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Sexual Sin and ‘Anxieties of Outreach’ in Thirteenth-Century England: Two Manuals for Penitents and their Adaptations

Krista A. Murchison

Introduction

Scholars of medieval history and literature have long recognized that medieval manuals that were designed to guide confessors through the confessional interrogation express significant unease about describing sexual activity, and with good cause. Medieval confessors were, as Pierre 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, or reminding penitents of old ones.¹ The *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (c. 1225), Raymond de Pennaforte’s remarkably influential guide for priests, warns confessors against this specific 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.’² Since sexual sins could be committed in private, knowledge of them could be guarded — in theory, at least. So significant was a concern over teaching new sexual sins that, according to Payer, trepidations surrounding confessional interrogation ‘are virtually always about sexual offenses’.³ These sins are, therefore, particularly important for understanding medieval tensions surrounding confessional practices.

While much has been written about how anxieties surrounding sexual sin are manifested in manuals for confessors, there has been relatively little about how these are manifested in the educational outreach material that was written for penitents, both lay and clerical, about

¹ Pierre Payer, *Sex and the New Medieval Literature of Confession, 1150–1300* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), p. 59.

² Translated in Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 115.

³ Payer, p. 60. Similarly, Tentler suggests, while discussing fears of introducing new sins in Raymond de Pennaforte’s *Summa de casibus poenitentiae*, that these 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’ (p. 115). The same view is expressed by Peter Biller in ‘Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction’, in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval, 1998), pp. 1–42 (p. 13).

how to prepare for confession.⁴ These texts, termed 'manuals for penitents' by Lee Patterson, proliferated in the late medieval period, especially after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which mandated annual confession for all believers who had reached the age of majority.⁵ The proliferation of these texts, which could be used with the help of a confessor or on one's own, made it increasingly possible for medieval penitents to learn about sins in a self-directed manner, and to probe their own consciences in new ways. The increasing importance of this type of 'distance education' led to new and significant concerns for the Church — part of the wider 'anxieties of outreach' described by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne that emerged in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council.⁶

Since these manuals enabled penitents to learn about potential sins on their own, it is to be expected that they would, perhaps even more than manuals for priests, exhibit a marked trepidation about descriptions of sexual sin, which had the potential of giving penitents new ideas. This article is thus aimed at exploring, for the first time, a particular form of the new 'anxieties of outreach' that emerged after the Fourth Lateran Council: the fears that developed about the potential of confessional literature for introducing new sins. In particular, it aims to uncover how — and why — these fears are less pronounced when manuals address clerical penitents rather than more general ones. By elucidating the increased unease around the description of sexual sins in texts aimed at those outside of the cloister — and, in so doing, highlighting the major concerns about sexual discourse that had permeated medieval society in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council — the findings here contribute to a broader movement of recognizing the multiple, diverse, and sometimes conflicting forms of self-knowledge available to medieval minds.

Two manuals addressed to penitents lie at the center of this investigation: Robert Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas* (c. 1235), which was written in England, and Robert de Sorbon's *Qui vult vere confiteri* (c. 1260–74), which was written in France.⁷ Both texts provide insight into views of sexual sins because, as we shall see, both were adapted for new audiences, and, in both cases, this adaptation history contains clues about what medieval authors considered appropriate for different types of readers. Grosseteste's was translated and incorporated into the Anglo-Norman *Compileison* (c. 1254–74), a text which anticipates a wider audience and also contains an expanded translation of the well-known anchoritic guide, *Ancrene Wisse* (c. 1220–30). Robert's was translated into French for a more general audience and, eventually, incorporated into Friar Laurent's widely popular *Somme le roi* (c. 1279).

Of course, determining the audience of a medieval text requires careful consideration. As Ruth Evans notes, a text's audience can be constructed in a variety of different ways, some

⁴ Allen J. Frantzen considers the depiction of sexual sins in Anglo-Saxon penitentials in *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983). But, according to Frantzen, such manuals are primarily written from the perspective of the priest, not that of the penitent (13). The recent and significant *New History of Penance*, edited by Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), dedicates surprisingly little space to medieval understandings of sexual sin.

⁵ Lee Patterson, 'The "Parson's Tale" and the Quitting of the "Canterbury Tales"', *Traditio*, 34 (1978), 331–80.

⁶ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Time to read: Pastoral Care, Vernacular Access and the Case of Angier of St. Frideswide', in *Texts and Traditions of Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett*, ed. by Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (Woodbridge: York Medieval, 2009), pp. 62–77 (p. 77).

