

Confessio cordis and landscapes of the heart in Henry of Lancaster's *Livre des Seyntz Medicines*

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Abelard's *Ethics* marks a watershed in the development of medieval subjectivity. His emphasis on *intentio* redefined sin as an inward reality, rather than an action extraneous to the subject.¹ Despite initial condemnation, his penitential doctrine was widely disseminated in the wake of the introduction of the requirement for universal confession at the Lateran IV council. This contributed to a shift in penitential attention away from conspicuous sins towards a scrutiny of the secrets of the heart. The novel definition of sin came to influence the enormous apparatus of instruction and examination of lay consciousness set in motion by the council, under the guise of manuals for confessors, *summae* of vices and virtues, guides for penitents, questionnaires and forms of confession.² This new penitential doctrine transformed the notion of interiority and mechanisms of self-formation. Although there are many differences between pre- and post Lateran IV penitential practices, the development of a more inward type of confession, which I will hereafter call *confessio cordis*, is the most significant one.

Whether *confessio cordis*, upon which this article seeks to shed light, was only a theoretical conceit or an actual practice remains problematic. In confessional manuals, it is not defined as a separate stage of the penitential process like *contritio cordis*, nor are the methods for achieving it in practice described, despite the pragmatic bend of these treatises. Notwithstanding, confession is universally regarded as a cleansing of the heart in post-Lateran didactic literature, which would have required a different set of penitential practices than the inventory of actions, as well as another way of conceptualizing the self in terms of *intentio* rather than as the sum of its acts. *Confessio cordis* redefines the

penitential subject in terms of being rather than doing, focusing on sinfulness as a state generating exterior sins, but independent from them.

Secondary literature on confession and doctrines of sin perpetuates the silence on the topic in medieval sources.³ Silvana Vecchio has dedicated a study to the taxonomies of *peccata cordis*, which, while very useful, fails to address the conundrum of how sinfulness was treated with respect to discrete sins.⁴ While I will draw on Peter von Moos's study, he focuses on the prescriptive norm in confessional manuals and does not present evidence on how medieval penitents attempted to respond to the intellectually challenging mandate of representing their innermost selves.

Henry of Lancaster's *Livre des Seyntz Medicines* (1354) is just such a private devotional exercise, which conveniently singles out the confession of the heart from other parts of the penitential sequence. The proposition of this article is that *confessio cordis* is indeed meaningfully different from other forms of avowal to deserve being considered independently. This hypothesis will be explored through an analysis of Henry of Lancaster's treatise and how this cultured aristocrat responded to the didactic texts spurred by Lateran IV and the imperative of a more inward confession.

Any discussion on confession has to take into account Foucault's substantial influence on how the confessional subject is conceptualized. Foucault regarded the obligation to annual confession imposed by Lateran IV as the pervasive foundation of avowal in all aspects of Western societies: medicine, psychology, justice and literature.⁵ Moreover, he deemed that the requirement to articulate the self played a very important role in self-formation mechanisms. Catherine Little corroborated Foucault's idea that the self is shaped by the very process of its entry into discourse.⁶ She widened Benveniste's theory of the deictic pronouns "I" and "you" as empty forms that the subject comes to inhabit in the act of speech in order to characterize more far-reaching forms of preexisting confessional discourses which mould the subject that comes to articulate itself through them. Little insists on the self-policing role of homiletic *exempla*, but a perfect incarnation of her theory is the late medieval genre of the first-person form of confession, which presents the penitent with an empty grammatical "I" rich with a host of other cultural conditionings of the self.⁷

The structure of the text interestingly unveils a gap in the instructional texts produced in the wake of Lateran IV. While didactic treatises and penitential *summae* widely adopted Abelard's distinction between sins as discrete actions and sinfulness as a state, the practical guidance they provided was restricted to ever more comprehensive and refined ways of listing actions derivative from the state, but that could not fully account for it. The *Livre des Seyntz Medicines* borrows its internal organizational principle from the penitential taxonomies common in these treatises.⁸

The first part of the *Livre* describes the wounds occasioned by the seven capital sins in the senses and the hands and feet, while the second part details the remedies that can be found in the contemplation of the Passion, equally mapped onto the classificatory scheme of the senses.⁹ The first part dedicates a whole subsection to the confession of the heart, which can in turn be divided into two segments. In keeping with traditional taxonomies, the prolegomena of the *confessio cordis* represent the progression of the capital sins inwards through the *topos* of the siege of the body castle, rewritten as an attack of the seven capital vices on the more inner citadel of the heart. However, when it comes to describing the embryonic sinfulness of the heart, pregnant with deeds that haven't been carried out yet and that are hidden from the scrutiny of consciousness by their very indeterminacy, penitential enumeration reaches a linguistic impasse and comes to a halt. The abandonment of the taxonomic framework of the rest of the treatise testifies to a need to account for the propensity to sin, which was not satisfied by the traditional listings of conscious thoughts and manifest deeds. This study is concerned with the images of inwardness Henry of Lancaster coined in order to describe the epistemic difficulties involved in mapping the intentional self.

