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THE FIGURE OF THE WAYWARD NUN IN LATE MEDIEVAL LITERATURE: THE AMBIGUOUS PORTRAITS OF THE ARCHPRIEST OF HITA'S DONA GAROZA AND CHAUCER'S MADAME EGLentyne

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by

GRACIELA S. DAICHMAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

THE FIGURE OF THE WAYWARD NUN IN LATE MEDIEVAL LITERATURE: THE AMBIGUOUS PORTRAITS OF THE ARCHPRIEST OF HITA'S DOÑA GAROZA AND CHAUCER'S MADAME EGGLENTYNE

by

Graciela S. Daichman

The literary figure of Doña Garoza, the ambiguous nun of the Archpriest of Hita's *Libro de Buen Amor* and that of Madame Eglentyne, the controversial prioress of the *General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, have been the object of scholarly scrutiny for a long time, especially in this century. The problem concerns the tone with which each woman is described; is the author mildly chastising the nun or is he damning her? In the case of Doña Garoza, critics have interpreted her in three ways: as a gentle, mildly sinning creature, as a religious failure, and as an intentionally ambiguously drawn character with both characteristics, painted thus to entertain the reader. Interestingly enough, the same three ways of interpreting Chaucer's Prioress also exist. In order to determine how Chaucer and the Archpriest of Hita regarded their nuns, it
is necessary to understand how the fourteenth century
would have regarded them, and whether these nuns were ex-
ceptional or typical in their faults. Such apparently
ambiguous literary portraits of the two nuns are in
reality satirical. The present study is an attempt to
place the portraits in the proper perspective, as heirs to
a long and distinguished tradition of literary wayward
nuns whose real-life counterparts date back to the
beginnings of monasticism. In an effort to prove our con-
tention that, far from being an isolated literary
occurrence, the wayward nun in medieval literature is the
reflection of the one in the nunnery, special attention
will be given in this study to those works where profligate
nuns seem to have been drawn almost directly from the pages
of the visitation reports by the bishops of the convents
in their dioceses. Different from the studies offering a
general picture of the life of the professed woman in the
Middle Ages, the emphasis here will be on the evidence of
immodest or dishonorable behavior in the nunnery observed
through the centuries by those who felt it their duty to
record it, reprove it, or mock it.

Chapter I will study the medieval nunnery as a
social institution through the available documents, while
listing, at the same time, numerous instances of blatantly
indecent behavior among nuns. Chapter II will survey the
works of the moral and satirical writers of the period, who provide the Archpriest of Hita and Chaucer with models for tone and attitude towards their nuns. Chapter III will review the "chanson de nonne" and the fabliau, two literary forms in which the figure of the wayward nun plays a very significant role, and which provided the Archpriest and Chaucer with models for their nuns. Chapter IV will analyze the portraits of Doña Garoza and Madame Eglentyne. No longer treated as literary types, in them the content of the "chanson de nonne" merges with the tone of the satire on nuns to make the two figures paragons of satirical ambiguity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Professor Jane Chance, whose scholarship, friendship and confidence in my ability to complete this dissertation, helped me through the many crises of research and composition.

A very big thank you goes to my children, Marcela and Sean, who managed with only half a mother much too long; it helped them grow up faster, though, and made them so much dearer to me.

My greatest debt, however, is to my husband Ricardo, whose unfailing sense of humor, patience, and understanding made it all possible.
For Ricardo, because he understood, and for Marcela and Sean, because they tried.
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INTRODUCTION

...Guardas teníe la monja más que la mi esgrima
pero de buena fabla vino la buena cima.

Libro de Buen Amor

Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gaeded al with grene,
And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
and after AMOR VINCIT OMNIA.