⁷ For the dating of Grosseteste's work, see Joseph Goering and F. A. C. Mantello, '“The Perambulauit Iudas...” (*Speculum Confessionis*) Attributed to Robert Grosseteste', *Revue Bénédictine*, 96 (1986), 125–68 (p. 132). For its authorship, see Goering and Mantello, pp. 126–29. For the dating of the latter work and its authorship, see F. N. M. Diekstra, 'Robert de Sorbon's *Qui Vult Vere Confiteri* (c. 1260–74) and its French Versions', *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 60 (1993), 215–72 (p. 216).

implicit and some explicit, and a text's constructed audience is not necessarily the same as its actual one. Evans, drawing on the work of Paul Strohm and others, distinguishes between four audience functions: 1) the 'actual audience', which may or may not be named explicitly in a 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'. A text may have different audiences in each of these categories, or they might overlap.⁸

Among manuals for penitents, many texts that explicitly address one audience will nevertheless describe some sins that would have no relevance to it; for example, a text addressed to the laity might contain some specifically clerical sins. In other words, the intended and implied audiences of a manual for penitents often differ. Indeed, a tendency toward compendiousness in these manuals means that most contain sins that are applicable to those in a variety of specific circumstances, and most therefore have very broad implied audiences, whereas their intended audiences are generally narrower. Given that in any given text the implied and intended audiences might differ from each other, I consider both of them here.

Robert Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas* (c. 1235) and its adaptation

The earliest of the texts considered here is Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas*. It begins with a preface addressed to an anonymous learned friend who asked for a confessional guide for his own use.⁹ The guide that follows is a "form of confession" text. These formulaic texts, which have been studied in depth by Michael Cornett, are brief lists of sins cast in the voice of a confessing penitent.¹⁰ Joseph Goering and F. A. C. Mantello suggest that the descriptions of sins in this first guide, which include, for example, references to the roles of cellarer and prior, have an implied audience of Benedictine monks. From these sins and from the preface, Goering and Mantello suggest that the guide was written for 'a superior in a house of monks or regular canons'.¹¹

The next part of the *Perambulauit Iudas* is addressed explicitly to a group of 'simpler brothers' (*simpliciores fratres*); Goering and Mantello describe this part as a "'mirror of confession" (*speculum confessionis*) concerning all the sins committed both in the cloister and in the world'. This second part begins with an interrogatory — questions that penitents could ask themselves to prepare for confession (sections 26–36), then supplies definitions of sins (sections 37–42). When both parts of the treatise are taken into account, it seems that it was prepared for a group of monks and their spiritual advisor.¹²

⁸ Ruth Evans, 'Readers/Audiences/Texts', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 107–25 (pp. 115–16).

⁹ Goering and Mantello, p. 132; Grosseteste writes to his friend, 'me rogasti vt tibi scriberem formam confessionis' ('you have asked me to write a form of confession') and specifies that the friend is intelligent ('intelligenti'): Goering and Mantello (pp. 148, 150).

¹⁰ Michael Cornett, 'The Form of Confession: A Late Medieval Genre for Examining Conscience' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2011), p. 5.

¹¹ Goering and Mantello, pp. 132–33; 125.

¹² Goering and Mantello, p. 141.

The *Perambulauit Iudas* exhibits a relative openness about sins that could be committed in privacy. It includes a lengthy discussion of lechery, which includes two 'sins against nature': 'sodomy' and non-procreative ejaculation.¹³ In the section on the sin of touch, Grosseteste describes examples of lechery committed through touching others. He clearly considers the subject a delicate one; he advises confessing such sins to a priest or to God alone, for otherwise the 'weak' could be 'scandalized' ('quia infirmi forte talia possint inde scandalizari').¹⁴ Yet his decision to include these sins in his text despite their potential for scandal suggests that he thought the benefit to his audience outweighed any possible risk.

Almost all of the *Perambulauit Iudas* was adapted and incorporated into the Anglo-Norman *Compileison*.¹⁵ Before examining the changes that were made in this process, it is necessary to briefly consider the *Compileison* and its audience. Although best known for containing an adaptation of the well-known religious guide *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Compileison* is in fact much wider in scope; Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne describe 'the massive structuring and originality of conception and voicing of this 29,000-line prose work of moral theology.'¹⁶ All parts of *Ancrene Wisse* are incorporated into the *Compileison* save for part 1, on anchoritic devotions. The others have been carefully reordered and substantially extended; W. H. Trethewey, who edited the *Ancrene Wisse* portion of the text, finds that *Ancrene Wisse* material accounts for only about 42 percent of the complete *Compileison*.¹⁷ The author's other sources remain somewhat elusive, but parallels have been found in Guilelmus Peraldus' *Summa de vitiis*, his *Summa de virtutibus* (both c. 1236), and Raymond de Pennaforte's *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* (c. 1225).¹⁸ Aside from the translation of Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas* the work includes a translation of the *Peines de Purgatorie*, which is occasionally ascribed to Grosseteste.¹⁹

¹³ Grosseteste, p. 164. The passage is given in full below.