I borrow the notion of 'intentional self' from Kathleen Smith's unpublished dissertation, *Literary Lives of Intention in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century England*, which examines how theological and legal theorizations of *intentio* fashioned late medieval literary conceptions of interiority.¹⁰ This kind of penitential subjectivity spread outside the narrow scope of didactic and devotional genres at the end of the Middle Ages, which confirms Foucault's theory about the far-reaching societal influence of the self-formation mechanisms of the confessional. Like

the understudied *confessio cordis* of which it is the product, the intentional self is a relatively novel and unknown conceit in the study of the confessional subject, which means that the landscapes of the heart examined in this article have heretofore passed under the radar of the critics that have considered the *Livre des Seyntz Medicines*.

Focusing on the medical metaphors that serve as matrix of the text, most studies divided Henry's treatise into an anatomy of sin and its spiritual remedies. The extended subsection dedicated to the *confessio cordis* disrupted the neat symmetry of this model and was hence relegated to the status of digression.¹¹ Introductions to the treatise see it in relation to homiletic Franciscan *exempla* and the body of didactic treatises, mirrors of vices and virtues and confessional guides penned for the instruction of the laity in the aftermath of Lateran IV.¹² Critics concur that its interest lies in that it can allow us to study how a lay nobleman of considerable status like Henry of Lancaster would have internalized and responded to the norm outlined in the didactic corpus. However the injunction towards *confessio cordis* and its difficulties are nowhere considered, although they give rise to the most original pages of the treatise.

Noting that a lot of the imagery in the *Livre des Seyntz Medicines* constitutes a rewriting of classic devotional tropes, Ackermann regards Henry's confession as a lay response to instructional treatises like the *Ancrene Riwe* or the *Cursor Mundi*, without autobiographical value.¹³ At the other end of the spectrum, *Le Livre des Seyntz Medicines* also prompted biographic readings, mining the text for personal details and real life experiences.¹⁴ Andrew Taylor's study is an interesting example of the latter category, quarrying the biographic aspects of the text for signs of resistance to an oppressive confessional norm. Taylor takes Henry's inability to completely forego some of the sins that he repents for as the liberating repulsion of religiously imposed self-policing by a recalcitrant penitent.¹⁵ However, a contrary reading of the same professed incapacity for penitential self-correction makes more sense: a complete discursive renunciation of sin would contradict the recommended penitential posture of self-abjection, evincing pride. The imperfect nature of Henry's confession actually constitutes an embracing of the norm, rather than its rejection.

The oppressive nature of the Lateran IV requirement for universal confession is one of the points where Foucault's analysis of the Middle

Agnes needs to be nuanced.¹⁶ The case for the confession of the heart provides an interesting counterpoint to Foucault's overall pessimism, because the move to a more inward avowal is overridden with such epistemic difficulties that the creation of a predefined discourse to assist with the expression of the innermost self becomes impossible, which paradoxically affords more freedom to the penitent in attempting to find its own language for the description of the ineffable deep self. Treatises like the *Fasciculus Morum* and *Somme le Roi*, from which Henry drew a lot of his imagery of inwardness, put forward the injunction to confess the *occulta cordis*, but do not provide a pragmatic roadmap on how to get there.¹⁷ Since there are no recipes for the exploration of the unconscious, the penitent is given the creative leeway to find the best way to embrace the confessional norm. The struggle to give shape to the inform regions of the psyche could best be characterized by Catherine Little's notion of "self-definition", which in contrast to the concept of Foucault's oppressive "subject formation" allows the self more freedom in the act of depicting itself.¹⁸

The heart is the seat of the essential self, which is characterized by an ontological mystery. Peter von Moos attributes this to the eschatological value of the *occulta cordis*, revealed only on the day of reckoning along with the ultimate fate of the soul in the afterlife.¹⁹ Opaque to the individual consciousnesses, the secret identity of the self is only transparent for God. This deep self only reveals itself obliquely in the outer man as an ineffable signified would manifest itself in its signifier.²⁰ According to Walter Benn Michaels, self-knowledge is a hermeneutic act, since the self only perceives itself as a sign through its activity (thoughts and cognition).²¹

The monastic origins of *confessio cordis* do not belie this interpretative quality of the scrutiny of the innermost self. Rooted in the monastic practice described by Cassian of disclosing bad *logismoi* to a spiritual director in order to attain *puritas cordis*, the close monitoring of thoughts was aimed to achieve a better understanding of the unconscious source of this mental activity, in order to keep subliminal urges in check.²² The purposed object of knowledge of both *confessio cordis* and monastic avowal practices should not however be mistaken with the Freudian unconscious, but should rather be understood in the light of Biblical anthropology. Unlike the Cartesian self which somehow

became conflated with the first-person pronoun, Scriptural personhood is not equated to the knowledge that the subject has of itself, to its consciously posited “I”.²³

Von Moos traces the evolution of penitential trends post Lateran IV as a process that ends in a paradoxical injunction to reveal the secret of the Holy of Holies of the self, the *invisibilia cordis*, previously regarded as inviolable. The transition from early medieval tariff penance, centered on tangible *satisfactio* for patent acts, towards the morality of *intentio* gradually included an increased attention to thoughts as signs of the deep self. After Abelard’s thesis was condemned for stating that *contritio* in the face of God could absolve the penitent in the absence of actual shrift of mouth, auricular confession of *occulta cordis* became the only avenue to be absolved of the deep-seated sinfulness of the heart. It was then that the privacy that God enjoyed with the deep self was broken into. The paradoxical obligation to confess as best one could that which one ontologically ignored about oneself became universal, creating a lot of anxiety about incomplete confession in the late Middle Ages.

