the same ones that Trivedi suggests were owned by layfolk (189). They are "generally larger . . . usually copied in a cursive script, and frequently illuminated or decorated in a more rudimentary fashion" (190), all of which suggests that they were intended to be read aloud by, for example, a confessor to a lay patron, or, in the case of British Library, MS Harley 1706, and Manchester, John Rylands Library MS Eng. 85, a mother to her child.⁸⁹

We can sum up this overview by observing that the typical *mise-en-page* of the three most popular manuals for penitents, through running titles or other visual aids, would support both individual reading and reading through a lector, since these aids would have also assisted one reading to others. These aids also suggest selective, and, therefore, self-directed reading. Many copies of these texts, but by no means all, were prepared in dimensions that could support individual reading, and both *Manuel des péchés* and its Middle English translation imply, through an emphasis on the physicality of the text, that the reader is holding it. Nevertheless, all of these texts were surely used for both individual reading and shared reading experiences.

It is somewhat common to find manuals for penitents set beside similar works. The works just described are all found in manuscripts with other self-examination material. For example, most of the texts found with the *Manuel des péchés* are other Anglo-Norman devotional works. Grosseteste's *Chateau d'amour* is a common companion piece; Sullivan lists five manuscripts in which the two works appear together (Sullivan 108), and we can add to these a sixth, York

⁸⁹ See below, footnote 123.

Minster Library MS XVI. K.7.⁹⁰ Some of the devotional works found with the *Manuel* are focused on self-examination. In Harley 4657, it appears with *Une petite sume de set pechez morteus*, a late thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman text for penitents.⁹¹ In Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. 1.1 it is accompanied by many works, including “[t]wo texts on confession, the first (in A.N.) on the seventeen points of conduct which a penitent should observe in the confessional, and the second (in Latin) on the general questions which confessors should ask penitents” (Sullivan 111).⁹² Finally, it circulated in British Library, MS Harley 4971 with what Sullivan describes as “a text on sin, virtue, and hell” (105). The program of these last two manuscripts extends beyond promoting moral reform; both also contain more worldly material (Sullivan 105-106, 110-12).

Pore Caitif often circulated alone, or with tracts about how to live one’s life in preparation for a good death. Nevertheless, sin is a common theme among its companion works. A significant number of linked manuscripts, mentioned above, and described by Trivedi, contain both *Pore Caitif* and the *Mirror for Sinners*—the latter a translation of the *Speculum peccatoris* that encourages virtue and warns against vice through graphic descriptions of bodily corruption. The author of this latter text writes, “O ful happy is he þat bisily biholdeth hym-self in this myrour: ffor þeer is no craft, medicyne, ne techyng, þat so soone distruyeth vice, & plaunteth vertewes, as doth þe inwardly biholdyng thus of a mannes laste thynges” (439) (“Oh very happy

⁹⁰ For a description of the contents of this manuscript, see Spencer’s “The Old French Manuscripts of York Minster Library” 246.

⁹¹ See Hunt’s edition of this text.

⁹² In addition to these, Sullivan finds that Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. 1.1 contains the *Lumere as lais*. The same appears alongside the *Manuel des péchés* in Cambridge, St. John’s College, MS 167 (Sullivan 109). This text has a lengthy section focused on penance and is counted among manuals for penitents by Patterson (338), although it does not meet the criteria for this category outlined above, as noted on page 46.

is he who frequently beholds himself in this mirror! For there is no practice, medicine, nor teaching that destroys vice and plants virtues as quickly as does this kind of inward reflection on man's last things").

Pore Caitif also circulated with a self-examination text—*Saint Brendan's Confession*.

The two appear together in at least six manuscripts, and Trivedi notes of the latter that "there are only two manuscripts that contain this text that do not contain the *Pore Caitif*" (105).⁹³ Trivedi argues that *Saint Brendan's Confession* is "really more of a private prayer than a confession proper" (118). Yet Cornett, who has studied forms of confession extensively, counts it within this genre (76). The six manuscripts of *Pore Caitif* that contain *Saint Brendan's Confession*, and the four with different forms of confession, could have worked holistically to promote a moral transformation.⁹⁴

⁹³ Manuscripts that contain both *Pore Caitif* and *Saint Brendan's Confession* are London, British Library, MS Harley 1706 (95), Paris, BN, Fonds anglais ms 41 (113), London, Lambeth Palace, MS 541 (115), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 699 (117), Cambridge, University Library, MS Hh.i.12 (122), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 322 (131). We might also count Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 6 here; Trivedi finds in it a prayer with a "beginning. . .very like that of *St Brendan's Confession*," but the end of it is illegible, making certain identification impossible (65-66). Fumio Kuriyagawa does not mention this copy in his list of manuscripts of *Saint Brendan's Confession* (1-2). Cornett does not include it in his list of copies forms of confession, although he does include other copies of *Saint Brendan's Confession* (D1).

⁹⁴ The four manuscripts that Trivedi finds that contain other forms of confession are London, British Library, MS Harley 1706 (90), Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 699 (117), Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Douce 322 (127), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1286, which contains a form of confession "ful lustely compilyd out of þe vij deedly synnes" (110). Trivedi discusses these (197-98). Though not a form of confession, a list of seven deadly sins appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 938 (Trivedi 149).

The Utilitarian Design of Manuals for Penitents

Much has been said of the way that many Books of Hours signalled their patrons' power and status, suggesting leisure time with meditative prayers, and wealth with elaborate foliate borders, lavish covers, and illustrations of patrons.⁹⁵ As we shall see, manuals for penitents were, for the most part, more utilitarian. This is certainly suggested by ownership inscriptions in copies of the *Speculum vitae*, some of which stress the text's utility. An inscription in Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 11, which was owned by the church of the Augustinian priory of Bolton, specifies that it "continet utilitatem oracionis dominice" (Doyle II.49) ("contains the usefulness of the Lord's Prayer").⁹⁶ Although this might seem to describe the Lord's Prayer alone, it is likely that it refers to the whole text of the *Speculum vitae* since, as Doyle points out, the prayer serves as a framing device for all other material (II.49). In another, Additional MS 8151, the text is described as "good and useful for the salvation of the human life and soul."⁹⁷

The colophon in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS McClean 130 gives us a sense of what one copyist considered useful: "Explicit tractatus de oracione dominica sive de paternoster. In quo reprehenduntur multa vicia. Et in quo continentur omnes virtutes que in hac vita

⁹⁵ Duffy, for example, observes that, "The presence and importance of pictures, textual illumination and marginal decoration made Books of Hours especially costly, and to begin with they certainly were the preserve of royal and aristocracy, or the wealthiest members of the urban elite. . . Indeed, the cost was often not so much a drawback of such books, as part of their *point*, and their decorative schemes were often designed to draw attention to wealth and dynastic alliances as much as religious preferences" (*Marking* 18-19). Duffy does, however, note that, "by the early fifteenth century Books of Hours had become much more widely accessible" (21), and describes their mass production (25).

⁹⁶ Studying this MS before Princeton University Library owned it, A. I. Doyle calls it the "Petre MS," after the family name of its previous owner.

⁹⁷ The full inscription, recorded by Doyle, reads "tractatus benus et utilis pro salute humane vite et anime" (I. 87).

degentibus sunt necessarie. Et specialiter illiteratis docende. ad dei honorem.” (Doyle I.87) (“Here ends the tract on the Lord’s Prayer—that is, the *Pater noster*. In which many vices can be checked. And in which is contained all the virtues that are necessary in this life of men, and especially to be taught to the uneducated. To the honour of God.”). Another scribe, that of National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 395, entitled his copy “*Liber sapientie*” (Doyle II.49) (“The Book of Wisdom”). This title gives us some insight into how he understood the text’s function. It would seem that whoever wrote it, like those who left their marks on the copies already mentioned, did not view the *Speculum vitae* as a display piece, but as a useful tool.

With this in mind, it is telling that the three popular insular manuals that I have been describing are almost always found in homely volumes, simple and unadorned save for the textual apparatuses described above. Their consistency in this respect is remarkable. Only one of the twenty-eight surviving copies of the *Manuel des péchés* contains significant illustrations—Princeton University Library, Taylor Medieval MS 1 (Taubman 48-49), a manuscript commissioned by a wealthy lay patron.⁹⁸ Copies of the *Speculum vitae* are likewise bare, aside from a few exceptional ones decorated with grotesques, flowers, or vines—themselves relatively simple.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ See the discussion of this commission on page 96.

⁹⁹ Hanna provides comprehensive descriptions of the surviving manuscripts in the introduction to his edition of the text. He identifies some grotesques in British Library, Additional MS 8151 (xxx). Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.13 opens with “a red and blue bar demivinet with sprays” (xxv). Hatton 19 has floral sprays (li), and Rawlinson C. 884 features simple foliate decoration, including a bird (liii). Two luxury copies, both exceptional, are decorated with gold leaf—the copy in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet a.1 (the Vernon MS) (xlvii, xlviii), and that of British Library, Additional MS 22283, (the Simeon MS) (xxxi). There is also one illustration in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 423 (D.4.3): “a vine and flower panel, of a sort typical in Horae” (xxvii).

Copies of *Pore Caitif* received more decoration. Some are touched with blue or red, and a few embellished with gold leaf. Yet even these decorations are generally purposive, as opposed to strictly aesthetic, as they signal the structural divisions of the text.¹⁰⁰ Trivedi notes that the use of gold leaf is limited to those copies associated with Lollard circles (226)—a curious finding that merits further investigation. It is undoubtedly a testament to the text’s utilitarian function that one manuscript alone of the thirty-six surveyed by Trivedi contains any significant illustrations—Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Douce 322 (Trivedi 133). Trivedi posits, based on these and other factors, that this copy originated in a London bookstore (Trivedi 133). Its images are simple and they may have served as sites of meditation, with a typical example depicting death as a skeleton, encircled by the word “dethe” (fol. 19v). From Linne Mooney we learn that it was intended for the nuns at Dartford, and served as the exemplar for another, less decorated, copy, London, British Library, MS Harley 1706 (208). Minor, equally functional, illustrations accompany the text in two other copies. London, British Library, MS Harley 2322 contains a medieval line drawing of Christ, flanked on each side by the words “ihesu merci” (fol. iii^v), and catchwords in British Library, MS Stowe 38 are decorated with tiny chalices and communion wafers (fols. 101v, 109v, 117v, 125v, 133v, 141v, 149v qtd. in British Library). The rarity and sparsity of illustrations in manuscripts of *Pore Caitif* must lead us to conclude that these were not decorative volumes; they were designed for the cloister or the closet, not for public display.

¹⁰⁰ Copies with illuminated initials identified by Trivedi are Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B. 14.53; Glasgow, Hunterian Library, MS 496 (61); Glasgow, Hunterian Library, MS 520 (63); Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 6.55 (64); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 3 (SC 1843); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lyell 29 (83); and Downside Abbey, MS 26542 (119). Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 5.45 is only partially illuminated (79). More decorated initials appear in British Library, MS Stowe 38 (169); Paris, BN, Fonds anglais MS 41 (114); and London, British Library, MS Harley 2322 (144). In the last of these, the initials are illuminated with gold.

Against these reams of plain volumes, the *Somme le roi* stands in stark relief. Its editors find that many of its early manuscripts are lavishly decorated (Brayer, and Leurquin-Labie 25). Brayer and Anne-Françoise Leurquin-Labie find that many manuscripts, both early and late, contain a set of miniatures, and there is little variation between these sets.¹⁰¹ Some of the miniatures illustrate the text with biblical scenes, such as the first of the cycle, which, as described by Brayer and Leurquin-Labie, depicts Moses receiving the Ten Commandments (36). Many set models of vice against those of virtue, such as the fourteenth miniature, which illustrates chastity through Judith slaying Holofernes, and lechery, through the attempt of Potiphar's wife to entrap Joseph (Brayer, and Leurquin-Labie 40).¹⁰²

The illumination in the early copies of *Somme le roi* might owe something to the tastes in France at the time they were produced—Wieck finds that, in late thirteenth-century France, lavishly illuminated Books of Hours became increasingly popular (28). The atypical beauty of its witnesses must also owe much to the text's courtly associations. According to Brayer and Leurquin-Labie, Laurent was probably involved in planning the set of miniatures. They note that although it is difficult to determine Laurent's role, since the earliest witnesses to the set were produced at fifteen years' remove from Laurent's composition of the *Somme le roi* (43), his involvement is nevertheless suggested by the consistency of the set, and by the striking similarities between some of the illustrations and the section on the virtues, a section of the *Somme* that they find is unique to this text (45). If correct, this finding would mean that the

¹⁰¹ They note that, "Cette permanence des modèles et de leur mise-en-page, malgré les différences de technique (peinture ou dessin à l'encre) et de formats, est tout à fait exceptionnelle" ("this sameness of the models and of their layout, despite some differences of technique [paint or line drawing], and of format, is altogether exceptional") (Brayer, and Leurquin-Labie 41).

¹⁰² For a full description of the miniatures and a reproduction of representative images, see Brayer and Leurquin-Labie 36-40.

miniatures were designed while Laurent was in the service of Philip III, and they may therefore reflect the courtly circumstances of the text's creation.

Brayer and Leurquin-Labie find that most of the early luxury copies circulated within courtly environments (25). The patrons of these must have valued their beauty. Blanche of Navarre, queen of France, described her copy as “bien enluminé” when bequeathing it to Louis of Valois—her son, and the great-grandson of Philip III, the king for whom the work was initially written (30). The extravagance of these early copies of the *Somme le roi*, then, would appear to be intimately tied to the status of their patrons.

But not all early copies were luxury productions. Brayer and Leurquin-Labie identify some less lavish copies among the earliest ones and find evidence that these were designed for clerical readers. They note that these contain more annotation and, on this basis, they suggest that they were used as preaching aids. They find that, as time went on, plainer copies, resembling those of the *Manuel des péchés* in their utilitarian design, were increasingly common, but lavish ones continued to be produced until the fifteenth century (25).

The case of some copies of *Somme le roi* aside, manuscripts for penitents were, on the whole, practical volumes designed primarily for use, not for display. Since these were not luxury items in the same way that Books of Hours were, their widespread popularity cannot be attributed to the desire to display wealth. Given the emphasis on utility in the ownership inscriptions in these texts, their popularity suggests instead that they were valued for offering guidance in matters of the soul.

Authors and Readers of Manuals for Penitents

William of Waddington insists that he writes his *Manuel des péchés* in answer to a request.¹⁰³ His claim is in keeping with the conventions of devotional writing, but it would not be difficult to take it at face value, since some writers of manuals for penitents had close relationships with their audiences.¹⁰⁴ This is certainly true of Grosseteste, who, as already noted, wrote at least two self-examination texts. He wrote the first of these, *Notus in Iudea Deus*, for his own household, according to Goering and F.A.C. Mantello, and he wrote the second, the *Perambulauit Iudas*, for a group of monks at the urging of a friend (“*Notus*” 254).

Yet not all authors had intimate knowledge of their audiences. For example, Robert of Sorbon does not seem to have written his widely-influential *Qui vult vere confiteri* (ca. 1260-74) for any single audience. The continental work, described by its editor as a “guide to confession” (Diekstra, “*Qui vult*” 218), contains no evidence that it was written for a particular audience and it opens with a broad description of a penitent: “*Qui vult vere confiteri peccata sua ad salutem anime sue*” (“He who truly wishes to confess his sins for the salvation of his eternal soul”)

¹⁰³ “Si l’escrit desplest a aukun, / Blamer ne me deyt par resun; / De fole enprise suy escusé, / Kar du fere fuy mut prié” (11531-34 qtd. in Schemmann 231). Schemmann translates the passage, “If the text displeases anyone / He must not blame me indeed; / I am excused from a foolish enterprise / Because I was very much asked to do it” (231). Sullivan suggests that the manual was commissioned by a monk by translating “fere” as “brother” (as in the modern French *frère*)—a reading that depends in part, on the variant “frer” which appears in the Vatican copy (28). He also claims that “reading ‘fere’ as *frère* yields intelligible constructions in the common reading and in all variants” (74). But Schemmann presents a careful and extensive refutation of Sullivan’s reading (326-29). She points out that “frer” appears in only one of the manuscripts that contain the relevant passage, “All the others have *fere/feere/feire*” (327). If the Vatican copy were the closest to Waddington’s original, we might be able to discount these other readings as corruptions, but Wilhelm G. Busse has shown that no existing *stemma* for this text is reliable (6-13). And Schemmann provides evidence, on syntactic grounds, that “fere” makes more sense with the variants for this passage (329).

¹⁰⁴ For this convention, see Millett, “He speaks” 52.

(238).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the French translation, written in the late thirteenth century, ends with an address to “toute boine gent crestienne” (259) (“all good Christian people”).

Some authors of manuals for penitents, such as Robert Mannyng, were monks. It is perhaps not surprising to find that some of them, including Friar Laurent and William of Waddington (Schemmann 330), were confessors. Some were layfolk, but what evidence survives suggests that this was rare. It is only in the late fourteenth century that we start to find lay writers composing works for penitents, and even after this point it remained rare. Probably the earliest example of a lay author writing a self-examination text would be Henry, Duke of Lancaster, who wrote the *Livre de seynt medicines*. Using strikingly visceral terms, Henry casts his sins as wounds that Christ must heal. He then suggests remedies, each described as a medical treatment. Yet this text is not, strictly speaking, a manual for penitents; most of it is in the first person, so it does not quite meet the requirements laid out in Chapter 1.

It is hard to judge whether Henry wanted his text to circulate widely. His approach to sin is deeply personal, but he notes that his work could be useful to others (241) (Trans. Batt 280).¹⁰⁶ Regardless of his intentions, the text did circulate among others, who may have reflected on Henry’s sins, or filtered their own examinations through Henry’s. This is clear from the two surviving manuscripts. The earliest of these, Blackburn, Stonyhurst College, MS 24 appears to have circulated among Henry’s close allies (Batt, “Introduction” 15). Its frontispiece features several coats of arms, including two belonging to Henry: those of the Duchy of Lancaster and those of the earldom of Lincoln (Batt, “Introduction” 14). Batt writes that, “The Stonyhurst frontispiece . . . uses the devotional text as the means to proclaim and commemorate personal

¹⁰⁵ For the place of *Qui vult vere confiteri* among manuals for penitents, see below, page 166.

¹⁰⁶ Page numbers for Henry’s text are from Arnould’s edition. The page numbers associated with translated passages refer to Batt’s translation.

dynastic power, aristocratic and military ties, status, and comradeship” (15). According to an inscription, the manuscript left Henry’s family soon after its production, but eventually returned to it when it was gifted to Henry’s great-grandson by Thomas Carew (Batt, “Introduction” 15).

The manuscript containing the second copy, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 218, contains several other religious works (Batt, “Introduction” 17), including the *Instructions* (fols. 68v-70v). As Batt notes, this work is a Latin translation of a letter composed by King Louis IX of France, and is linked to *Somme le roi*, both by its addressee—Louis’ son, the future King Philip III—and by its recommendation of frequent confession (“Foul Friends” 60). Summarizing her findings about these manuscripts, Catherine Batt writes, “One could even characterize one copy as looking outwards, to the public sphere, and the other as ostensibly more private and devotional in emphasis” (“Introduction” 14). Batt adds that, taken together, they suggest “a work apparently both public and private” (“Introduction” 17).

By far the most famous of the manuals written by a layman is Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale*, which I discuss at greater length in my final chapter. Gower also wrote a manual for penitents—the *Mirour de l’omme*. We might also, with some reservations, count John Clanvowe in this category. Although Clanvowe’s *Two Ways* is primarily a guide for how to live a virtuous life, it has much in common with these manuals, as Larry D. Benson suggests in his introduction in the *Riverside Chaucer* (21). This includes discussions of the sins (61-66) and of the Ten Commandments, as well as of some sins against them (73-75). Yet while all four of these texts were by laymen, it is worth noting the clerical associations even here; Henry wrote at the urging of a confessor, and Chaucer, while a layman, cast his as the work of a parson.

Lay people were also addressed as audiences in self-examination writing, although this seems to have happened rarely before the middle of the thirteenth century, when the first

manuals for penitents began to appear. Before this time, self-examination writing was, with a few exceptions, addressed to anchorites, monks, or other clerical readers.¹⁰⁷ The *Manuel des péchés* was on the vanguard of this new wave of manuals that address the laity. Admittedly, this has been the subject of some dispute in recent years. As Schemmann notes, unambiguous details about its implied audience (i.e. the audience constructed within the text) are unfortunately scarce (227).

On one hand, Sullivan takes trepidation surrounding clerical sins as a sign that the text addresses members of the clergy (including monks and priests), whom William did not want to offend (28).¹⁰⁸ But this view has been challenged by Schemmann, who suggests that the text addresses additionally or, perhaps, primarily, *laye gent* (331). Surveying all instances of the term “laye” in the text, she arrives at the conclusion that *laye gent*, in the *Manuel des péchés*, “are treated as a separate group and distinguished from the *clers* (the secular clergy) and the *religius* (the regular clergy)” (331). She acknowledges, however, that the only explicit address to these *laye gent* appears in the prologue to the poem:

Pur la laye gent iert fet;
Deu le parface, si ly plest,
K’eus ver pussent apertement
Kaunt eus trespassent, e kaunt nient.
Si aukun de l’oyr seit asmendé,
Deu de cyel en seit gracié. (91-96 qtd. in Schemmann 229)

¹⁰⁷ See the discussion in chapter 3.

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan provides an excellent overview of prior attempts to characterize the audience of the *Manuel des péchés* (281-82).

It is done for lay people; / May God bring it to an end, if it please him, / So that they
can see clearly / When they sin and when not. / If anyone, from listening [to it], may
be improved / may God in heaven be thanked for it. (Schemmann 229)¹⁰⁹

Sullivan deems these lines spurious because they are absent from five copies of the text, and because they describe the audience's engagement with the text as "oyr"—a term that Sullivan believes William does not use in this context (26).¹¹⁰ But Schemmann does not put much weight on Sullivan's assertion (to put it mildly) (324). As already noted, she establishes that William does, in fact, use both *lire* and *oier* to describe his audience's engagement with the text (319). Schemmann does not take into account Sullivan's first piece of evidence: that these lines are absent from five manuscripts. But, of course, their absence from these manuscripts could not tell us much about William's original unless we could establish that these five were the closest to it. Sullivan does not attempt to do this, and, as Wilhelm G. Busse has shown, we do not have a reliable *stemma* for manuscripts of the *Manuel des péchés* (6-13). So, until we have a better understanding of the relationship between copies of the *Manuel*, Sullivan's reading of this evidence is premature.

Moreover, even if Sullivan is correct and these prologue lines were not written by William, they were included in some thirteenth-century copies of the *Manuel*, so we can at least say that it was addressed to layfolk within a few decades of its initial composition. A lay audience also makes sense given the kinds of reading that William expects. Schemman notes that

¹⁰⁹ The word order of the translation has been amended to more closely reflect the Anglo-Norman.

¹¹⁰ Sullivan finds that these lines are missing from copies in British Library, MS Harley 4971, York Minster Library MS. XVI. K.7, Vatican, Pal. Lat. MS 1970, Paris, BN, fonds français ms 14959, and Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 11. For Sullivan's views on William's use of *oier*, see above, footnote 85.

the text calls for “slow and repeated study” and, from this she concludes that, “One point . . . can be stated with surety and that is that the *Manuel dé Pechez* would not suit the priest or friar who has to speak to changing audiences whom he faces for a limited period of time,” and “a lay household is the most probable environment in which the *Manuel dé Pechez* was received” (319). The evidence considered so far suggests that Schemmann is right that the text implies a lay audience, although we should of course be careful not to assume, as she does here, that this implied audience is a record of its actual audience.

It is also important to keep in mind, as Schemmann does, that William “seemingly did not rule out a clerical audience” (331). Schemmann finds a number of passages which single out members of a clerical audience—here defined in the broadest sense, to include members of both the secular and regular clergy (272-75). All of the evidence examined here suggests that we can agree with Andrew Reeves who, after weighing current scholarship on the topic, writes, “We might be on safe ground if we say that it had an audience of both laity and clerics in mind, without attempting to privilege one or the other” (*Religious* 150).

Beyond the implied audience of the *Manuel des péchés*, there is the question of its actual one. Barratt speaks of the text’s “wide appeal among male religious” and lists several copies that were owned by religious houses:

The Cistercians at Meaux listed a copy in their 1396 inventory, as did the Titchfield Premonstratensians. Dover Priory owned one, as did the Augustinian canons at Leicester. St. Augustine’s, Canterbury, was given a copy by the monk Richard of Canterbury (*fl.* c. 1320). A parish priest’s inventory of 1369 and a bequest of 1393 include our text. And in 1368 Simon Bredon, fellow of Merton College, Oxford, left a copy to the Benedictine nuns at Malling (Kent). (“Spiritual Writings” 354)

This much is certain. More doubtful, however, is the claim that clerical readers such as these were the main recipients of the text—a position held by Sullivan on the basis of a survey of half of the surviving manuscripts and fragments (102-17).¹¹¹ Sullivan’s contribution to our understanding of the circulation of the *Manuel des péchés* is significant, but his conclusions rely too heavily on a pessimistic assessment of the abilities and interests of the laity. Of those copies that he counts as clerically-owned, most are so attributed on uncertain grounds. Certainly his conjecture that the compiler of the late fourteenth-century British Library, MS Arundel 288 prepared his volume for a clerical audience must give us pause. Sullivan bases this conclusion on the supposedly clerical nature of the texts that accompany the *Manuel des péchés* in this manuscript: the *Peines de purgatorie* and an Anglo-Norman version of the *Speculum religiosorum*, written by Edmund of Abingdon, the Archbishop of Canterbury (115). But neither of these was restricted to clerical readers; the former appears in the *Compileison*, which is addressed to lay and clerical readers alike (Hunt 72).¹¹² The latter was, as A. D. Wilshire notes in his edition of the Anglo-Norman version, adapted for lay circles (xi-xii). Indeed, Reeves, writing of this manuscript, finds that “the redaction of the *Mirour* that it contains is one that was meant to provide the basic requirements of the life of a Christian layperson,” and on this account decides “to suspend judgment and note the possibility that it could have been prepared for a lay owner” (“Teaching” 194).

¹¹¹ Sullivan states that “a full study of the MSS appears in Chapter II” (82). However, at the time of Sullivan’s study, only twenty-four manuscripts and fragments had been identified, and Sullivan examines only fourteen at any length in Chapter II (102-117).

¹¹² In his dissertation on the *Peines de purgatorie*, Robert Relihan describes the work’s fundamentally “practical” character: “The form of meditation in the *Peines* is highly practical; its ultimate purpose, like those of the devotions in the *Ancrene Riwe*, is to turn the mind of the reader from sin by training his thoughts on a deepening perception of the will of God” (24).

Sullivan ascribes clerical origins to British Library, MS Harley 4971, arguing that, “The simple and tidy presentation of the *Manuel* (rubrics and initials only, with almost no annotation) suggests that the manuscript in which it appears was produced by and for clerics” (106). Sullivan’s assumption here, that manuscripts with a “tidy presentation” had clerical origins or readers, suggests a pessimistic view of lay copyists and audiences—one that does not hold up to scrutiny. Although an inscription indicates that the monks at Bury St Edmunds owned the manuscript in the fifteenth century (Sullivan 106), there is no evidence that it originated with them. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that a number of layfolk owned it before the monks did. It contains an inscription attesting to a 1308 grant of land at Aldwinle (in Northamptonshire) from one Simon de Repindon to “John de [A]ldewynle and Agnes his wife” (fol. 128 v qtd. in Herbert 289). John and Agnes de Aldewynle were undoubtedly layfolk, and there is some evidence to suggest the same was true of Simon de Repindon. In 1331, a Simon de Repindon was asked to prosecute a debt in Lincolnshire on behalf of one Joan Orger of Freston (*Calendar of the Close Rolls* 323). If, as seems likely, all three parties recorded in the Harley land grant were layfolk, it seems likely that the manuscript was in lay hands at the time of the grant in 1308. Given that the section of the manuscript in question is dated to the early fourteenth century, the 1308 exchange of land it records suggests that it was either produced for lay owners or fell into their hands remarkably quickly.¹¹³

Moreover, Sullivan notes, but does not remark upon, another fourteenth-century inscription in this manuscript: the name “William Cartere” (fol. 128 v qtd. in Sullivan 106). The name is not uncommon, but, given the date of the hand and the manuscript’s ties to Lincolnshire,

¹¹³ Yet we cannot, of course, rule out the possibility that the land grant was placed in a clerically-owned manuscript, either for safe-keeping or for some other purpose.

it could be that of the William Cartere who, in 1328, was tried for two different acts of thievery in the area: the first, a break and enter into the Lincolshire enclosure of one Albinus de Sutton (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 293), and the second, a theft in York against Arnald Micol of Gascony (*Calendar of the Patent Rolls* 281). The manuscript would therefore appear to have strong early lay associations.

Sullivan's suspicion of lay sensibilities also leads him to ascribe clerical origins to Cambridge University Library, MS Gg. 1.1, a lavish and substantial volume. Its contents include a number of works that seem most useful to a lay patron, such as a Latin "list of knights' fees in England and Ireland," and the Anglo-Norman "rules of love for clerks and knights" (Sullivan 111). Sullivan concedes that the works in this manuscript are "occasionally appropriate for secular reception," but claims that they "are collectively so vast, varied, and so demanding of an exceedingly patient and educated mind that one must doubt that the book's patron was a layman" (111). But dense luxury manuscripts owned by layfolk are not uncommon, so it is equally easy to imagine this manuscript in the hands of a layman.