¹⁴ Grosseteste, p. 154.

¹⁵ With the exception of the passages translated from Grosseteste's text, I have taken passages from the *Compileison* from the copy in Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.7, since this is the one W. H. Trethewey uses as a base text for his edition. Abbreviations have been silently expanded. Translations of the *Compileison* are my own.

¹⁶ Nicholas Watson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'The French of England: The *Compileison*, *Ancrene Wisse*, and the Idea of Anglo-Norman', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 4 (2004), 35–59 (p. 42).

¹⁷ W. H. Trethewey, 'Introduction', in *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Edited from Trinity College, Cambridge MS. R. 14.7, with Variants from Bibliotheque Nationale MS. F. fr. 6276 and MS. Bodley 90*, ed. by W. H. Trethewey, Early English Text Society, o. s. 240 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. ix–xxxiii (p. xxiii).

¹⁸ Germaine Dempster, 'The Parson's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 723–60 (p. 727).

¹⁹ Ruth J. Dean and Maureen B. M. Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999), pp. 357, 366. For a study of the translation of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, see Matthias Hessenauer, 'For a Larger Audience: Grosseteste's *Perambulauit Iudas* in Anglo-Norman', in *Robert Grosseteste: His Thought and its Impact*, ed. by Jack Cunningham (Toronto: PIMS, 1964), pp. 259–313. In the copy preserved in Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.14.7 (James no. 883), 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' ('the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins, and their species, according to the teaching of Saint Gregory', fols 70a–71a). It then returns to the *Perambulauit Iudas*. Parts 27–35 are translated on fols 71a–73b. Only parts 36–43 of Grosseteste's text are omitted. Only two copies of the *Compileison* contain this translation: the Trinity copy and that in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, 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 and in the middle of the *Compileison de seinte penance*. For an edition of the *Peines de Purgatorie*, see Robert J. Relihan, 'A Critical Edition of the Anglo-Norman and Latin Versions of "Les Peines de Purgatorie"' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978).

The intended audience of the *Compileison* is complex and broad. It addresses ‘gent de religion’ (‘people of religion’), and ‘hommes e femmes de religion’ (‘men and women of religion’).²⁰ These ‘gent de religion’ are not, as Cate Gunn notes, from one order alone; the address is more generally to those ‘living a dedicated religious life.’²¹ Yet the author also writes for others outside of a disciplined religious life:

quotececo est conquilli en semble. des set pechez morteus. e de lur especes. sicome nus les auom troue en seinte escripture pur aprendre les leaument e sanz feintise a tote genz mes especiaument e par deuant tuz autres a hommes e a femmes de religioun.²²

This [work] was [*lit. is*] gathered together from 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.

Here, the primary audience is those following a religious life, and the secondary one is anyone else. Occasionally, the text singles out the religious audience in particular. The adaptation of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, introduced by a rubric stating that it is for the ‘gent de religion’, is one such place: ‘Isci comence li primer chapitle de la secunde partie de la tierce partie de confession. ky nus mustre coment genz de religion se deiuent de tute leur uie confesser’ [‘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’].²³ The *Compileison*’s broad intended audience is consonant with its implied audience; many of the sins described in the first part of the text are specific to lay life: ‘peche homme par auarice [...] par trop elarger ses terres ou ses mesons a tort’ (‘man commits avarice [...] by enlarging his lands too much, or his houses wrongfully’).²⁴ In general, then, the text has a wider audience than that of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, although sections, including the translation of the *Perambulauit Iudas*, are addressed to a more limited one.