This anxiety was fueled by a host of *exempla* circulated in sermons and penitential manuals, in which minor oversights in confession resulted in eternal damnation. For instance, a fleeting thought of anger that goes unshriven is enough to condemn an otherwise devout virgin in the *Fasciculus Morum*. This treatise in particular emphasizes the inward nature of confession, conceived in accordance with Luke 11:25-26 as a cleansing of the insides of the vessel of the heart. A devout, but lecherous monk has a vision in which the Virgin presents him with a wholesome drink in a dirty dish. The vision is intended to represent that prayers and good deeds offered from an impure heart are not acceptable to God.²⁴

Abelard’s morality of *intentio* had definitely shifted the weight of confession from outside deeds, which appeared as almost inconsequential, to a scrutiny of the heart, so much so that a comprehensive avowal came to be assimilated to the courtly *don du coeur*. Another *exemplum* presents the vision of a woman reluctant to confess a sin that she was particularly ashamed of. Christ appears to her inviting her to put her hand in his side wound, with the words: “Why are you afraid of showing me your heart when I am not ashamed to show you mine?”²⁵ But the best illustration of confession as a offering of

the heart comes from the *Livre des Seyntz Medicines* itself via *Fasciculus Morum*. In a meditation on the humility of the Divine Infant, Henry comes to the conclusion that an upset child can be easily pacified by presenting him with something as simple as an apple, glossed as the penitent's heart.²⁶ Playing on the courtly paradox that parting with one's heart could lead to instant demise, Henry notes that this sort of love gift actually preserves both from sudden and eternal death.

Despite the taxonomical sophistication of the systems of classification of *peccata cordis*, the essential self located in the heart resisted description. Notwithstanding redefining confession itself as a purge of the heart, neither the *Fasciculus Morum* nor *Somme le Roi* offered any practical guidance about how such a cathartic description of inwardness was to be achieved. The confession of the heart constitutes a distinct subsection in Henry's treatise, marked off as such by a repudiation of the numeric symmetries underlying the listings of sins and their remedies that structure the rest of the book. The abandonment of the previous classificatory framework of sin for this segment is an indication that Henry saw it as inadequate for giving expression to sinfulness as an embryonic inward state.

On the one hand, these symbolic images of inwardness afford a type of knowledge that embraces the fundamental opacity of the deep self to the consciousness. The distance between signifier and signified integrates the mystery of the person, the liberating and unsettling fact that the individual is not to be equated to its self-awareness. Moreover, as allegorical images, they require an interpretation, which can constitute a support for the self-glossing exercise that yields an enigmatic picture of the deep self to consciousness. On the other hand, their nature of approximations of what the self might be like and their oblique way of signifying prevent them from fully achieving their penitential purpose. My analysis will show that rather than being meant to complement traditional confession via listings, bringing it closer to the ideal of comprehensiveness touted in penitential *summae*, the triptych of landscapes of inwardness actually mean to convey the ultimate impossibility of accurately representing the deep self.

Consistent with his self-abjection posture, Henry of Lancaster depicts his confession not as a salvific act, but as the post-mortem display of internal maladies in a dissection performed in Montpellier

on the body of a man executed for his crimes.²⁷ Since the penitential ideal of exposing the *culpa latens*, sin conceived in its most inward form, stripped from outward manifestations was epistemically unachievable, Henry's imperfect confession was ultimately bound to be damning. Despite earnestly attempting a *catabasis* in the inferno of the darkest recesses of the self, Henry is aware that it might not be enough, hence the sincere pathos of his treatise, interspersed with prayers and calls to the Virgin and her Son.

The heart as vortex

The aspiration towards a more inward confession involves going beyond the *fait accompli* by taking into account the steps preceding the deed. The debate surrounding the sinfulness of first movements led to sin being theorized as a process, a sequence of different penitential gravity: *suggestio*, *delectatio*, *consensus*, *peccatum in facto*, *peccatum in consuetudine*.²⁸ In terms of penitential taxonomies, if sin is theorized like a living, growing organism, its break up according to its developmental stages (pride in *intentio*, pride of mouth and pride in deed in an illustration from the *Fasciculus Morum*) can only expunge it partially, without going to the root of the matter, since it is unable to seize it in its essential mutability.²⁹

The first spatial representation of the heart is a seascape, intended to articulate a fluid vision of sin as a dynamic entity constantly transacted between inwardness and the outside world. The heart is assimilated to a whirlpool on the bottom of the sea that creates the ebb and flow by engulfing the waters of the receding tide and spitting them back out at high tide:

A trois choses puisse jeo bien comparer mon coer. La primere est un place en la mer, qe homme apelle transglout ; et homme l'appelle ainsi pur ceo qe c'est com un pertuz en la mer qe transglout tout l'ewe qe se ratrait de la mere et hors d'illoques vient tout le flote de la mer. (...) Tresdouz Sires, ensi est il de mon coer, qe bien y penseroit coment touz les grantz pecchés et les petitiz de ceo monde entront et issont.³⁰

[I can fittingly compare my heart to three things: the first is an area of the sea they call a whirlpool. And they call it this because it is a kind of chasm in the sea that swallows up all the water that ebbs away at the tide, and from it surges all the sea's floodtide. (...) Most sweet Lord, so it is with my heart, through which one can imagine all the sins of the world, great and small, coming and going]³¹