More plausible is Sullivan's suggestion that Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Poetry MS 241 originated at Bury St Edmunds. Sullivan suggests this because it contains "a collection of miracles of the Virgin by Everard Gately, a member of the Benedictine house at Bury St. Edmunds" (109). Sullivan may also be right about the clerical origins of two other manuscripts, both of which seem to have been produced for monastic houses. Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm. 6.4 was, as Sullivan states, "originally owned by and probably copied at the Cistercian

house at Quarr, on the Isle of Wight” (117).¹¹⁴ Finally, clerical origins can possibly be granted to Stonyhurst College MS, A.VI.22, as it contains two *summae* for priests (106).¹¹⁵

But we cannot conclude from these last three manuscripts—the ones with the clearest signs of clerical origins that Sullivan considers—that the *Manuel* circulated primarily among monks, priests, and other members of the clergy. Analysing the marks of provenance on fourteen of the surviving twenty-eight manuscripts and fragments (102-117), Sullivan finds two that were initially intended for layfolk: British Library, MS Harley 273 (114), and Princeton Library, Taylor Medieval MS 1 (113). The first of these, Sullivan notes, “consists of four separate manuscripts (or booklets) copied during the first quarter of the fourteenth century and bound together by the mid-fourteenth century” (114). Sullivan claims that the second booklet, which contains the *Manuel*, “was designed for and originally owned by a (probably wealthy and well-educated) layman,” based on the “presence of the charms and the pragmatic content and presentation of the other texts” (114). We must be careful when guessing the owners of a manuscript from the presentation of its text or the “pragmatism” of its content, but Sullivan’s conclusions here nevertheless hold up to investigation.

The booklet in question contains Richard de Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’amour* (fols. 70r-81r), the *Reules Seynt Roberd* by Robert Grosseteste (Dean no. 392) (fols. 81r-85v), the *Rules of Friendship* (Dean no. 246) (fols. 85r-85v), a charm (fol. 85v), and instructions on bloodletting (fol. 85v). These are followed by the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* (fols. 86r-102v) and the *Sermon*

¹¹⁴ Sullivan bases this attribution on an inscription toward the middle of the manuscript: “Iste liber est de armariolo Monasterii beate Marie de Quareria quem qui substraxerit uel malicose elongauerit anathema sit, et interminabilem dei maledictionem incurrat” (fol. 178r qtd. in Sullivan 124).

¹¹⁵ But see the lay associations of this manuscript described below, on page 96.

on *Penance* (Dean no. 672) (fols. 103r-110r).¹¹⁶ Next is an “invocation in verse to the virgin” (Dean no. 772) (fol. 110r), two prayers (Dean no. 781, 891), one with a rubric (Dean no. 951) (fol. 110r), and a diagrammatic guide to meditation (fols. 110v-112v). This section includes *The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Dean no. 615) (fol. 112v). The *Manuel* follows (fols. 113-190v). After the *Manuel*, in a different hand, is a page of notes in Latin and Anglo-Norman listing the sins and sacraments (fol. 191r), followed by the *Purgatoire de S. Patrice* (Dean no. 550) (fols. 191v-197v). The presence of the *Reules Seynt Roberd*, a discourse on the proper management of an estate, supports Sullivan’s claim that this booklet was intended for a lay household.

The second manuscript, Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval 1, attests to lay interest in the text. Joan Tateshal, a wealthy Lincolnshire landholder, commissioned it in the late thirteenth century for her own use.¹¹⁷ Joan wanted her involvement in the production of this manuscript recorded; the *Manuel* text begins with an initial containing a drawing of her and the scribe she employed (Bennett 173).

While these are the only two copies that Sullivan finds were produced for members of the laity, several others contain signs of ownership among them. So, for example, the earliest mark of provenance in British Library, MS Royal 20. B. XIV indicates that it was in lay hands by the middle of the fourteenth century (Sullivan 116).

Stonyhurst College MS, A.VI. 22, which Sullivan, as we have seen, takes as a clerical compendium based on its contents, also has early lay associations. Sullivan notes that the name John Pye appears in both this manuscript and in York Minster Library MS XVI. K.13, a

¹¹⁶ In Patterson’s study of manuals for penitents, the *Sermon on Penance* is entitled *Avis sur la confession* (337).

¹¹⁷ For Joan Tateshal’s involvement in the production of this manuscript, see Bennett’s “A Book Designed for a Noblewoman.”

manuscript that contains a fragment of the *Manuel* and that is not considered by Sullivan in any depth. From the inscriptions in these two volumes, Sullivan suggests that Pye “may have been a collector of MSS” (107). Although Sullivan does not consider it, there is reason to suspect that this Pye, whose name is inscribed “Joannes Pye” in the York Minster manuscript (fol. 103r qtd. in Laird 119), was the “Johannes Pye” who held lands in the late fourteenth century in Ulverston, in the Northern county of Cumbria (*Coucher Book* 430-34).¹¹⁸ Both Pye manuscripts seem to have Northern origins, which makes it plausible that they were in the collection of the Ulverston landowner.¹¹⁹ We therefore have two more copies of the *Manuel* with early lay associations. Given the number of copies owned by the laity, and the fact that, of those manuscripts surveyed by Sullivan, only three show plausible signs of having been produced for members of the clergy compared to two for members of the laity, we are in no position to exclude either group from the text’s early audience, nor, judging from inscriptions of layfolk described above, from its later one.¹²⁰

The Middle English translation of the *Manuel* is, according to Jennifer Garrison, addressed to a lay audience (Garrison 897). But its copies reached both lay and clerical owners. Sullivan sums up his findings about the manuscripts containing these copies by noting that most “are unremarkable, and often sloppy, compilations ordinarily owned by unremarkable people, for example a country rector (who may have also owned a copy of Mannyng’s metrical chronicle)

¹¹⁸ It is not clear if Sullivan considers Pye a layman, because Sullivan does not consider this evidence in his claim that the *Manuel* circulated among clerical owners primarily. It is possible that he does not consider Pye relevant because he thinks, for reasons he does not provide, that Pye lived in the fifteenth century (107).

¹¹⁹ Charlton G. Laird finds that, “Both manuscripts are preserved in the North, in collections which seem generally to have been local” (119).

¹²⁰ The audiences of the *Manuel des péchés* are explored at greater length in my article on the subject forthcoming in *Philological Quarterly*.

and a backwater mayor from Norfolk, a Leicestershire family man, and a rural Buckinghamshire house of the obscure Bonshommes canons” (Sullivan 12). Sullivan is perhaps too quick to describe men like William Trewe, the mayor of King’s Lynn (204), as “unremarkable,” but his conclusions about the mixed readership of *Handlyng Synne* have remained unchallenged.

For its own part, the *Somme le roi* was commissioned by Philip III, but in the text, Laurent addresses a much wider group of layfolk: “Ce livre est fait pour les lais et non pour les clerks, qui ont des livres” (48) (“This book is made for members of the laity and not for clerks, who [already] have books”). Yet like its insular predecessor, the *Manuel des péchés*, it reached both lay and clerical owners. As already noted, Brayer and Leurquin-Labie find that, even in the first few decades of its composition, it circulated both in courtly circles and in clerical ones (25-26). Aside from recommending it for the future Charles VII, Gerson recommended it for the “simple woman” for whom he wrote his *Mendicité spirituelle* (Hasenohr 208).

The author of the *Speculum vitae*, the late fourteenth-century English adaptation, draws on his source to insist that he writes for the unlearned, because clerks have enough books already:

And al for lewed men namely
þat can na manere of clergy.
To kenne þam war mast nede,
For clerkes can bathe se and rede
In sere bokes of Haly Writte
How þai sal lif, if þai loke itt (7; 83-88)

Duffy takes these lines to mean that the work is written for “unlettered lay people” (*Stripping of the Altars* 69), and Doyle writes that the whole manual is addressed to an uneducated audience (I.78).

Even so, like its source, the *Speculum vitae* circulated among lay and clerical owners alike. Doyle suggests that the copies in “coucher” books—the well-known Vernon and Simeon manuscripts—were made “for reading in the circles of devout noblewomen, by their priests, their attendants, their visitors, or themselves” (I.84). The Vernon copy, as already noted, contains lavish illustrations (I.84). Hugh Damlett, who was, according to Mary C. Erler, a London rector and prominent book collector, owned one copy: Stonyhurst College, MS 27 (78). Of the smaller manuscripts, Doyle finds that many “show some evidence of clerical ownership along with that of communal entertainment and edification” (I.84). Doyle concludes that this work generally circulated among “the better-educated and more comfortable clergy and laity” (I.92).

Pore Caitif is addressed to a similarly diverse audience; the prologue states that it is for “al cristen peple” and that it “shal teche symple men & wymmen of good will . Be riȝt weie to heuen” (1). It seems to have reached the audience described. Trivedi notes that, “From the few indications in surviving manuscripts, it seems to have been used by men and women religious and laymen alike” (17). Its popularity among both men and women is worth stressing; ownership inscriptions attest to an almost equal number of men’s names as women’s.¹²¹ This should not

¹²¹ Of all surviving manuscripts of *Pore Caitif* with fifteenth century inscriptions described by Trivedi, eight contain men’s names and seven contain women’s names. Trivedi finds men’s names in: Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.14.53 (James 336) (58); Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 6.55 (66); Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Eng. 85 (72); London, Lambeth Palace, MS 541 (116); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Add. B. 66 (140); London, British Library, Harley 2322 (143); London, Westminster School, MS 4 (147); Cambridge, MA, Harvard College MS English 701 (161). Trivedi finds women’s names in: Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 5.45 (78); London, British Library, MS Harley 4012 (88); London, British Library, MS Harley 1706 (100); London, Lambeth Palace, MS 3597 (104); Oxford, Bodleian

come as a surprise. Although *Pore Caitif*, and many of the other manuals for penitents that I have examined tend to describe the paradigmatic sinner using male pronouns—an observation made by Jacqueline Murray about works for confessors (“Gendered Souls” 81)—many of these texts nevertheless include specific addresses to women, as well as sins that were thought to be unique to women.

Somewhat curiously, some manuals make mention of sins specific to children. Although evidence for it is comparatively rare, some must have been used by the young. Of course, *Omnis utriusque sexus* applied only to those who had reached the age of discretion. Tentler writes that there were competing views following the council on what age was intended: “Estimates varied from seven to fourteen years of age, with a general agreement that the age could vary from person to person” (70). As discussed below, Goering finds that William of Montibus’ *Peniteas cito peccator*, a text that could have been used for self-examination, was taught to students during their “formative years,” although Goering does not specify a particular age (*William de Montibus* 107).

Sometimes the age of an implied audience is difficult to determine. One of the forms of confession examined by Durkin is addressed to “my brothyr þat art yong of age” (38; no. 42), although this does not necessarily suggest that it was for a child; other addresses to “frater” in the text may, as Durkin notes, suggest that it was intended for “members of a religious community” (39). The poet of the *Speculum vitae* implies that his text is for those of all ages; he says that he writes in English because “lered and lawed, alde and yhungre, / Alle vnderstandes Inglishche tunge” (7;79-80). Moreover, the work is occasionally found among those for the young—one

Library, MS Ashmole 1286 (110); Cambridge, University Library, MS Hh.i.12 (124-5); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 322 (132).

manuscript contains a copy of the rare “Little Children’s Little Book,” added in the fifteenth century (Hanna, “Introduction” xxx), and another Lydgate’s “Dietary” and “Stans puer ad mensam” (“The Child at the Table”) (Hanna, “Introduction” xlv).

As we have seen, manuals for penitents generally contain some essentials of the faith, and although in these manuals they are often cast a means of examining sin, they nevertheless would have been useful for a child trying to memorize them. As Woods and Copeland note, diocesan constitutions, such as those passed in Salisbury in the thirteenth century, continually insisted on the importance of teaching these essentials of the faith to children (390). Writing of his *Threefold Work*, a text “de praeceptis, de confessione, de scientia mortis” (“on the commandments, confession, and the science of dying”) which he shares in order to foster “prosperum ad virtutes, vitiis depulsis, incrementum” (“prosperous growth in virtue, if vices are repelled”), Gerson claims that its possible beneficiaries include “pueris et juvenibus qui a rudimentis infantiae circa fidei nostrae generalem tenorem et principalia puncta primitus debent erudiri” (“Gerson à un inconnu” 74) (“children and youths who from the beginning of childhood ought to be taught in a basic manner the general content and principal points of our faith”) (“Letter 18” 224).

Gerson writes elsewhere of the difficulty in getting a full confession from the very young, and asks confessors to be particularly careful when interrogating them for this reason (“On the Art of Hearing Confessions” 368). Gerson seems to have expected instruction in self-examination even among those who had not yet reached the age of discretion; in his letter to Charles’s confessor, he recommends the *Somme le roi* as appropriate reading material for the dauphin, who, born in 1403, would have been between five and seven at the time.¹²² Yet, as a

¹²² See above, page 66.

future monarch of France, the dauphin might have had unusual requirements in terms of education.

Two copies of *Pore Caitif* appear in manuscripts alongside works for children.¹²³ Another, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1286, served as an “educational text,” according to Gabriel Hill, who has examined its marginalia in depth. Hill finds a charming fifteenth-century inscription in two different hands, both apparently by an eighteen-year-old looking for work: “If ther be any good gentle man spirituell or temporall willyng to haue / / a lad of xviii yere of age that can write and rede undre this mannur of forme and better yf nede be lette him substribe his name and he shall geue him attendance” (qtd. in Hill 202) (“If there is any good noble man, ecclesiastical or lay, willing to have a lad of eighteen years of age that can write and read in this way, and better if need be, let him write his name and he [the lad] shall serve him” (Trans. Hill 202). As Hill notes, it is unclear if the eighteen-year-old behind this inscription expected that the manuscript would circulate among potential employers, or if this was a trial for a cleaner copy to be circulated (203). Either way, this fleeting glimpse into a job hunt, considered alongside the works for children contained in some of these volumes, suggests that some, at least, must have grown up beside domestically-owned manuals for penitents.

Medieval Views of Manuals for Penitents

While these manuals were gaining popularity among the laity, a new possibility was beginning to be discussed—that of confessing in writing. Already in the twelfth century, and

¹²³ These are British Library, MS Harley 1706, which contains both the “ABC of Aristotle” (Trivedi 96), and “Instructions for a Child” (IMEV 1416) (Trivedi 100), alongside other useful instructional material, and Manchester, John Rylands Library MS Eng. 85, which contains elementary educational material, including “pe abice” (Trivedi 69).

across the channel, Caesarius of Heisterbach recounted that a clerk he knew actually confessed through writing, albeit under extraordinary circumstances. The man had, according to Caesarius, kept a significant sin hidden, and was afraid to confess it. Finally, following a priest's advice, he wrote it down, and the words disappeared, which, according to Caesarius, signalled the cleanness of the man's soul (Herbert 351). In England, Richard Rolle repeated the same story (Perry 7 qtd. in Herbert 351). Writing was not only a means of confessing but an aid to it; James Aho writes that "by the time of Alain de Lille, some handbooks were urging that penitents keep written records of their sins, their companions in vice, their addresses, and their occupations, all as mnemonic aids in preparing full confessions" (27). The *Manuel des péchés* insists that confession cannot be done through writing alone; it must be done in person to a priest.¹²⁴ It is difficult to determine if confessing through writing was commonly attempted, but if William felt the need to mention it, this must have been at least somewhat of a concern.

To this evidence we can add Henry of Lancaster's *Livre de seyntz medicines* (1354). Although the variety of sins that Henry describes gives the impression of a comprehensive, general confession rather than a record of a single confessional encounter, Henry's work nevertheless adopts some of the structures of confessional utterances: "Ore, Sire, s'il vous plest, jeo vus moustrerai mes plaies qe sont sept" (8) ("Now Lord, if it please you, I shall show you my wounds, seven in all") (77). Henry describes his sin in detail through first-person statements that could easily be spoken by a person confessing to a priest: "Primerement y passa orgoil. Ceo estoit quant jeo fui joesnes et me senti fort et legier, et me plesoit ma bealtee et ma taille ou ma

¹²⁴ "Ne par escrit ne vus poez / Vus confesser de vos pechez, / Si present vus memes ne saez / E de buche au prestre cuntez." (9945-8 qtd. in Schemmann 287) ("You cannot confess your sins / By writing, / If you yourself are not present / And tell the priest orally") (Schemmann 287). The second last line of the translation has been amended to more closely reflect the Anglo-Norman.

gentillesce et les vertus et graces qe vous, Sire, m'avetz ordenee pur salver m'alme" (15-16)
("First, pride passed through. This was when I was young and felt myself strong and agile, and took pleasure in my good looks and my figure and my noble manners and the abilities and gifts with which you, Lord, provided me to save my soul") (85).

Henry's text would appear to be unique in giving a detailed personal account of sins. Yet one personal account, identified by Cornett, is somewhat similar. Cornett finds that, in a twelfth-century manuscript from across the channel, a scribe, Rainaldus, confesses that he has erred in ruling the manuscript in which he writes (25; n. 18). Cornett notes that the passage looks like a confessional utterance—not a private confession to a priest, but a public one in chapter: "Rainaldus here confesses to his readers, not to a confessor, but in this monastic context, a monk would confess his public faults to his brothers during a chapter meeting" (25; n. 18).

Accounts of written private confessions are rare, but given the vast number of forms of confession identified by Cornett, which are, as already noted, first-person confessional statements covering a wide variety of possible sins, it would not be surprising if some of these are, like Henry's work, collections of personal confessions.¹²⁵ Writing could also act as an aid to confession; James Aho writes that "by the time of Alain de Lille, some handbooks were urging that penitents keep written records of their sins, their companions in vice, their addresses, and their occupations, all as mnemonic aids in preparing full confessions" (27).

In the same period, self-examination began to be depicted as a kind of reading. Urging his readers to reflect on their sins, the author of the *Weye of Paradys* writes that "Euerj man hath

¹²⁵ Cornett writes of the form of confession that it does not represent a single instance of an individual's confession: "We do not have here, of course, the transcription of any particular penitent's confession, what *actually* was said in a historical moment of confessing" (24). It is nevertheless possible to imagine an author writing a form of confession as a personal confession of sins committed over the course of his life, like Henry of Lancaster's *Livre de seynt medicines*.

a book of conscience hymself wherejnne he ow3te ofte to studie for to knowe 3if enythyng there be that be not wel” (145) (“Every man has a book of conscience in which he ought to study in order to know if there is anything that is not well”). This link between self-examination and reading was undoubtedly related to the Book of the Heart—the notion that a person’s vices and virtues are inscribed in a divine register. In his extensive study of this idea, Eric Jager finds that it was widespread in the later medieval period (105-19). So, in Raoul Houdenc’s *Songe d’enfer*, the devil asks the dreamer to read from a book in which all the sins of “menestrels” are written: “Et de chacun la plus vil tèche, / Le plus vil péchié dont il pèche / I est escrit.” (93.643-45) (“And of each [person], the vilest moral blemish, the vilest sin that he commits, is written there”). Related to this idea was the image of a devil observing a sinner and recording his sins—one that was particularly common in medieval literature, as Margaret Jennings has shown (41).

In the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, a passage listing the types of avarice urges the reader not to use the handbook as a stand-in for his own conscience: “Ine manye oþre maneres is ydo þe zenne of wyckednesse. Ac lang þing hit were to zigge. and betere may ech man rede þe ilke zenne and þe oþre ine þe boc of his inwyt: þanne ine ane ssepes scinne” (44) (“In many other ways is the sin of wickedness committed. But it would be a long thing to say [them all]. And each man may better read these same sins and others in the book of his conscience, than in any sheep’s skin”). Here, reading the manual and “reading” the conscience are similar in the sense that both can reveal a person’s sins. However, the soul is the preferred “book,” since it is capable of revealing a multitude of sins—more than can be described in an actual book. This passage and the aforementioned passage from the *Weye* suggest how intimately self-examination was connected to the act of reading.

One final observation can be made about medieval views of these manuals: they seemed to have been understood as sites of prayers for departed souls. Their manuscripts, like many contemporary ones, were donated by benefactors seeking ongoing prayer in return. The donors of one copy of the *Speculum vitae*, whose inscription has already been examined, view their gift as a source of surety for their souls.¹²⁶ Another copy, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 160/81, contains an early fifteenth-century inscription urging the same, “Orate pro anima Magistri Iohannis Lyghton et pro benefactoribus domini Thome Chamber(s)” (Hanna, “Introduction” xxiv) (“Pray for the soul of Master John Lyghton and for the benefactors of Master Thomas Chambers”). One benefactor donated a copy specifically on the condition that the beneficiary pray for his soul (Hanna, “Introduction” lviii).

The *Speculum vitae* may have been passed on in wills, although the evidence is hard to read. As already noted in the previous chapter, the work is often entitled simply “Pater noster,” which means that, theoretically, any testamentary record of a *Pater noster* tract could refer to it (Doyle I.87-9). Doyle acknowledges that the breadth and variety of *Pater noster* tracts in the fifteenth century makes identifying the *Speculum vitae* in wills difficult, but he ventures that it was a common bequest (I.92).

The *Manuel des péchés* was also bequeathed. In the late fourteenth century, William Creyke, Vicar of Barling, left a copy of the “Manuel de Pecches” to one of his parishioners, named John Milton (232). There is reason to suspect that this gift was a generous one, since the will indicates that Creyke held Milton in high regard; the vicar appointed Milton as an executer

¹²⁶ See the inscription above, page 76.

of his estate and insisted that Milton have first pick between two of his cloaks.¹²⁷ Yet it is not clear if copies of this text were common in wills.

We are on firmer ground with *Pore Caitif*, copies of which were, as Trivedi notes, “popular bequests from prominent lay men and women to friends and relations of the religious persuasion” (200). These bequests were expected to last; a hand in the early leaves of Downside Abbey, MS 26542 writes “This boke is youe to Betryce Chaumbir . And aftir hir decease to sustir Emme Wynter . and to suster Denyse Caston nonnes of dertforhe. And so to abide in the saam hous of the nonnes of dertforthe for euere” (fol. iii v qtd. in Trivedi 200).

One copy of *Pore Caitif*, that in British Library, MS Harley 2336, was, according to an inscription within it, created as a common profit book. To understand how this copy was used, it is worth looking at the common profit framework in some detail. It was first noted by Doyle and was studied most extensively by Wendy Scase. Scase describes it as a coherent group of devotional volumes produced in late fifteenth-century London out of the posthumous sale of an individual’s goods: “The broad framework of the scheme is clearly that of testamentary charity” (“Reginald Peacock” 262). Building on Scase’s findings, Anna Lewis notes that the common-profit framework, while possibly inspired by the production frameworks for other religious books, was notable in that it was “lay-initiated and lay-managed” (“Discerning” 273).

Common profit volumes are marked by a characteristic inscription, with a typical example appearing in British Library, MS Harley 993, a copy of Walter Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*:

¹²⁷ “Also I leave to John Milton my blue cloak or my red cloak at the choice of the aforesaid John. . . Also I leave to the same John one book called ‘Manuel de Pecches’” (231-32).

This book was maad of the Goodis of Robert Holond for comyn Profite. That that Persone that hath this book committid to him of the Persoone that hath Power to commite it, have the use thereof the terme of his liif, prayinge for the soule of the same Robert, And that he that hath the foreseid use of the Commissoun whanne he occupieth it not, leeve it for a Tyme to sum other Persoone. Also that Persoone to whom it was committid for the teerme of Liif under the forseid Condiciouns, deliver it to another Persoone the teerme of his Liif. And so be it delivered & committid from Persoone to Persoone, Man or Woman, as long as the Book endureth. (British Museum I. 501)

Doyle identified several common profit books in his ground-breaking discussion of the subject: MS Harley 2336, MS Harley 993, and three others not mentioned here. Doyle traced the movement back to one John Colop, who acted as executor for several of the donors of these volumes and, Doyle concludes, played a role in their production (I. 211). The volumes were meant to be passed from one owner to the next, as was indeed the case with the Lambeth common profit book, judging from its sequential ownership inscriptions. Scase notes that some of these books contain works that had heretical associations, and the common profit scheme provided a framework of distribution that shielded these volumes from the censure of the Church (“Reginald Peacock” 267).

From the important role that executors, especially Colop, played in choosing the content of these volumes, Lewis finds that these books are testaments to what executors thought useful for future readers (“Discerning” 274). As bequests, they were meant to provide what Scase terms “insurance for one’s soul” (“Reginald Peacock” 263), since the continual use of the manuscript would ensure a constantly renewing source of prayers for the deceased. In effect, they

transformed the estate of an individual into a site of prayer, but one that depended on constant use.

The inscription in the Harley 2336 copy of *Pore Caitif* is near identical to that given above: “This book was maad of the goodis of John gamalin for a comy[n] p[ro]fite [th]at [tha]t p[er]soone [tha]t ha[th] [th]is book co[m]mittid to hi[m] of [th]e p[er]soone [tha]t ha[th] pow[er] to co[m]mitte it. . .man or wo[m]man as lo[n]ge as the book endure[th]” (fols. 137r-v qtd. in British Museum II.657). As part of the common profit framework, this copy of *Pore Caitif* was intended to serve a two-fold devotional function, providing for the souls of its owners as well as that of its donor. Admittedly, this was not always effective. In the case of the British Library, MS Harley 993 copy of Hilton’s *Scale*, it was not achieved for long—James Palmer, a later owner, added a scathing reply rejecting the call for prayers.¹²⁸

When we consider that these volumes were thought useful for securing one’s salvation at a time when this was a particularly strong concern, and when we consider the layfolk who commissioned copies of these texts for themselves, and the remarkable popularity of these texts, we get a sense that the proliferation of these manuals among lay audiences was a direct response to a growing need. As a common profit book, Harley 2336 is significant for suggesting that these manuals could be produced to circumvent church control. This is not to downplay the significant role of the Church in promoting these texts—it was, of course, the Church’s teachings that drove concerns over the state of the conscience. Nevertheless, understanding the role that the laity played in promoting these texts is important, and has direct relevance to the chapters that follow, which trace the tensions that emerged around them.

¹²⁸ “James Palmer owneth this Booke, yet without the least Intent to pray for the Soule of Robert Holland, being a wicked & simple Custome of sottishly ignorant Papists. J. Palmer Junior” (British Museum I.501).

These manuals played important roles for their audiences. The way that they were designed suggests that penitential education could be self-guided, and, therefore, engaged. As modest works that could be read in isolation, they represent a personal, private form of devotional engagement, and they stand in contrast to works like Books of Hours, which were often designed for display. It is valuable to recognize these rarely-noticed features of manuals for penitents since such texts were remarkably popular, and therefore speak to medieval literary tastes and reading practices. Similar features are also found in the three important literary works that I discuss below.

Chapter 3 – Self-Examination Literature from 1150 to 1250, with Particular Attention to *Ancrene Wisse*

When scholars consider self-examination writing in England at all, they tend to focus on the tradition that emerged in the second half of the thirteenth century, represented by texts such as the *Manuel des péchés*, the *Somme le roi*, and the English adaptations of these.¹²⁹ As we have seen, these survive in a relatively large number of manuscripts, so it is not surprising that they have received the most attention. The emphasis on these works has contributed to a tendency to neglect vernacular religious writing from the twelfth century. This neglect is also, in part, because Anglo-Norman, the language in which many twelfth-century religious texts are written, has been sidelined in scholarship on England's literature, as Georgianna notes ("Coming to Terms" 50).

Yet this neglect has not been limited to Anglo-Norman religious texts alone; most English ones written before the middle of the thirteenth century have suffered some degree of it. Jolliffe, speaking of "Middle English prose writings concerned with confession and spiritual guidance," claims that "nothing relevant in English can be found before the fourteenth century, except *The Ancrene Riwe*, and no manuscripts earlier than 1340 contain other tracts belonging to this field" (23). Yet, as we shall see, there are several English works that meet Jolliffe's description written before 1340. The emphasis on late thirteenth-century self-examination material has had the effect of obfuscating that written in the years surrounding the Fourth

¹²⁹ An emphasis on the late-thirteenth century tradition is suggested by the scholars, listed in footnote 131 below, who view the *Somme le roi* as the starting point of a tradition of vernacular self-examination writing. However, the two studies on the "form of confession" by Durkin and Cornett do trace the origins of self-examination writing back further.

Lateran Council (1150-1250). This includes the self-examination material in *Vices and Virtues*, and that in part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*—a text that is brought to the fore in the present chapter.

Those describing the development of self-examination writing generally place a powerful emphasis on the role of the Fourth Lateran Council. So, for example, the editors of the most recent edition of *The Mirroure of the Worlde*, describing the work as a means of “preparing penitents for confession,” write:

It belongs to a vast body of medieval prose religious literature owing its origin to the reforming zeal of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which in its twenty-first decree, known by its opening phrase *Omnis utriusque sexus*, made annual confession and Easter communion mandatory for all Christians and stimulated the production of treatises (for the clergy and later for the laity) expounding a system of moral constructs useful for the correct administering and receiving of the sacrament of penance. (Raymo, Whitaker, and Sternglant 6)

Some suggest that writing about confession, defined in the broadest sense, can be divided into two “waves”—one in which writing was directed primarily at confessors, and second in which writing began to be directed at penitents themselves. This view is expressed most directly by Boyle, who writes that “the first wave of manuals of confession—that up to about the year 1260—is largely concerned with educating priests,” while “the second wave of penitential pastoralia,” “that around or about 1260—has a broader basis and is more directly concerned with the penitent as such and with the education of the penitent” (“Fourth Lateran” 35).¹³⁰ Marjorie

¹³⁰Many suggest that self-examination writing emerged after the Fourth Lateran Council, although there are divergent views about when this occurred. John Hubert Gray claims that, in the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council, there was little in the way of confessional writing for those who were not ordained (161). Describing the self-examination material in *Ancrene Wisse*, he writes that, “One might well wonder where the author got his idea for such a treatise

Curry Woods and Rita Copeland suggest a slightly different model: “By the mid-thirteenth century the production of manuals and treatises on confession resolves itself into two genres: instructions to priests on conducting confession and prescribing penances, and instructions to lay people on preparing for and making confession” (391). In this model, manuals for confessors did not precede manuals for penitents; rather, both emerged in the middle of the thirteenth century out of a mass of undifferentiated confessional writing.