General Prologue to the
Canterbury Tales

The literary figure of Doña Garoza, the ambiguous
nun of the Archpriest of Hita's Libro de Buen Amor, and
that of Madame Eglentyne, the controversial prioress of the
General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, have been the
object of scholarly scrutiny for a long time, especially in
this century. The problem concerns the tone with which
each woman is described; is the author mildly chastising
the nun or is he damning her? In the case of Doña Garoza,
critics have interpreted her—and the Archpriest's in-
tentions—in three ways: as a gentle, mildly sinning
creature,\textsuperscript{1} as a religious failure,\textsuperscript{2} and as an intentionally
ambiguously drawn character with both characteristics,
painted thus to entertain the reader.\textsuperscript{3} Interestingly
enough, the same three ways of interpreting Chaucer's
Prioress also exist—as harsh,\textsuperscript{4} soft,\textsuperscript{5} and ambiguous.\textsuperscript{6}
However, in order to determine how Chaucer and the Arch-priest of Hita regarded their nuns, it is necessary to understand how the fourteenth century would have regarded them, and whether these nuns were exceptional or typical in their faults. Such apparently ambiguous literary portraits of the Spanish and the English nuns in reality mask satirical portraits of religious women of the fourteenth century. This study is an attempt to place these portraits in the proper perspective, as heirs to a long and distinguished tradition of literary wayward nuns whose real-life models date back to the beginnings of monasticism. Fourteenth-century audiences would not have expressed shock or even mild surprise at the presence of a possibly wayward nun in a literary work; hundreds of years of exposure to the public as an object of popular ridicule or a target of episcopal wrath had given her clearly defined social and moral features.

In order to situate the wayward nun of the Middle Ages within the literary and social convention that eventually led to the portraits of Doña Garoza and Madame Eglentyne, it is essential to outline the historical background against which the real life models for the literary nuns lived their life, and the divers reasons that led medieval women to the cloister. The medieval nunnery was essentially an aristocratic institution open to all females of the upper classes; grieving widows and
disconsolate lovers of all ages seem to have been almost as numerous as young novices with a strong vocation. Such unlikely mingling, however, often had disastrous effects not only on the spiritual aspect of life in the nunnery but also on conventual discipline. Nevertheless, the issue of misconduct in the women's religious houses has been largely ignored by twentieth-century historians. As a result, most contemporary critics of medieval literature have failed to perceive the presence of the wayward nun in the "chanson," the fabliau and the satire--wherein the figure of the wayward nun chiefly appears in the literature of medieval Europe--as in any way related to her historical existence. Despite this, though, the salacious sisters of the fabliaux, as well as the unwilling nuns of the "chansons de nonne," and the dishonest ones castigated by the churchmen in lengthy tirades, are the descendants of those whose improper, and often indecent, behavior was recorded by the bishops in their visitation reports of the convents in their diocese.

Because of its remarkable social composition, the medieval nunnery witnessed transgressions that were a constant source of anxiety for the Church which, beset with incidents of monastic abuse had come to regard scandal as worse than sin by the fourteenth century. The sins of the medieval nun seem to have ranged from the trivial--being late to chapel--to the cardinal--incontinence and child-
bearing. In an attempt to prove our contention that, far from being an isolated literary occurrence, the wayward nun in medieval literature is the reflection of the one in the nunnery, special attention will be given in this study to those works where profligate nuns seem to have been drawn almost directly from the pages of the episcopal reports. Different from the studies offering a general picture of the life of the professed woman in the Middle Ages, in the present study the emphasis will be on the evidence of immobile or dishonorable behavior in the convent observed through the centuries by those who felt it their duty to record it, reprove it, or mock it.

The study will consist of four chapters. In the first chapter, which will furnish the historical background, we will take a look at collections of medieval wills that show how women of every age were forced into the convent. Such collections of wills as the Testamenta Vetusta (London: Nichols and Son, 1826), the Testamenta Eboracensia (London: Surtees Society, 1836), and the Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Hustings, edited by R. Sharpe (London: John C. Francis, 1889) reveal how well-to-do fathers provided for their daughters by assigning them either to a suitor or a nunnery, both of which required an equally generous dowry. As to the girls themselves, though for some young women the religious life was certainly a true vocation, for
others it simply offered an honorable alternative to matrimony. Another group of women, just as numerous, seems to have entered the nunnery entirely against their will. Besides these young women there were also the widows and older women who went to the convent in search of a refuge from the turmoil of a difficult and dangerous everyday life, a haven where they could spend the rest of their lives in safety and seclusion. Such studies of medieval monastic life as Lina Eckenstein's *Woman under Monasticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1896) and especially G. G. Coulton's impressive *Five Centuries of Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1952) disclose one startling fact: not only were religious women no longer paragons of Christian duty and devotion, but near the end of the Middle Ages the centuries old monastic impulse itself appeared dangerously on the wane.