The geographic notion of a marine vortex generating the tide probably comes from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, where he states that all the waters rise and return to a central abyss. The heart is the locus of the *sensus communis* in Aristotelian physiology. According to William of Auvergne, "the senses are like gates into the body through which ingressions and egressions are made".³² According to Heather Webb, medieval sensation can be better conceptualized as "intercourse" than as an "impression", because it presupposes an "uninterrupted intercorporeal circulation that mixes the world beyond the skin into the individual who is in turn mixed into her or his surroundings".³³ As the seat of sensation, defined as a twofold exchange with the outer world, the heart is necessarily porous. Henry of Lancaster refashions this physiological openness onto the world into a metaphor for the circulation of sinfulness.

The allegory of the maelstrom, with the heart "transglout" ravenously consuming the sea of the world, blurs the boundaries between the space of inwardness and the outside world beyond those of the physiological porosity of the heart. The stark contrast with the predominant devotional representation of selfhood as an enclosed architecture fending off extraneous contamination, like the sealed off inwardness in the *Ancrene Wisse* or the castle of virginity in Grosseteste's *Château d'Amour*, intimates that Henry's marine imagery should be read in conjunction to the imagery in Psalm 69 as a *topos* of extreme humility and penitential self-abjection.³⁴

Moreover, allegories of the siege imply a linear conception of sin, in which evil enters solely from outside. Henry's image of the rotating waters ebbing to and from the heart attempts to capture the idea that sinfulness also stems from inside, as in Matthew 15, 17-20, where Jesus

polemically states that the things that enter the body do not defile it, but the evil things that go forth from the heart do. The marine vortex echoes other images in the text placing the heart, “*receitour et hors liverour de touz mals*” (“receiver and exporter of all evils”), at the center of a circular dynamics of sin.³⁵

Sin circulates in the body like a poisonous fluid, envenoming the superficial lesions of the senses with the corrupt humors from the chief internal wound in the heart and in turn further infecting the latter with the toxic exhalations of the former. In the same vein, the heart is also compared to a thief sanctuary, where marauders retreat after committing their crimes. The doctrine of the fluctuating dynamics of sin finds a very original expression in an extended metaphor of the migratory cycle of salmon. In order to spawn, salmon run up freshwater, changing their nature to that of “kyper”.³⁶ Their offspring acquire their nature only by returning to the sea, just like sin only becomes mortal in the heart. The idea of natural metamorphosis demonstrates that sin changes, while retaining an underlying identity, as it progresses towards outward realization *in facto* or in the opposite movement of becoming ingrained inwardly.

By pointing out that sin is a dynamic entity caught in a perpetual movement between the heart and the outside world, Henry of Lancaster gestures towards a dilemma latent in traditional penitential taxonomies: in its mobile ontology between the embryonic and the fully-fledged, sin cannot be effectively pinned down by the habitual listings recommended in confessional manuals. A protean entity, sin manifests in *operae* only the tip of the iceberg of a far more repulsive sinfulness dissimulated in the heart.

Given Henry’s understanding of sin, this veritable descent into the maelstrom of his being is not merely intended to combat mental sins, but to disrupt the cycle of sin entirely by coming to terms with evil in its most essential and inward form. The avowal of outward actions should be relatively straightforward for the honest penitent, but the larval sinfulness hidden in the heart defies easy expression. Another metaphor of Sloth as an infernal hen continuously hatching sin in the heart emphasizes the epistemic conundrum of describing the chicks before they break out of their shell (*in operis*). Catherine Batt identifies the image of the chicks to be one of the unconscious as ever pregnant with sin.³⁷ Faced with the amorphous depths of the psyche, language

reaches a pragmatic impasse, which leads confession to take the oblique way of imagery.

The subterranean heart, confession as a fox hunt

Confessio cordis distinguishes itself from previous penitential practices by its mission to describe embryonic sin before it manifests itself in *operis*. Henry of Lancaster's second allegorical figuration of the space of the heart as a labyrinthine fox's earth gives the most forthright expression to the epistemic hurdles besetting such an enterprise. Although the fox hunt, with its description of hunting methods recalling contemporary technical treatises like *Les Livres du Roy Modus et de la Reine Ratio* (1354-1377), attracted some critical attention, it was never discussed in relation with the penitential paradigm change towards a more inward practice of avowal.³⁸ The confessional nature of the fox hunt was mostly mobilized as a supporting argument that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was a literary response to the *Livre des Seyntz Medicines*, tied to Henry of Lancaster's circle.³⁹

The first epistemic difficulty presented by *confessio cordis* is that it presupposes an exploration of the underground regions of the self, where evil proliferates unchecked. The fox's earth is a place where the fox, commonly associated with the devil, multiplies in the dark:⁴⁰

Par cest ensample il me semble qe jeo puisse trop bien
comparer mon malveis coer al angle q'est par dedeinz cest
court de renars, ou les renars se treient einz et **demorent et
se muscent de jours**, et de nuyt saillent hors pur quere lour
proie. Ceux sont **les ordes pecchés qe sont en mon coer et
les vices qe la se muscent et se reposent** de jour et saillent
hors de nuytz pur prendre lour proie: c'est a entendre que **les
pecchés et les malveistiés se muscent et se reposent en mon
coer et ne se moustrent mye en apert ne clerement qe home
les puisse conoistre**; et ceo appelle jeo **jours**. Mes de **nuyt** s'en
saut et c'est quant nul ne le purra **veoir ne conoistre** : c'est
nuyt quant il est oscur et oscurément s'en issent les males
vicez de mon coer, com **renard**.⁴¹