Both of these models of confessional writing describe a shift in terms of audience, but others describe a shift in terms of language. In these, works about confession written before the middle of the thirteenth century were primarily in Latin; only after the middle of the thirteenth century were some written in Anglo-Norman or English.¹³¹ Some suggest that a shift in terms of

on confession; for we have no knowledge of any other work which may have set a precedent. The *Summae*, even those of pastoral theology, were written for theological students and scholars, and would seem unlikely to have been inspiration for this treatise written for lay religious” (161-62). As discussed in the note that follows, Georgianna also views *Ancrene Wisse* as unique for its time in being addressed to penitents instead of confessors (*Solitary* 102). Morton Bloomfield suggests that Raoul of Houdenc’s *Le Songe d'enfer* (c. 1225) might represent the beginnings of “examination of conscience” writing (*Sins* 133). A similar model, on yet another time frame, is described by Wood, who, while writing of the fourth vision in *Piers Plowman*, states that, “This particular kind of penitential discourse, exemplified in vernacular texts like Richard Rolle’s *Form of Living* and the anonymous texts *The Chastising of God’s Children*, *The Cleansing of Man’s Soul*, and *Memoriale credencium*, re-presents pastoral materials, originally designed for the use of the priest, in newly ‘laicized’ terms for direct use by religious and ultimately by lay people” (47). Duffy also describes the development of self-examination material as later than that of manuals for priests (*Stripping of the Altars* 56-61). Others are more specific about the kind of self-examination writing that emerged after 1215. Speaking of the genre in which the *Parson’s Tale* participates, Larry Scanlon writes that “this tradition of the penitential manual begins after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215” (12). Joseph Goering states that “the production of confessional treatises and *summae* in the various vernacular languages” such as the *Manuel des péchés* and *Handlyng Synne* “gathered momentum after 1300,” and remarks on the indebtedness of this tradition to existing works in Latin (“Internal Forum” 226).

¹³¹ So, for some, the late thirteenth-century *Somme le roi* is among the first vernacular texts concerned with confession. Carruthers suggests this in an early study of the *Somme le Roi*: “Numerous manuals of this kind already existed in Latin, but not in French, and were not, therefore, accessible to the wider public outside the monastery” (194). In their introduction to *The Mirroure of the Worlde*, R. R. Raymo and Elaine E. Whitaker write that, “The *Mirroire* is

language occurred as a result of a shift of audience; so, for example, speaking of the “confessional manual” in part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*, Georgianna suggests that it is the first of its kind: “In that it is directed not toward priests but toward penitents, and in that it is written, therefore, not in Latin but in English, this confession manual is unique in early thirteenth-century literature. Not until late in the century do vernacular manuals for penitents reappear” (*Solitary* 102).

These models are all helpful for explaining some of the contours of the development of self-examination writing, but relying on them too heavily can lead to a reductive view of the kinds of this writing that existed before the middle of the thirteenth century. The present chapter seeks to highlight the complexity of this material. As we shall see, while comprehensive manuals that state that they could be used by penitents—the “manuals for penitents” described in the first chapter of the present study—were a late thirteenth-century development, a body of self-examination writing predated these manuals that could be considered a precursor to them in terms of function. Most of this early writing circulated among the clergy or others whose lives were dominated by the Church, and it therefore serves as a valuable reminder that confessional discipline was imposed on both the clergy and laity alike. In the latter part of this chapter, I use

derived from *Le Mirroir du Monde* and *La Somme le Roi*, the two earliest vernacular treatises on vices and virtues” (7). We can see a similar tendency to ascribe originary significance to the *Somme le roi* in Pantin’s discussion of “Religious and Moral Treatises on the Vernacular” of the fourteenth century, including “*Handling Sin*” and “the *Azenbite of Inwit*” (220). Pantin notes of these texts that, “They were specially influenced by the great thirteenth-century treatises on Vices and Virtues, the work of French theologians like the Dominican William Perrault or Peraldus (d.1249) and William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris (d. 1249), and the *Somme le roi* of the Dominican Friar Lorens (c. 1279)” (220). Although this last text was a source for many fourteenth-century English texts in England, it is puzzling that Pantin does not look for influences beyond these texts, especially since he recognizes that “only the latter part of [the *Somme le roi*] is Lorens’s own original work” (225).

the findings from my exploration of early self-examination writing to shine light on the self-examination material in *Ancrene Wisse*.

To understand the insular tradition of self-examination writing from 1150 to 1250, we must first look briefly at that from the Anglo-Saxon period. In this period, most confessional material was directed at those interrogating penitents. Frantzen finds that the “chief witness” to confessional practices in this early period “remains the handbook of penance,” which he defines as “the priest’s guide in counseling penitents” (*Literature* 13, 7). One possible exception is Alcuin’s *Advice to Wido*, also known as *De virtutibus et vitiis*. This text lays out a devotional program for a layman whom Kiril Petkov describes as “Charlemagne’s designated margrave in Brittany” (47). It includes instructions on confession and an enumeration of the vices and the virtues (Firey, “Blushing” 177). Yet Alcuin wrote his treatise while serving at the Carolingian court (Petkov 47), so it might not reflect England’s penitential discipline, but rather that of the Carolingian empire where, as Firey points out, self-examination material was abundant.¹³²

Frantzen also writes that, “Anglo-Saxon penitential literature was written from the administrator’s point of view, rarely from the sinner’s” (*Literature* 13). However, some penitential prayers written in England during this period complicate the situation. Penitential prayers are typically lists of sins voiced by a first-person sinner. They are addressed either to a confessor, directly to Christ, or to God. Cornett sees them as important antecedents to the “form of confession” (14). Such prayers would have been useful for a penitent preparing for confession but, as Cornett notes of the form of confession more generally, they also would have been useful for a priest trying to learn what to expect during the confessional encounter (5).

¹³² Abigail Firey writes that, “Penitential literature framed around the seven capital sins flowed from Carolingian clerics to lay addressees; the quantity suggests a considerable expansion of a penitential and confessional ethos among the laity” (“Blushing” 191).

Cornett identifies a number of these prayers that were written between 800 and 1200 (321-68), some of which were produced in England. Item A21 of Cornett's list is particularly interesting in this context; Cornett describes it as a "[p]aragraph-long confession," and it is preserved in an eleventh-century manuscript (363). Its prologue suggests that its implied audience is a person preparing to confess:

Man mot hine gebiddan, swaswa he mæg 7 cán, mid ælcum gereorde 7 on ælcere stowe. Nu is her on englisc andetnyss 7 gebed. Ac seðe þis singan wylle, ne secge he na mare on þære andetnysse, þonne he wyrccende wæs: for-þon-ðe ure Hælend nele, þæt man on hine sylfne leoge, ne eac ealle menn on áne wisan ne syngiað.

One must pray as he can and knows how to, with any language in any place. Now here is a confession and prayer in English. But whoever wants to sing this, may he say no more in that confession than he was doing, because our Lord does not want a man to lie about himself, nor do all men sin in one and the same way. (Förster, "Zur Liturgik" 8-10 qtd. and trans. in Kate Thomas 235-6)

The warning here, that a person using this prayer should limit his confession to those sins that he has actually committed, bespeaks an expectation that the audience will use the prayer to prepare for confession; we may thus count it among self-examination material.

We also have some self-examination material surviving from England from between 1150 and 1250, the period with which this investigation begins in earnest. In general, this is limited in scope, and is incorporated into large compendiums covering a range of non-penitential topics. It is worth stressing that it was not until the second half of the thirteenth century that

manuals containing lengthy sections on self-examination, i.e. “manuals for penitents,” began to be written.

Undoubtedly the most popular of all the texts containing self-examination material written between 1150 and 1250 was William de Montibus’ *Peniteas cito peccator*, or “Do penance quickly, sinner.” This short verse exposition on penance, written in the decades before Lateran IV, survives in over 150 manuscripts (Goering, *William de Montibus* 111, 113). As already noted, Goering finds that it “was one of the mainstays of European primary education” and was, as already noted, “memorized by students during their formative years in grammar and theological schools” (Goering, *William de Montibus* 107). Its powerful first lines address a sinner: “Peniteas cito, peccator, cum sit miserator / Iudex” (“repent in haste: the judge is merciful”).¹³³ This is followed by advice about repentance and proper behaviour: “sunt hec quinque tenenda tibi: / Spes venie, cor contritum, confessio culpe, / Pena satisfaciens, et fuga nequitie” (“Observe these five commands: for pardon hope; / Have heart contrite; admit the sins you’ve done; / Make full amends, and flee from wickedness”) (Rigg 116). Goering writes that it “became one of the most popular vehicles for conveying the essentials of penance to medieval confessors” (*William de Montibus* 107). But it occasionally constructs an implied audience of penitents, as we have seen in the first line, and as Nicholas Orme suggests: “It calls on the reader to confess and explains why this is necessary, how to make your confession, and how to expiate your sins when confession is over” (101).

Insular self-examination writing from 1150 through 1250 was not limited to Latin, however; some was in either English or Anglo-Norman. Although we have less vernacular self-

¹³³ For passages from William’s text, I have taken the original Latin and its translation from Rigg’s *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066-1422* (116).

examination writing from this period than from later ones, it nevertheless appears significant when we consider that the overall number of texts surviving from this period is smaller than that from later ones. Of course, we should not take the use of the vernacular in this material to mean that it was written for a lay audience. In fact, like its Latin counterparts, most of the vernacular self-examination writing that survives from this period has an implied audience of clerical penitents. And, like its Latin counterparts, most of it is limited in length, and incorporated into larger works or compendiums.

We might count among this material the twelfth-century “Effects of the Seven Sins” (Dean no. 652). This Anglo-Norman poem appears in three manuscripts, but has not been edited in full.¹³⁴ It is diagrammatic; each of the seven sins is listed on the left-hand side of the folio, and linked to its seven species—or branches—with lines. So, for example, in the copy in Trinity College Cambridge, MS B.14.39, the entry for sloth has “accidie fet hume” (fol. 81r) (“sloth makes man”) on the left-hand side, and this is linked to the species of sloth, such as “Negligent en ce ke il deit fere” (fol. 81r) (“Negligent in the things that he must do”).

The work has no prologue, and gives no clues toward an implied audience—whether priests interrogating penitents, penitents preparing for their own interrogations, or both of these groups. The manuscripts are somewhat useful for helping us determine how it was used in various contexts. In the earliest, Cambridge, Emmanuel College MS 83 (I. 4. 4), it is entitled, “Item de uiciis in gallico ideomate,” and it appears with Latin works that M. R. James, in his manuscript catalogue for the College, describes as “a series of tracts on the seven sins and the modes of confessing them: also on the senses and commandments” (75). This context suggests

¹³⁴ Paul Meyer prints two selections of the poem: those on envy and pride (“Les mss” 40-41). See the discussion of this text above, page 41.

that, in this manuscript, the “Effects of the Seven Sins” may have called for a penitential type of reading. In the Trinity manuscript, it is followed by a work on the joys of Mary (“I Sing of a Maiden that is Matchless”) (IMEV 2366) (fol.81v) and the “Prayer of Penitence to our Lady” (IMEV 2687) (fols. 81v-82r). As suggested by its title, this latter prayer has some penitential lines, such as “Agult ic haue waylaway. sinful ic am a wreche” (fol. 82r) (“Guilt I have, oh woe! Sinful, I am a wretch”), and these may indicate that the compiler of this manuscript, at least, intended the preceding list of sins for self-examination use.

All three of the surviving manuscripts that contain this under-studied work were likely owned by clerical readers. James describes the Emmanuel College manuscript, judging by its contents, as having been “intended for the use of persons confessing, and for confessors” (74). Ralph Hanna describes the Trinity manuscript, which is trilingual and was produced in the thirteenth century, as a “communal book of preaching materials,” and notes that it was likely produced at a Franciscan convent in Worcester (*London Literature* 19). The final manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Fr.e.22, may have been owned by Shaftesbury Abbey according to Legge, who bases this supposition on an earlier suggestion by John Foxe (238).

Few of the other Anglo-Norman works on confession have been studied in detail, so at this stage it is hard to say if any of them were composed in the period in question (1150-1250). It is, however, suggestive that, aside from “The Effects of the Seven Sins,” none of them appears in a manuscript that Dean dates to this period. It is, however, possible that “The Estates of Man, the Vices and Virtues, by Henry” (Dean no. 623) was written in the period in question. This is an octosyllabic poem edited by Jacques Monfrin under the title “Poème anglo-normand sur le mariage, les vices et les vertus, par Henri.” It begins by describing the relative goodness of

chastity, marriage, and widowhood (24-60), and ends with a discussion of the seven deadly sins, which are cast as the devil's servants (121-138).

The order of the sins may provide a clue about its dating. The text follows the *saligia* order (*superbia, accidia, luxuria, ira, gula, invidia, and avaritia*) that became popular in the thirteenth century. This order is found in Henry de Suso's *Summa* (c. 1250-1253), and some attribute its popularity to the *Summa*, but its origins are still not fully understood (Newhauser, "'These Seven Devils'" 158).¹³⁵ Morton Bloomfield holds that "[t]he *saligia* list cannot be found before the thirteenth century and usually indicates a work later than that period" (*Sins* 105), but Monfrin, who dates the poem to the thirteenth century (427), suggests that its *saligia* structure actually predates that in Henry de Suso's work (437-38), which would suggest that the poem was written at some point in the decades surrounding the Fourth Lateran Council. Still, the only manuscript that contains the poem has been dated by Dean to the late thirteenth century and, given the later date of this manuscript and Bloomfield's conclusions about the *saligia* structure, we cannot date this poem to the period in question (1150-1250) with any certainty.

The English tradition of self-examination material in this period, like the Anglo-Norman one, is sparse, but not negligible. None of the English confessional prayers identified by Cornett dates to this period (321-368). Nor do any of the texts dealing with the vices—and, therefore, potentially related to self-examination—on Raymo's list of works of religious instruction. Some, such as those grouped under "Miscellaneous Manuals" (no. 24), have not been studied in depth

¹³⁵ Bloomfield writes that, "Since Henry of Susa or Ostia (de Segusia or Hostiensis), in whose works we first find *saligia*, refers to it as if it was already known, he was probably not the originator of either the order or the use of the word as a mnemonic device" (*Sins* 86).

and may prove to have been composed in this period, but, considering that none of them survives in a manuscript from before the mid-thirteenth century, this seems somewhat unlikely.¹³⁶

One of the few Middle English texts written between 1150 and 1250 that contains self-examination material is in Francis Lee Utley's section of Hartung's *Manual*, on dialogues (no. 26). This is the anonymous work entitled *Vices and Virtues*, which is distinct from the fourteenth-century poem by the same name. After years of neglect, this work is now the subject of two studies: one by Gunn, on its context as a pastoral work, and one by Stephen Pelle, on its sources and date.¹³⁷ In this latter study, Pelle has provisionally dated the text to the last quarter of the twelfth century (163). As already noted, it takes the form of a dialogue between "Reason" and a "Soul." Sinners seeking a window into the state of their souls could find it here. The "Soul's" supposed "confession" contains identifying details about each sin; so, for example, in the section on detraction, the "Soul" says: "Ic habbe beswiken min emcristen mid faire wordes ðe ic to him habbe ȝespeken, and oðerlicor mid weorkes him ȝekydd, and uppe mine lahfulnesse ofte him behet, þat ic naeure eft him neȝelaeste" (I.11) ("I have deceived my fellow-Christian with fair words which I have spoken unto him, and have shown him otherwise by my works, and have often promised him upon my word of honor, what I never afterwards accomplished for him") (I.10).

Like the "Effects of the Seven Sins," *Vices and Virtues* does not contain any explicit description of its purpose, but Gunn argues that it is not a guide for a priest about hearing

¹³⁶ The scarcity of material for penitents written in English prior to the mid-thirteenth century is noted by Bloomfield who, while speaking of works on the vices and virtues in England before the twelfth century, claims that "Ælfric's sermons and the *Vices and Virtues* contain the only two outstanding examples of the employment of our concept in this early period in English" (*Sins* 121).

¹³⁷ I am grateful to Cate Gunn for pointing me toward Pelle's article. See the discussion of *Vices and Virtues* above, page 43.

confessions (“*Vices*” 79). The author’s urging toward penance suggests that he intended it for self-examination.¹³⁸ Moreover, Gunn identifies some later additions, written in Latin, that, she notes, provide some insight into how readers understood the text. She finds that a reader has written “*mea culpa*” beside one profession of sin, “*Swa ic happe ibien full of euele þohtes*” (“So have I been full of evil thoughts”), and she concludes from this and other annotations that “as the author was writing in a confessional mode, so was the text being read” (“*Vices*” 83). She emphasizes, however, that the text does not call for self-examination in a straightforward way; rather, the reader is invited to reflect on his sin along with the “Soul.”¹³⁹

The text seems to be directed at both clerical and lay audiences; Gunn finds in the work some guidance that would have been most useful for monks (77-78), but she also notes that, “References to worldly practices, such as fair market trading, that would not be out of place in *Piers Plowman*, suggest a need to communicate at a more popular level” (81), and she concludes that the text may have been “intended for a variety of readers” (82). Gunn’s caution here is sensible, since, as discussed at greater length below, guessing the implied audience of a text from the sins that it describes is not a straightforward practice—an author could include “worldly practices” for many reasons, and their presence does not necessarily suggest a lay audience is intended.

In sum, some material written between 1150 and 1250 could have been used for self-examination, and this proves that the tradition of self-examination material can be traced back

¹³⁸ “*Ða ðe bieð on religiun, hie bieð aure under scrite, swa bihoueð us als wa*” (“Those who are in a religious order are ever under penance, as it also behooves us”) (120-21). Gunn identifies an emphasis on penance here: “The author and his readers may not be in religious orders, but that is no reason not to lead a life of penance” (“*Vices and Virtues*” 82).

¹³⁹ Gunn describes the “mode” of the text as follows: “not, ‘these are the ways you must check your conscience for sin’ but ‘these are the sins I have committed, and likely you, reader, as well’” (“*Vices*” 83).

beyond the Fourth Lateran Council, and that works like *Ancrene Wisse*, and the *Somme le roi* are not, as has been claimed, innovative in this respect.¹⁴⁰ Many of these early works, including the “Effects of the Seven Sins,” do not make it clear whether they are intended for penitents identifying their sins, or for priests interrogating others, so there is some basis for Woods and Copeland’s claim that the tradition in this period is separable by these two functions, but the claim is certainly complicated by those texts, including *Vices and Virtues* and the earlier penitential prayers, that do imply an audience of penitents.

It is equally important to note that most—though not all—of the penitential teaching of this earlier period has an implied audience made up of clergy members; the social control that the Church imposed on the laity was also being directed inwards, toward its own ranks. Indeed, the self-examination material in works that were likely used for training priests, including William of Montibus’ guide, reminds us that the agents who were imposing penance on others were also imposing it on themselves. As we shall see, recognizing this is important for understanding why self-examination material appears in *Ancrene Wisse*.

Members of the clergy remained important recipients of self-examination material in the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council. Two of Grosseteste’s works, discussed in chapter 1, are relevant in this context. The first of these is the *Perambulauit Iudas*, which Grosseteste probably wrote before becoming a bishop in 1235 (“Perambulauit” 132).¹⁴¹ It contains both a form of confession, which Goering and Mantello suggest may have been written for “a superior in a house of monks or regular canons,” and “a general handbook of confession compiled to provide the simpler brothers (*simpliciores fratres*) with a ‘mirror of confession’ (*speculum*

¹⁴⁰ See footnote 131.

¹⁴¹ For the authorship of this work, see Goering and Mantello, “Perambulauit” 126-29.

confessionis) concerning all the sins committed both in the cloister and in the world”

(“Perambulauit” 125). The first part of this “mirror of confession” (sections 26-36) is in the form of an interrogatory—questions that penitents could ask themselves to prepare for confession. For the rest of this “mirror,” Grosseteste “abandons the inquisitional approach in favour of brief definitions and glosses on mnemonic verses” (Goering and Mantello, “Perambulauit” 141).

The second work, *Notus in Iudea Deus* has been dated provisionally by Goering and Mantello to the end of Grosseteste’s life, between 1235 and 1253, and it survives in one copy (“*Notus*” 265, 258).¹⁴² Goering and Mantello, speaking of the manuscript in which it appears, suggest that it “is a unique witness to activities in and around the episcopal household of Robert Grosseteste” (“*Notus*” 264). On this basis, they suggest that it “was intended for use by members of Grosseteste’s household,” and that it may not have been intended for broader audiences (265). The work begins by stating that it is “De confessione et modo confitendi peccata” (266) (“on confession and the means of confessing sins”). Grosseteste then meditates on psalms about the importance of confession (par. 1-2). So, for example, he opens with the first line of Psalm 76, “*Notus in Iudea Deus*” (“God is known in Judah”), then explains that “Judah,” here, signifies confession: “*Iudea* interpretatur confessio” (266). He then proceeds with a first-person confessional formula, which Cornett counts among forms of confession (373; no. B1b2). This section begins “In conspectu Dei omnia uidentis et omnipotentis, et beate Marie, et omnium sanctorum, confiteor ” (266) (“In the sight of the all-seeing and omnipotent God, and the blessed Mary, and all the saints, I confess ”) (254). But the first person voice is not consistent; it is interrupted occasionally by explications to the audience (254). The work is another witness to the

¹⁴² For the authenticity of the link to Robert Grosseteste, see Goering and Mantello, “*Notus*” 264.

kinds of confessional discipline that members of the Church imposed upon themselves in this period.

But in the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council, self-examination material was increasingly addressed to the laity. This is not to say that self-examination material addressed to the laity did not exist before this period—indeed, as we have seen, *Vices and Virtues* seems to imply a lay audience. But it is in the first half of the thirteenth century that we start to see a sudden increase in works that include members of the laity among their audiences—texts like the *Compileison*, the *Manuel des péchés*, and the *Somme le roi*.¹⁴³

The popular *Speculum religiosorum* (c. 1213-1233) by Edmund of Abingdon is instructive here, because, as we shall see, it was initially intended for professed religious and was later adapted for the laity.¹⁴⁴ It survives in eighty manuscripts (Wilshire iii), and was translated into Anglo-Norman, as the *Mirour de Seinte Eglyse*, back into Latin, and later into Middle English (Gunn, “Edmund” 101). Although scholars once thought that the Anglo-Norman version was the earliest, Helen Forshaw has argued that the *Speculum religiosorum* preceded it (“New Light” 32), and this claim is generally accepted (Wilshire x-xi).

Edmund’s *Speculum religiosorum* is, first and foremost, a compendium of information about the religious life, and it contains many of the essentials which, as we have seen, became tied to the confessional interrogation in later medieval period: the Seven Deadly Sins, their

¹⁴³ For the expectation of lay audiences in these texts, see below, pages 86 to 89, 95, and the discussion starting on page 153.

¹⁴⁴ For the dating of this text, see Gunn, “Edmund” 100; 110 and Watson, “Versions” 117; 118. C. H. Lawrence suggested c.1213-1214 but Gunn and Watson both question this dating, and Watson writes that whether the work was written around 1213-1214 or within two decades of this date is “an open question” (118). I have therefore adopted this more cautious dating. I have followed Gunn in using the conventional name of the author of this text, “Edmund of Abingdon” as opposed to “Edmund Rich,” which is also in use.

corresponding virtues, the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, the Articles of the Faith, and the seven sacraments (Gunn, “Edmund” 103). Gunn finds that Edmund wrote for “professed religious” (“Edmund” 108). The Anglo-Norman translation, the only early thirteenth-century text listed by Dean and Boulton that contains self-examination material, is addressed to a similar audience. Watson suggests that it was initially for nuns (“Versions” 122). Soon after its initial translation into Anglo-Norman, it was, according to Wilshire, revised extensively. Wilshire claims, based primarily on the absence of the more contemplative sections of the work, that this revision was for lay audiences (xi-xii).¹⁴⁵ In her study of the audiences of the text, Gunn finds that the later Latin translation, the *Speculum ecclesie*—which, she notes, likely dates to the second half of the thirteenth century (“Edmund” 101 n. 5)—was written for a wider group than the original Latin: those living a religious life, more broadly defined (“Edmund” 108).

From this overview, we can conclude that there were a number of texts prior to 1250 that could have been used by penitents preparing for confession, and these were written in Latin, English and Anglo-Norman. These texts are generally either addressed to clerical readers or used by clerical readers, although some of them count the laity among their implied audiences. Although many do not make it clear whether they are intended for priests interrogating others or for penitents examining themselves, and therefore serve as support for Woods and Copeland’s claim, some of these do make their intended uses clear. As we shall see, some of these findings will be important for understanding the way that audience is constructed in part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*.

¹⁴⁵ Watson, however, suggests that the existence of a lay version, as described by Wilshire, lacks adequate support (“Versions” 122).

The Audiences of *Ancrene Wisse*: Current Perspectives

Ancrene Wisse serves as a powerful illustration of the new emphasis on self-examination among those outside of the Church, since, as already noted, it includes a section on self-examination addressed to a wide audience. More broadly, as Gunn has demonstrated in her monograph on the text, it is deeply indebted to the rhetoric and ideas of contemporary *pastoralia*, including sermons and priests' *summae*.

Self-examination is at the heart of this guidance text, judging from its structure. In his preface, the author states that he has divided his work into eight parts ("dalen") (5). The first and last of these form the "outer rule" which "riwleð þe licome ant licomliche deden" ("regulates the body and physical acts") (1), and the six between them form the "inner rule," which "riwleð þe heorte, ant makeð efne ant smeðe wiðute cnost ant dolc of woh inwit ant of wreizende þe segge 'Her þu sunegest'" ("rules the heart, and makes it even and smooth without the bumps and hollows of a crooked and troubled conscience that says 'you are committing a sin here'") (1). The dualism behind this structure is not maintained; as Christopher Cannon points out, "inside" and "outside" are inseparable at both a textual and a structural level (112-13). Nevertheless, in this model, which maps the structure of the text onto the body and heart and casts the journey toward its centre as a movement away from the outer world, the most "inner" are the three parts that form a "miniature treatise on penance": part 4 on temptations and their remedies, part 5 on the conditions of confession and the sins of anchorites, and part 6 on penance.

The author insists that the external rule is less important than the internal one. Describing the former, he writes, "Ant þeos riwle nis nawt bute forte serui þe oþer. Þe oþer is as leafdi, þeos as hire þuften; for al þet me eauer deð of þe oðer wiðuten nis bute forte riwlin þe heorte wiðinnen" ("And this rule only exists to serve the other. The other is like the lady, this one like

her maid; because whatever is done according to the outer rule is done only to regulate the heart internally”) (1-2). So, part 5 lies at the centre of what the author describes as the most important part of the manual.

The study of the self-examination tradition above is helpful for thinking through the complex ways in which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* constructs his audiences. He typically addresses “mine leoue sustren” (“my dear sisters”); this phrase occurs over fifty times in Millett’s estimation (“He speaks” 51, 57). Discussions of the text’s audience have traditionally circled around these “dear sisters.” The text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 contains an address to an audience of twenty or more, but it is generally accepted that these are not the same as the “dear sisters” that the author of *Ancrene Wisse* addressed in his initial text, and the passage is generally understood to be a later addition (Millett, *Guide* xlv).

Rather, it is generally held that more specific details about the “dear sisters” appear in the version preserved in British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. xiv. This version alone addresses a more specific group of anchorites at one point—three well-born sisters, descended from the same parents (Millett, *Guide* xlv):

3e, mine leoue sustren, beoð þe ancren þet Ich iknowe þet habbeð lest neode to
uroure aȝen þeos temptaciuns, bute one of sicnesse, vor mid more eise ne mid more
men[s]ke not Ich none ancre þet habbe al þet hire neod is þene 3e þreo habbeð, ure
Louerd beo hit iþoncked. . . God hit wot, moni oþer wot lutel of þisse eise, auh beoð
ful ofte iderued mid wone and mid scheome, and mid teone. In hire hond ȝif þis
cumeð, hit mei beon ham uroure.

You, my dear sisters, are the anchoresses that I know who have the least need of support against these temptations, except only for illness; because I do not know any anchoress who has all she needs with more ease or more respect than you three have, our Lord be thanked for it. . . God knows, many others have little experience of this ease, but very often suffer from need and humiliation and trouble. If this comes into their hands, it may be a comfort to them. (73)

Although the Nero copy is not the earliest, most scholars take this address to be the work of the original author of the manual.¹⁴⁶ They therefore assume that addresses to the “dear sisters” point to these three sisters.

Yet as we can see from the Nero passage above, the author does not limit his addresses to these three “dear sisters”; he addresses others as well. As Millett notes, these include both a wider group of anchorites, and another, unspecified, group of readers (“He Speaks” 51-52). Gunn has recently drawn attention to addresses to this latter group. She remarks on the text’s emphasis on pastoral education and its addresses to alternate audiences, writing that it is “always open to a wider—and not necessarily female—readership” (*Ancrene Wisse* 8).