In Chapter II the objects of study will be the works of the moral and satirical writers of the period who provide the Archpriest of Hita and Chaucer with models for tone and attitude towards their nuns. The French moralists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, like Guiot de Provins and Hughes de Berzé in their Bible, and Matheolus in his *Lamentations*, indignantly denounce the unchaste behavior of religious women whom they accuse of concealing their boundless concupiscence with an aura of spirituality and devotion. In order to satisfy their evil desires, says
Matheolus, they are constantly looking for reasons to go outside the convent, a charge echoed by numerous ecclesiastical authorities throughout the Middle Ages. It is in fact this failure to remain loyal to their claustrophobia vows that prompts religious women to commit all sorts of horrible crimes, according to the bishops in charge of the well being of their souls. One after the other, the spiritual leaders of the Church chastise certain nuns for leading sinful lives with complete disregard for religion or even propriety. In this chapter too will be reviewed certain works of the Churchman in praise of virginity, as well as some books of devotion or admonition addressed to nuns, although the former will not be considered in detail because they do not really concern themselves with the actual life of a professed woman.

Chapter II will also examine certain satiric parodies on the conduct of profligate nuns. Written mostly in jocular vein the humor, however, is sometimes rather somber in these, as in Langland's _Piers Plowman_, for instance. Here there is a convent in which very dishonorable events take place and whose prioress "had childe in chirityme," while in Matheolus' _Livre des lamentations_ there is an entire section devoted to religious women whom, he believes, should not be trusted because they cannot control their appetites. In the _Spill_ or _Libre de les Dones_, the Portuguese Jacme Roig gives a detailed picture of a
medieval nunnery where vices and corruption are rampant, much like the section in the *Speculum Stultorum* by Nigellus Wireker in which, half seriously and half in jest, the decay of the female monastic order is exposed. The chapter will end with an analysis of the anonymous Latin *Concilium in Monte Romarici*, a "jeu d'esprit" describing in a typically medieval tone of good-humored blasphemy, a large gathering of nuns at Remiremont. Here "de solo negotio Amoris tractatum est" and the debate centers on the merits of clerks and knights as lovers, all actually an impudent parody of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* as well as of certain religious women whose behavior is openly unchaste.

Chapter III will be a review of the medieval "chanson de nonne" and the fabliau, two literary forms in which the figure of the wayward nun plays a very significant role, and which provided the Archpriest and Chaucer with models for their nuns. Though the "chanson de nonne" is the plaint of the nun unwillingly professed, her wishful thinking is most of the time highly indecorous and, therefore, the tone of the "chansons" is almost always festive rather than sad. The earliest known ancestor of the "chanson de nonne" that has come down to us is the twelfth-century "Planctus monialis," published for the first time in 1922 in *Studi Medievali*, 1 (1904). The "Planctus" is unusually sorrowful, whereas most of the
medieval "chansons de nonne" have an air of almost irrepressible frivolity. An example of such an attitude is the following song from *L'Ancienne Chanson populaire*, edited by J. B. Weckerlin (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1887):

Mon père n'a fille que moy--
Il a juré la sienne foy
Que nonnette il ferá de moy,
Et non feray, pas ne voudray.
J'amerai mieux mery avoir
Qui me baisast la nuit trois fois.
L'un au matin et l'autre au soir,
L'autre a minuit, ce sont les trois.

The other medieval literary form discussed in Chapter III is the fabliau, where the figure of the wayward nun also occupies a prominent position. The same stories used by the Church for edifying purposes were used by the jongleur, although not to edify but to provoke laughter. Thus, the reprobate nun was the target of countless ribald tales that eventually found their way into vernacular verse; scurrilous and unredeemed by any sense of moral decency, the fabliaux mock the immoral habits of certain religious women with total impunity. In Italian literature, probably the most notorious—and indecent—nun stories are those in the *Decameron*, where religious women are held up to ridicule in tale after tale of unrelenting debauchery.

The stage will then be set for Chapter IV and a study of the two most famous literary nuns of the Middle Ages. The Archpriest of Hita's Doña Garoza and Chaucer's Prioress are no longer merely literary types; in them the content of the "chanson de nonne" merges with the tone of
the satire on nuns. Thanks to the creative spirit of the two genial poets, Doña Garoza and Madame Eglentyne become three-dimensional and are able to interact with others, especially in the case of the Spanish nun, while both display very real emotions and anxieties. Ambiguity, however, envelops the figures of the two religious women. Sharing the "vertwes" and "vyces" of most medieval nuns, Doña Garoza and Madame Eglentyne are the polished end-products of a long line of prototypical wayward nuns going back many centuries in European literature. The tradition to which they belong was already an old one by the Arch-priest's and Chaucer's time; it is the poets' remarkable achievement, however--doubly remarkable, in fact, as there is no evidence of contact between them--that from the composite satirical figure that had emerged hundreds of years before, each was able to create a fascinating and enigmatic literary figure. The ambiguity of the two portraits is precisely the key to the approach of this study; it justifies not only the centuries-old misunderstanding to which they have been subject, but also our contention regarding their satirical nature. Critics have altogether ignored, or in some cases vaguely hinted at the possible satirical implications in the descriptions of Doña Garoza and Madame Eglentyne, but no one before the present study has attempted to trace the literary and the real-life ancestors of the two nuns who have captivated
the imagination of the readers for so long. By focusing on the conventionally satirical aspects of the portraits, our discussion should open the way to more studies of other potentially conventional literary figures whose sources, both in the literature and the world of the Middle Ages have not been acknowledged so far.
FOOTNOTES