Lechery is discussed at length twice in the *Compileison*: once in the adaptation of the *Perambulauit Iudas* addressed to the ‘gent de religion’, and once in a passage for which no direct source has been found, addressed to a more general audience. That addressed to a wider audience is markedly less candid about sexual sin than is the *Perambulauit Iudas*. The author includes many of the same species of lechery as Grosseteste does, but the treatment of ‘sins against nature’ is different and somewhat vague compared to that in Grosseteste’s text:

peche en coudre nature est. ky tout a homme tote la reson de la nature. issi ky il nen est pas pae de sa mauueste fere naturement. etuz sen entremet de totes maneres de ordures ky il poet ou par esgarder. ou par tast. ou par manier. ou par bestes. ou par oiseaus contrefere. kar il ne font si come nature les a prent. e li mauueis le fet encoudre nature.²⁵

The sin against nature is that which deprives man of natural reason such that he is not satisfied — because of his depravity — to behave naturally, but instead engages in all

²⁰ Fols 125d, 105d. The audience is also addressed under other titles, including “freres e suers en deu” (fol. 106c).

²¹ Cate Gunn, ‘Reading Edmund of Abingdon’s *Speculum* as Pastoral Literature’, in *Texts and Traditions of Pastoral Care: Essays in Honour of Bella Millett*, ed. by Cate Gunn and Catherine Innes-Parker (Woodbridge: York Medieval, 2009), pp. 100–14 (p. 105).

²² Fol. 1b.

²³ Fol. 67a.

²⁴ Fol. 17b.

²⁵ Fol. 24a.

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kinds of indecencies, whether by looking, by touching, or by imitating animals and birds, since they only do as nature has taught them, but the depraved man [who does the same] does it against nature.

The passage is marked by circumlocution — a practice that medieval rhetoricians considered a method of evading delicate subjects.²⁶ While Grosseteste’s *Perambulauit Iudas* mentions ‘sodomy’ in its list of sins, the *Compileison* here does not. It does place non-procreative ejaculation among the ‘sins against nature’, but is vague about what is intended:

E sachez bien ky entotes les maneres ky homme ou femme par la uolunte en euillante sachant sul par sei ou e autre par cure pollicion de la char. hors de mariage ou en mariage autrement ky nature de homme e de femme demaunde. cest asauer en autre manere ky homme deit enfant engendrer. e femme conceuer; tot est peche mortel. e peche en countre nature.²⁷

And know well that in all the manners in which 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 [*lit.* should] engender a child, and woman conceive — all [this] is mortal sin, and sin against nature.

This passage, like the first, relies on circumlocution to avoid potentially sensitive details. Yet the second discussion of lechery — that addressed more specifically to the ‘gent de religion’ and adapted from the *Perambulauit Iudas* — gives more detail. As Matthias Hessenauer notes, the translation of Grosseteste’s text is remarkably faithful; ‘only rarely does [the author of the *Compileison*] make slight changes’.²⁸ This makes the places where changes were made particularly interesting, and an extended comparison between it and its original provides valuable insight into the approach favoured by the author of the *Compileison*.²⁹ see Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of *Perambulauit Iudas* and the *Compileison*: text

<i>Perambulauit Iudas</i>	<i>Compileison</i>
DE LUXURIA,	De luxure deit venir avant la enquete en tiele manere:
Fornicacionem, incestum, adulterium, viciu sodomiticum uel peculiale, uel aliquid simile actu uel uoluntate patrastrasti, vel aliis consensisti.	Fornicacion, avoterie, incest, pecche encontre nature ou especial pecche ou acune semblance par fet ou par volunte avez fet, ou a ceo consentu;

²⁶ Matthew Vendôme, for example, suggests that through *periphrasis*, ‘sententiae foeditas circuitu evitatur’ (‘the foulness of an idea may be avoided by a roundabout statement’) in ‘Ars versificatoria’, in *Les Arts poétiques du XIIIe et du XIVe siècle*, ed. by Edmond Faral (Paris: Champion, 1958), pp. 106–93, p. 185; translation in *The Art of Versification*, trans. by Aubrey E. Gaylon (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1980), p. 105. For others who championed *periphrasis* as a means of avoiding delicate subjects, see the discussion in Jan M. Ziolkowski’s chapter on ‘Obscenity in the Latin Grammatical and Rhetorical Tradition’, in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 41–60 (pp. 56–57).

²⁷ Fol. 24a.

²⁸ Hessenauer, p. 262.

²⁹ Grosseteste, p. 164; Hessenauer, p. 310.