Did these addresses—both to the “dear sisters,” and to others—correspond to actual audiences? According to Millett, some have questioned whether these addresses might serve a rhetorical function exclusively—in other words, that they might not correspond to real readers. She acknowledges that, “There are certainly good reasons for not taking medieval addresses to the audience too readily at face value” (“He Speaks” 52). But Millett finds grounds for considering the three sisters the real recipients of the original text: “the circumstantial detail of

¹⁴⁶ Wada, however, expresses some skepticism: “One should treat this passage with caution because there is no evidence that all the references to these sisters in the Nero text were inherited from the original text which no longer exists” (“What is *Ancrene Wisse*?” 4).

the two extended addresses to the audience in *Ancrene Wisse*, first to the three sisters and later to the larger group of anchoresses, is. . . difficult to explain as fiction, and their textual history suggests that it was understood as fact” (“He speaks” 52)

Millett argues that, while the author clearly did expect his text to reach real non-anchoretic readers, his addresses to these also served a distinct rhetorical function for the anchoritic audience, namely, to emphasize its superior virtue (56). The following is one of the examples that Millett uses to illustrate how the author describes various audiences to stress the moral superiority of the sisters:

Ich write muchel for oþre þet nawiht ne rineð ow, mine leoue sustren, for nabbe 3e nawt te nome—ne ne schulen habben, þurh þe grace of Godd—of totilde ancras.

I write a great deal for others which doesn’t apply to you at all, my dear sisters, because you don’t have the reputation—and never will, through the grace of God—of peeping anchoresses. (“He Speaks” 58)

Millett writes of this passage, “While making it clear that his work is not just composed for his immediate audience, [the author] nevertheless distinguishes them flatteringly from other possible anchoritic readers” (58). In light of Thomas of Chobham’s suggestion in the *Summa de artes praedicandi* that flattery can make an audience more open to teaching, Millett suggests that *Ancrene Wisse* might praise the “dear sisters” in order to spur them to virtue (61).

Millett states that the text’s “rhetorical focus is primarily on its immediate audience,” but she does not think that the addresses to other audiences are for rhetorical purposes alone (62). In her reading, then, the passages that address a broader audience work simultaneously to address actual readers and to reinforce high expectations for the immediate anchoritic audience. But as

Millett notes (57), the construction of audience is somewhat different and particularly complex in part 5, and it is therefore my interest to look at this part in depth.

When considering the ways that audiences are constructed in this part, we must keep in mind Ong's well-known pronouncement that "the writer's audience is always a fiction" (17). Ong argues that, compared to orators, authors are more removed from their actual audiences, so the audiences they address are always partly invented (10). These invented audiences, in turn, shape how one experiences a text (19).

Ong gives the example of Hemingway, who, he claims, uses phrases that suggest a familiarity with his audience: "A feature more distinctive of Hemingway. . . is the way he fictionalizes the reader, and this fictionalizing is often signaled largely by his use of the definite article as a special kind of qualifier or of the demonstrative pronoun 'that,' of which the definite article is simply an attenuation" (13). According to Ong, when Hemingway uses a phrase like "To the mountains," the definite article ("the") creates the implication that, "We have somehow been there together" (13). Ong writes, "The reader—every reader—is being cast in the role of a close companion to the author" (13). The author's audience, in Ong's model, is not a record of actual readers in any straightforward sense, but an authorial projection. Derek Pearsall has adapted Ong's views to the context of medieval romance, writing that: "The content of a romance and its manner of address" are "fallible as indicators of its actual audience" (44).¹⁴⁷

But if the audience is always a fiction, it is important to keep in mind that it is not *only* a fiction; an invented audience within a text is often based on an actual one. Ruth Evans'

¹⁴⁷ Another who draws a distinction between actual and fictional audiences is Dieter Mehl, who writes, for example, that, "We may discover which people Chaucer actually read to or who first read his works, but our own understanding and experience of Chaucer is largely directed by the fictional audience suggested by the poems, an audience with which every reader is invited to identify himself" (60).

discussion of the audience of medieval texts is useful here. Evans provides a model, first developed by Paul Strohm, that distinguishes between four different audience functions: 1) “the actual audience,” which may or may not be named explicitly in the text, 2) the “inscribed” audience, which comprises any listeners described within a text, such as Chaucer’s pilgrims, 3) the “intended audience,” which Evans describes as those “sometimes identified by dedications and addresses to patrons” and 4) the “implied audience,” which Evans describes as “the text’s ‘ideal reader,’ anticipated or constructed by statements in the text with which he or she is encouraged to agree” (115-16). Evans equates this final category with Ong’s fictionalized audience (116). But, Evans, drawing on studies by Richard Firth Green and Paul Zumthor, remarks on the interconnectedness of these categories: “historically real and implied audiences are not easily distinguished” (111). Indeed, she observes that implied audiences were often modified in response to the needs of actual ones (110). As we have seen in Millett’s reading of *Ancrene Wisse*, an actual audience can also play the role of an implied one, in the sense that it can shape the way that one experiences a text. So, although in the discussion below I focus on what Evans would term the implied audiences of part 5, I do not mean to suggest by doing so that they are not, or could not be, the same as its actual audiences.

In the case of *Ancrene Wisse*, the construction of audience is an important point of inquiry since, as Watt notes, the audience plays a remarkably powerful role in the text.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, as already noted, a great deal of scholarship on the text since the 80s has been driven by an interest in the way that it constructs and engages its primary audience of women readers. As

¹⁴⁸ “*Ancrene Wisse*, for example, vividly illustrates the importance audience plays in the composition and revision of a text” (7).

Jennifer Anne Oguma writes, “*Wisse* scholars have shown a consistent interest over the years in questions of authority and audience” (9-10).

Before turning to the implied and intended audiences of part 5, it is first necessary to briefly outline its structure. This part, which describes the conditions of a good confession, is at the centre of what Hasenfratz terms the “miniature treatise on penance” (443). It can be divided usefully into two sections. The first is addressed to a variety of readers and covers the various conditions of a good confession—I will refer to this section as the “general conditions.” This section is broken into two “limen” (“branches”): the power of confession, and the qualities of a good confession (114). The second of these is by far the longest, and it subdivides further into the sixteen conditions of a good confession. The first of these conditions begins, “Schrift schal beo wreiful. Mon schal wreien him i schrift, nawt werien him ne seggen, ‘Ich hit dude þurh opre’, ‘Ich wes ined þerto’, ‘Þe feond hit made me don.’” (“Confession must be accusatory. You must accuse yourself in confession, not excuse yourself and say, ‘It was someone else’s fault’, ‘I was forced to’, ‘The devil made me do it’”) (115-16). At the end of the “general conditions,” the author writes that he has divided up these conditions for the benefit of his “dear sisters” (129): “Nu 3e habbeð alle ihaued, as Ich understonde, þe sixtene stucchen þe Ich bihet to dealen; ant alle Ich habbe tobroken ham ow, mine leoue sustren, as me deð to children þe mahten wið unbroke bread deien on hunger.” (“Now you have had all the sixteen sections that I promised to divide for you, and I have broken them all up for you, my dear sisters, as people do for children who might die of hunger with unbroken bread”) (129).

He then explains that part 5 was written with an eye to a wider audience: “Mine leoue sustren, þis fife dale, þe is of schrift, limpeð to alle men iliche; for-þi ne wundri 3e ow nawt þet Ich toward ow nomeliche nabbe nawt ispeken i þis dale” (“My dear sisters, this fifth part, which

is about confession, is relevant to everybody alike; so do not be surprised that I have not spoken to you in particular in this part”) (129). It is curious that the author waits until the end of the “general conditions” to explicitly describe his audience for this part. This means that someone encountering the text for the first time will read through all of the “general conditions”— twelve leaves in the Corpus manuscript (fols. 81r-93r)—before learning directly that the “general conditions” section was written for a broader audience than the “dear sisters.”

Following the “general conditions” is a second, shorter section, which I term the “anchoritic confession.” The author introduces this section by writing, “Habbeð þah to ower bihoue þis lute leaste ende” (“But here is a short final section for your use”) (129). Some of the sins in this section are more particular to anchoritic life (129-30). These include “of silences ibrokene, of sitten longe ed þurl, of vres mis iseide, wiðute ʒeme of heorte oðer in untime” (“breaking times of silence, sitting too long at the window, saying the Hours incorrectly, without concentrating, or at the wrong time”) (129).

In 1981, Georgianna observed that, with a few exceptions, “critics simply ignore the author’s extensive discussion of sin and confession” (*Solitary* 121), and the situation has changed only marginally in the intervening years. Only one study has been devoted exclusively to part 5—Millett’s analysis of its sources and traditions. The part has been examined in terms of its audience only rarely, and has presented a puzzle to those who have considered it. In 1961, John Hubert Gray argued that part 5 is distinct from the others in its relatively broad applicability, and in its almost complete lack of address to an anchoritic audience. He concluded that the author

wrote this part for some other purpose, and included it in his anchoritic guide as an after-thought.¹⁴⁹

Tied to this argument was the view that the part's focus on confession would make it unsuitable for anchorites, who were expected to be morally upstanding. So, in the introduction to M. B. Salu's influential 1955 edition, Gerard Sitwell argued that:

the existence of these two sections on temptations and confession is surprising. I think they legitimately raise the question whether they apply to the anchoresses at all, or whether the author happened to be interested in the subject matter of them and included them in his treatise for no other reason. An examination of the theological background of the period will, I think, show that the latter was more probably the case (xviii)

Sitwell acknowledged that, "In so far as the seven deadly sins represent tendencies which are in all men, these sections do, of course, apply to the anchoress," but held that "they are in no way necessary, and it might be fairly argued that they are unsuitable" (xix). In her own introduction, Salu echoed Sitwell by stating that these parts "may themselves be an insertion by the author of his own previously written work" and, like Gray, drew on the change of audience as evidence, "The absence in Part v of the author's normal direct address to 'my dear sisters' is noteworthy, and so is his return to it [toward the end of Part v]" (xxv).

¹⁴⁹ Since Gray's dissertation is unpublished, it is worth providing some of his conclusions in full. Gray writes of part 5 that "except for the concluding passage when the author makes what must seem to us a rather clumsy attempt though he may have intended merely to be tactful—to adapt his matter to the anchoresses, there are no terms of direct address in the whole of Part Five. In previous as well as subsequent parts, he addresses the anchoresses quite constantly, some one-hundred and twenty times in all" (83). On these grounds, Gray writes that, "The most logical conclusion, therefore, would seem to be that the author, in composing his *Riwle*, made use of one of his previous works on confession, and incorporated it, without a great deal of revision, into the text of the *Riwle*" (91).

The hypothesized independent origin of the confessional material was firmly rejected by Georgianna in her 1981 monograph (*Solitary* 120-1). Georgianna demonstrated that the focus of part 5 on what she terms “moral theology”—“the branch of theology that helps the ordinary Christian distinguish right from wrong”—is not, as Sitwell and Salu had suggested, out of place in the manual (121). Indeed, she argues that questions of moral theology arise throughout the manual (121). It is now generally accepted that part 5 is integral to *Ancrene Wisse*, reflective of contemporary pastoral developments. Some emphasize the “lay” quality of the content. Gunn, for example, writes of this part that it “is closely related to pastoral works designed for a lay audience,” on the grounds that it “uses the formalized theme of the ‘conditions of confession’, which was a popular tool for preachers and confessors to the laity in their efforts to educate and reform” (*Ancrene Wisse* 147).

So, few now hold the view that part 5 was an independent work of the author, although its audience continues to present a mystery. Most take the author at his word that he writes the “general conditions” for another actual—in Evans’ sense—audience (in addition to the three sisters), but what this other audience might be is not known. In his edition of the text, Hasenfratz suggests that references to other audiences in this part “may indicate that the *AW* author expected his treatise to circulate more widely among laypeople or that confessors might use it in their pastoral work” (460; n. 486). He records that Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson think it “would also have been useful for the anchoresses in directing the spiritual lives of their maids” (392; n. 58 qtd. in Hasenfratz 460; n. 486).

Oguma looks at both the text’s evocations of alternate audiences and use of “academic” diction—such as the term “antonomasia” (39-65 qtd. at 50)—to conclude that “the author’s male peers would have read the guide” (65). Oguma argues that the manual contains information

designed to help the anchorite's confessor guide the anchorite: "[a] potential confessor could feel comfortable instructing from such a guide" (42). Yet in light of the studies that have emerged in the past three decades demonstrating that Latinate and scholastic learning may have been more common among medieval women than previously assumed,¹⁵⁰ Oguma's alignment of academic thought with the expectation of a male advisor is perhaps somewhat premature.

When considering the question of audience in the "general conditions," it is crucial to recognize that although the section ends with the statement that it "limpeð to alle men iliche" ("is relevant to to everybody alike") (129), this intended audience does not in itself exclude the "dear sisters" addressed in previous parts of the guide. Moreover, we must disabuse ourselves of any notion, held, as already mentioned, by Sitwell and others, that thirteenth-century authors would have considered self-examination material unsuitable for women anchorites. As we have seen, many of the works containing self-examination material written prior to 1250 were either used by clerical readers or addressed to them. Aside from *Ancrene Wisse*, several other guides for religious life include self-examination material, including Edmund of Abingdon's *Speculum religiosorum*, and the *Speculum virginum*. The latter is an anonymous early twelfth-century guide from Germany written for those who had taken a vow of chastity, which, in at least two early copies, contains elaborate visual depictions of the vices and virtues that may have been intended as a guide to self-examination.¹⁵¹

Contemporary self-examination writing gives us a context for understanding the implied audience in the "general conditions." It would be easy to assume that its descriptions of

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, Green's *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* and Bell's *What Nuns Read*.

¹⁵¹ These copies are British Library, MS Arundel 44 (fols. 28v, 29r) and Walters MS. W.72 (fols. 25v, 26 r). For a discussion of the first of these, see Arthur Watson's article on the *Speculum virginum* 449.

seemingly worldly sins—those that would be hard for an anchorite to commit, such as “longe beon unbischpet” (“delaying being confirmed”) (80)—necessarily imply a non-anchoritic lay audience, but the situation becomes more complicated when we consider that the same kinds of sins appear in some contemporary texts addressed to clerical readers. Grosseteste’s *Perambulavit Iudas*, which is, as already noted, addressed to a particular group of monks and their spiritual advisor to help them prepare for confession, contains some sins that Grosseteste almost certainly did not expect of his addressees, such as homicide (165.561). It is possible that Grosseteste aimed to be comprehensive so that an addressee could use his text to identify a sin committed prior to ordination, but even if we allow for this possibility, some of the sins, such as failing to instruct one’s wife or children, must be directed at those who are not ordained.¹⁵² “Worldly” sins, then, do not necessarily preclude a clerical or lay religious audience. In the case of *Ancrene Wisse*, “worldly” sins alone cannot be taken as proof that the “general conditions” were written for some other audience beyond the “dear sisters.”

For determining the audience of the “general conditions,” it is equally crucial to recognize that the author does not explicitly evoke a broader audience until the end of the section. This might seem like a mistake—that he simply forgot to announce his intention of addressing a wider audience at the beginning of the “general conditions.” But given how frequently he addresses his “dear sisters” throughout the rest of the text, we would expect him to remember to make this change of audience explicit when, at the beginning of the “general conditions,” he stopped addressing them explicitly. Moreover, if it is true, as current consensus holds, that the author partially revised *Ancrene Wisse*—the results of which appear to be

¹⁵² “Maritus uxorem tuam non sufficienter exhibuisti nec pro posse tuo instruxisti. Prolem debito affectu non educasti.” (162.463-464)

preserved in the Corpus manuscript (Millett, *Guide* xxxviii)—it seems likely that he would have caught an omission as glaring as an unexplained change of audience. The lack of address to a broader audience at the beginning of this part cannot be written off as a mistake, and it is therefore worth looking more carefully at the implied audiences of the “general conditions.”

The Implied Audience of Part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse* and its Implications

At the beginning of part 5, the “dear sisters” addressed in previous parts are written into a larger community of sinners. So, although the conclusion to part 4 addresses a “leoue suster” (“dear sister”) (112), no similar address appears at the beginning of part 5. Here, the first significant hint of an implied audience is “us”: “Schrift wesheð us of alle ure fulðen, ȝelt us alle ure luren, makeð us Godes children” (“Confession washes away all our filth, gives us back all that we have lost, and makes us God’s children”) (114). “Us” here is somewhat vague. It indicates that the author counts himself among the people he addresses, but we do not learn much about them. At this stage, there is nothing to suggest that he is still addressing the “dear sisters” of the previous parts, but there is nothing to contradict this either.

In the first “branch” of the “general conditions”—the powers of confession—the author uses pronouns like “us,” “we,” and “ure” to construct his audience.¹⁵³ He also addresses the audience directly, “Lokið nu ful ȝeorne hwet tis beo to seggen” (“Now pay careful attention to what this means”) (114). And he introduces into this discussion what Millett terms a “paradigmatic sinner” (*Ancrene Wisse* II. 233; n. 5.564). He writes, for example, “Ȓe sunfule seolf is Ȓe unwihtes lond, Ȓe is ure deadliche fa” (“The sinner himself is the land of the devil,

¹⁵³ “Ȓe oðer Ȓreo Ȓing, Ȓet hit deð us seoluen” (“The third effect confession has on ourselves”)(115); “Schrift wesheð us of alle ure fulðen” (“Confession washes away all our filth”)(115); “makeð us Godes children” (“makes us children of God”)(115).

who is our mortal enemy”) (115). He speaks again of a paradigmatic sinner while offering an exposition on a biblical passage: “Erunt sicut fuerant antequam proieceram eos; þet is, scrift schal makie þe mon al swuch as he wes biuore þet he sunegede” (“*They will be as they had been before I had rejected them*: that is, confession will make a man just as he was before he sinned”) (115).

Millett observes that the author often uses *sum mon*, and its associated masculine singular pronouns to illustrate a point that applies to sinners in general (*Ancrene Wisse* II.233; n. 5.564). Millett suggests that this “paradigmatic sinner” might be a woman, since the monologues in the “general conditions,” discussed below, often imply a female audience (“He Speaks” 63; n. 11). But it is worth keeping in mind that these monologues do not begin to appear until the fourth condition of confession and, assuming the “general conditions” are read in order, there is nothing to limit the audience before these monologues appear—at this stage, the paradigmatic sinner is unspecified.

Through this paradigmatic sinner, the author expands the audience beyond the “dear sisters.” Yet since an author’s implied audience generally remains in place until it is explicitly changed, and since there is nothing to exclude the “dear sisters” from the wider group evoked through *sum mon*, the “dear sisters” would seem to be part of this broader audience. In other words, when, in part 5, the subject turns to confession, the author ceases to address his “dear sisters” in particular and writes them into a larger community.

The author refers to a paradigmatic sinner throughout the “general conditions,” yet, as already noted, he also narrows his audience to more limited groups of readers. In the fourth condition of confession he constructs an audience of women alone. He states that confession should be “naked,” and explains what he expects in this respect by using a woman as an

example: “Sire,’ ha seið, þe wummon, ‘Ich habbe ihaued leofmon,’ oðer ‘Ich habbe ibeon’, ha seið, ‘fol of me seoluen.’ Þis nis nawt naket schrift. Biclute þu hit nawt. Do awei þe totagges! Vnwrih þe ant sei, ‘Sire, Godes are! Ich am a ful stod-meare, a stinkinde hore!” (“‘Father,’ a woman will say, ‘I have had a lover’, or ‘I have made a fool of myself.’ This is not naked confession. Don’t wrap it up. Get rid of the trimmings! Lay yourself bare and say, ‘Father, God have mercy! I am a filthy stud-mare, a stinking whore!’”) (120). In her study of the reading practices expected in *Ancrene Wisse*, Robertson argues that monologues such as this one create a new “reader function”; while the reader is usually depicted as the addressee of the text, here, the reader becomes a speaker within it (27). This passage, simultaneously voicing and addressing a female audience, narrows the audience somewhat, but the author has still not returned to addressing the “dear sisters” he addresses in previous parts of the manual.

The author narrows the audience still further in this fourth condition when he discusses the circumstances of sin. Here, he provides some monologues that could be used during confession, many of which resemble, in their first-person mode of address, the “forms of confession” described by Cornett. The first, illustrating the circumstance of person, begins “Sire, Ich am an ancre; a nunne; a wif iweddet; a meiden; a wummon þet me lefde se wel” (“Father, I am an anchoress; a nun; a married woman; an unmarried girl; a woman in whom great trust was placed”) (120-21). With “an ancre,” the author seems to evoke his “dear sisters”—the first explicit nod to them in part 5. Indeed, Braswell, in her discussion of how confessional literature led to the development of individualistic fictional characters, assumes that monologues such as this one are in the voice of “the fictional persona of the anchoress created by the author of the *Wisse*” (50). Braswell concludes that they “serve as a scenario for the penitent, giving her words

and stage directions” (51). But the statements that follow the anchoritic one are clearly not voiced by an anchorite, so the implied audience of this monologue is more complex.

The various speakers of the monologue fracture the implied audience into separate groups, some of which (the nuns and wives) exclude the anchoritic reader. In so doing, the manual places an emphasis on the job, or social status of a penitent—subjects that, according to Peter Biller, became increasingly common in confessors’ interrogations in the second half of the thirteenth century (14). Yet at the same time as it demarcates the implied anchoritic audience from other implied audiences, the monologue depicts the former as equal to the latter in terms of the propensity to sin; none of the speakers is more sinful here than any other. This is, of course, in line with the pastoral teaching of the day, which stressed that sin is universal.

Indeed, in this passage, the different implied audiences share not only a general propensity to sin but one single confessional utterance. This is suggested by the grammatical structure of the confessions; a single “Ich am”/ “I am” serves for all of the speakers (120), which suggests that the confessional statement that follows is common to all. The “ancre” here, while separate from the other audiences, is guilty of the same sin. We could therefore take this monologue as enacting a kind of moral levelling.

It is somewhat surprising to find an emphasis on commonality in a passage on the circumstances of sin, since, as Michaud-Quantin and others have noted, priests’ *summae* of the time stressed that the circumstances of sin should be used by a confessor to lead a particularly individual interrogation (32); Biller writes that a priest was instructed to “enquire who the

penitent is, what sort of job he has, and frame [his] question accordingly” (13). The circumstances were expected to produce unique confessions, not those shared by many.¹⁵⁴

Most of the other monologues illustrating the circumstances of sin do not imply any particular audience, although the monologue for the circumstance of place hints at anchorites through the sins that it describes: “Sire, þus Ich pleide oðer spec i chirche; e[o]de o ring i chirc3ard; biheold hit oþer wreastlunge, ant oðre fol gomenes; spec þus oðer pleide biuoren worltliche men, biuoren [religiuse], in ancre-hus, ed oþer þurl þen Ich schulde, neh hali þing.” (“Father I joked or talked in this way in church; joined in round dances in the churchyard; watched the dances or the wrestling, and other frivolous amusements; talked in such a way or joked the presence of people living in the world, or of religious, in the anchor-house, at another window than I should have, near sacred things”) (121). The implied audience here is complex. “Ancre-hus” and “þurl” (“window”) imply anchorites, but “pleide oðer spec i chirche” (“joked or talked in this way in church”) apparently does not, since elsewhere in the guide the author suggests that he does not expect anchorites to sit in church, but rather, to watch the service through a special window.¹⁵⁵ Like the monologue for place, then, this monologue contains a number of different implied audiences. And, like the other monologue, it does not emphasize the

¹⁵⁴ Boyle writes that the Gregorian reform put a greater emphasis on using the circumstances of sin to identify the particular nature of each individual’s sin: “It attempts to understand the penitent as a person according to his or her particular circumstances or calling (wife, husband, teacher, labourer, for example), and then urges the imposition of an ‘appropriate’ penance rather than an automatic one” (“Summae” 227). Braswell arrives at a similar conclusion: “The use of questions of circumstance, which were applicable to any given situation, enabled the priest to dispense with long lists of sins and, at the same time, to use the manual as an aid to understanding more clearly the mental disposition of the sinner with whom he dealt” (38).

¹⁵⁵ “Vt þurh þe chirche þurl ne halde 3e tale wið na mon, ah beoreð þer-to wurðmunt for þe hali sacrement þet 3e seoð þer-þurh, ant neomeð oðerhwile” (“Do not talk with anyone through the window opening on to the church, but show reverence towards it because of the holy sacrament that you see, and sometimes receive, through it”) (29).

differences between these groups, but, by placing their statements alongside each other, creates a sense of equality between them. Indeed, the difficulty in separating the various speakers from each other creates the impression that they commit similar sins.

Immediately after the circumstances of sin, and still in the context of the fourth condition of confession, the author returns to his broader audience; he explicitly evokes both women and men, “Euch efter þet he is segge his totagges, mon as limpeþ to him, wummon þet hire rineð” (“Each individual should give an account of his circumstances according to his condition, a man as it applies to him, a woman as it concerns her”) (122). He also returns to using pronouns that refer to a paradigmatic sinner, like “he” (124). And he addresses the audience as “þu” (“you”) (127). Here, as before, the distinctions between the implied anchoritic audience and others disappear, and the anchoritic one is again subsumed into a larger community of sinners.

The author’s contemporaries picked up on the apparent changes of audience in the “general conditions.” Millett finds that one of these, which occurs later in the “general conditions,” seems to have troubled some revisers (*Ancrene Wisse* II. 233; n. 5.564). One seems to have been bothered by the author’s switch from a reference to an undefined sinner (using “sum mon”) (128), to a statement that is apparently voiced by an individual woman sinner. This reviser added female pronouns to the beginning of the passage to try to resolve the tension he perceived between these two audiences. Millett puts these revisions in bold:

Pis Ich segge for-þi þet swuch auenture bitimeð to sum mon **oðer to sum wummon** þet **ha** ne mei nawt fulleliche wreien **hire** seoluen bute **ha** wreie oþre; ah bi nome noðeleatere ne nempni **ha** nawt þe ilke, þah þe schrift-feader wite wel toward hwam hit turne, ah ‘a munk’ oðer ‘a preost’, nawt ‘Wilȝam’ ne ‘Water’, þah þer beo nan oþer.

I say this because sometimes a man **or a woman** may be placed in such a position that **she** cannot fully accuse **herself** unless **she** accuses others as well; but **she** should nevertheless not mention the person concerned by name, even though the confessor may know very well who is involved, but ‘a monk’ or ‘a priest’, not ‘William’ or ‘Walter’, even if it cannot be anyone else. (128-29)

Millett describes the apparent motivation behind the revisions:

The problem seems to be . . . that the author begins by making a point which applies to penitents in general, using (as often) the hypothetical *sum mon* with the masculine singular personal pronoun to cover both sexes, but then illustrates it by an example which applies only to his immediate female audience (*Ancrene Wisse* II. 233; n. 5.564)

But as Millett suggests, the original version of the text was not flawed; as we have seen, the shift from a general audience to one particular group of women sinners happens often in part 5 (*Ancrene Wisse* II. 233; n. 5.564). Here, as above, it works to demarcate an audience of women as one subset of a wider community of sinners.

The author describes himself as a member of this community of sinners. As we have seen, he often uses pronouns like “us” to describe sinners in general and this suggests that he sees himself among those he addresses. This levelling language stands in stark contrast to the ways he constructs audiences in other parts of the text. As Millett argues, in these parts, the author generally produces the impression of a close relationship with the “leoue sustren” and demarcates them as role models for others (“He Speaks” 58). In part 5, the author stresses that his “dear sisters” commit the same kinds of sins as others.

After the “general conditions,” the author turns back to explicitly addressing his original audience of anchorites with the “anchoritic confession.” Yet he does not immediately return to his tendency of stressing the anchorites’ superior virtue. Of the “cuðe sunnen” (“manifest sins”) (129) that he claims anchorites must confess, many are relatively minor—the kind to which a contemporary priest’s *summa* would assign light penance: “leote . . . claðes unseowet, bireinet, unwesschen, breoke nep oðer disch” (“leaving clothes undarned, damp with rain, or unwashed, breaking cups or plates”) (130). Yet we must not take this to suggest that he thought anchorites incapable of more serious offenses; his list of “manifest sins” also includes some of the “mother” sins: “prude”/“pride”, “onde”/“envy”, “wraððe”/“anger”, “slawðe”/“laziness” and “of mete, of drunch to muchel oðer to lutel”/“eating or drinking too much or too little” (129).

After this list of sins particular to anchorites, he states that, “To euch preost mei ancre schriuen hire of swucche utterliche sunne þe to alle bifalleð; ah ful trusti ha schal beon o þe preostes godlec þet ha allunge schaweð to hu hire stonde abute flesches temptatiuns, 3ef ha is swa ifondet, bute i deaðes dute” (“An anchoress can confess those external sins that are common to anyone to any priest; but if she is subject to sexual temptations, she must be very confident of the virtue of the priest to whom she reveals this fully unless she is in danger of death”) (130). The description of sins “þe to alle bifalleð” (“that are common to anyone”) implies that the anchorite shares certain sins with others.

The author does recognize that some anchorites are above such sins, but even here he is cautious: “3ef ei ancre nat nawt of þulliche þinges, þonki 3eorne Iesu Crist, ant halde hire i drede; þe deouel nis nawt dead, þet wite ha, þah he slepe” (“If any anchoress knows nothing about such things, she should give earnest thanks to Jesus Christ, and live in fear; the devil is not dead, she can be sure of that, even if he is asleep”) (130). The tone is markedly changed from

that of other parts of the manual, such as the insistence that the anchoritic audience will never have a reputation of being “totilde ancras” (“peeping anchoresses”).¹⁵⁶

Yet although the anchorite is not significantly different in terms of her propensity to sin, we learn, at the end of part 5, that she does have different requirements in terms of penance: “Be preost ne þearf for na gult, bute hit beo þe greattre, leggen oþer schrift on ow þen 3e leadeð efter þeos riwle” (“Unless a sin is fairly serious, the priest need not impose any other penance on you for it than the life that you are leading according to this rule”) (130). The implication here of the anchorite’s distinctiveness prepares us for the opening of part 6, in which the author resumes his tendency to imply his anchoritic audience is morally superior: “Al is penitence, ant strong penitence, þet 3e eauer deheð, mine leoue sustren” (“Everything that you have to bear, my dear sisters, is penance, and hard penance”) (132). As Georgianna notes, this opening passage represents, “A marked change in the *Ancrene Wisse* author’s attitude toward the anchoress” (*Solitary* 120).