2 One of these critics is Roger Walker ("A Note on the Female Portraits in the Libro de Buen Amor," *Romanischen Forschungen*, 77 [1969]), for example, who points out that since the Archpriest frames the episode of Doña Garoza with remarks—consistently derogatory—on the love of nuns, and makes no effort throughout the episode to indicate that she is an exception to the rule of what he seems to regard as the characteristically unchaste behavior of religious women, she must belong to that group too.

3 The ambiguity of Doña Garoza's character is such that even the most perceptive of all the critics of the Libro de Buen Amor, María Rosa Lida ("Nuevas notas para la interpretación del Libro de Buen Amor," in *Estudios de literatura española y comparada* [Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 1969, 2nd ed.]) views the portrait of the nun—and the rest of the book—as typical of the Archpriest's maliciously clever art of confusing the reader with conflicting statements in order to entertain him. Luis Beltrán (Razones de buen amor: oposiciones y convergencias en el libro del Arcipreste de Hita [Valencia: Editorial Castalia, 1977]) points out that Doña Garoza obviously had a history of previous love affairs which were known to her old servant and confidante (the Archpriest's own procuress) and that is why the old woman can assure her employer that she will obtain the love of a nun for him even before contacting Doña Garoza. A few critics agree with Lida that the portrait is too ambiguous to risk a definite opinion; among these James Burke ("Love's Double Cross: Language Play as Structure in the Libro de Buen Amor," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 43 [Spring, 1974]) and Leo Ulrich (Zur dichterische Originalität des Arcipreste de Hita [Francfort, 1958]) offer two of the most
interesting theories. According to Burke, it is the perspective of the reader which alone determines whether Doña Garoza had a sexual liaison with the Archpriest or chastely served as his inspiration to abandon for a while his wicked amorous ways and think only of God's love. Ulrich thinks the pervasive ambiguity of the episode—and of the nun herself—unfolds on two parallel levels skillfully designed never to cross: on one level the Archpriest conquers Doña Garoza's resistance and she becomes his paramour; on the other, the affair is covered up by the importance given to "buen amor." Of all the critics quoted and the scores of others who have attempted to solve the mystery of the figure of Doña Garoza, only Lida hints at her possible literary ancestors and she lists—in a footnote—a number of poems having to do with nuns unwillingly professed. The possibility of Doña Garoza belonging to a tradition of subtly or overtly wayward nuns does not occur to any other critic.

Among these are D. W. Robertson (A Preface to Chaucer [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962; 3rd. rpt., 1973]) who feels that the Prioress's behavior is not in accordance with the Benedictine Rule principles of proper ecclesiastical behavior and that Chaucer's satirical approach to the nun is very harsh, and Phyllis Hodgson, editor of "General Prologue" to the "Canterbury Tales" (London: Athlone Press, 1969) who talks of "acute irony" in the portrait. Graham Landrum ("The Convent Crowd and the Feminist Nun," Tennessee Philological Bulletin, 13 [1976]) finds that the Prioress is not fit to be one as described in the portrait.