[From this example it seems to me that I may all too aptly compare my wicked heart to the corner, deep in the fox's earth, to which the foxes withdraw and where they live and hide during the day and from which they emerge at night to seek out their prey. That is to say that the sins and the evils hide and take their rest in the heart and do not show themselves at all openly or clearly enough for anyone to recognize them- and this is what I mean by the light of day. But at night they leap out, and that is when no one is able to see them or recognize them. It is night when it is dark, and in the dark the wicked vices of the heart emerge, like the fox.]⁴²

The metaphor of underground animal generation recasts the cycle of sinfulness represented in the previous landscape by the ebb and flow from the heart as a matter of epistemic light and darkness. Sin is not latent in the heart, but ever productive in the world, with larval *peccata cordis* deriving their fertility from their remoteness from the light of consciousness. *Confessio cordis* must therefore find the means to give expression to that which the penitent ignores about himself, because the only way to effectively reverse the cycle of sin is to weed it out at the root, in the occult angle of the heart.

Discrete sins, as *operae*, are more readily accessible to the light of knowledge and hence, more easily eradicated in confession than the sinfulness lodged in the heart. Because of this epistemic facility, Henry's allegory of confession starts in a counterintuitive manner with the moment following the sacrament, when the penitent has to do satisfaction for the sins which he has already professed to.

Henry describes in great naturalistic detail three techniques of fox hunting: the aristocratic *chasse à force des chiens* which unfurls in the open and two underground hunting methods, asphyxiating the fox inside its earth and sending a fox terrier after it. The latter two are classified as vermin control in *Les Livres du Roy Modus et de la Reine Ratio*.

The first method represents the foxes as outside their lair, tracked by bloodhounds while the entrances to their lair have been stopped up by true confession, repentance and a will to eschew relapsing in the same sin. Manifest sin is easy to hunt down in confession, because it cannot play hide and seek with consciousness.

The shift operated in the traditional succession of stages of the penitential process (contrition, confession and satisfaction) constitutes an immediate trigger of hermeneutic attention. Other allegories of confession map out a straightforward penitential itinerary, oriented outwards. In Rutebeuf's *Voie de Paradis*, the road to confession is laid out "*plan comme .I. parchemin*" (flat as a parchment sheet), without diverging towards the exploration of the depths of the psyche.⁴³ As a rule, avowal is defined as expelling sin from the confines of interiority, like in the *topos* of confession as a sweeping of the house of the soul with the broom of the tongue, present in the *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Doctrine of the Hert*, *Somme le Roi* and Henry's own text, describing the sacrament as the preparation of a household for the arrival of a great lord.⁴⁴ In this image, confession corresponds unequivocally to Christiania Whitehead's definition: a "putting *out* of the self, via speech (...) conjoined with determined self-construction".⁴⁵

The fox hunting allegory inverts the confessional progression, causing it to become an investigation of inwardness that starts on the confines of exteriority. Confession acquires an inward bent: it becomes an exploration of the uncharted regions of the self and a quest for form. That which lies in hiding in the shapeless darkness of the subconscious has to be cast into language in order to be expelled.

Confessio cordis involves working one's way down to the deep self from the signs it projects on the surface: a hermeneutic of thoughts and acts that would allow a conjectural knowledge of the hidden principle that generates them. Self-interpretation is not a byproduct of self-expression, but a precondition if the essential self is conceived as ontologically obscure to consciousness.

The second and third allegorical tableaux consist in methods of exterminating foxes within the lair. Once all the openings of the lair but one have been stopped up, one can smother the animal inside by lighting a triune fire at the entrance that is left clear (the flames allegorize the Holy Spirit, the love of God and the fire of hell). In order for their conjoined smoke to effectively cleanse the inner space, it is essential that the openings of the senses be tightly sealed. The second hunting technique puts forward the cleansing effect of Grace that dispenses with self-knowledge. The hunter remains unaware of the number of foxes and other vermin possibly infecting the underground *strata* of the self.

The third hunting method best represents the epistemological difficulties posed by *confessio cordis* understood as an exploration of the unconscious. A small and lean terrier representing conscience is sent down the labyrinth passageways of the self in order to track down sin. Confession works its way inwards from the sins that are easier to grasp: conscience is supposed to pursue sin across all the senses, until it has firmly pinned it down in the heart. The problem is that when the terrier finally corners the beast, the latter turns to face it in self defense. As the face is naturally comelier than the rear, the fox's behavior is moralized as sin's propensity to dissimulate its ugliness from consciousness.