I have argued that in part 5 the anchoritic audience is cast as equal to others, not just in its propensity to sin, but in some of the specific sins it commits. As we have seen, it is note-worthy that this levelling effect is particularly pronounced in the section on the circumstances of sin, since contemporary priests’ manuals cast the circumstances as a tool for effecting a personalized confession. By consistently stressing the similarity between the kinds of sins anchorites commit and those that others commit, this part stands in stark contrast to the others that, as Millett points out, depict the superior virtue of the anchorite.

The significance of this contrast becomes pronounced when we consider that part 5 lies at the centre of the text. As we have seen, the movement toward the inner parts of the manual is,

¹⁵⁶ See the quotation above, page 130.

according to the author, a figurative movement away from the external world, and toward the inner one. Rather than leading the anchorite away from others, as we might expect of a journey away from the external, this journey inwards, according to my reading of part 5, writes her into a wider group of sinners. In other words, the movement inward effects a movement toward the wider community. That the journey inward ultimately dissolves some of the distinctions between the anchorite and others might seem like a paradox, but it is, of course, one that characterizes confessional practices of the period more generally. This model is perhaps best summed up by Bynum who, in her seminal study of medieval individuality, writes that, “In the twelfth century, turning inward to explore motivation went hand in hand with a sense of belonging to a group that not only defined its own life by means of a model but also was itself—as group and as pattern—a means of salvation and of evangelism” (106).

Moreover, the seeming paradox here—that a movement away from the external world writes one into the wider community—is one that finds a parallel in anchoritic life. According to Cannon, a central “doctrinal problem” to anchoritic enclosure is that the anchorite is at once expected to be both removed from the community and an agent of its improvement (114). He writes that the author’s injunction that “the reader ‘gather in [her] heart all the sick and sorrowful who endure misery’ is in deep conflict with the very logic of enclosure” (114). So, the model of the text I have been describing, in which the anchorite’s similarity to others is most pronounced at the centre of a figurative journey inward, is a powerful parallel for one of the significant tensions of anchoritic enclosure.

Chapter 4 – Manuals for Penitents from 1250 to 1350, with Particular Attention to the *Compileison*

Between 1250 and 1350, a number of new works emerged—the “manuals for penitents” defined in chapter one. These are different from the texts containing self-examination material that preceded them in that they contain more extensive treatments of sin and declare explicitly that they can be used by penitents. Early examples include the *Compileison* (c.1254-1274), the *Manuel des péchés* (c.1260), the *Somme le roi* (c.1279), and the English translations of the last two.¹⁵⁷

In an insular context, many, though by no means all, of these are in English or Anglo-Norman. They are tied to the growing emphasis on pastoral education that was promoted and reflected in the constitutions of the 1281 Council of Lambeth.¹⁵⁸ It is generally held that this emphasis stoked a desire for vernacular works, of which manuals for penitents, like *Handlyng Synne*, formed an important part. As we have seen, Pecham’s decree was not a novelty; it would have struck a familiar chord with many in attendance, since similar decrees had been passed by Richard Poore in 1219 and, at a more local, diocesan level, by Grosseteste in 1238.¹⁵⁹ And of course, this decree did not give rise to vernacular pastoral writing by any stretch—the vernacular manuals for penitents produced before this decree, such as the *Manuel des péchés*, remind us that there was a strong tradition of vernacular pastoral writing in England preceding it.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on pastoral learning promoted by the 1281 Lambeth Constitutions must have helped bolster the popularity of this new wave of texts. As Richard

¹⁵⁷ The grounds for counting these texts among “manuals for penitents” are laid out on pages 35 to 37.

¹⁵⁸ See above, page 55.

¹⁵⁹ See the discussion of this legislation on pages 51 to 56.

Newhauser writes, the Constitutions promoted a growing emphasis on learning the traditional material of the confessional encounter on one's own:

the historical development of the outlook institutionalized in Pecham's Constitutions eventually led to the goal of vernacular education in pastoralia being achieved not just orally by the confessor or preacher first studying and then communicating doctrinal material to the unlearned, or by a congregant's recitation of convenient formulae in confession or catechetical instruction, but also by the act of reading in environments not specifically ecclesiastical in nature, whether private and solitary or public and communal, in religious communities or in households. ("Religious Writing" 49)

As the expectations for pastoral education increased, so too did a need for texts that could provide this instruction at a remove from the Church.

The present chapter seeks to understand some of the changes to self-examination writing that occurred in this period (1250-1350). It focuses on two of these in particular. The first is a new emphasis on lay audiences. Texts like the *Somme le roi* explicitly address lay audiences, which, as we have seen in Chapter 3, is less common in earlier self-examination writing. I will focus on the *Compileison*, since, having been written sometime between 1254 and 1274, this text may be the earliest of the manuals for penitents I have examined, and it is therefore well positioned to act as a witness to this transformation.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, its links to *Ancrene Wisse* provide a valuable point of comparison.

¹⁶⁰ Trethewey dates the text to this period from internal evidence, drawing on Hope Emily Allen's previous findings (xxiii). Allen, who can be credited with the modern re-discovery of the *Compileison*, followed the practice of the author of the text by referring to each section as a "Compileison" and the entire work as the *Compilation*. However, Watson and Wogan-Browne

I also find that some manuals addressed to the laity in this period were apparently shaped by a concern that they could potentially teach new types of sins to these readers; this constitutes the second change that I will explore in this chapter. By comparing manuals that address clerical audiences to those that address both clerical and lay ones, the present study finds that authors considered lay audiences more suggestible in this respect than clerical ones.

The Implied Audience of the *Compileison* and its Implications

Addresses to lay audiences in texts like the *Somme le roi*, the *Manuel des péchés*, and *Handlyng Synne* are notable, because, as we have seen, prior to the emergence of manuals for penitents, most self-examination writing was either used by or addressed to clerical or lay religious audiences. An important text for tracing this development is the *Compileison*. As already noted, it shares a large amount of material with an earlier text which, as we have seen, also contains self-examination material—*Ancrene Wisse*. As Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne describe in-depth, the vestiges of earlier versions in the text suggest that two stages of revision led to its production. Through these, the text affords a rare glimpse into the development of a manual for penitents.

Before considering these stages of revision, it is worth describing the form of the manual as it has come down to us, as well as the current state of scholarship on it. As Watson and Wogan-Browne observe, its relationship to *Ancrene Wisse* is complex: “Although the *Compileison* is both a compilation and a version of *Ancrene Wisse*, neither description is adequate to the massive structuring and originality of conception and voicing of this 29,000-line

prefer to use the title *Compileison* to describe the entire work, and, because this has become standard in *Ancrene Wisse* scholarship, I have adopted this convention.

prose work of moral theology” (42). It incorporates almost all of the anchoritic guide, omitting only part 1, on anchoritic devotions. The other parts appear substantially rearranged and supplemented with a wide range of additional material; Trethewey estimates that *Ancrene Wisse* accounts for only about 42 percent of the work (xxiii). This substantial reworking of *Ancrene Wisse* for a wider audience makes the *Compileison* a powerful witness to how material for self-examination increasingly came to be addressed to large audiences in the thirteenth century.

The author’s other sources remain somewhat elusive. As noted in the introduction, Germaine Dempster identified some parallels in priests’ *summae*: Peraldus’ *Summa de vitiis*, his *Summa de virtutibus*, and Raymond de Pennafort’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*. Dean adds another which, as I note below, proves to be an important one: Grosseteste’s *Perambulavit Iudas*.¹⁶¹ The manual opens with a passage from the Book of Revelation that is, as Watson and Wogan-Browne note, nearly identical to that of the opening of the tract on the vices in the *Somme le roi* (“Le traité des vices”), but the two manuals offer divergent discussions of the passage (44).¹⁶² The discussion in the *Compileison* bears some resemblance to the opening of Pseudo-Bonaventure’s *Tractatus de VII vitiis capitalibus*, a Latin self-examination text which survives in seventeen manuscripts (Bloomfield, *Incipits* 557; no. 6450).¹⁶³ There is no edition of this latter work, and the relationship between these two texts needs further study.

¹⁶¹ See the discussion below, page 165.

¹⁶² Wogan-Browne and Watson state that it is “the same verse from Revelation that heads the *Somme le roi*” (44), and in many copies of the *Somme le roi* this is true, although in the one printed by Brayer and Leurquin-Labie the opening of the tract in question (113) follows one on the Ten Commandments (99-111).

¹⁶³ Diekstra discusses this work while examining the sources for the Middle French *Voie de paradis*. According to Diekstra, its incipit is: “Sequitur de septem viciis que significantur per bestiam quam vidit Johannes in Apocalypsim dicens: Vidi bestiam ascendentem de mari . . . Bestia dicitur quasi vastia, quod signat diabolum qui omnes vult vastare” (qtd. in Diekstra, “Introduction” 33). The interpretation here bears some resemblance to the opening of the *Compileison*. After the opening rubric, this latter text begins: “Vidi bestiam de mari

The *Compileison* remains relatively neglected, like many Anglo-Norman texts. It is rarely mentioned apart from its connection to *Ancrene Wisse*, which, in recent years, has become one of the most widely-studied Middle English devotional guides. The connection itself was discovered in 1936 by Hope Emily Allen, who then studied it in some detail for a 1940 article. Most recently, the *Compileison* was the focal point of a 2004 article by Watson and Wogan-Browne about the uses of Anglo-Norman. It has never been edited in full. Trethewey edited parts for a 1958 EETS volume but, since this was part of a wider editorial project aimed at illuminating the transmission of *Ancrene Wisse*, it was limited to those portions with parallels to the anchoritic guide. Another section of the *Compileison* was edited as a possible source for *The Parson's Tale* in 1941 by Brown, Bryan and Dempster, and, in 2000 and 2002, by Newhauser. In his 1978 doctoral dissertation, Robert J. Relihan edited another portion that circulated separately: the *Compileison de purgatorie*. The want of a complete edition has undoubtedly contributed to the paucity of scholarship on the text.

As it has come down to us, the *Compileison* is divided into five sections: 1) the *Compileison de set morteus pecches*, 2) the *Compileison de seinte penance*, 3) the *Compileison des peines de purgatorie*, 4) the *Compileison des dis commandements*, and 5) the *Vie de gent de religion*. The first features an in-depth discussion of the sins and how to recognize them. After each sin, the author describes its remedies, some of which are identical to those in *Ancrene Wisse*. This section concludes by comparing the seven deadly sins to beasts—this, too, is taken from *Ancrene Wisse*. The second section describes steps for reconciliation with the Church and

asce[n]dentem habentem semptem capita. / A ses trechers freres e sueres en ih[es]u / crist. ea tuz i ceus; e celis ki liru[n]t cest / escrit. u deuoteme[n]t e de bon quer de au/tre lire loru[n]t saluz. e sainte de alme e de / cors; en lui ky est uerrai saueour de tuz. / Seint iohan le euangeliste dit en un li/ure ke il fist. ky est en escrit apocalipse / appelle. io ui / une beste mount[er] de la mer / ky auoit set testes. / p[ar] quei le diable est / beste apelle.” (fol. 1a).

the reasons why one should confess. Following this is the almost-complete translation of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, and a long section on alms. Trethewey writes that this second section emphasizes satisfaction, and that, “This emphasis reflects clearly the main purpose of the compiler, which must have been to produce a penitential stressing oral confession and penance through works” (xxi). Both of these first two sections count several priests’ *summae*, including that of Peraldus, among their sources, as well as *Ancrene Wisse*.

The third and fourth sections contain no *Ancrene Wisse* material and are substantially shorter than the first two. The third is a grim reflection on judgment day and the punishments for unrepented sin. It circulated independently, both in Anglo-Norman and in Latin. Although Trethewey supposes that the Anglo-Norman version was adapted from the Latin, Watson and Wogan-Browne argue that it is just as likely that the Latin version borrowed from a *Compileison*-like text instead (43). The author calls the fourth section the *Compileison des dis commandementz*, but its interests extend far beyond what this title suggests. Much of its content is of that sort that, as we have seen, became increasingly common in manuals for penitents in the late thirteenth century. This includes the six things to be feared, the six things that make a person saintly, and the five degrees of chastity. All of the fifth and final section—the lengthy *Compileison de la vie de gent de religion*—was taken, according to Trethewey, from *Ancrene Wisse* (xxi).

As already noted, Watson and Wogan-Browne advanced our understanding of this text significantly by identifying some internal evidence for how it developed into its current shape, including traces of an earlier arrangement of tracts. The following both supplements and offers support for their findings. In particular, they find that the introduction to the fifth section (the *Vie de gent de religion*) lists a number of subjects that will be treated which does not line up with the

actual contents of this section. In brief, they argue that this introduction would make sense only if the *Vie de gent de religion* came first in the manual, and if its introduction described the *Compileison* as a whole (47-48).

Based on this, and other evidence, they suggest that the *Compileison* developed through two distinct stages of revision. In the first stage, *Ancrene Wisse* was expanded and translated into Anglo-Norman. Watson and Wogan-Browne term this revised version the *Vie de gent de religion*, after its prologue. The structure of this version was similar to that of *Ancrene Wisse*, although the first part of *Ancrene Wisse*, on daily devotions, was absent, as was the seventh part, on love. Two parts were added at this stage: “de dis comandementz Deu” and “de purgatorie e de ses peines” (47). In the second stage—that which transformed the *Vie de gent de religion* into the *Compileison* in its current form—the compiler omitted the “outer rule” of *Ancrene Wisse*, which is concerned with the daily management of the affairs of anchoritic life. The sections on penance and confession were expanded and moved to the beginning of the manual.

For ease of reference, Watson and Wogan-Browne’s findings about the development of the text are summarized below. I have taken the section titles from Watson and Wogan-Browne’s outline (57-59), but, for the sake of clarity, I have abbreviated some of them:

<i>Ancrene Wisse</i>	<i>Vie de gent de religion</i> (first stage)	<i>Compileison</i> (second stage)
Prologue	1. De deus reules	
1. Daily Devotions		
2. Five senses	2. uoz cinc sens garder	
3. The Custody of the Heart/birds	3. De une manere de oiseaus	
4. Temptation and the sins	4. De charnele temptacion	
	5. De set mortels pecchez	1. Compileison de set morteus pecches

5. Confession	6. De penance	2. Compileison de seinte penance
6. Penance		
7. Love		
	7. De dis comandemenz Deu	
	8. De purgatorie	3. Compileison de purgatorie
8. The outer rule	9. De la reule foreine	
		4. Compileison des dis commandemenz
		5. Compileison de la vie de gent de religion (includes <i>Vie</i> parts 1-4)

Two observations can be made here about the development of the manual. These are both suggested by Watson and Wogan-Browne, but they are worth tracing in detail. The first concerns the audience of these texts. The *Compileison* is often addressed to “Gent de religion” (fol. 125d) (which can be roughly translated as “people of religion”), or to “hommes e fem-/ mes de religion” (fol. 105d) (“men and women of religion”).¹⁶⁴ As Gunn, citing Millett, notes, in this text, “gent de religion” refers to those “living a dedicated religious life, but the term is not limited to a specific order” (“Edmund” 105).

At times, the author singles out subsections of this audience, with a particularly telling example appearing in a translation of the passage of *Ancrene Wisse* that I have termed the “anchoritic confession.” The *Compileison* translates much of this passage from *Ancrene Wisse*, but this translation is interrupted by a passage, which has no parallel in the anchoritic guide, that describes how an “homme de religion” (“man of religion”) should confess (fol. 66a qtd. in Trethewey 111). The passage covers sins such as “nul defense de uostre reule” (“any transgression of your rule”) and sexual transgression: “si vus auez este incontinent ceo est non chaste. ou de quer. ou de cors” (fol. 66a qtd. in Trethewey 111-12) (“If you have been

¹⁶⁴ The audience is also addressed under other titles, including “freres e suers en deu” (fol. 106c).

incontinent, that is, unchaste, either in heart or in body”). This passage is followed by further material translated from *Ancrene Wisse*’s “anchoritic confession,” but parts of this have been explicitly earmarked for an audience of women with a rubric not found in the “anchoritic confession”: “A quel prestre. des ques pecchez femme se deit confessor” (fol. 66b qtd. in Trethewey 112) (“[Concerning] to which priest, and of which sins, a woman should confess”). All of these changes suggest a deliberate reworking of the “anchoritic confession” for others leading a life dedicated to religion—both men and women.

Although these “gent de religion” are his focus, the author also addresses others. He spells out his approach to these audiences at the beginning of the text:

ceo est co[n]quilli en sensble. des set pechez / morteus. e de lur es especes. sicome nus
/ les auom t[rou]ue en seinte esc[ri]pture p[our] apre[n]- / dre les leaume[n]t e sanz
feintise a tote genz / mes especiaume[n]t e par deuant tuz autres / a ho[m]mes e a
fe[m]mes de religioun. (fol. 1b)

This [work] was [*lit.* is] gathered together out of the seven deadly sins and their species, as we have found them in sacred scripture, in order to teach them faithfully and without deceit to everyone, but especially, and above all others, to the men and women of religion.

This model casts those leading religious lives as the primary audience, and others—presumably the non-anchoritic lay audience—as the secondary one. It is worth noting that many of the sins described in the first compilation are specific to lay life: “p[e]che ho[m]me par auarice . . . p[ar] trop elarger ses terres ou ses mesons a tort” (fol. 17b) (“man commits avarice. . . by enlarging his lands too much, or his houses wrongfully”). As we have seen with respect to Grosseteste’s

manual, “worldly” sins do not necessarily suggest an intended lay audience, so we cannot make assumptions about a text’s overall audience based on these alone.¹⁶⁵ But, when considered alongside the explicit address to everyone (“tote genz”) in the prologue, they do suggest that the author was working to ensure that his manual could be useful to the laity. This supports the conclusion arrived at by Watson and Wogan-Browne about the first two sections of the *Compileison*: “Although they, too, were written in the first instance with religious *freres e seurs* in mind, their address and subject-matter is broad enough to be applicable to any devout reader” (48).

We can make some tentative observations—based, again, on Watson and Wogan-Browne’s findings—about how the text came to address these various audiences. It is likely, but by no means certain, that the version produced through the first stage of revision was not addressed to anchorites alone, but to “gent de religion.” As Wogan-Browne and Watson note, the prologue to the *Vie*, which provides the evidence for the order of material in the first stage of revision, does not mention the Daily Devotions from *Ancrene Wisse* part 1 (47). Its silence on this particularly anchorite-specific section suggests that this version was addressed to a wider audience than *Ancrene Wisse*. This is also suggested by the pronouncement in the prologue of this tract in the *Compileison* that the text that follows is a *Vie de gent de religion* (“Life of people of religion”).

In the second stage of revision, the text was addressed to an ever wider group, beyond the “gent de religion” addressed in the previous stage. It is, of course, difficult to determine which addresses were unique to which stage of development, but the introductions to the various sections of *Compileison* are helpful in this respect. These reflect and describe a structure that is

¹⁶⁵ See above, page 138.

unique to the *Compileison* itself (in its current form), so it is likely that they were added in the second stage of revision, when this structure was introduced. These introductions are, with one exception, addressed to an all-encompassing audience.¹⁶⁶ The introduction to the first compilation exemplifies the formula common to almost all: “A ses trechers freres e sueres en ih[es]u / crist. [e] a tuz i ceus, e celis ki lirru[n]t cest escrit. u deuoteme[n]t e de bon quer de au- /tre lire loru[n]t saluz.” (fol. 1a) (“To his own very dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, and to all those [*masc.*] and those [*fem.*] who will read this work, or, through others’ reading, will hear [it] devotedly and with good heart—greetings.”). This formula addresses monks and nuns (the “freres e sueres en ih[es]u / crist”) and those not included in either of these categories—including, presumably, the laity. The introductions suggest that the person behind the second stage of revision was committed to addressing a general audience beyond his immediate audience of “gent de religion.” It is difficult to determine if this commitment was unique to this stage of revision, but it seems likely, since, as we have seen, the first stage text was probably addressed to “gent de religion.” So, it would seem that, as the text was expanded into its current form, it was aimed at an increasingly diverse audience.

The second observation about the development of the text that can be noted here is that the second stage text was more focused on confession than the first stage text had been. As we have seen, the second stage moved the sections most concerned with confession—that on the *set morteus pecches* and that on *seinte penance*—to the start of the text, assigning them an important place. Moreover, as Wogan-Browne and Watson observe, the *Compileison de set morteus*

¹⁶⁶ This address, with minor variation, occurs at the beginning of nearly all of the compilations (fols. 36 b, 115c, 124d). The only exception is the *Compileison de purgatorie*, which, as Watson and Wogan-Browne note, is alternately described as a compilation in its own right and as a part of the previous compilation (58).

pecches and the *Compileison de seinte penance* were likely expanded in the second stage of revision, given that their current length would have been unwieldy within the first stage structure.¹⁶⁷

Bringing together these two observations, we can say that the second reviser likely began with an expanded Anglo-Norman version of *Ancrene Wisse* (the *Vie de gent de religion*). This must have contained some of the addresses to a general audience that, as already discussed, appear in *Ancrene Wisse*, but it must have been addressed primarily to those living a religious life. While revising this text, the second reviser maintained a focus on these, but added more addresses to the laity. At the same time, he changed the focus of the manual by moving the sections on confession and penance to the start of the text, and by removing material on enclosed religious life. In sum, as he transformed his source into a manual for penitents, the second reviser envisioned more readers outside of monasteries and anchoritic enclosures. It is impossible to say for sure whether the expansion of a guide on religious life into an extensive manual for penitents inspired the reviser to construct a wider implied audience for his text, or if instead he was driven by the desire to reach this audience from the start. But it is certainly true that the manual suggests that a new link was developing in this period between self-examination and lay audiences.

Private Sins in Manuals for Penitents

The new audiences envisioned by manuals for penitents came accompanied by pressing concerns. Priests in this period worried that interrogating a penitent could inadvertently teach new sins. Foucault would see this as a post-medieval development, writing that, after the Council

¹⁶⁷ “The *Compileisons de pecches* and *de penance* are so massive as to have outgrown their original place within the structure of the *Vie*” (48).

of Trent, the questions in manuals for confessors became increasingly “veiled”: “Consider the evolution of the Catholic pastoral and the sacrament of penance after the Council of Trent. Little by little, the nakedness of the questions formulated by the confession manuals of the Middle Ages, and a good number of those still in use in the seventeenth century, was veiled” (*History* 18-19). But as we shall see, the earlier manuals were veiled as well, and with good cause. Confessors of the period were, as Payer relates in his study focused on manuals for priests, deeply concerned with the question of how to probe a penitent’s conscience without inadvertently introducing new sins (59). Tentler notes that the *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, Raymond de Pennafort’s remarkably influential guide for priests, warns confessors against this danger: “Nevertheless, I advise [the confessor] that in his questions he not descend to special circumstances and special sins; for many fall severely after such an interrogation who otherwise would never have dreamt of it” (*Sin* 115). According to Payer, trepidations surrounding confessional interrogation “are virtually always about sexual offenses” (60).¹⁶⁸ Since these could be committed in private, a person could be shielded from knowledge of them, in theory.

As we shall see, there is reason to believe that writing about sexual sins was less of a concern when it was addressed to a clerical audience than to a lay one. Works of the thirteenth century addressed to a primarily clerical audience do not generally shy away from details about sexual sin. So, Grosseteste’s self-examination work addressed to monks and their spiritual advisor, the *Perambulavit Iudas*, includes a lengthy discussion of lechery, and it mentions two

¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Tentler suggests, while discussing concerns about introducing new sins in Raymond de Pennafort’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, that such concerns were generally centered on sexual sins: “It is difficult to believe that Raymond had anything in mind except sexual sins when he advised against descending into detail” (*Sin* 115). The same view is held by Peter Biller (13).

“sins against nature”: “sodomy” and non-procreative ejaculation (164).¹⁶⁹ In the section on the sin of touch, Grosseteste describes a number of ways of committing lechery by touching others (154). He clearly understood that the subject was a delicate one; he advises confessing these sins to a priest and to God alone, for otherwise the “weak” could be “scandalized” (“quia infirmi forte talia possint inde scandalizari”) (154). Nevertheless, he does mention these sins for the benefit of his audience.

This relative willingness to mention sexual sins is also characteristic of Grosseteste’s other work for clerical penitents, *Notus in Iudea Deus*—a form of confession which Goering and Mantello suggest was written between 1235 and 1253 for those in Grosseteste’s own episcopal community. Here, Grosseteste describes five different species of lechery: *fornicacio*, *stuprum*, *adulterium*, *incestus* and *peccatum contra naturam* (268). The description of this final species might seem cloaked but Grosseteste offers clarification about what is intended: “quocumque modo effundatur semen ultro, id est scienter et prudenter, id est uoluntarie, extra vas ad hoc deputatum” (268) (“in any way seed is spilled outside, that is knowingly and with understanding, that is voluntary, out of the vessel for this purpose”).¹⁷⁰ Here, too, Grosseteste writes that these species of lechery should not be spoken too openly—they should be approached “cum magna cautela” (168) (“with great caution”).¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ See below, page 165.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Goering and F. A. C. Mantello find that most of the discussion of lechery in this work was derived from the *Summa de vitiis* of Peraldus, but that this one section is Grosseteste’s original work, “Only the definition of a sin against nature . . . is reminiscent of Grosseteste’s other writings” (“*Notus*” 255). For a description of this work and the audience it addresses, see page 124.

¹⁷¹ Grosseteste recommends caution both in speaking about these species and, somewhat surprisingly, in interrogating others about them: “De isto modo cum magna cautela loquendum est et predicandum, interrogaciones in confessionibus faciendo ut nihil hominibus reueletur quod eis occasionem prestet peccandi” (268). The discussion of interrogating others in this passage is

The *Compileison*, which, as we have seen, has an intended audience comprising “gent de religion,” but also, and importantly, the laity, is slightly less candid about sexual sins. This is clear from the first of its two discussions of lechery. No direct source has been identified for this passage. The author includes many of the same species of lechery as Grosseteste includes in his texts, but the treatment of “sins against nature” is different and somewhat vague compared to those in Grosseteste’s texts:

peche en count[r]e nature e[st]. ky tout / a ho[m]me tote la reson de la nature. issi ky il nen est pas pae de sa mauueste fer[e] / naturement. etuz sen entremet de totes maneres de ordures ky il poet ou p[ar] esgar/der. ou par tast. ou par manier. ou par bes/tes. ou p[ar] oiseaus contrefere. kar il ne font / si come nat[ur]e les a prent. e li mauueis le / fet encountre nat[ur]e. (fol. 24a)

The sin against nature is what deprives a man of all his natural reason so that he is not satisfied, because of his depravity, to behave naturally, but engages in all kinds of indecencies, whether by looking, or by touching, or by imitating animals and birds, since they only do as nature has taught them, but the depraved man does it against nature.

The passage works by circumlocution—a practice that medieval rhetoricians considered an effective means of evading delicate subjects.¹⁷² Moreover, unlike Grosseteste’s *Perambulauit*

not typical of the tract, but it does remind us that many of the clerical penitents addressed in this work would have also served as confessors to others.

¹⁷² Matthew Vendôme, for example, suggests that through *periphrasis*, “sententiae foeditas circuitu evitatur” (185) (“the foulness of an idea may be avoided by a roundabout statement”) (105). For others who championed *periphrasis* as a means of avoiding delicate subjects, see the discussion in Ziolkowski’s chapter on “Obscenity” 56-57.

Iudas, the *Compileison* does not mention “sodomy.” It does place non-procreative ejaculation among the “sins against nature,” but is vaguer than *Notus in Iudea Deus* about what is intended:

E sachez bien ky entotes les maneres ky / hom[m]e ou fem[m]e p[ar] sa uolunte en
euilla[n]t/e sachant sul par sei ou e [corr. illegible; BnF fol. 21a gives a] autre
p[ro]cure / pollicion de sa char. hors de mariage ou / en mariage autrement ky nature
de ho[m]/me e de fe[m]me demaunde. cest asau[er] en / autre manere ky ho[m]me
deit enfant en/gendrer. e fe[m]me conceuer; tot e[st] p[e]che / mortel. e p[e]che en
countre nat[u]re. (fol. 24a)

And know well that in all the manners that a man or woman procures by will the
pollution of his or her flesh, in watching or awareness, alone by oneself, or
accompanied by another, out of marriage or within marriage, differently than nature
requires of a man and woman—namely in another manner than man can [*lit.* should]
engender a child, and woman conceive—all [this] is mortal sin, and sin against nature.

In this first discussion of lechery, then, the author of the *Compileison* uses circumlocution to avoid discussing the sins against nature in detail. Yet although he avoids discussing non-procreative ejaculation directly here, he does go into more detail about it later, in his discussion of confession in the second section, the *Compileison de seinte penance*. It is worth noting that this particular discussion of confession is introduced by a rubric stating that it is for the “gent de religion” in particular: “Isci comen-/ ce li p[ri]mer chapitle de la secu[n]de p[ar]tie / de la tierce partie de confession. ky nus / mustre coment genz de religion se dei-/ uent de tute leur uie confesser” (fol. 67a) (“Here begins the first chapter of the second part of the third part of confession, which shows us how people of religion should confess about all their lives”). As

Dean notes, what follows is a translation of nearly all of Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas*.¹⁷³

The translation is remarkably faithful; Matthias Hessenauer, who has studied it in some depth, writes that “only rarely does [the author of the *Compileison*] make slight changes” (262). A comparison between it and its original provides valuable insight into the particular concerns of the author of the *Compileison*.