Helen Corsa (Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality [Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964]) calls Madame Eglentyne an ironic figure because of the tension in her between the secular and the sacred, and Peter Tait (Incubus and Ideal: Ecclesiastical Figures in Chaucer and Langland [Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Englische Sprache, 1975]) is sure that Chaucer's conception of the Prioress is only vaguely ironical. Chauncey Wood ("Chaucer's Use of Signs in his Portrait of the Prioress," in Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry, ed. John P. Hermann and John J. Burke, Jr. [Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981]) believes that the portrait is satirical thanks to the use of what he calls one of Chaucer's most "delicate" devices: omission. By this he means that none of the features, either physical or spiritual that we associate with the figure of a prioress and, therefore, expect the poet to mention, is included in the portrait. In this way the satire comes across as soft rather than harsh.
As an example of the ambiguity evoked by the portrait in scholars who have dedicated considerable time to its study, these are two quotes from the same page of Florence Ridley's compendium on critical approaches to Madame Egmontyne until the mid sixties, The Prioress and the Critics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965): "she is certainly not a devil," and "she is certainly not a saint." They are the words of Howard Patch (On Rereading Chaucer [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939]) and Dom Maynard Brennan ("Speaking of the Prioress," Modern Language Quarterly, 10 [1949]).

One of these, for instance, is Alice Kemp-Welch. Her essay on Roswitha the nun in Of Six Medieval Women (1913; rpt. Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House Publishers, 1972, 2nd. impression 1979) makes no mention of what we see as the close connection between certain religious women in life and literature.

An exception to this neglect of such a striking cultural circumstance is historian Eileen Power's study on medieval nuns, Medieval English Nunneries (Cambridge, 1922; rpt. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1964). Although concentrating on the historical aspects of the medieval nunnery in England, Power's book includes a long and detailed appendix on profligate nuns in the literature of the period and a chapter on the wayward nun in medieval literature, where the relationship between her presence there and her historical existence is analyzed in some detail.

Studies on medieval women in general do not seem to have flourished for many years after the publication of Kemp-Welch's and Power's books until the seventies when several scholarly works appeared, among them Women in Medieval Society, edited by Susan Mosher Stuard (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976) and Medieval Women, edited by Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978; rpt. 1981). Women in Medieval Society is a collection of nine essays by different scholars on topics relating to female participation in the medieval world, among which the only one dealing with religious women is "Nulieres Sanctae" by Brenda Bolton. Bolton's thesis is that although large numbers of women were looking for a true spiritual communion with God in the cloister, their male counterparts in religion and the world in general did not regard their vocation seriously, and insisted on treating them as "femmes fatales" whose company was to be
shunned rather than sought. This attitude of hostility towards religious women is also discussed by Sally Thompson, "The Problem of the Cistercian Nuns in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries," in Medieval Women. Thompson records the efforts of many religiously-oriented women to enter the Cistercian order and the latter's resistance to such efforts. Indiscipline among the sisters, problems arising from their constant breaking of claustration vows, and the danger posed by certain forward nuns to young and inexperienced monks assigned to the congregation as confessors are cited by the author as the three main reasons for the Cistercians' reluctance to accept women. The study provides an insight into a situation reflecting a prejudice against religious women that does not seem wholly unjustified, after all. Two other essays in Medieval Women also deal with the problems inherent in regulating communities of frequently strong-willed women living together under strict rules. Jacqueline Smith's "Robert de Arbrissel's Relations with Women" follows that famous "procurator mulierum" as he organizes his itinerant male and female followers into structured groups devoted to religious pursuits. Eventually de Arbrissel founded what later became the Abbey of Fontevraud as a refuge for women in need of spiritual guidance, but was severely criticized for allowing into his nunnery some whose morals were doubtful at best. In "Aelred of Rievaulx and the Nun of Watton," Giles Constable discusses an episode in the early history of the Gilbertine order in which Aelred had been asked to intervene. Aelred subsequently related how a nun of Watton, placed in the convent at the age of four, had grown up into a dissolute young woman and was involved, together with her priestly lover, in a gruesome episode which ended in castration for him and public dishonor for her and some of her fellow nuns.
CHAPTER ONE

THE MEDIEVAL NUNNERY AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

"Nec omnes virginis sunt, mihi crede, quae velum habent."

The wayward nun of the late Middle Ages is a product of the social, economic and political climate of an era in which the Church was going through some of the most eventful moments in its history, particularly in the fourteenth century when a divided papacy was causing a schism in the Christian world that threatened to become permanent. Obviously the changes taking place in the structure of the Church itself had to affect all of its institutions, among which monasticism was one of the strongest. By this time, the centuries old monastic impulse that had inspired so many devoted men and women to enter the religious life was apparently on the wane, and incidents of misconduct in the religious houses were alarmingly frequent, if we are to trust the historical documents of the period. Among these the reports and injunctions written by the bishops after visits to the convents of their diocese provide the most thorough evidence of misconduct in the women's houses.
It is precisely through these visitation reports and the bishops' subsequent mandates into conventual scandals, rumored or confirmed, that something like a catalogue of sins and sinners of the nunnery has come down to us. Sometimes dire and menacing, often forgiving and almost always understanding, the medieval bishops took their mandate to act as guardians of the Church's sons and daughters with the zeal of true religious fathers whose tolerance seems to have been greatly abused by certain religious women. As mentioned in the Introduction, the sins of the medieval nun apparently ranged from the trivial to the cardinal, from failure to attend matins to incontinence and child-bearing. Since the present study is concerned with the wayward nun, that is, the one who strayed from the path of virtue and often broke one of the most sacred of all monastic vows—chastity—we will now review a number of cases illustrating such behavior so offensive to the Church.