Mes qei fait donques la pecché a la conscience, quant il sente de pres? Mes tourne son deriere en l'angle et le visage devers le chien, pur soy meultz defendre. Homme doit jugger le visage de toutz bestes communalement pur le plus bel, et le deriere pur le plus lede. Il ne convient my dire la cause, car chescun le seit par soi meismes. Ensi fait le pecché, qi tourne ses ordures en l'angle, et le plus beal mette contre la conscience pur soy defendre s'il poet et ceo lesse abaier au visage : c'est a les meyndres et a les meyns ordz pecchez, et sont touz les plus ords tournez en l'alme par l'angle de coer, come dist est. Mes quant lui mestre vendra pur fouir apres le renard, il trouvera aussi bien le deriere q'est en l'angle com le visage qe le chien abaie, et par l'abaier de l'un si avient homme a l'autre.⁴⁶

[But what does sin do to the conscience, when it feels it close by, but turn its back to the corner and face to the dog, the better to defend itself. The face is usually considered to be the most attractive aspect of all animals and the backside the ugliest. There is no need to explain why, as everyone knows it for himself. And so sin turns its foulness to the corner and its best feature towards the conscience to defend itself if it can. And so it allows itself to be barked in the face, that is, for the conscience to attack the minor, and least filthy sins, while the most disgusting are turned to the soul in the recess of the heart, as has been said. But when the master hunter arrives to dig in pursuit of the fox, he will find its backside stuck in

the corner just as well as the face at which the dog is barking, and by holding one at bay, a man can get at the other.⁴⁷

By way of a self-defense mechanism, consciousness cannot apprehend the full measure of one's moral deformity and repulsiveness. Henry of Lancaster's positing of the impossibility of an impartial self-awareness seems more faithful to reality than the Cartesian axiom of the absolute transparency of the self to itself, which is so foundational for the development of our modern myth of objectivity. The duke readily admits to a host of obstacles that thwart his will to make a thorough confession of the heart: a lack of attention to the workings of his inner world, a lack of wisdom, of theological knowledge and rhetorical prowess to give expression to the "great evils that are so deeply rooted and hidden in my heart",⁴⁸ and a propensity to judge his failings less harshly than he should. The volte-face of the fox in its encounter with the terrier represents the latter, which calls for an assisted self-examination.

The most honest of penitents require the expertise of a confessor in order to assess the true nature of their sins. Alerted by the bark of the terrier, the hunter will extract the whole body of the fox, revealing the most abject aspects of the sinfulness lodged deep in the angle of the heart, which Henry describes in terms of the excremental stench the animal was reputed for in hunting treatises.⁴⁹

Freud distinguished the nascent science of psychoanalysis from old penitential practices by stating that in confession the sinner tells what he knows, whereas the neurotic was bound to tell more.⁵⁰ The role assigned to the confessor in Henry's hunting allegory is similar to that of the psychoanalyst: he has to enable the exploration of that which the penitent does not know, accompanying him in a plunge in the subterranean regions of his psyche. Although arguably Augustine himself purposed to confess both that which he knew and which he ignored about himself, Henry's fox hunting allegory is the clearest allegorical expression of confession as an exploration of the unconscious in the Middle Ages that I am aware of, and quite unique in its kind.⁵¹

Although by definition, an "*angle*" is the topographic opposite of the center, it constitutes the focal point of the labyrinthine geography of

the terrier hunt allegory. The heart is not designated as a complete fox's earth, but as the more inward '*angle q'est par dedeinz cest court de renars*' ('the corner, deep in the fox's earth), where the terrier representing conscience will attempt to corner ('*enangler*') sin.⁵²

Henry's usage of the notion of "*angle*" differs radically from the way the concept appears in another allegory of confession in Guillaume de Digulleville's *Pelérinage de Vie Humaine*. In another avatar of the *topos* of confession as a domestic cleaning, Guillaume represents the moral imperative for a particularly punctilious confession through an image of the Broom of Confession carefully sweeping the nooks and crannies of the house of consciousness.

*Le balai tourner doit on,
Quar autrement grant soupeon
Seroit que en aucun angle,
En aucun destour ne cornet
Ne fust ordure recelee,
Reposte ou amoncelee.*⁵³

[One must wield the broom well, because otherwise a great suspicion would be cast that waste might be hidden and amassed in an angle, nook or corner somewhere.]⁵⁴

The diminutive form "*anglel*" appears as a synonym for other nouns "*destour*" and "*cornet*", designating out of the way places.⁵⁵ Rather than representing the abysmal depths of the psyche, these hard to reach nooks allegorize smaller and hierarchically less important sins, forgotten by design or because of a condemnable lack of thoroughness in self-scrutiny.

In Henry's fox hunt allegory, the lateral "*angle*" is defined by its vicinity to sin and its liminal nature from an epistemological standpoint. It is there that sin hides in a darkness that remains inaccessible to consciousness, but it is also there that it begins to be known, albeit in its more innocuous form. The angle is therefore an allegory of the inward epistemic progress of confession, from more superficial forms of sin towards their naked inward principle. It is there that the metamorphic cycle of sin in its transaction between exteriority and interiority can be effectively disrupted. It is in the fox allegory that what has been alluded

to in the description of the migration of salmon and the marine vortex is spelled out most clearly:

Certes ainsi est il de moi, ceo face jeo a savoir a Dieux et a touz gientz, com le renard q'est en la grande court chacee ou le terrer tantqe il soit enanglez : tout ainsi est le pecché par my moi, cea et la, par bouche, mayn et piee, et par touz les autres lieux tantqe soit enanglez en coer et l'alme, car si tost come il est fermement en l'anglee en coer, il est en l'alme.⁵⁶
[As the fox is hunted into the great earth by the terrier until it is cornered, in just the same way sin is pursued within me, this way and that, through mouth, hand and foot, and through all the other places until it has been cornered in the heart and the soul, for as soon as it is cornered in the heart, so it is in the soul.]⁵⁷

While the hunt must necessarily start on the surface on account of the obscurity of the deep self, as long as it unfurls on such a superficial level, it cannot seize sin in its elusive and protean metamorphoses. Tracing sin to its inner source is the only way to contain it and quarantine it.