Following Grosseteste, the author of the Anglo-Norman guide goes into some detail about sexual sin in his translation of the description of lechery, but a comparison between the two reveals that he made some changes:

Perambulauit Iudas

DE LUXURIA

Fornicacionem, incestum, adulterium, viciū sodomiticū uel peculiale, uel aliquid simile actu uel uoluntate patrasti, uel aliis consensisti. Virginem deflorasti. Excitasti in te affectus libidinis. In cogitatione libidiosa delectatus fuisti. Pudenda inpudenter tractasti. Si unquam extra uas ultro fudisti. Aliquo modo curam adhibuisti ut libidini satisfaceres. Per sompnum pollutus fuisti. Quo modo concupisti. Voluisti concupisci et ob hoc te ornasti. Quo modo fornicacionibus consensisti, consilium et auxilium impendendo. In puericia aliquid luxuriosum sinistrum egisti. Aliquam inpudenter tractasti uel te tractari permisisti. (164.35)

Compileison

De luxure deit venir avant la enqueste en tiele manere: Fornicacion, avoterie, incest, pecche encontre nature ou especial pecche ou acune semblance par fet ou par volunte avez fet, ou a ceo consentu; avez virgine despucele de soen pucelage? Avez vus esmu en vus le talent de leccherie? Avez delitee en leccheruse pense? Avez vus treite hontousement les hontouses membres ou en vus ou en autres? Si vus onkes hors du dreit vessel par vostre ein degre esbandistes voste semence? Avez vus en acune manere mis diligence ke vus assez feissez a leccherie? Fuistes onkes soillee par pollucion en songe, e si vus avez este, dites coment? Avez onkes coveite ou voillez estre coveite e puis vus

¹⁷³ In the Trinity copy, parts 1-26 of the *Perambulauit Iudas* are translated on fols. 67a-70a of the *Compileison*. The *Compileison* then turns to “de dis commandementz e de set mor/teus p[e]chez. e lour especes solonc le eseing/nement de seint gregorie” (fols. 70a-71a) (the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins, and their species, according to the teaching of Saint Gregory). It then returns to the *Perambulauit Iudas*. Parts 27-35 are translated on fols. 71a-73b. Only parts 36-43 are omitted. Only two copies of *Compileison* contain this translation: the Trinity copy and that in Paris, BN, Fonds français MS 6276. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 90 does not contain the translation of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, as the text cuts off before this section, in the middle of the *Compileison de seinte penance*.

aurnastes; e si vus avez ceo fet, dites coment!
Avez consenti a fornicacions en donant
conseill ou eide? Avez fet en vostre enfance
acun pecche de luxure? Avez nule femme
trete hontousement ou suffert de lui
hontousement estre tret? (Hessenauer 310)

On one hand, the author of the *Compileison* seems to have made his version more direct by explicitly asking about the “spilling of [one’s] seed” (“espondistes voste semence”) (310), which is described more implicitly in his source (“Si unquam extra uas ultro fudisti”). The author seems to have understood this detail to be somewhat indecent, since, as we have seen, he uses circumlocution to describe it in his first discussion of lechery. However, he is careful here, as above, not to name “sodomy” directly, describing it only as a “sin against nature” (“pecche encontre nature”) (310).

Overall, then, the author of the *Compileison* is somewhat more guarded in his descriptions of sexual sin than Grosseteste. Although he is willing to go into some detail about it, this is restricted to the section translated from Grosseteste and addressed exclusively to the “gent de religion,” and, unlike Grosseteste, he avoids altogether mentioning “sodomy” by name.

To see whether this increased trepidation around sexual sin is standard in manuals for mixed audiences, it is useful to look at Robert de Sorbon’s *Qui vult vere confiteri* (c. 1260-74) and its French translation, both of which, as already noted, are “guides to confession” (“*Qui Vult*” 218).¹⁷⁴ Both contain confessional statements in the first person, but are not, strictly speaking, forms of confession, because these are introduced with indirect addresses to the sinner, such as “Et debet sic dicere peccator” (243) (“And the sinner should say this”). Although Robert’s text was written in France, it is important for our understanding of self-examination

¹⁷⁴ F. N. M. Diekstra notes that the “Traité de Confession” in the *Miroir du monde* “is a French version of Robert of Sorbon’s treatise on confession, *Qui vult vere confiteri*” (“*Qui Vult*” 215). For the dating of this latter work, see Diekstra, “*Qui Vult*” 216.

writing in England: this text, or a work like it, was incorporated into the *Miroir du monde* (c. 1248-1280) (Raymo, Whitaker, and Sternglant 7), which was, in turn, incorporated into the *Somme le roi*, and this work, as we have seen, had considerable influence in England (Diekstra, “Introduction” 215-16). Diekstra, who prints both Latin and French versions, presents a convincing argument for the primacy of the Latin while noting that “it is not inconceivable that among the Latin versions there are instances of ‘backformation’, in which the French served as the actual model rather than the Latin exemplar” (“*Qui Vult*” 231-32).

Both versions printed by Diekstra are important for establishing the relationship between the audience of a manual for penitents and its author’s relative willingness to describe private sins, since they both imply a mixed audience.¹⁷⁵ Both contain “worldly” sins, such as, under the heading of “avarice,” disguising meat with the intent to deceive the buyer.¹⁷⁶ Both also list some sins that would have been particular to certain forms of clerical life. So, both include, under ‘avarice’ the buying and selling of benefices, along with an acknowledgement that this type of

¹⁷⁵ The only comment that Diekstra makes regarding the audience of these two works is that they were written for “laymen” (“*Qui Vult*” 218), but it would seem that he means “those examining their consciences” since this statement occurs in a larger passage stating that the text was designed for penitents (as opposed to priests), and since he does not provide any evidence for why the text is for the laity in particular.

¹⁷⁶ The Latin text gives: “Alia species [apparet] in carnibus; et fit ibi dolositas quando ille qui vendit carnes facit credere de carne suina vel suilla quod sit porcina et [apponit] ibi signum porci; vel [de] carne caprina quod sit arietina; vel simul ponit carnem veterem non habentem bonum odorem cum recenti, [et ita] aliqui decipiuntur” (250) (“Another species [of this sin] is found in meat; and in this case when the person who is selling the meat claims that sow’s meat [*lit.* the flesh of *suina* or *suilla*] is boar’s meat and labels it as such, or that goat’s meat is mutton, or, in the same way, disguises meat that is aged and does not have a good odor as new, and so deceives some”).

The French text gives: “En char vendre fait on trecherie quant cil ki le vent fait entendre de char de truie ke c’est chars de [marle; et si mest en saegne de marle], u de char de kievre ke c’est chars de mouton; u il mesle le vielle [et ki ne flaire mie souef] avoec le jovene” (250) (“Fraud takes place in the selling of meat when the person selling the meat claims that sow’s meat is boar’s meat, or that goat’s meat is mutton; or he mixes the old that has gone off with the fresh meat”).

avarice pertains mostly to the clergy and others living religious lives. That said, the Latin text occasionally contains more sins particular to clerical readers than the French one; in the same section on the sin of avarice, the Latin text gives both the selling of benefices and the selling of sacraments, whereas the French gives only the selling of benefices.¹⁷⁷

As always, we cannot take the implied audience—either clerical or lay—of sins as the implied audience of the whole text. But in the case of these two versions of *Qui vult vere confiteri*, the manual with the fewest monastic sins—the French text—is more explicitly addressed to a more general audience; it alone ends with a statement that it is for all good Christians.¹⁷⁸ So, while both texts construct a general audience to some degree, the French one is particularly committed to this audience.

Like the *Compileison*, another text with both an intended and implied mixed audience, both versions of *Qui vult vere confiteri* exhibit some trepidation around sexual sin. This is especially true of the section on sins against nature. Unlike Grosseteste, Robert, in his Latin text, avoids using the term “sodomy,” and describes this sin circuitously: “Sextus ramus luxurie est quando [homo facit] quoddam peccatum contra naturam, de quo legitur Deum fecisse talem vindictam quod quinque civitates destructe [et combuste] sunt igne fetido propter ardorem vel fetorem luxurie.” (255) (“The sixth branch of lechery is when man does a kind of sin against

¹⁷⁷ The Latin text has: “Septimus ramus avaricie est symonia, quando venduntur vel emuntur sacramenta vel prebende [vel aliquid] ecclesiasticum vel religionis. Sed tale peccatum pertinet ad clericos et religiosos.” (251) (“The seventh branch of avarice is simony, when sacraments, or prebends, or anything ecclesiastical or religious, is sold or bought”).

The French text has: “La sisime branche est simonie, quant lais hom vent u achate les benefisses de Sainte Eglise. Cis pechiés monte plus as clers u as gens de religion ke il ne fait as lais.” (251) (“The sixth branch is simony, when men sell or buy benefices of Holy Church. This sin is of more importance to members of the clergy or to people of religion than it is to layfolk”).

¹⁷⁸ See above, page 87.

nature, of which we read God took [*lit. made*] such vengeance that five cities were destroyed and were burnt in stinking fire, because of the heat and the stench of lechery”).

In this discussion of sins against nature, Robert describes masturbation in terms that are also somewhat vague: “quando homo facit peccatum per se sicut faceret cum muliere et percipit bene quod est contra naturam; vel quando etiam illicite et [inhoneste] virilia membra sua vel aliorum tenuerit vel palpaverit vel [respexerit]” (255) (“when a man commits a sin by himself as he would do with a woman and perceives well that it is against nature, and when he illicitly and shamefully holds, feels, or touches his own or others’ male members”). Robert finally notes that, aside from these ways of sinning against nature, sin can be committed “aliis modis qui non debent dici in aperto, sed omnia in confessione debent manifestari” (255) (“by other ways that should not be said in the open, but all these things should be declared openly in confession”). Where Grosseteste, whose text addresses monks and their spiritual director, was willing to list a variety of sins in this category, including sodomy, Robert describes these sins more circuitously.¹⁷⁹

Following the general tendency to be more guarded when writing for a wider audience, the later, French version, which contains fewer clerical sins, is even more cautious about describing the sins against nature than the Latin one. It includes the same vague description of sins against nature as those “dont Dex fist tel vengeance ke .v. cités en [furent fondues et arses] de feu puant” (255) (“for which God took such vengeance that five cities were melted and burnt

¹⁷⁹ There is, however, one copy of this text that goes into relatively explicit detail about the carnal acts that it purports to discourage. Diekstra writes that “its elaborate dwelling on salacious details would appear to move far beyond the requirements of pastoral care” (“*Qui Vult*” 224). However, because Robert is generally more cautious in his treatment of sexual sin, and because this version is only preserved in one manuscript, Diekstra concludes that this more explicit copy cannot be authorial (226).

in a stinking fire”). But it omits the description of “members” from the discussion of masturbation, and does not mention touching the genitals of others: “quant li hons [u] la feme [fait] le pechié par soi et bien s’en apierchoit c’est contre nature” (255) (“when the man or the woman commits the sin by himself or herself and knows well that it is against nature”). While both versions are circuitous in their descriptions of sexual sin, that addressed to a wider audience contains even fewer details. We cannot simply write this silence off as part of a wider tendency toward abridgement; although the French version omits several passages from the Latin, it also contains expansions, such as the lengthy section about penance at the end of the text (258-59).

What emerges from the comparison thus far is that, out of the five texts examined, the ones addressed expressly to clerical audiences—those by Grosseteste—are more explicit about sins against nature than those that address or imply both clerical and lay audiences—the *Compileision* and both versions of *Qui vult vere confiteri*. Moreover, of this latter work, the version that is addressed explicitly to both clerical and lay audiences—the French one—is more circuitous about “sins against nature” than the Latin. This correlation suggests that trepidation around sexual sins is heightened in those works addressed to a general audience.

To test this theory, it is useful to turn to the *Somme le roi*, since it was written for courtly readers and, as already noted, has some material in common with *Qui vult vere confiteri*.¹⁸⁰ In particular, the first two tracts of the *Somme le roi*, that on the Ten Commandments and that on the seven deadly sins, are derived from the *Miroir du monde* which, in turn, is indebted to the text just discussed, *Qui vult vere confiteri*.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ For the audience of the *Somme le roi*, see page 85.

¹⁸¹ For the purposes of the current study, it would, of course, be valuable to examine how private sins are treated in the *Miroir du monde*, but this latter manual for penitents has not been edited, and the wide divergence between copies complicates any analysis of the text.

The treatment of sins against nature in the *Somme le roi* stands in stark contrast to that of *Qui vult vere confiteri*. To illustrate the differences, it is worth quoting the relevant passage of the *Somme le roi* at length:

Li derrains est li plus vilz et li plus orz, qui ne fet a nomer. C'est pechiez contre nature que li deables enseingne a fere a home ou a fame en mout de manieres qui ne font a nomer pour la matiere qui est trop abominable. Mes en confession le doit dire cil ou cele a cui il est avenu, car de tant comme li pechiez est plus grant et plus horribles, de tant vaut plus la confession, car la honte que on a dou dire est grant partie de la penitence. Cist pechiez desplait tant a Dieu que il en fist plovoir feu ardent et sofre puant sus la cité de Sodome et de Gomorre, et en fondi .V. citez en abisme. (150)

The last is the most vile and the most putrid, which is not fit to be named. It is sin against nature, which the devil teaches man or woman to do in many manners that cannot be named, on account of the matter being too abominable. But in confession, he or she to whom [this sin] has befallen [*lit.* come] must say it, because the greater and more horrible the sin is, the more important confession is, because the shame that we have to say it is a big part of the penance. This sin displeases God so much that he made ardent fire and stinking sulfur rain on the city of Sodom and Gomorrah, and plunged five cities into the abyss.

Like Robert, Laurent avoids using the term “sodomy.” His account of sins against nature is even more censored than Robert’s. Gone are the comments about touching genitals, and, aside from

the cloaked nod to Sodom and Gomorrah, Laurent's account of "sins against nature" is reduced to an insistence that these sins are simply too horrible to be described.

When we turn to other contemporary manuals for penitents addressed explicitly to the laity, we find equally powerful concerns about sins done in private. In the *Manuel des péchés*, these are first raised in the prologue. Here, William insists that one will not find any private sins in his text: "De privetez n'i troveret rien, / Kar mal put fere ou poy de bien" (61-62) ("You will not find anything about private matters here / because it can lead to harm, or little good"). His choice of "privetez" here is suggestive, demarcating those sins that happen in secret from those that could be acquired through social observation. William's self-censorship reflects what Foucault describes as the urge to "subjugate [sex] at the level of language"—one that Foucault considers a seventeenth-century development (17).

The context behind William's rejection of "privetez" is particularly suggestive. The lines just quoted follow from a passage about pleasure in reading. Immediately before William says that he will not include any "privetez," he writes: "Ke plus en lisaunt seit delitus, / Cuntres nus mettrum vus aucuns" (57-58 qtd. in Schemmann 229) ("So that reading more is delightful, / We will add for you some stories") (Schemmann 229).¹⁸² These stories are supposed to help the reader hate sin: "Sicum les seins nus unt cunté / Pur plus fere hayr peché" (59-60) ("[these tales are] just as the saints have told us / to make sin more hated"). This idea, that delightful ("delitus") stories will make us hate sin more, is consistent with many of the justifications of literary pleasure described by Glending Olson, that stress that literary pleasure supports a text's moralizing goals (19-38). But the progression of ideas in the wider passage—from an insistence that stories are included to evoke a hatred of sin through literary pleasure, to an insistence that

¹⁸² I have adapted the second line of Schemmann's translation to bring it closer to the original.

private sins are not included, because nothing good will come of them—is curious. The proximity of these two ideas suggests a link between them, as if William is suggesting that “private sins,” like the stories he includes, could delight the reader, albeit in the wrong way.

Indeed, William often uses “deliter” and its analogues in the context of sinful pleasures. So, for example, in the tale of the devil’s confession, the devil states that various sins, including lechery and gluttony, “mut me delit” (9140) (“delight me very much”).¹⁸³ There is, then, the possibility that William’s concern as it is expressed in the prologue is not just that the description of private sins might provoke his audience to commit them—although this is clearly a central part of it—but that such description might prompt his audience to take the wrong kind of pleasure in his text.

William generally follows through on his promise not to include these sins. In his discussion of lechery he avoids the sins against nature, limiting himself to seven branches: fornication, adultery, incest, lechery between the ordained, taking a woman’s virginity, rape of an unmarried woman, and the rape of another man’s wife (5645-6004). The descriptions of the branches of these sins are general and do not include specific sexual acts or body parts: “Le premer est fornicatiun: / C’est a dire kant simples hum / E femme hors d’espusage / S’asemblent en lur fol curage” (5651-5654) (“The first is fornication, that is to say, when simple men and women meet by wanton desire outside of marriage”).

In his adaptation, Mannyng repeats William’s concern, but places it earlier than it appears in William’s text: “Of pryuytees speke y nouȝt: / Þe pryuytees wyle y nouȝt name, / For noun þarfore shuld me blame” (30-33) (“Of private [sins] I will not speak, the private [sins] I will not name, for none therefore should I be blamed”). Avoiding private sins is, according to

¹⁸³ Other examples occur at lines 1095, 1477, 3004, 3013, 3405, 6058, and 10788.

Mannyng, a way of avoiding guilt. The implication here is that including sexual sins in a text could make it offensive. The same idea appears in Henry of Lancaster's *Livre de seyntz medicines* (1354), where Henry explains that he will not describe his sins of lechery because if he did "le livre feust plus haiez" (69) ("the book might be the more loathed") (137).

Toward the end of the prologue, Mannyng repeats his intention to eschew descriptions of private sins: "Parfore may hyt & gode skyle why / Handlyng synne be clepyd oponly. / For hyt touchyþ no pryuyte / But opon synne þat callyd may be" (137-40) ("Therefore may [this book], and with good reason, be called 'Handlyng Synne,' and openly. For it touches on no private [things], but those sins that can be called "open" [i.e. public]"). In other words, since it avoids private sins, it can be called by its title openly. The implication is that only in this way can a book be made fit for the public. Here, as in the *Livre de seyntz medicines*, books that include private sins are cast as suspect.

Like his source, Mannyng is generally true to his word, and avoids discussing private sins in any depth. He avoids the "sins against nature" completely and describes the species of lechery without detail (7339-8160). Like its source, then, and like the *Somme le roi*, Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* exhibits significant concern surrounding private sins.

Since the self-examination tradition of the *Manuel des péchés* and that of the *Somme le roi* had the greatest influence on English self-examination texts,¹⁸⁴ the trepidation around private sins in these manuals is suggestive of contemporary views of the subject. A comparison of the treatment of sexual sins in these lay-oriented texts to that in Grosseteste's clerical texts, and to those intended for mixed audiences—the *Compileison* and *Qui vult vere confiteri*—reveals that authors addressing the clergy exclusively were more comfortable including details about sexual

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 2.

sin than authors addressing both the clergy and the laity. This might seem surprising when we consider that monks, and other members of the clergy, faced higher demands of chastity than layfolk.

Why, then, were authors more comfortable describing private sins when addressing clerical audiences than lay ones? It is, of course, possible that this is because many of the sins in question were closely associated with monastic enclosure. James Brundage finds an emphasis on homosexuality and masturbation in pre-Lateran “penitential” guides for priests and suggests that this reflects “the experience and concerns of the monastic environment in which most penitential writers received their spiritual and intellectual formation” (174). Jacqueline Murray, speaking of pastoral literature more generally, observes that “confession had . . . evolved in the peculiarly masculine monastic environment of the early Middle Ages” (81). However, even if these sins were thought to be particularly common in monastic environments, this does not explain why they would be censored in manuals that address both clerical and lay audiences, like the *Compileison*. We would expect, rather, that these manuals that address clerical and lay audience would include these sins for the clerical ones. It seems more likely that authors were more comfortable describing private sins for clerical audiences because they worried that lay ones were more prone to trying new sins than clerical ones. It is not hard to imagine that Grosseteste, writing for a monastic community, was less concerned about introducing new sins to his readers than Laurent would have been. Moreover, authors like Grosseteste might have been less concerned about being accused of producing illicit content than those like Laurent. This is certainly suggested by Mannyng’s statement that his not mentioning private sins will shield him from blame.

It would seem, then, that concerns that the confessional interrogation could inadvertently teach penitents new sins spilled over into self-examination writing, especially into those texts addressed explicitly to the laity. This matters, because it shows that the creation of manuals for penitents for lay audiences raised concerns among the members of the Church who produced them. The development of these texts, and the extension of penitential discipline that this process represented, were not straightforward. Members of the Church recognized that, while extending the confessional apparatus, they were also losing some control over how this apparatus would be interpreted by their audiences.

On one hand, the creation of manuals for penitents that address the laity, such as the *Compileison*, is suggestive of how far Innocent's 1215 injunction to confession had been internalized by penitents and had permeated society. These texts represent the same widening of the Church's power that Tentler and others find in manuals for confessors. But, at the same time, the concerns that would seem to be reflected in manuals addressed to the laity over sexual sin suggest that members of the Church feared that the extension of this power could inadvertently introduce new sins.

Chapter 5 – “So Heigh a Doctrine I Lete to Divines”: Vernacular Commentary on the Essentials of the Faith in Manuals for Penitents from 1350 to 1400 and the *Parson’s Tale*

Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* is now the best known fourteenth-century manual for penitents. However, its place among manuals for penitents was not recognized until relatively recently. For much of the past century, confusion about the text abounded due in part to the *Tale*’s parallels with other religious treatises, and, in part, to the effect of what Georgianna describes as a distinctly Protestant current in early twentieth-century literary scholarship that de-emphasized Chaucer’s orthodoxy to the Church of his day.¹⁸⁵ Responding to Mark H. Liddell (1901), who had dismissed the tale as “a clumsy combination of two religious treatises” (256), Coolidge O. Chapman (1928) described it as a medieval sermon (231). In so doing, Chapman defended the tale’s unity (233-34), but also denied the possibility that it could have served as a site of in-depth reflection for medieval audiences; quoting from G.R. Owst’s seminal *Preaching in Medieval England* (1926), Chapman noted that a sermon is designed for one-time delivery to a languid and inattentive audience: “the preacher can make a recapitulation of his sermon, so that if they have neglected the beginning, the people may know on what the sermon and its conclusions are based” (229). By classifying it as a sermon—a genre that, at the time, was rarely studied in terms of its literary qualities—Chapman put a damper on serious literary study of the text.

Chapman’s interpretation, by emphasizing the *Tale*’s sober tone, also reinforced a tendency, described by Patterson (331) and more recently by Frances McCormack (15), to read the Parson’s “meditacioun” (X. 55) as a part of Chaucer’s retraction. The retraction itself was, at the time, taken as fundamentally un-Chaucerian, and therefore sidelined in wider studies of the

¹⁸⁵ Georgianna describes attempts to co-opt Chaucer for the Protestant cause in “The Protestant Chaucer.”

Tales. So, the tendency to view the *Parson's Tale* as part of Chaucer's retraction further reinforced a view that the *Tale* was unworthy of study.

In 1936, Homer G. Pfander observed that the tale should not be counted among sermons but among "manuals of religious instruction," without distinguishing between manuals for interrogating penitents and those for penitents themselves (243). W. A. Pantin (1955) described it among other vernacular manuals "intended both for the laity and for unlearned priests" (221), as a "rather conventional example of a treatise on confession" (226-27). E. T. Donaldson (1975) described it in more specific terms as a manual for confessors (1112). It was not until Patterson (1978) took up the question of the tale's generic affiliations that it was understood within the wider corpus of manuals for penitents. Patterson insisted that "[i]t is an instance of a clearly defined and recognizable genre, the manual intended exclusively for penitential use" (339). Yet the view that the *Parson's Tale* is a sermon, or a manual for priests, continues to hold some currency.¹⁸⁶

The question of the *Parson's Tale's* generic affiliations is an important one. In recent years, it has been read as heterodox—or, if not heterodox, as a challenge to the established church—on the grounds that it subverts the conventions of vernacular theological writing. Here, the discussion of the text's place within vernacular theological writing intersects with a broader, ongoing debate about the tale's—and its teller's—potentially Lollard undercurrent. With respect to the Parson himself, it is now rare to find a scholar who accepts uncritically the host's

¹⁸⁶See, for example, Pitard's reading of the tale, described on page 180 below. Siegfried Wenzel followed Patterson in describing the *Parson's Tale* among "penitential handbooks" ("Notes" 249), but did not distinguish between penitential writing aimed at penitents, such as that in Edmund of Abingdon's *Speculum religiosorum*, and that aimed at priests to assist them in their pastoral duties, such as Thomas of Chobham's confessional *summa* ("Notes" 255-56).

accusations in the epilogue to the *Man of Law's Tale* that the Parson is a "Lollere" (II.1177),¹⁸⁷ since any attempt to characterize the Parson as a Lollard is complicated by two strong pieces of evidence of his orthodoxy. First, we are told that he will not put on a "spiced conscience" (I.526), which John C. Hirsch takes as a sign that there is "nothing sudden about his religion, and no hint of fashion" (417), and, second, the Parson joins the pilgrimage, a practice Lollards fervently disavowed (Pitard 306). Yet although the Parson cannot be considered a Lollard in any straightforward sense, many nevertheless agree with the Shipman that the Parson "wolde sowen som difficulte" (II.1182), and his tale, and its supposed subversion of the conventions of vernacular theological writing, is often used as key evidence for his heterodox leanings. Since Chaucer's departures from the tradition in which the tale participates have become crucial to these debates, this tradition demands close examination.

Despite a growing trend in recent years toward comparing the *Parson's Tale* to other manuals for penitents, a thorough examination of this tradition, and the tale's place within it, is still lacking. The goal of the present analysis, then, is to more fully contextualize the *Parson's Tale* among contemporary self-examination works. Aside from helping us understand how the Parson departs from this tradition, establishing some of the normative characteristics of manuals for penitents of the fourteenth century will further the broader aims of the present study of elucidating important stages in the development of manuals for penitents. With the aim of identifying those characteristics of this tradition that would have been recognizable to the greatest number of medieval readers, this investigation will centre around those manuals that, judging from the number of surviving copies, were the most widely read: *Pore Caitif* and the

¹⁸⁷ But see McCormack 17 for those who would read the Parson as a Lollard.

Speculum vitae.¹⁸⁸ As already noted, *Pore Caitif* fits into this body of texts only partially, but it is nevertheless an important text in this context.¹⁸⁹

***The Parson's Tale* and the Conventions of Vernacular Theology: Current Perspectives**

Although many who read the *Parson's Tale* as a challenge to the established Church do so on the grounds that it rejects contemporary conventions of vernacular theology, there is little accord among them about which of these conventions Chaucer challenges and what in his departures is significant.¹⁹⁰ Derrick G. Pitard (2004) argues that the tale strays from the conventions of vernacular devotional writing by offering what he considers Latinate academic theology. His argument is worth considering in detail. He claims that the *Parson's Tale* is “precisely the kind of tract on penance that existed to help parish priests—parsons—with confession” (315). He sees it as an “academic” text because it is “a translation and compilation of three Latin penitential tracts originally intended for use by clerics,” it contains “internal references to various academic authorities, including Saint Jerome, Saint Bernard, Saint Augustine, and of course the Bible,” it “exhibits a dearth, and hence an apparent mistrust, of

¹⁸⁸ For the popularity of these texts, see above, page 68.

¹⁸⁹ For *Pore Caitif's* place among manuals for penitents, see above page 68.

¹⁹⁰ While arguments for the *Tale's* heterodoxy often depend on its relationship to contemporary conventions of vernacular theology, this approach to the issue is in no way universal. For example, in her book-length study of the *Parson's Tale* (2007), Frances McCormack reads the tale as heterodox, but she is less concerned with its relationship to the expectations for vernacular works and more with its links to Lollard texts. She finds in the Parson's biblical translations echoes of the Wycliffite bible, and concludes that “Chaucer's Parson's Tale is a subversive text on these grounds alone” (183). McCormack identifies insinuations of Lollardy throughout the tale, but states that the Parson “does not adopt categorically a Lollard or Anti-Lollard position” (236).

narrative plotting and poetic imagery,” and because it contains “a hierarchically organized, encyclopedic attention to detail” (299).

Pitard claims that these supposedly “academic” elements make the *Parson’s Tale* distinctive among texts in English—“the language of the *illiterati*, a language with little or no academic tradition” (299). He argues that, “Before the last half of the fourteenth century, and especially the last quarter, academic treatises on religious matters intended for lay consumption are rare” (299). According to Pitard, the Parson’s vernacularization and laicization of high theology is somewhat subversive. Pitard writes that it “gives penitents the means to textualize themselves and thus become their own interpreters” (324), and he claims that, because this is a goal of the Lollard movement, the *Tale* is somewhat subversive. In this interpretation, “Chaucer’s Parson and his *Tale* become not a fictional representation of Lollardy, per se, but of changes in lay devotional practice that Lollardy exploits” (316). But Pitard’s conclusions are based on a limited number of vernacular theological texts, and his evidence looks tenuous when we compare the *Parson’s Tale* to a wider variety of these. A text like the widely-popular *Somme le roi*, an exhaustive prose compilation derived heavily from Peraldus, would certainly meet Pitard’s requirements for an “academic treatise,” and *Somme le roi* has an implied lay audience. The “academic” nature of the *Parson’s Tale*, then, is only unique from the perspective of Pitard’s limited list of vernacular theological texts.

In her recent doctoral dissertation, Dawn Fleurette Colley (2012) arrived at a conclusion, similar to that of Pitard, that “the *Parson’s Tale* draws on texts that were intended to guide religious leaders (confession manuals for priests) and were primarily written for readers within religious institutions; it reaches out beyond these particular audiences to proffer its knowledge to a secular readership” (169). Here, Colley, like Pitard, assumes that Chaucer brings “academic”

material, which she considers the realm of the clergy, into the hands of supposedly less academic lay audiences.