<i>Perambulauit Iudas</i>	<i>Compileison</i>
Virginem deflorasti.	avez virgine despucele de soen puce- lage?
Excitasti in te affectus libidinis.	Avez vus esmu en vus le talent de leccherie?
In cogitacione libidinosa delectatus fuisti.	Avez delitee en leccheruse pense?
Pudenda inpuenter tractasti.	Avez vus treite hontousement les hon- touses membres ou en vus ou en autres?
Si unquam extra uas ultro fudisti.	Si vus onkes hors du dreit vessel par vostre ein degre espandistes vostre semence?
Aliquo modo curam adhibuisti ut libi- dini satisfaceres.	Avez vus en acune manere mis diligence ke vus assez feissez a leccherie?
Per sompnum pollutus fuisti.	Fuistes onkes soillee par pollucion en songe, e si vus avez este, dites coment?
Quo modo concupisti. Voluisti concu- pisci et ob hoc te ornasti.	Avez onkes coveite ou voillez estre coveite e puis vus, aurnastes; e si vus avez ceo fet, dites coment!
Quo modo fornicacionibus consensisti, consilium et auxilium impendendo.	Avez consenti a fornicacions en donant conseill ou eide?
In puericia aliquid luxuriosum sinistrum egisti.	Avez fet en vostre enfance acun pecche de luxure?
Aliquam inpuenter tractasti uel te tractari permisisti.	Avez nule femme trete hontousement ou suffert de lui hontousement estre tret?

Comparison of *Perambulauit Iudas* and the *Compileison*: translation

<i>Perambulauit Iudas</i>	<i>Compileison</i>
ON LECHERY.	Lechery should be subject to investiga- tion in the following manner:
Fornication, incest, adultery, the vice of sodomy — either in itself, or a similar act — either brought about by free will, or by consenting to others.	fornication, adultery, incest, and sin against nature — either that specific sin or any similar deed — done in act or in intention, or by consent.
You deflowered virgins.	Have you deflowered a virgin?
You roused, from within yourself, lech- erous desire.	Did you rouse, from within yourself, a desire for lechery?
You took delight in lustful thought.	Did you delight in lustful thought?
You stroked genitals shamelessly.	Did you very shamefully stroke shame- ful parts of the body — either your own, or those of others?

<i>Perambulauit Iudas</i>	<i>Compileison</i>
If you ever expelled outside of the proper vessel.	If you ever by your own free will expelled your seed outside of the proper vessel?
You have taken care to satisfy your lust in any manner.	Have you taken care to satisfy your lust in any manner?
You have expelled in defilement during sleep.	Were you ever defiled by pollution while sleeping — and if you have been, say how?
If you were, in any way, moved by desire — or wished to be desired — and, for this reason, adorned yourself.	And have you been moved by desire, or wished to be desired, and then adorned yourself? And if you have done this, say how!
If you participated in fornication in any way through counsel and granted aid.	Have you consented to fornication by giving counsel, or aid?
You performed some sinister act of lechery during your childhood.	Did you commit any act of lechery during your childhood?
You stroked someone shamelessly, or let yourself be stroked by someone.	Have you shamefully stroked any woman, or let yourself be shamefully stroked by her?

At first glance, it is hard to say if the *Compileison* is more or less explicit here than the *Perambulauit Iudas*. On one hand, the *Compileison* is more direct, as it describes the spilling of ‘semence’ (‘seed’ or ‘semen’) which is described only implicitly in the source (‘Si unquam extra uas ultro fudisti’), and which the *Compileison* describes, as we have seen, more circuitously elsewhere, when addressing a wider audience. On the other hand, the *Compileison* here is less specific about sodomy; where the *Perambulauit Iudas* describes it as ‘the sin of sodomy’ (‘viciu sodomiticu’) the *Compileison* describes it in more general terms as ‘sin against nature’ (‘pecche encontre nature’). This is in keeping with the approach to sodomy elsewhere in the text. Overall, then, the *Compileison* is somewhat more guarded in its descriptions of sexual sin than the *Perambulauit Iudas*. The section addressed to a general audience deploys circumlocution to avoid describing it, and that addressed to ‘gent de religion’ gives some detail, but nevertheless does not mention ‘sodomy’ by name.