In the above paragraph, the comparison affords allegorical imagery an almost performative role. Henry can tackle the exploration of his deep self only by means of the literary vehicle of his allegories. While illustrating the epistemic hurdles facing *confessio cordis*, the allegorical geographies of the self paradoxically become a means towards a pragmatic penitential goal. According to Catherine Little, homiletic *exempla* played a great role in penitential self-construction, as they provided models and a casuistic that the laity was invited to conform to.⁵⁸ Henry repeatedly designates his imagery of the fox hunt as “*ensample*”,⁵⁹ in a different way, stressing the pragmatic function of “*prendre ensample par le renard coment jeo doie destruire les ords pecchés qe sont en la court de mon corps (...)*”,⁶⁰ (heed the example of the fox as to how I should destroy the filthy sins that are in the earth of my body).⁶¹

The body becomes inscribed in the image and the image fuses with the body in the same way medicine would if ingested. When analyzing

the curative role of meditative recollection of Passion scenes in the *Livre des Seyntz Medicine*, Clarissa Chenovick affords them an almost physiological role. The heart is marked with the *arma Christi*, because as the center of both memory and humoral flow it continually recirculates these images as it ruminates on them. This meditation on *simulacra* is instrumental in a process of refashioning the self that is at once occurring in the imagination, and on the physical plane of all the healing metaphors in the text.⁶²

The spatial similes of inwardness that are the concern of this study have a comparable function for self-fashioning. By giving shape to the ineffable deep self, they allow for the circumventing of a linguistic impasse that prevented its penitential purgation. However, the expression of the self via literary approximation is imperfect and ultimately inadequate, advancing the confessional enterprise while at the same time making clear that it is doomed to fail. Henry's awareness of the inherent epistemic barriers to confession is not the mark of a defeatist spirit, but rather the sign of an individual bravely measuring himself to the yardstick of an assumed impossible ideal.

The heart as marketplace: the transactional nature of sin

The triptych of allegorical landscapes of inwardness in the *Livre des Seyntz Medicines* concludes with the comparison of the heart to a busy marketplace found at the crossing of the main town roads. The final metaphor rehearses the same vision of inwardness as the marine vortex avatar of the heart, elevating its structural permeability to an eschatological plane. Placed at the junction of all the major faculties of the soul, judgment, affect and *sensus communis*, the heart constitutes the seat of a sensuous exchange with the outside world which decides the fate of the soul in the afterlife. The description of how sense impressions and thoughts are processed in the heart is informed by Abelardian ethics, confirming Henry's debt to this penitential doctrine of inwardness.

The vivid description of the colorful throng that inundates the market on a fair day draws from the Franciscan homiletic practice of recognizable every-day *exempla*.⁶³ The merchants, representing the capital sins, come in through the gates of the senses and display their wares in the central marketplace which, consistent with Henry's idea

that evil doesn't come solely from without, also features the internal output of the city. In order for a tax to be levied on all the transactions, merchants are not allowed to trade outside of the marketplace.

Et qi sont les marchantz principals qe viegnent vendre lour denerez en ceo marchee? Ils sont trois : foles pensees, malveis desirs et ords delitz. Ceux sont trois compaignons qe ameignent, portent et treinent toute la male marchandie en marchee. Leur marchandie n'est autre chose forqe peccés mortels et veniaux, c'est tout ceo de quoi ils ont affaire. Et ceo vendent ils pur malveise monoie par le conseil de lour hoste qe homme appelle le vil consentement. La monoie si est les peynes d'enfern. Mes sicome sovent homme prent voluntiers le paiement qe vient sanz delaiement et cesty est prest sanz delay, ja ne soisons a l'asay.⁶⁴

[And who are the chief merchants to come to sell their fine goods at this market? There are three of them: wanton thoughts, wicked desires, and vile pleasures. These are the friends that bring, carry and draw all the bad goods into the market. Their merchandise is nothing other than mortal and venial sins; that is all they do business in. And these they sell for false coin on the advice of their host, whom men call base consent. The coin is the pains of hell. But since a man often more willingly accepts a ready payment, and this one is available without delay, may we never be put to the test.]⁶⁵

The category of merchants which deal in the marketplace faithfully reproduces the taxonomy of *peccata cordis*, mental sins, evil desires and delights. Henry adopts an Abelardian stance in the theological debate surrounding first movements: *suggestio* and *delectatio* are not sinful in the absence of consent, personified as a host which admits the merchants into the city.⁶⁶ While in Abelard's inward ethics, incoming thoughts did not incriminate the subject in themselves, consent conferred upon them the same gravity as that of actual action in the world. The heart became the theater where salvation was played, as it was there that first movements were weighed and either rejected or consented to.