Colley's argument, insofar as it depends, like Pitard's, on an unrepresentative sample of texts, is also suspect. Colley draws on Patterson's study of the *Parson's Tale*, but she sees the *Tale* as participating in a wider category of confessional texts than Patterson does: "manuals intended either to help the individual prepare for confession or to instruct the priest on methods to tease out the entirety of the confessant's sinful admissions and to determine proper penance" (174). She therefore compares the *Parson's Tale* to three manuals for penitents—*Handlyng Synne*, *The Weye of Paradys*, *Jacob's Well*—and one for priests—*Instructions for Parish Priests* (174). Although Colley treats these texts as normative within the penitential tradition, she does not explain why she has chosen them. It is likely that she chose the *Weye of Paradys* and *Jacob's Well* since they are contemporary with the *Parson's Tale*, but *Handlyng Synne*, written at least a century before the *Tale*, is a puzzling choice, as is Mirk's *Instructions*, since, as noted, Mirk was writing for confessors.

Several scholars have considered the way that the *Tale* challenges the conventions of vernacular theology by comparing it to some of the manuals for penitents that Patterson identified. So, like Pitard and Colley, Katherine C. Little views the *Parson's Tale* as a departure from the conventions of vernacular theological writing, but she arrives at this conclusion by comparing it to *The Boke of Penance*, which circulated with the *Cursor mundi* (95, 99). Based on this comparison, Little suggests that the *Parson's Tale* is unique in its emphasis on contrition and in its interest in the way that the vernacular shapes the self. This suggestion, that the tale emphasizes the self, sounds much like Pitard's view that the text encourages penitents to

“become their own interpreters,” and, much like Pitard, Little sees this as a reformist position, but not a wholesale espousal of Lollardy (94-100).

Not everyone who reads the *Parson's Tale* as a departure from the conventions of its day takes this as a sign of the Parson's reformist sympathies. Patterson, whose position will be discussed at greater length below, holds that the *Tale's* departures from convention reinforce a “concern with the largest possible context for individual acts, the Christian *historia salutis*” (370). For Patterson, the *Tale* should not be read as a commentary on the pilgrims of Chaucer's fiction alone, but as a meditation on all men (369-70).

Karen Winstead (2009) also compares the text to contemporary works for penitents: the three particular works that Patterson, in his essay on the work's place among manuals for penitents, had suggested were analogous. Winstead holds that, in these comparable works, “references to the priest and to the importance of oral confession recur throughout” (248). The *Parson's Tale*, she argues, differs from these in its relative lack of interest in the priest's role in confession. She writes, for example, that Chaucer's work “emphasizes that contrition, alone of the three components of penance, is absolutely essential, and the penitent's heart replaces shrift of mouth as the dominating theme of his tract” (248). For Winstead, this emphasis on contrition downplays the role of the priest, and the institutional Church, in confession. But unlike the others examined here, Winstead does not view the Parson's as a heterodox or progressive position, but as a return to a “traditional, more nuanced, flexible and intellectual orthodoxy that had thrived for centuries” (251).

What emerges from these divergent perspectives is a sense that with the *Parson's Tale* Chaucer is reimagining the boundaries and aims of vernacular theological writing. But even among those who recognize that the *Tale* is a manual for penitents, there is little agreement about

the characteristics of this tradition, or about how Chaucer is subverting it. The discussion that follows builds on the findings of previous chapters to identify some of the normative characteristics of this tradition, and, in so doing, to establish what is unique to the *Parson's Tale*. By shedding light on the late fourteenth-century tradition of manuals for penitents, the discussion that follows will not only help to contextualize the *Parson's Tale*, but also to forward the broader aims of this study.

Before we do this, however, we must consider a few issues that are central to how we interpret the *Parson's Tale*. The first concerns its date, which is crucial for understanding its cultural context. As Benson writes in his explanatory notes to the *Riverside Chaucer*, it was once commonly believed that the *Parson's Tale* was one of Chaucer's first, but scholars questioned this on the grounds that the *Tale* seems to contain explicit allusions back to earlier tales (956). The most comprehensive study of these allusions was conducted by Patterson, who argues, based on the "lines of influence" between the *Parson's Tale* and Chaucer's other tales, that Chaucer wrote the *Parson's Tale* after the others (369).

Central to the dating of the *Tale* is its relationship to the *Retraction*, which follows immediately after it.¹⁹¹ If it could be proven conclusively that the two were written as a unit, this would support a later dating of the *Parson's Tale* since, as Patterson notes, any attempt to read the *Retraction* as early would have to face the difficult task of accounting for its reference to "the tales of Caunterbury," as well as its rejection of "translaciouns and enditynges of wordly

¹⁹¹The relationship between the *Parson's* and *Manciple's Tales* has also been the subject of some debate. The usual order, in which the Parson follows the Manciple, has been questioned by some editors due to textual inconsistencies, although scholars now accept that this placement is supported by manuscript evidence. Helen Cooper observes that there is an editorial tendency to divide these into two separate fragments based on textual inconsistencies between the two, but she notes that these "do not justify disregarding the overwhelming manuscript evidence that the two tales belong together" (395). The same argument is made by Stephen D. Powell 40-42.

vanitees” (357). Persuasive manuscript evidence certainly suggests that the *Parson’s Tale* and the *Retraction* were written as a unit, as Stephen Partridge has shown (112-127). Current scholarship would therefore favour a late date for the *Parson’s Tale*, toward the end of Chaucer’s life (1400). But none of the evidence surveyed thus far can rule out conclusively the possibility that Chaucer wrote the *Tale* before some of his others, and this is undoubtedly why Benson, in the explanatory notes of the *Riverside Chaucer*, writes that, “No external or internal-external evidence is available to determine the date of the tale” (956).

Another important interpretive problem that must be considered here is whether we can read the Parson and his tale as representing a unified character. While early twentieth-century critics such as G. L. Kittredge and Bertrand H. Bronson held what is known as the “dramatic” approach to the tales—one in which each tale shapes, and is shaped by, the character of its teller¹⁹²—this view was problematized by D. W. Robertson, among others. Robertson rejected this reading as being ahistorical, arguing that for Chaucer and his contemporaries, the pilgrims—and, indeed, most medieval representations—would not have been read as characters with psychological consistency and motivations, but rather as “types” (206). As Stephen Henry Rigby observes in his overview of these two approaches, many have questioned whether Robertson’s approach—which Rigby calls a “patristic” approach—is, in fact, grounded in a faithful representation of medieval literary theory (101-102). Moreover, Rigby notes that even if we grant that medieval literary theory was fundamentally allegorical, this does not mean that

¹⁹² Kittredge wrote, for example, that, “Structurally regarded, the stories are merely long speeches expressing, directly, or indirectly, the characters of the several persons” (155 qtd. in Bronson 77). Bronson also holds that the tales are reflections of their tellers, but he holds that, for many of the tales, this was not their original function. He writes, for example, that it was “only very late that [Chaucer] came to full awareness that the context affected the stories themselves, their impact and their significance” (71).

Chaucer was “unaware of more novelistic modes of characterisation or that dramatic readings of the tales must always be rejected” (101). He adds that, “We do not, therefore, have to choose between either seeing Chaucer’s pilgrims as personified abstractions or as full-blown, psychological portraits” (101). So, even if we were to insist on reading the Parson as he would have appeared to Chaucer’s contemporaries, we could still understand him as a unified and consistent character.

Related to this interpretive difficulty is the question of whether we should consider the *Parson’s Tale* part of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* at all. Some of those seeking to read the *Canterbury Tales* “as Chaucer intended it”—itself a vexed goal—have dismissed the *Parson’s Tale* on the supposition that Chaucer translated it from a previously existing work, and that it therefore does not represent true “Chaucerian originality,” although, as already noted in the introduction, we have no evidence either to support or to refute this view. There is therefore little reason to dismiss the *Parson’s Tale* from Chaucer’s oeuvres on these grounds.

Late Fourteenth-Century Manuals for Penitents

Patterson notices one particular difference between the *Parson’s Tale* and contemporary manuals for penitents: that while most of these contain commentary on biblically-derived essentials and prayers, like the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the *Pater noster*, the *Parson’s Tale* does not (340). The only framework that the Parson gives for identifying sin is the seven deadly sins. The absence of these biblically-derived tracts is, in fact, highlighted by the Parson. He states that he must leave an exposition on the *Pater noster* to the “maistres of theologie” (1043), and, speaking of the Ten Commandments, states “so heigh a doctrine I lete to divines” (957).

For Patterson, these essentials of the faith are incidental to the tradition. He writes, for example, that *The Clensyng of Mannes Sowle*, *The Weye to Paradys*, and *The Boke of Penance* all contain “didactic materials that are only tangentially relevant: catechetical accounts of the ten commandments, the twelve articles of the faith, and so forth” (340). Patterson therefore reads the Parson’s avoidance of these essentials as a rejection of “anything that is not specifically penitential” (340). According to Patterson, by omitting this “catechetical” material, “Chaucer has elected to use just those elements from the paradigms of religious writing that will enforce a sense of theoretical cohesion” (340).

We have already seen that these essentials of the faith are common in manuals for penitents, but to evaluate Patterson’s claims, it is worth looking more closely at how these essentials are treated in manuals from the second half of the fourteenth century, since these are more representative of the tradition at the moment that Chaucer was writing. An important text for this purpose is *Pore Caitif*, since, as we have seen, *Pore Caitif* seems to have circulated widely, and it is likely that it had an influence on contemporary expectations.

At first glance, *Pore Caitif* does not seem to belong among works like *The Parson’s Tale*, nor the *Somme le roi*, nor, indeed, in any grouping; traditionally, it has been considered a disorderly mess.¹⁹³ We must therefore begin by considering its suitability for contextualizing the *Parson’s Tale*. As we shall see, when we place *Pore Caitif* alongside earlier manuals for penitents, its indebtedness to this group of texts becomes clear. Since its contents are important for this comparison, they are listed here.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Gillespie, for example, writes that, “Though there is an intelligible rationale for the ordering of the first half of the work, which parallels catechetic manuals, it is more difficult to see any logic in the ordering of the rest” (332).

¹⁹⁴ The tracts are listed in the order given by Teresa Brady in her doctoral dissertation on *Pore Caitif* (“Introduction” xlvii). The Middle English titles are those assigned by Brady.

1. Prolog (The Prologue)
2. Þe crede (The Creed)
3. Prolog of þe heestis (Prologue of the Commandments)
4. Prolog of þe pater noster (Prologue of the *Pater noster*)
5. Conceil of crist (The Counsel of Christ)
6. Vertuous pacience (Virtuous Patience)
7. Of temptacioun (Of Temptation)
8. Chartre of heuene (The Charter of Heaven)
9. Of goostli bateile (Of Spiritual Battle)
10. Þe name of ihesu (The Name of Jesus)
11. Þe loue of ihesu (The Love of Jesus)
12. Of verri meeknes (Of True Meekness)
13. Þe effect of wille (The Effect of Will)
14. Actiif liif & contemplacioun (Active Life and Contemplation)
15. Þe mirrour of chastite (The Mirror of Chastity)

This same arrangement of tracts, plotting an ascension toward virtue, appears in twenty-two copies of the text though, as Trivedi warns, given the variable nature of the treatise, we must be careful not to take this order as an “authentic” one (23).

The second, third, and fourth tracts were, by the time *Pore Caitif* was written—c. 1360-1400, according to Trivedi (19)—in use by priests for identifying sin, and commonly included in manuals for penitents.¹⁹⁵ The subsequent sections, which are quite brief—described in the prologue as “short sentencis excitinge men to heuenli desiir” (2)—are cast as rungs of a ladder,

¹⁹⁵ See this discussion in chapter 1.

leading the penitent from the “ground of belief” to the divine.¹⁹⁶ These tracts might seem out of place in a manual for penitents, but a sense of coherence emerges when we consider the overall structure of *Pore Caitif* alongside that of the *Somme le roi*, a work which, as we have seen, was by far the most popular thirteenth-century manual for penitents. Laurent’s manual starts with the Ten Commandments, the Twelve Articles of the Faith, and the seven deadly sins. After these tracts, Laurent offers a “ladder of virtue” (“L’eloge de la vertu”) and a tract on virtue (“le traité de vertu”), both of which have much in common with the ten tracts that make up the “ladder of dyuerse rongis” in *Pore Caitif*.¹⁹⁷ Even *Pore Caitif*’s “Of goostli bateile,” a tract that might seem out of place in a ladder of virtue, finds a parallel in the discussion of nobility in the *Somme le roi*, which compares spiritual bravery to courage in battle (273-282). Although *Pore Caitif*, by omitting a separate discussion of the seven deadly sins, places greater emphasis on virtue than manuals for penitents such as the *Somme le roi*, it nevertheless has much in common with these manuals.

We can also find a penitential focus in the two works that Trivedi, through an extensive examination of the affiliations between manuscripts, calls “companion pieces” to *Pore Caitif*: *The Three Arrows of Doomsday* and the *Mirror for Sinners*, a text which is, as already noted, a translation of the *Speculum peccatoris* (50). All three appear together in ten of the surviving manuscripts (50). Trivedi posits that the *Mirror* was “the original ‘companion piece’” to *Pore Caitif*, while the *Three Arrows* gained its inclusion in the guide through an association with the

¹⁹⁶ “ffor þus it bihoueþ to stie up. as bi a laddir of dyuerse rongis: fro þe ground of bileeue: in to þe keping of goddis heestis / and so vp fro vertu in to vertu til to he se god of syon: regnynge in euerlastinge blis” (2).

¹⁹⁷ Among the topics shared between these texts are the virtue of meekness c.f. *Pore Caitif* 164-67 and d’Orléans 247-53, and the virtue of chastity, c.f. *Pore Caitif* 175-198 and d’Orléans 350-76.

Mirror (Trivedi 186). Both of these additional texts enjoyed wide independent circulation, with *The Three Arrows* surviving in twenty-one manuscripts and the *Mirror* in twenty-two (Trivedi 179). Although neither offers a list of sins, both encourage the amendment of sin through visceral descriptions of death, and they therefore reinforce the text's place among manuals for penitents.

The other popular manual produced in this period that will be considered here is the *Speculum vitae*. The poet sets up his text as a more accessible equivalent to the kinds of manuals owned by clerics, writing, "I hald it mast siker þan / To shewe þe langage þat ilk man can, / And al for lewed men namely / þat can no manere of clergy" (7; 81-4). He borrows much of his material and overall structure from the *Somme le roi*, and therefore includes expositions on a wide range of devotional topics, including the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the seven virtues. Yet he accomplishes what Hanna, in his edition of the text, terms "some quite elaborate restructuring and rationalization of what he found in Laurent" (lxxi). So, instead of the separate treatments of the vices and virtues that we find in the *Somme le roi*, the *Speculum vitae* interweaves each sin and its opposing virtue (Hanna, "Introduction" lxxii), a change that brings to the fore the fostering of good behaviour.

But the most significant change that the poet made to Laurent's manual was to add a *Pater noster* tract as a framework for all the other material, with each petition of the prayer introducing a distinct devotional theme (Hanna, "Introduction" lxxii). Some of this *Pater noster* tract has parallels to Laurent's own text on the *Pater noster*, but Allen identifies a closer parallel in a Latin work, which she terms "the tract on the Pater Noster," and which achieved some medieval renown ("*Speculum*" 142-43). Allen notes that although Carl Hortsman attributed this tract to Rolle, it is anonymous (156). She also suggests that it could not have been the direct

source of the *Speculum vitae* (142-43).¹⁹⁸ The poet of the *Speculum vitae* also includes a second, more elaborate exposition on the *Pater noster*, which is closer to that in the *Somme le roi* than the other (Hanna, “Introduction” lxxii). Both of these alterations, by adding more content related to the *Pater noster*, lend special significance to the prayer. In fact, Allen finds that in three copies of the *Speculum vitae*, the text is given “a title such as, *Liber de Pater Noster*” (“*Speculum*” 146).

So, commentary on the essentials of the faith occupies a central place in both *Pore Caitif* and the *Speculum vitae*. This extends some of the findings of the first chapter of the present study and suggests that Patterson is right that these essentials were a typical feature of manuals for penitents of the time. Yet Patterson’s related claim—that these essentials are “didactic” and “only tangentially relevant” (340) in these manuals—requires interrogation.

When we look at the role of these essentials in popular manuals for penitents, we find that they are not “only tangentially relevant”; they work to support the overall penitential aims of this literature. As we have already seen, by the late fourteenth century, some priests were using the Ten Commandments as a framework for interrogating a penitent about his sin, and manuals such as the *Somme le roi* included it to help penitents prepare for this kind of interrogation. It should therefore not surprise us to find this material directed at this purpose in *Pore Caitif* and the *Speculum vitae*.

Indeed, in both of these manuals, these biblically-derived essentials are directed at self-reflection and self-improvement—they are not “only tangentially relevant.” In *Pore Caitif*, the tract on the Creed is not only aimed at “explaining to the unschooled laity the essential articles of belief,” as James D. Gordon observes of the Creed’s usual function in manuscript miscellanies

¹⁹⁸ For a list of manuscripts in which this text appears, see Allen, “*Speculum*” 155-56.

(634), but also at urging continuous self-reflection. The exposition on the first article of the faith—“I Billeue in god fadir almyȝti: maker of heuene & of erþe” (6)—offers the reader a means of evaluating his failings in this respect:

summe of men & wymmen : failen in þis point / for if þei bileeueden verili. þat þe
wordis of god ben trewe: whiche he spekȝ in hooli writt. azens her synful lyuyng þei
wolden eþir for dreded. eþir for loue: amende her defaultis. (6)

By describing a transgression against this article, the passage calls for taking stock of one’s behaviour, which casts the article as a site of self-reflection. Other penitential passages, either assisting in the identification of sin or emphasizing the importance of amending it, are scattered throughout the explanation of the Creed. Some of these penitential passages include the crucifixion as an extended metaphor for the necessity of penance (8.23-9.14), confession as a remedy for “goostli deef” (10.15-18), the list of sins of the tongue (13.8-10), warnings that man will be doomed by any sins left unrepented (15.9-18), the importance of man’s “sorwinge for his synne” (19.8-11), the discussion of purgatory (20.24-27), and the admonition to leave sin (22.12-19). The effect is that the exploration of the Creed is closely intertwined with an exhortation to reflect on one’s own sins.

The next tract, on the Ten Commandments, is more consistently penitential in nature. While it is deeply concerned with fostering virtue, it also often lists ways in which one might sin against the commandments. So, the author uses the commandment against manslaughter to encourage readers to think on their sins. He describes, for example, the types of manslaughter that are “goostli of mouþ” (55.5-6)—including “fals flatering” (55.6)—and exhorting the reader

to “fle þou synne” (56.5-6).¹⁹⁹ By listing the varieties of sin against the commandments and exhorting the reader to abandon them, the author uses the *Decalogue* as a site of self-reflection.

The tract on the *Pater noster*, in turn, is invested in the power of this biblically-derived prayer to treat sin. Each petition of the prayer is cast as a tool that can help one combat sin. The author transforms “Give us this day our daily bread” into a lesson against gluttony: “Here we preien for no lordshippis. ne richesnis of þis world: but oonli for needful sustynaunce. bi which is vndirstondun bi breed. . . In þis asking: covetise is distried” (106.13-19) (“Here we pray, not for lordships, nor for riches of this world, but only for that sustenance that is necessary, by which is understood the bread. . .through this asking, covetousness is destroyed”). The emphasis on combating sin in this tract supports the incitement, found in the previous tracts, to self-reflection. So, rather than being a digression from the manual’s penitential focus—a charge which, as we have seen, has been levelled against commentary on essentials of the faith when they appear in manuals for penitents—this commentary in *Pore Caitif* supports its overall goals of promoting behavioural reform.

Nor is the commentary on the essentials of the faith in the *Speculum vitae* a digression from its penitential aims. To begin, it is worth stressing that in the framing text on the *Pater noster*, the poet insists on a deeply engaged type of reading, one that he contrasts to rote memorization. In a passage not found in his source (the *Somme le roi*), the poet writes that it is not enough to know the “naked lettre” of the prayer—one must understand it in order to “feel its sweetness”: “we may fynde many a man / Þat þe naked lettre anely can / Of þis prayere þat Cryst wroght, / Bot þe vnderstandynge can þai nought. / Þarefore thynk þam it sauourles / For þarein

¹⁹⁹ Other places where the author lists ways in which one can transgress against a commandment are 29.4-30.16, 36.8-9, and 43.9-14.

fele þai na swettenes” (9.143-152).²⁰⁰ Where the *Somme le roi* highlights a contrast between the shortness of the prayer and its complexity (“Ele est mout courte en paroles et mout longue en sentence; legiere a dire, soutive a entendre” [207.6] [“It is very short in speaking and long in meaning; easy to say, complex to understand”]), the *Speculum* translates this passage “Þis prayere es short in worde wrought; / It es in sentence lange in thought. / It es light to say prayande; / It es sutill to vnderstande” (10.171-174), then elaborates on this theme:

Short in worde es þis prayere,
For men it suld lyghtlyar lere
And thurgh shortnes of it by kynde,
Haf it þe titter in þair mynde.
In sentence it es lange to se
For þe mare deuocioun þarein suld be.
For þe naked lettre þat es noght heuy
Men suld say by mouth anely,
And alle þe sentence of it
Vnderstande and in hert knytt.
It es also light to say
For men suld thurgh it ofter pray.
Sutill to vnderstande es it
For men suld mare sette þair witte
On þe sentence of it namely
Thurgh grete bisynes and study. (10.175-191)

²⁰⁰ The same sentiment occurs at 10. 182-4.

Here, the poet emphasizes that the prayer should be read in a deeply engaged way; its meaning must be “understood” and “knit to the heart.”

In the *Speculum vitae*, a strong understanding of the *Pater noster* can help us know how to behave: “Þis worde ‘Fader’ to vndirstande, / Þat makes swete al þe remenande, / Shewes vs what we sal trowe / And what we sal do here and howe” (13;275-78). Like its equivalent in *Pore Caitif*, this first, framing exposition on the *Pater noster* casts the prayer as a tool for promoting virtuous living. This focus on virtuous living means that this exposition on the *Pater noster* is deeply enmeshed with the overarching penitential goals of the *Speculum vitae*—it is not, therefore, a digression from the manual’s penitential focus.

The tract on the Ten Commandments in the *Speculum vitae* shares with the framing text on the *Pater noster* a focus on promoting virtue. The exposition on the first commandment calls for reflection on one’s behaviour: “Thurgh þis commandement to fele / Ilk man may bithynke hym wele / If he haf leely Godde honored ay” (36; 995-98). But it also offers some explanations of sins against the Ten Commandments. Like *Pore Caitif*, the exposition on the commandment against slaughter lists several categories of sins related to this commandment: “A slaughter es thurgh hande smert, / Anothir thurgh tunge, þe thridde thurgh hert” (39; 1069-70). It then gives examples of sins within these categories: “Anothir hates in hert dedely, / Or hym backebytes, arely or late” (40; 1098-1100).

In both of these texts, commentaries on the essentials of the faith are focused on promoting virtue. Moreover, they offer lists of vices and encourage reflection on one’s sins. In the two most popular self-examination texts of the time, then, commentary on the essentials of the faith acted as complex frameworks through which the medieval penitent reflected on his transgressions against the Church and his options for improvement. They are not impersonal

expositions—a view held, as we have seen, by Jolliffe, among others. The Parson’s silence on these essentials, then—a significant difference between his manual and those of his contemporaries—cannot be taken as an avoidance of “anything that is not specifically penitential” (Patterson 340). To understand what is signalled by the Parson’s silence on this commentary, we must look further.

Charting the Heterodoxy of Vernacular Commentary on the Essentials of the Faith

What, then, can we make of the generic departures signalled by the Parson’s omission of the *Pater noster* and *Decalogue*? Given the ubiquity of these tracts in the fourteenth century, it is likely that Chaucer’s audience would have reacted with either shock or amusement at the Parson’s protestations that he must leave an exposition on the *Pater noster* to the “maistres of theologie” (X. 1043). The same would be true for the excuse he gives for his silence on the Ten Commandments: “so heigh a doctrine I lete to divines” (X. 957). Indeed, Nicholas Love, who was writing around the same time as Chaucer, passes over the *Pater noster* quickly because it is so well known: “Bot for als miche as þis matere is spoken of in many oþer tretees & bokes boþe in latyne & in english & þis praiere sufficiantly expowenet, þefore we passen ouer more shortly at þis tyme hereof” (84 qtd. in Bradley 125) (“But because this matter is spoken of in many other treatises and books, both in Latin and in English, and this prayer sufficiently expounded, we pass over it quickly at the present time”). Read alongside the vast number of tracts on the subject in this period, it is not difficult to take Love’s comment at face value, as Christopher G. Bradley does in his discussion of this passage (125).

The omission of these essentials of the faith in the *Parson’s Tale* is therefore puzzling. Given the general tendency toward compendiousness, outlined above, few manuals are as limited

as the *Parson's Tale* in terms of scope—an observation that Patterson and Newhauser have both made.²⁰¹ It is perhaps significant that these essentials are omitted in one of the other important self-examination texts of this period that was written by a layman: Henry, Duke of Lancaster's *Livre de seynt medicines*. Yet Henry's text is only a rough analogue for Chaucer's since, as already discussed, the former does not fit neatly among manuals for penitents.²⁰² Moreover, Chaucer was writing several decades after Henry, and tensions surrounding vernacular religious texts had increased in the intervening time.

The omission of these essentials looks especially significant in light of their association with Lollardy at the time that Chaucer was writing. Indeed, Newhauser suggests that the Parson may have omitted the Ten Commandments “partially in a reaction to the Lollard emphasis on the Decalogue” (“These Seven Devils” 162). This is a bold suggestion, and one worth considering in greater depth. How can we talk about an air of heterodoxy surrounding tracts on the Commandments given that these were, as we have seen, central to the late fourteenth-century manuals for penitents that proliferated widely, and that were owned so openly by lay patrons that they left records of their ownership on them?

Despite the “best-seller” status of vernacular commentary on the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in England, historians have indeed questioned whether such commentary was strictly orthodox. Since Watson's ground-breaking article on the Arundel Constitutions (1995), most now recognize that the most important legislation passed in response to the Wycliffite movement was that of Arundel in 1409, which took aim at vernacular translations in English. Watson writes that “the legislation as a whole constitutes one of the most draconian

²⁰¹ See above.

²⁰² See above, page 87.

pieces of censorship in English history, going far beyond its ostensible aim of destroying the Lollard heresy and effectively attempting to curtail all sorts of theological thinking and writing in the vernacular that did not belong within the pragmatic bounds set by earlier legislation like Pecham's Syllabus of 1281" ("Censorship" 826). Watson finds that in the wake of Arundel's Constitutions, "there is a sharp decline both in the quantity of large theological works written in the vernacular and in their scope and originality" (832).

Although scholars generally agree that Arundel's Constitutions created an atmosphere of suspicion around the production and dissemination of the Bible and other vernacular religious texts, the extent and importance of this ban have been debated, and Watson's findings have been subject to some revisions. The contours of these revisions are traced perhaps most clearly in the suggestively entitled volume *After Arundel*. Here, scholars propose what Watson, in his closing response, terms a "new model" of cultural change—one in which "the Constitutions and the wider theme of censorship play a more minor role than we have become used to" ("A clerke schulde" 582). Among those who forward this new model is Michael G. Sargent, who underlines some of the problems with writing literary history and questions the impact of the Constitutions by arguing that "the exclusion of sermons, saints' lives, the drama, and Wycliffite writing from the survey of vernacular theological literature appended to 'Censorship and Cultural Change' seriously distorts our view of the field" (65). In the same volume, Ian Johnson raises a similar question by noting that many of the "Golden Age texts" of vernacular theology that Watson describes continued to be read and copied well into the fifteenth century (83).²⁰³ Several scholars, including Sargent, Kerby-Fulton, and Fiona Somerset, have called for a more nuanced

²⁰³ Another who could be counted here is Katherine Kerby-Fulton, who, in her ground-breaking study of heterodox revelatory writing, urges caution in ascribing too much significance to the Constitutions, and stresses their limited applicability (397-401).

approach to medieval heterodoxy, one which is, in the words of Sargent, sensitive to “the ‘grey areas’ between orthodox and heterodox in late medieval theology” (60). More recently, Susan Powell, in a study of book licensing written in response to the *After Arundel* volume, concludes that while the constitutions did not succeed in banning vernacular translation outright, they nevertheless raised questions about the heterodoxy of translated texts: “What did come out of Arundel’s seventh constitution was a climate of awareness” (146).

Another line of inquiry that has emerged in recent years concerns which types of literature the Church considered heterodox. Of direct relevance to the present study is the question of whether biblically-derived essentials were subject to censorship. The question is part of a wider one concerning the orthodoxy of translations of the Bible more generally—itself a complicated issue. David Lawton writes with respect to the Bible that “orthodoxy was an unstable judgment before 1407, existing not only in the eye of the beholder, but also in the class, reliability and discretion of the user” (459). In 1401, *De haeretico comburendo* created suspicion surrounding Wycliffite biblical translations, but Lawton finds that the statute was unevenly enforced, and “Wycliffite Bibles were preserved without great risk in otherwise placid aristocratic households” (459).