Robert de Sorbon’s *Qui vult vere confiteri* (c. 1260–74) and its adaptations

To see whether the increased trepidation that characterizes the depiction of sexual sin in the *Compileison* is typical of 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 are ‘guides to confession’.³⁰ Both contain confessional statements in the first person, but unlike the first part of Grosseteste’s work, they are not, strictly speaking, forms of confession, because

³⁰ Diekstra, ‘Robert de Sorbon’, p. 218.

these confessional statements are introduced with third-person narration, such as ‘Et debet sic dicere peccator’ (‘And the sinner should say this’).³¹ The Latin version was written first and supplied the source for the French version according to F. N. M. Diekstra, who edited both versions, although Diekstra notes that ‘it is not inconceivable that among the Latin versions there are instances of “backformation”, in which the French served as the model rather than the Latin exemplar.’³²

Given the connection between them, both Latin and French versions printed by Diekstra can help with establishing the relationship between the audience of a manual for penitents and its author’s relative willingness to describe private sins. Both imply a mixed audience to some extent;³³ they contain ‘worldly’ sins, such as, under the heading of ‘avarice’, disguising meat with the intent to deceive the buyer.³⁴ Both also list some sins that would have been particular to certain forms of clerical life. So, both include, also under ‘avarice’, the buying and selling of benefices, a type of avarice which, both versions acknowledge, pertains mostly to the clergy and others living religious lives. That said, the Latin text contains more sins particular to clerical readers than does 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.³⁵

As always, we cannot take the implied audience — either clerical or lay — as the audience in any straightforward way. But in the case of these two versions of *Qui vult vere confiteri*, the one with the fewest clerical sins — the French one — also explicitly addresses a more general audience; it alone ends with a statement that it is for ‘all good Christians’ (‘toute boine gent crestienne’).³⁶ So, while both texts construct a general audience to some degree, the French one is particularly committed to this audience.

³¹ Robert de Sorbon, ‘Robert de Sorbon’s *Qui Vult Vere Confiteri* (c. 1260–74) and its French Versions’, ed. by F. N. M. Diekstra, *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 60 (1993), 215–72 (p. 243). Translations from both Latin and French versions are my own.

³² Diekstra, ‘Robert de Sorbon’, pp. 231–32.

³³ The only comment that Diekstra makes regarding the audience of these two works is that they were written for ‘laymen’ (‘Robert de Sorbon’, p. 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.

³⁴ The Latin text gives: ‘alia species [apparet] in carnis; 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’ (‘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’; p. 250). The French text gives: ‘en char vendre fait on trecherie quant cil ki le vent fait entendre de char de trueie 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] avec le jovene’ (‘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’; p. 250).

³⁵ 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’ (‘the seventh branch of avarice is simony, when sacraments, or prebends, or anything ecclesiastical or religious, are sold or bought’; p. 251). 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’ (‘the sixth branch is simony, when men sell or buy benefices of Holy Church. This sin is more important to members of the clergy or to people of religion than it is to layfolk’; p. 251).

³⁶ Robert de Sorbon, p. 259.

Like the *Compileison*, which also constructs a 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' altogether, 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' ('The sixth branch of lechery is when man does a kind of sin against 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').³⁷

In this same discussion of sins against nature, Robert also describes masturbation in terms that are somewhat vague: 'quando homo facit peccatum per se sicut faceret cum muliere et percipit bene quod est contra naturam; vel quando eciam illicite et [inhoneste] virilia membra sua vel aliorum tenuerit vel palpaverit vel [respexerit]' ('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, sins against nature can be committed 'aliis modis qui non debent dici in aperto, sed omnia in confessione debent manifestari' ('by other ways that should not be said in the open, but all these things should be declared openly in confession').³⁸ 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 more circuitously.³⁹

Following the tendency to be more watchful when writing for a wider audience, the later, French version, which is addressed to all Christians, 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' ('for which God took such vengeance that five cities were melted and burnt 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' ('when the man or the woman commits the sin by himself or herself and knows well that it is against nature').⁴⁰ So, 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.⁴¹

What emerges from the comparison thus far is that, out of the five discussions of lechery examined, those 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 *Compileison* and *Qui vult vere confiteri*. Moreover, of this latter work, the version that is addressed explicitly to both clerical and lay readers — the French one — is more

³⁷ Robert de Sorbon, p. 255.

³⁸ Robert de Sorbon, p. 255.

³⁹ 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' ('Robert de Sorbon', p. 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 ('Robert de Sorbon', p. 226).

⁴⁰ Robert de Sorbon, p. 255.

⁴¹ Robert de Sorbon, pp. 258–59.