This shift towards a clear anchoring of eschatological choice inwards becomes obvious if one examines the source of the fair imagery in the *Fasciculus Morum*, where the market place in which God, the devil, the flesh and the world vie for the buyer's attention is not a landscape of inwardness. The fair allegorizes the illusory nature of worldly goods, external to the subject. At the end of a fair day, all temptations are wrapped up and all that is left behind is a desolate mud-covered square, a representation of the sinfulness that amasses at the end of a life spent trading badly.⁶⁷ Commerce is a confessional metaphor in the *Fasciculus Morum* as well, as man is advised to offer a drink of tears to the merchant Christ in order to coax him into doing business with him. On the other hand, in the *Livre des Seyntz Medicines*, eschatological trade becomes a wholly inward process of discriminating the nature of thoughts and sense impressions before they are allowed to take residence within.

Inwardness is defined as open onto the world and shaped by a judicious response to it, monitored both by God and by the overseer of all the transactions in the heart, the devil, which levies the soul as a trading tax. Because of the Scriptural lexical field of trade, commerce is also connected with the idea of an eschatological reckoning. Transacting in sinfulness is understood as a cessation of goods paid in full by the Redeemer and of an eschatological reward in exchange of instant gratification.

The heart is a place of eschatological reckoning in part because it encloses a record of all the individual's thoughts and actions. Confession is meant to prefigure and abate the rigors of the Last Judgment by publicizing the annals contained in the heart before they get to be openly displayed on Doomsday.⁶⁸ According to Eric Jaeger's monograph⁶⁹ confessional writing in the wake of Augustine comes to be characterized as an outward copying of the individual book of reckoning inscribed on the fleshy tablet of the heart.

By defining avowal as a dissection meant to expose the wounds of sin, the *Livre des Seyntz Medicine* grounds confession and the description of the inner spiritual universe of the penitent in the matrix metaphor of the body. The embodied nature of the penitential account references the fleshy nature of the overwriting of sin onto the inward tablet, designating Henry's private devotional exercise as a book of the heart. It follows that the section on *confessio cordis* with its triptych of

landscapes of the heart constitutes a triune *mise en abyme* that encapsulates the whole confessional project.

Jaeger describes confessional writing as a process of self gloss, as it presupposes a careful editing and interpreting of the inward book one is working from. The fact that *confessio cordis* reverses the direction of traditional confession attests to its hermeneutic underpinnings. In contrast with common confessional practice which is predicated on an exteriorizing of secrets, the confession of the heart defines itself as an investigation of inwardness that starts on the surface and proceeds inwardly by interpreting the superficial signs (thoughts, actions and cognitions) of the deep self. The allegorical renditions of the space of the heart actively fuel penitential self-gloss and self-gnosis.

As I have endeavored to show, the section on *confessio cordis* does not rehearse the same neat divisions and classifications of sin common in contemporary confessional manuals and devotional treatises, but rather endeavors to offset them in a totalizing and dynamic understanding of sin. Rather than forking into branches and subspecies, *peccata in facto* and in *intentio* seem to converge in an indistinct and mysterious generic plight of the heart. Faced with an amorphous sinfulness shirking away from consciousness, the only recourse left is that of the poetics of the image invested with a pragmatic confessional function. Allegorical images give shape to the unspeakable realities of the deep self and the literariness of the confessional undertaking is no longer an ornament, but becomes organically linked with the devotional function of the text.

The landscapes of the heart examined in this study were shown to play a paradoxical role in confession. On the one hand, the triptych of images of inwardness renders *confessio cordis* possible, by giving shape to the inform regions of the psyche, turning the opaqueness of the deep self into a visual image that can be explored and interpreted. On the other hand, it expresses the insurmountable difficulties facing this penitential project. Traditional allegories of inwardness, houses, castles, walled-in gardens, temples and monasteries, are representational. The self is a given which is translated into allegory. In contrast, Henry's imagery of inwardness has a tentative nature connected to its pragmatic devotional function. His landscapes of the heart approximate the self in relationship to exteriority in order to pragmatically allow for a

penitential examination of the ineffable *occulta cordis*, which is however bound to fail because the essence of the deep self remains forever elusive.

Henry's confessional writing is beset by an eschatological anxiety which reflects the unsettling effect that the novel penitential ideal of an all-encompassing *confessio cordis* must have had on late medieval consciousnesses. The more the merits of confession were touted in sermons and instructional literature, the more desirable it became to attain this impossibly high mark of self-understanding so punctilious that it would not leave out any areas of the make up of the psyche. Paradoxically, this meant that the more the efficacy of confession was established in theory, the more it lost the capacity to offer the assurance of salvation in practice.

Finally, *confessio cordis* constitutes a very interesting exception to Little's and Foucault's theories on penitential self-formation, in that it hasn't generated a pre-defined discourse which could be inhabited by a self in the process of defining itself. A degree of creativity was necessary in order to respond to the penitential injunction to give expression to the deep self, which can allow for a reconsideration of the rapport between the self, the individual and the norm. The common misconception seems to be that the norm fashions copy cat selves and that the individual defines itself through a Romantic rejection of the standard.⁷⁰ Instead of starting from this anachronistic conception of individuation, I suggest apprehending medieval individualities in the process of creatively appropriating and inflecting a non-prescriptive norm. Henry of Lancaster's theology of sin is by all accounts an original and profound rethinking of the standard penitential fare, intricately interwoven with his images of inwardness, which feel refreshingly unorthodox in their orthodoxy.

Notes

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