When we look more specifically at the heterodoxy of translations of biblically-derived essentials of the faith, we should keep in mind that Arundel specifically allowed for the teaching of material prescribed in Pecham’s Constitutions, which, as Watson points out, included the Ten Commandments and the *Pater noster*—both derived from the Bible (“Censorship” 827-28). Yet these essentials did have some associations with heresy, the extent of which is difficult to determine. As Somerset observes, Lollards emphasized the importance of knowing the *Pater noster*, *Decalogue*, and other elements mandated by Pecham’s Constitutions (62). Indeed, several

expositions on these essentials appear in Wycliffite collections and show reformist sympathies.²⁰⁴

The heretical associations of these prayers might lend credence to Newhauser's suggestion that the Parson omits the *Decalogue* owing to its connections with Lollardy ("These Seven Devils" 162). Yet, as we have seen, lay education in the essentials of the faith was not a goal unique to Wycliffite preachers and was, indeed, a central mandate of the Church. This suggests that these translations might exist in one of the "grey areas" between orthodoxy and heterodoxy described by Sargent and others. To understand the position that these prayers occupied relative to the established church we must look further.

To date, most discussions of the orthodoxy of vernacular translations of essentials of the faith have been centred on the years following Arundel's Constitutions. In her early, ground-breaking study, Anne Hudson describes the translation of these essentials in fifteenth-century England as a dangerous choice: "by the time of bishop Alnwick's investigations in 1429, knowledge even of the elements of religion, of the creed, the Pater Noster or the Ave in English constituted accepted evidence of heresy" (31). But Hudson does not go into any detail about the situation.

In her own study of the issue, McSheffrey urged caution in categorizing translations of biblically-derived prayers as heretical. In a study focused on what she terms the "late Lollard period," 1480 to 1525 (48), McSheffrey observes that English translations of the Creed, Ten

²⁰⁴ These are the *Pater noster* commentaries printed by Thomas Arnold that Anna Lewis, in her study of Wycliffite *Pater noster* commentary, has entitled "Arnold 1" and "Arnold 2" ("Textual" 2). Matti Peikola finds, while considering Wycliffite translation in the context of the *Ave Maria* (2000), a distinctive vocabulary demarcating Wycliffite expositions. Lewis follows Peikola in identifying reformist intentions in Wycliffite *Pater noster* commentaries, but observes that both "Arnold 1" and "Arnold 2" are also greatly indebted to traditional *Pater noster* tracts ("Textual" 2-3).

Commandments and Lord's Prayer circulated widely in England in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and "it cannot safely be claimed that orthodox doctrine forbade English prayers" (60). However, she notes that Lollards "may have denigrated the usefulness or efficacy of Latin versions" (60), and they may have considered all English versions to be in conflict with the established church: "The Lollards made a link between religious books in English and their own proclivity to dispute the Church's place in religious life: they assumed that any layperson's reading of books in English constituted the same sort of challenge" (64). She suggests that "the issue was not so much the content or the language of prayers—or of the English books that were also a hot issue in Lollard prosecutions in this period—as the intentions of the person praying or reading. Heresy was at least as much—or more—about authority as it was about doctrine" (52).

McSheffrey draws her conclusions in part from the books found in the possession of persecuted Lollards in the early sixteenth century. She notes that, since many of these books sound perfectly safe, the suspicion surrounding them may have been caused by their owners' intentions, or, in some cases, social status. For the purposes of this study, it is worth noting that among these texts were some that must have included vernacular commentary on biblically-derived essentials, including a primer (64-5), a "treatise on the *Pater noster*" (66), and "a treatise on the seven sacraments" (66). Tracts on the Ten Commandments were often found among books of suspected Lollards in Coventry in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (McSheffrey, and Tanner 42). One work—that which James Morden taught to one Alice Atykyns, and which resultantly fell under suspicion—appears to have contained self-examination material. Although McSheffrey does not identify it as such, it would seem that this was part of Rolle's "Form of Living," as the line of the work given by Morden's prosecutors—"here sueth 4. thinges by which a man may knowe whether he shall be saued &c"—resembles the opening line

of one part of Rolle's work: "Wharfore þat þou be ryght disposed, bath for þi saule & þi body, þou sall vnderstande fowre thynges"(21). The part in question, which also circulated separately (Horstmann 21; n. 1), concerns self-examination; it enumerates types of sins under the categories of "synnes of þe hert" (20), "synnes of þe mouthe" (21), and "synnes of dede" (22), then offers remedies for these. McSheffrey's findings indicate that vernacular commentary on the essentials of the faith were occasionally among the works of persecuted Lollards in the late medieval period.

Fiona Somerset, who significantly furthered the study of Lollard devotional practices recently with the publication of *Feeling like Saints* (2014), shares in McSheffrey's conviction that, in the later Lollard period, the question of heterodoxy was deeply enmeshed with intention. Somerset charts the treatment of vernacular prayer from the time of Wyclif to the Reformation (105-8), concluding that the "Pater Noster, Ave Maria, and creed" "were the accepted foundation of religious literacy" (103). She is careful to stress, building on McSheffrey's argument, that the condemnation of vernacular prayer was limited; "it is worth recalling," she notes,

that heresy prosecutions in which vernacular prayer was an item of questioning, those by Bishops John Hales in 1486 and John Stafford in 1520 in Coventry and Lichfield and by Bishop John Langland in Buckinghamshire in the 1520s, were something of an anomaly, even among heresy trials and most certainly in the broader picture. (103)

Observing that charges involving vernacular texts were usually levelled at those who owned, rather than produced, them, Somerset concludes that there seems to have been what she pointedly terms a "lack of accord" (129) about who should have access to this material.

Somerset also considers these prayers in the context of Wycliffite debates about the construction of interiority, and finds little difference in this respect between the commentaries on the *Pater noster* that appear in Wycliffite manuscripts and those circulating more broadly. In her estimation, both traditions stress a deep understanding of the *Pater noster* and are concerned that new, overly complex prayers are distracting from this more original prayer (125). Yet Somerset does find some features unique to Lollard approaches to the *Pater noster*: “What is more distinctive in the Lollard expositions (though by no means heterodox) is their intensive focus on feeling and intention” (125).

Somerset arrives at this conclusion through a survey of a broad temporal period, and, given the multifaceted and changing face of Lollardy over the century and a half in which its threat was felt by the English Church, it is worth looking more carefully at the associations of vernacular prayer in the earlier Lollard period, around the time when Chaucer was writing. Lollards of this period were already circulating their own commentaries on the *Pater noster*, so some of Wyclif’s early followers clearly saw biblically-derived prayer as central to their devotional system.²⁰⁵

What is less clear, though central to the question of the omission of the *Pater noster* and the *Decalogue* in the *Parson’s Tale*, is whether the Church in this period was trying to restrict translations of biblically-derived essentials of the faith. Wyclif’s early followers seem to have sensed some tension around the *Pater noster* in particular. This can be felt in a tract that Somerset terms the “Seven Heresies of Friars” (*Septem hereses contra septem petitiones*), which appears alongside several other Wycliffite writings in British Library, MS Harley 2385

²⁰⁵ Arnold 2 must date from this period, as it survives in eight fourteenth-century copies (Lewis, “Textual” 9).

(Somerset 74).²⁰⁶ Like traditional commentaries on the *Pater noster*, the text provides commentary on each petition of the prayer, but rather than exhorting the reader to eschew vice or to embrace virtue, this commentary challenges contemporary church practices. So, for example, for the fourth petition of the *Pater noster*, where we would expect an explication on “Give us this day our daily bread,” we have instead a criticism of those who believe that the host ceases to become bread when it is sacramental: “þe ferthe heresie of þe ferthe askynge says, þat þe sacrid ooste is no maner of brede, but ouþer nouȝt, or accident wiþouten ony sogett, and so worse þen stones or ony oþer body” (443). By insisting on the primary importance of the *Pater noster*, the scheme of the work reinforces one of its central themes: that the *Pater noster* must be upheld before all other prayers. This idea is established in the commentary on the first petition, where the author laments that priests focus on the *Famulorum*, a prayer said during the mass, rather than the *Pater noster*: “fals men,” he says, claim that “one Famulorum saide of a frere is better þen a Pater noster, wiþ oþer þinges even” (441). These priests insist that the *Famulorum* is better because the “Pater noster is moste generale, and þe Famulorum moste special, of alle þe prayers þat God heris” (441). His complaint here is over the privatization of prayer; through the *Famulorum*, the congregation is asked to pray for one or more specific individuals—often those who had made substantial donations to the Church. The Lollard writer of this text is not expressing concern over restrictions on the *Pater noster*, but over its liturgical demotion.

²⁰⁶ In the Harley manuscript the work is attributed to Wyclif and, based on this inscription and the tract’s style, Arnold insists that Wyclif’s authorship “can hardly be doubted” (441). Arnold goes further to suggest that the tract was written “quite at the close of Wyclif’s life, in 1383 or 1384” (441). Yet the inscription does not appear in either of the other two manuscripts containing the tract: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 274, and Trinity College Dublin, MS C.V.6.

The *Pater noster* was, for Wycliffites, the prayer of the people. In one Wycliffite tract edited by F. D. Matthew, the *Pater noster* is set in opposition to prelates' masses: "a symple pater noster of a plouȝman þat his in charite is betre þan a þousand massis of coueitouse prelatis & veyn religious ful of coueitise & pride & fals flaterynge & norischynge of synne" ("How Satan" 274). Here, the *Pater noster*, virtuous and simple, is associated with an important figure of moral reform, the virtuous, simple, and socially useful plowman. Langland sets up the same opposition between the *Pater noster*'s elementary power and the vanity of clerical education in *Piers Plowman* in passus X, where Wil claims:

Arn none rather yrawysshed fro the righte bileve / Than are thise konnyng clerkes
that konne manye bokes, / Ne none sonner saved, ne sadder of bileve / Than
plowmen and pastours and povere commune laborers, / Souteres and shepherdes—
swiche lewed jutes / Perce with a Paternoster the paleys of hevene (10.455-10.459)

According to one anonymous sermon writer of the late fourteenth century, the disparagement of the *Pater noster* among prelates was part of a deliberate power-grab. Warning against "ypocritis," he states that, "to blynden þe peple more þei feynen long preiers þat þei seien ben moche beter þan þe Pater Noster" ("Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" 76).

The Church was not only denigrating the potency of the Lord's Prayer but actively discouraging its translation—at least, this is what Wyclif suggests. In his tract on the prayer, he defends his translation by stating:

And syþþe it is þe gospel of Crist, and Crist bad it be preched to þe people, for þe
peple scholde lerne and kunne it and worche þerafter, why may we nouȝt wryte in
Englyssche þe gospel, and opere þynges declaryng þe gospel, to edification of

Cristen mennus soules, as þe precheour telleþ it trewelyche an Englyssche to þe people? (“Pater Noster” 98).

His writing suggests unease among his contemporaries about translations of the *Pater noster*, and an air of suspicion surrounding written versions in particular. These ideas are repeated a few paragraphs later, with greater emphasis:

And here is a reule to Cristen men, of what langage evere þey be, þat it is an heye sacrifice to God to kunne here Pater Noster, þe gospel, and oþer poyntes of holy wryt nedeful to here soules, and þey to do þer-after, wheþer it be ytold to him or wryten in Latyn, or in Englyssche, or in Frensche, or in Duchyssche, oþer in eny oþer langage, after þat þe peple haþ understandyng. And þus clerkes scholde joye þat þe peple knewe Godes lawe, and travayle hemself busylyche, by alle þe goode menes þat þey myȝte, to make þe peple knowe þe treuþe. . . And yf any clerke wolde contrarye þis, who schal be dampned bot suche a quyke fende?’ (“Pater Noster” 100)

Through his defensive tone, Wyclif suggests that he has witnessed resistance to vernacular translations of the *Pater noster*. Further confirmation that Wycliffites saw themselves as working in opposition to the Church on this issue comes from a sermon written by John Purvey sometime between 1382 and 1390 (Deanesly 271):

But if the ten commandments, the creed, pater noster and ave, that all Christian people ought to kunne, common things of holy writ, gospels and epistles read in church, be well translated and truly, sentence for sentence, with good declaration [i.e. exposition], whoso read it, he shall the better understand it, both in Latin and English. (qtd. in Deanesly 272)

Purvey's argument in favour of translating biblically-derived catechetical material suggests that some needed to be convinced of the value of such translation.

But given the Lollards' broader goal of characterizing themselves as Promethean figures in a struggle over biblical authority, we cannot know, without external confirmation, whether these passages reflect contemporary reality or a purposefully denigrating exaggeration of the Church's stance on vernacular prayer. Indeed, when we turn to orthodox writers of the period we find a similar concern with promoting the translation of biblically-derived frameworks. The proliferation of vernacular expositions on the *Pater noster* and on the *Commandments*, surveyed above, does not appear to have emerged in opposition to the established church. John Mirk, whose views ran, as Judy Ann Ford describes, in many ways counter to the Lollards (113), propagated the program of vernacular lay education that had been developed decades before through texts such as the *Lay Folks' Catechism*. In his late fourteenth-century *Festial*, Mirk translates the *Pater noster* into English in a gesture of support for increased lay access to English versions of the prayer. In this sermon, he writes:

Then schull 3e know at þe begynnyng þat hit ys moch more spedfull and meritabull to you to say your 'Pater Noster' yn Englysche þen yn suche Lateyn, as 3e dothe. For when ye spekyth 3n Englysche, þen 3e knowen and vndyrstondyn wele what 3e sayn; and soo, by your vndyrstondyng, 3e haue lykyng and deuocyon forto say hit.

Then you should know at the beginning that it is much more useful and meritorious for you to say your 'Pater Noster' in English than in such Latin as you do. For when you speak in English, then you know and understand well what you say; and so, by

your understanding, you gain fondness for it and devotion to saying it. (qtd. and trans. in Ford 120)²⁰⁷

It is important to note, as Ford does, that the exposition on the Lord's Prayer that follows this passage was, as a sermon, designed to be read aloud, and therefore governed by a different set of rules than written translations. As we have seen, Wyclif himself conceded that the recitation of English versions of the *Pater noster* was common practice, and not a point of contention with the Church. But Ford, who has examined this passage at length, notes that "there is nothing in the *Festial* to imply that Mirk objects to laity reading his collection even though they are not the named audience" (121). Ford emphasizes, moreover, that Mirk is not alone among orthodox writers in his hope of further democratizing the *Pater noster*, and Ford finds similar views in the contemporary writings of Richard Ullerston (118).

Nor can I find any reliable indication that tracts on the *Pater noster* were the subject of scrutiny in Wyclif's time. A possible heresy investigation involving the *Speculum vitae* may suggest some concern over vernacular prayer, but the evidence is hard to read. An inscription occurring in three manuscripts states that in 1384 the tract was "examined for four days with all care and diligence, and tested in every college on every side," by masters of theology, who eventually "declared and affirmed that it was well and subtly drawn out of the sacred laws and divine books." The inscription asserts that if heretical doctrine *had* been found in the work, it "would have been burnt before the University of Cambridge" (qtd. and trans. in Pantin 229).²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ I have amended the translation slightly to more closely reflect the original.

²⁰⁸ The complete Latin text, given by Allen, is as follows: "Anno Domini Millesimo ccc^{mo} lxxxiiij^o., compilatio ista hoc modo Cantabrigiæ erat examinata; dum a quodam sacerdote ad ligandum ibidem fuit posita a quibusdam scholaribus, diligenter erat intuita atque perlecta, et cancellario Universitatis ejusque concilio praesentata, propter defectus et haereses examinanda, ne minus litterati populum per eam negligenter fallant, et in varios errores fallaciter inducant. Tunc jussu cancellarii, coram eo et toto consilio universitatis, per quatuor dies, cum omni studio

Margaret Deanesly takes this inscription at face value,²⁰⁹ and Susan Powell notes that if it is valid, it would be the earliest surviving evidence of a book requiring a licence in the wake of the Wycliffite movement (136). But Susan Powell follows Allen in doubting the inscription's authenticity. Allen writes:

[t]hough no positive certainty can of course be attached to such information, unsupported by other evidence, there is nothing, on the other hand, to render it positively suspicious, unless it be the fact that the manuscripts containing it all belong to the early fifteenth century, and by that time the suspicion with which vernacular religious works were regarded on account of Lollardy was so great that a note like the present one was practically useful as a safe-conduct, and therefore likely to be fabricated. ("*Speculum*" 148)

If the *Speculum* was indeed probed for heterodox views, we do not know what, in the work, initially raised suspicion. Given that it contains much of the same material as the *Somme le roi*, which continued to be copied in this period, it is hard to determine what was considered objectionable in the *Speculum vitae*. The text's vernacularity may have been the cause of suspicion, but, given the wide proliferation of English theological texts in the period, this seems unlikely. It is, however, possible that its emphasis on the *Pater noster* raised eyebrows. As we

et diligentia fuit examinata, atque in omni collegio undique comprobata, die quinto, omnibus doctoribus utriusque juris et magistris theologiae, cum cancellario, dicentibus et affirmantibus eam de sacris legibus et libris divinis bene ac subtiliter tractatam, et ex auctoritate omnium doctorum sacrae paginae sapienter allegatam, id est affirmatam, necnon et fundatam. Ideo quicumque fueris, o lector, hanc noli contempnere, quia sine dubio si aliqui defectus in ea inventi fuissent, coram Universitate Cantabrigiae combusta fuisset" ("*Speculum*" 148).

²⁰⁹ "It is a sign of the suspicion which all theological books in the vernacular aroused about the time of Wycliffe's condemnation and after, that a copy of Nassington's *Speculum* was in 1384 formally presented to the chancellor of Cambridge by the stationers, with whom it had been left by a certain priest to be bound" (Deanesly 216).

have seen, it is primarily the *Pater noster* framework that distinguishes the *Speculum vitae* from the *Somme le roi*.

But even if the *Speculum* was subject to investigation, we could not use this suspicion as the grounds for wider conclusions about the dangers of translating biblically-derived essentials in the fourteenth century. If it happened at all, the examination of the *Speculum* happened firmly within a scholastic context and, as the phrasing of the later Arundel Constitutions suggests, different rules applied to university texts than to those for public consumption. At most, this investigation would suggest mild unease surrounding biblically-derived works. Without any other signs of persecution related to vernacular expositions on prayer from this period, the fears of Wyclif and Purvey that the Church was restricting lay access to these devotional works appear to be somewhat misplaced—or perhaps, considering the later heresy trials noted by McSheffrey, premature.

What emerges, then, from Wycliffite anxieties concerning English expositions on prayer, is a sense that Wyclif and his followers were eager to characterize themselves as better purveyors of vernacular devotional texts than the established church—a kind of ideological turf war over biblically-derived vernacular prayer. The conflict was, at its heart, over the internalization of devotion; as Somerset has observed, both orthodox and heterodox versions of the *Lord's Prayer* stress the importance of a deep, self-reflexive engagement with the prayer (124). That encouraging this kind of devotion was a goal common to both reformers and traditionalists in this period should perhaps not surprise us; it is worth recalling that Wyclif himself had been a key agent in promoting the Church's program of lay education in the *Pater noster* in the early stages of his pastoral career (Ford 118).

It would seem, then, that the Wycliffite claim that the Church was trying to suppress expositions on the *Pater noster* was, at the time, unfounded. But there is evidence to suggest that the Church's permissiveness changed drastically in the testy religious climate that followed Arundel's Constitutions. In the shadow of this legislation, the aforementioned *Pater noster* tract of the *Festial* became a site of tension. McSheffrey observes that it was "little copied in the decades following Arundel's Constitutions, perhaps because its advocacy for the vernacular was deemed too risky; the few copies of the cycle made in the post-1409 period tended to omit the sermon which most strongly encouraged lay vernacular knowledge of the Pater Noster" (58).

The Parson's decision to leave commentary on vernacular prayer to the "maistres of theologie" and the "divines," then, could be read as a nod to the emerging dispute surrounding translations of biblical material. His unwillingness to include these essentials with his self-examination material is suggestive of the kind of silencing that Wyclif expressly feared. This is especially true when we consider that, by the time the Parson gets to tell his tale he has already been silenced once over a charge of Lollardy (II.1177). The Parson's departures from other self-examination texts, then, do not align him with the Wycliffite cause, but stand as an act of self-censorship in a climate of growing anxiety over biblically-derived texts.

The Parson's unease surrounding biblical translation is not necessarily at odds with his rejection of "fables and swich wrecchednesse," although scholars have wondered if there might be a Lollard undercurrent in his mistrust of fables.²¹⁰ In fact, the Parson's advocacy here of a

²¹⁰ Peggy Knapp, for example, writes that "Wycliffite objections to including non-biblical stories in sermons are well known," and argues that the use of the term *fable*, in particular, "does strike a Wycliffite chord" (98). For an overview of approaches to the Parson's rejection of fables, see Arvind Thomas "What's *Myrie* about the Prose of the Parson's Tale" (423). Thomas follows Knapp in suggesting that the Parson "may have wished to dissociate his tale from a genre that the Lollards held in contempt" (423).

more pure religion, unadulterated by fables, is not unusual among contemporary authors of manuals for penitents. Standing somewhat in contrast to the thirteenth-century author of *Handlyng Synne*, who seems to announce the entertainment value of his work by insisting, “Talys shalt þou fynde þer ynne / And chauncys þat haue happyd for synne” (131-32) (“You will find tales within, and happenings that took place due to sin”), and the author of the late fourteenth-century *Of Shrifte and Penance* who states, “þat hyt be þe more delicious some talus we schul telle ȝow” (34), the author of the *Speculum vitae* sets his manual in opposition to vernacular romance:

I warne yhow first at þe bygynnynge,
I wil make na vayne carpynge
Of dedes of armes ne of amours,
Als dose mynstraylles and iestours
Þat mas carpynge in many place
Of Octouyane and Isambrase
And of many othir iestes,
And namely whan þai cum to festes.
Ne of þe lyf of Beuis of Hamptoun
Þat was knyght of grete renoun,
Ne of Sir Gye of Warwyke,
Al-if it myght sum men lyke,
I thynk my carpynge sal noght be,
For I hald þat noght bot vanyte.
Bot þis sal be my carpynge

To carp of mast nedefull thyng

Pat sykirest es for saul and lyf

To man and womman, mayden and wyf (6; 35-52)

As already noted, the author of the *Speculum vitae* sees his work as adjacent to forms of secular entertainment, but he nevertheless distances it from vernacular romance, not only on the grounds of its content, but its utility; the author insists that his work is more valuable because it contains the “mast nedefull thyng / Pat sykirest es for saul and lyf” (6; 50-51). For the poet, a rejection of vernacular romance is important because it supports the kind of analysis he seeks to offer. Read alongside the *Speculum vitae*, the Parson’s refusal to tell a fable is not a sign of his Lollardy, but of his commitment to utility. This commitment to utility makes it all the more striking when the Parson declines to comment on the *Pater noster* and the *Decalogue*—texts which were, in the eyes of his contemporaries, fundamentally aligned with his goal of fostering virtue and discouraging vice.

Conclusion

In the tense religious climate of the late fourteenth century, owning vernacular commentary on the essentials of the faith was not grounds for persecution, but, nevertheless, Wyclif’s followers insisted that some of it was under attack. Both heterodox and orthodox writers stressed the importance of cultivating virtue and internalizing doctrine, but Wyclif’s followers were keen to characterize their approach to theological texts as offering a more intimate relationship with the divine.

In many ways, the Parson is a harbinger of the kinds of control over vernacular translation that were to come. Regardless of the efficacy of Arundel's Constitutions, it remains the case that, as Susan Powell and others have shown, vernacular writing about religious matters became increasingly contentious in the fifteenth century. Since the Parson's omission of the *Pater noster* and the *Decalogue* is also Chaucer's, we can credit Chaucer with a keen awareness of the emerging theological debates of the time—perhaps unsurprising given the many connections he had to Lollard communities, recorded so meticulously by McCormack (23-8). Indeed, we may attribute some of Chaucer's continuing popularity to his prescience in this respect. As Georgianna has noted, his popularity is due in part to being generally unobjectionable to both Protestants and Catholics alike.²¹¹ Sitting on the cusp of this important juncture in the history of vernacular religion, *The Parson's Tale*, through its departures from the tradition of manuals for penitents, stands as a timely warning about the potential suppression of commentary on biblically-derived essentials of the faith.

²¹¹ Although "the second book of the tales of Canterbury," along with "the mirror of sinners," was noted among the books of the suspected heretic John Baron in 1460 (Chedworth's Reg. fol.62b qtd. in Deanesly 363), it would seem that the work generally escaped suspicion. Indeed, while Henry VIII, during the return to Catholic orthodoxy that marked his final years, forbade devotional works that ran contrary to his most recent interpretation of scripture, he was careful to note that the *Canterbury Tales* were perfectly acceptable. In his 1543 "Act for the Advancement of True Religion," Henry banned "all maner of bokes of the Olde and Newe Testament in Englishe, being of the craftye false and untrue translac[i]on of Tyndale, and all other bookes and wryting[s] in the English tongue teaching or compyryng any mattiers of Christen religion articles of the faithe or holye scripture, or any parte of them, contrarye to that doctrine whiche sithens the yere of our Lorde a thousande fyve hundred and fourtie is" ("Act" 894), but making provision for "Canterburye tales Chaucers bokes Gowers bokes and stories of mennes lieves," among other works written before 1540 (895). Following the Reformation, Chaucer's continued success owes much to Foxe's reclamation of him for the Protestant cause, and his general amenability to Protestant sensibilities, as Georgianna contends in "The Protestant Chaucer."

Conclusion

C. S. Lewis described the confessional framework of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* as "the master-stroke which organizes the whole of Gower's material" (17). Yet while some scholars, such as Peter Nicholson, have explored the work's indebtedness to confessional writing, the subject is relatively neglected in criticism on the poem. The introduction to the recent TEAMS edition suggests that most of the text is "composed in the genre of confession/consolation" (15), but the introduction's emphasis is plainly on the text's relationship to works of consolation, such as that of Boethius.²¹² This focus is somewhat surprising given the centrality of the confessional framework to the *Confessio Amantis* and to Gower's work more generally—after all, before writing the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower had produced his own manual for penitents, the *Mirour de l'omme*.

Although the *Confessio Amantis* is not itself a self-examination text, its indebtedness to this tradition is evident, and the neglect of the poem's relationship to other confessional texts is undoubtedly a symptom of a wider sidelining of the tradition of self-examination writing in England. As we have seen, the normative characteristics of this body of texts have been overlooked in much of the scholarship, and representative texts are generally treated in isolation, so that the commonalities between them go unnoticed. This study has aimed at exploring this body of writing in terms of its characteristics and its function in medieval culture, and at illuminating some of the important literary texts that participate in it, including *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Parson's Tale*.

²¹² Where the subject of confession comes up in the introduction, the discussion turns to the question of self-discovery, and the poem's participation in a tradition of self-examination writing does not surface (24-25).

We have seen that contents of manuals for penitents in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council reflect changes in pastoral education, and that these manuals could have been used for both self-directed, individual reading, and for reading through a lector. We have found that their actual audiences considered them useful and valuable for securing salvation, and that their implied audiences were both clerical and lay, the latter group becoming a particular important one toward the end of the thirteenth century.

This study has also illuminated some of the tensions surrounding these manuals, particularly that their introduction brought with it some concerns for the Church. By inviting the laity to access confessional teaching, including biblically-derived frameworks such as the *Decalogue*, without the assistance of the clergy, these texts enabled self-directed learning of confessional teaching that had traditionally been imparted face-to-face, through sermons or through the confessional encounter itself. We have seen that this change is reflected in tensions surrounding the potential of introducing new sins to penitents, and surrounding control over biblically-derived prayer.

Aside from their immediate importance for our understanding of manuals for penitents, tensions over the development of these texts have fascinating contemporary resonances. It has been shown that they arose, in part, due to the increasing possibility of penitents experiencing confessional education at a remove from the Church. This shift in educational delivery has some similarities with the shift that has been taking place in many higher education systems from synchronous learning—in which instructor and student meet face-to-face—to asynchronous learning—in which instructor and student are separated by time, space or both. The growing emphasis on this latter method of instruction, resulting from developments in educational technology such as e-learning platforms, has been met with both criticism and praise in various

quarters. On one hand, it has contributed to the democratization of education by enabling students to receive instruction who might not otherwise receive it (Vai and Sosulski 16-17). It has also allowed a greater number of students to receive concurrent instruction by removing some of the spatial constraints of the traditional classroom (Andrews and Haythornthwaite 12-13). On the other hand, asynchronous learning raises issues of control over instruction; some suggest that the extra control that students gain through asynchronous approaches actually diminishes learning (Clark 25-26). The parallels here to the kinds of concerns that surface in medieval manuals for penitents are obvious, and they speak to one of the benefits of looking to past changes for our understanding of present ones.

While this study has contextualized a few important texts of England's literary tradition within the corpus of self-examination works, much remains to be done in this respect, and the *Confessio Amantis* is just one possible direction for future exploration. Another is the role that language plays in this largely vernacular tradition. Why, for example, are some of the most enduring Anglo-Norman works, such as the *Manuel des péchés* and Henry, Duke of Lancaster's *Livre de seynt medicines*, concerned with confession? Given the recent studies that have found that Anglo-Norman was uniquely positioned in England as a language of devotional thought for years following the Norman Conquest, what are the implications behind an author's decision to write self-examination material in Anglo-Norman instead of English? More, too, must be done to explore the relationship between the tradition of self-examination writing in England and that of the Continent, and, as noted in the introduction, to determine how England's penitential traditions are unique.

Finally, while many see confessional literature as an important step in the development of literary psychologies, the relationship between these and self-examination writing remains

poorly understood. It is my hope that, by exploring a few of the often-overlooked *literary* qualities of self-examination writing, such as the complex construction of audience in part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*, this study will help link up England's self-examination tradition with its literary canon, and, in so doing, pave the way for future inquiry in this direction. By approaching self-examination texts as artistic creations, with complex structures and rhetorical strategies, we stand to gain both a better understanding of the links between these texts and more traditional literary works, and a richer appreciation of one of the most widely-read types of medieval writing.

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