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 while Laurent was in the service of Philip III and has some material in common with *Qui vult vere confiteri*. 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* (c. 1248–80), which, in turn, is indebted to *Qui vult vere confiteri*.⁴² The treatment of sins against nature in the *Somme le roi* stands in stark contrast to that in either version 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 granz et plus horribles, de tant vaut plus la confession, car la honte que on a dou dire est granz partie de la penitence. Cist pechiez desplait tant a Dieu que il en fist plovoir feu ardant et sofre puant sus la cité de Sodome et de Gomorre, et en fondi .V. citez en abisme.⁴³

The last is the vilest 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 de Sorbon, Laurent avoids using the term 'sodomy', but Laurent's account of sins against nature is even more censored than Robert's. Gone is any discussion of touching genitals, and, aside from the cloaked reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, the account of 'sins against nature' is, in Laurent's text, reduced to an insistence that these are too horrible to be described.

Sexual Sin and Illicit Textual Pleasure

Other contemporary manuals for penitents addressed explicitly to lay readers voice equally powerful trepidation about sins done in private. An important text in this context is William of Waddington's Anglo-Norman *Manuel des péchés* (c. 1260), since this text survives in twenty-

⁴² For the relationship between Robert de Sorbon's text and the *Miroir de monde* (c. 1248–80), see R. R. Raymo, Elaine E. Whitaker and Ruth E. Sternglant, 'Introduction', in *The Mirroure of the Worlde: A Middle English Translation of Le Miroir Du Monde*, ed. by R. R. Raymo, Elaine E. Whitaker and Ruth E. Sternglant (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 3–42 (p. 7). For the relationship between the *Miroir de monde* and the *Somme le roi*, see F. N. M. Diekstra, 'Introduction', in *The Middle English Weye of Paradys and the Middle French Voie De Paradis*, ed. by F. N. M. Diekstra (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 3–96 (pp. 215–16). Of course, for our present purposes, it would be valuable to examine how private sins are treated in the *Miroir du monde*, but it has not been edited, and the wide divergence between its copies makes any analysis of it difficult at this stage.

⁴³ Laurent d'Orléans, *La Somme le roi*, ed. by Édith Brayer and Anne-Françoise Leurquin-Labie (Paris: Anciens Textes Français, 2008), p. 150.

eight manuscripts and fragments and therefore seems to have been popular in England, where it was written.⁴⁴ In the prologue, the text is positioned as a work for the laity:

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.

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
God in heaven may be thanked for it.⁴⁵

William of Waddington first raises concerns about the treatment of private sins in the prologue. Here, William insists that none are described in his text: 'Des priuitéz n'i trouerez ren, l Car mal peot fere, ou poi de bien' ('you will not find anything about private matters here l because it can lead to harm, or little good').⁴⁶ His choice of 'priuitéz' here demarcates those sins that happen in secret from those that could be acquired through social observation.

The context behind William of Waddington's rejection of 'priuitéz' 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 'priuitéz', he writes: 'Ke plus en lisaunt seit delitus, l Cuntres nus mettrum vus aucuns' ('to make the reading delightful l we will add for you some stories').⁴⁷ These stories are supposed to help the reader hate sin: 'Sicum les seinz nus unt cunté l Pur plus fere hayr pechié' ('[these tales are] just as the saints have told us l to make sin more hated').⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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 private sins are not included, because nothing good will come of them — is curious. The proximity of these two ideas might suggest 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

⁴⁴ Dean and Boulton, pp. 349–51.

⁴⁵ Quoted and translated by Ulrike Schemmann in *Confessional Literature and Lay Education: The Manuel de Pechez as a Book of Good Conduct and Guide to Personal Religion* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2000), p. 229. For the question of whether these lines are authorial, see Schemmann, p. 324. Where possible, I quote passages from Schemmann's text, since the only edition of the *Manuel des péchés*, cited below, is out of date.

⁴⁶ William of Waddington, *Robert of Brunne's 'Handlyng synne' and its French Original*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, o. s. 119–23, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1901–3), I, ll. 83–84.

⁴⁷ Quoted and translated by Schemmann, p. 229.

⁴⁸ William of Waddington, I, l. 81–82.

⁴⁹ Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 19–38.

lechery and gluttony, ‘me delit mult’ (‘delight me very much’).⁵⁰ There is, then, the possibility that William’s fear 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.⁵¹ The descriptions of the branches of these sins are general and do not include specific sexual acts or body parts: ‘Le premier est fornicaciun, | Ceo a dire, quant simples hom | E femme hors d’espusage | Se assemblent par fol corage’ (‘the first is fornication, that is to say, when single men and women meet by wanton desire outside of marriage’).⁵²

In his adaptation, *Handlyng Synne* (c. 1303–7), Robert Mannyng repeats William of Waddington’s concern, but places it earlier than it appears in William’s text: ‘Of pryuytees speke y nou3t: | Þe pryuytees wyle y nou3t name, | For noun þarfore shuld me blame’ (‘Of private [sins] I will not speak, the private [sins] I will not name, for none therefore should I be blamed’).⁵³ Avoiding private sins is, according to 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’ (‘the book might be the more loathed’).⁵⁴

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’ (‘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]’).⁵⁵ 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. Like its source, then, and like the *Somme le roi*, Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne* suggests significant unease surrounding private sins.

⁵⁰ William of Waddington, 1, l. 11, 198.

⁵¹ William of Waddington, 1, l. 5813–6070.

⁵² William of Waddington, 1, l. 5819–22.

⁵³ Robert Mannyng, *Robert of Brunne’s ‘Handlyng synne’ and its French Original*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, o. s. 119–23, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1901–3), 1, l. 30–33.

⁵⁴ Henry, Duke of Lancaster, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines: The Unpublished Devotional Treatise of Henry of Lancaster*, ed. by E. J. Arnould (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1940), p. 69; translated in *The Book of Holy Medicines (Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines)*, ed. and trans. by Catherine Batt, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 419/The French of England Translation Series (FRETS), 8 (Arizona: Arizona State University, 2015), p. 137.

⁵⁵ Robert Mannyng, 1, 137–40.

Private Sin and 'Anxieties of Outreach'

The self-examination tradition of the *Manuel des péchés* and that of the *Somme le roi* had a significant influence on other self-examination texts, so 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 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 willing to describe private sins when addressing clerical audiences than lay ones? It is, of course, possible that it was 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'.⁵⁶ Jacqueline Murray, speaking of pastoral literature more generally, observes that 'confession had [...] evolved in the peculiarly masculine monastic environment of the early Middle Ages'.⁵⁷

However, even if these sins were thought to be particularly common in monastic environments, this does not explain why they are censored in manuals that address both clerical and lay readers, like the *Compileison*. We would expect, rather, that these manuals that address clerical and lay readers would include these sins for the sake of the clerical ones. It seems more likely that authors were more open to listing private sins for clerical audiences because they worried that lay ones were more prone to trying new sins than were clerical ones. It is not hard to imagine that Grosseteste, writing for a monastic community, was less worried 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 fears that the confessional interrogation could inadvertently teach penitents new sins spilled over into manuals for penitents, especially into those texts addressed explicitly to the laity. This matters, because it shows that the wave of manuals for penitents written for lay audiences in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council raised concerns among those who produced them; their authors recognized that, while extending the confessional apparatus, they were also losing some control over how this apparatus would be used by their audiences.

On one hand, the creation of manuals for penitents that address a wider readership, such as the *Compileison*, is suggestive of a demand that reflects how far the changes in confessional practices that culminated in the injunction to confession of 1215 had been internalized by penitents and had permeated society. These texts represent the same widening of the Church's

⁵⁶ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 174.

⁵⁷ Jacqueline Murray, 'Gendered Souls in Sexed Bodies: The Male Construction of Female Sexuality in Some Medieval Confessors' Manuals', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* ed. by Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval, 1998), pp. 79–94 (p. 81).

power that Payer and others find in manuals for confessors. But, at the same time, the concerns that would seem to be reflected in manuals addressed to general audiences over sexual sin suggest that members of the Church feared that the extension of this power could inadvertently introduce new sins — or even remind penitents of old ones — and point to the heightened tension that emerged as religious education became increasingly removed from the institutional Church.

Aside from illuminating a new aspect of distance penitential education, the findings here shed new light on the medieval mind. Michel Foucault once declared, in *La volonté de savoir* (1976), that anxiety about sexual discourse emerged after the Council of Trent (c. 1545–63), and that this growing unease around the language of sexual sin in the Early Modern period was part of an emerging self-reflexivity.⁵⁸ In this model, anxiety about speaking of sex is a symptom of, and contributes to, the complex self-awareness of the modern subject — one generally absent from the medieval world. The findings presented here, by highlighting the significant unease about sexual discourse in manuals for penitents, contributes to a growing awareness of the forms of self-knowledge available to the medieval mind and, in so doing, to a broader movement of challenging a progressivist narrative that locates the emergence of self-reflexivity in the Early Modern period.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ '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.' *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, 3 vols (New York: Vintage, 1990), I, 18–19, 70.

⁵⁹ For critiques of the tendency to locate the emergence of self-knowledge in the Early Modern period see, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), 1–17, and David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of the Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the "History of the Subject"', in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 177–202.