Although some of the sinners come from the smaller, more poorly endowed houses, others belong to the wealthiest, most prominent abbeys such as Shaftesbury, Godstow and Amesbury. Therefore, even though it would be unfair to level a charge of generalized immorality against any particular nunnery, since in all of them there must have been many devout and high-principled women, some communities seemed to have more wayward nuns than others. Interestingly
enough also, it was this small group of dishonest nuns who caught through the centuries the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities striving to return order and morality to the monastic world. Thus, reports of immoral behavior in the convent date as far back as the early twelfth century, although they do not become common until the beginning of the fourteenth, increasing in number and severity throughout the entire fifteenth century, almost to the end of the medieval period. The reported cases of what the Church saw as errant behavior in women supposedly devoted exclusively to the love of Christ are actually far too numerous to be detailed in a general survey such as the present one, therefore, only certain examples of blatantly indecent conduct will be mentioned. These will perhaps be sufficient to justify the feeling of dismay and often disgust ("their life is wanton and wretched") evoked in a number of spiritually-oriented men and women.  

An early example of immorality in the convent is that of certain nuns of Amesbury, one of the oldest and most prestigious houses in England which fell into bad times in the last quarter of the twelfth century. According to the records, the house was dissolved in 1189 after the abbess was said to have given birth three times and a large number of the sisters were found to be leading sinful lives—
The nuns of Amesbury (Ambresbiria), some 30 in number, for the turpitude of their life, the dissolution of their order, and public scandal (infamia), were, by the mandate of Pope Alexander, with assent of his father king Henry and by the care of Richard archbishop of Canterbury, . . . removed from their monastery and placed in other monasteries.\textsuperscript{6}

Another nunnery whose name is mentioned in connection with the scandalous conduct of some of the inmates is Godstow where, near the end of the thirteenth century there seems to have been a controversy regarding the probity of the sub-prioress. Although the archbishop speaks on her behalf--". . . la tenouns por nette e pur chaste kant a tote charnalite"--\textsuperscript{7} he makes strong recommendations regarding conduct at Godstow: "... nule nonein ne parle a nul homme seculer, si deus autres noneins bones et de bon renoun oient kant ke len li dirra."\textsuperscript{8} Although we can only guess what the immediate effect of the episcopal injunction was, we do know it did not have far lasting results, for in 1432 the bishop found a pregnant sister at Godstow, and in 1445 another one was involved in an affair with an Oxford priest and a monk of Eynsham.\textsuperscript{9} Transgressions of a similar nature are also reported at smaller, less richly endowed houses such as Cannington and Easebourn, for instance, where the nuns came from the best families in the country. A document signed by two commissioners of the Archbishop of Shrewsbury states that at Cannington

Two of the Nuns, Matilda Pulham and Alice, Northlode, . . . were known, to the violation
of their monastic vow and the shame of their sex, to keep company with, and too frequently to admit, sundry suspected women . . . and by their sensuality brought disgrace upon their vow and a scandal on their House.\textsuperscript{10}

At Easebourn one of the nuns testified during a 1422 visit that sister Philippa King had had relations with "a certain 'brother William Cotnall'" and that, together with sister Joan Portsmouth, a chaplain and one of the Earl of Arundel's retainers they had left the convent after giving birth to one or more children each.\textsuperscript{11}

Many more examples of immoral conduct in the nunnery are mentioned in the section on religious houses of the \textit{Victoria History of English Counties}, where the nature of the sins and the circumstances under which they were committed are often given in full detail, as for instance, in the following excerpt from Archbishop Thoresby's \textit{Register}: "On 8 December 1358" Alice de Reygate, a nun of Hampole, "with weeping countenance, had prostrated herself at his feet, confessing that she had broken the voew of her profession and been guilty of immorality with an unmarried man."\textsuperscript{12} At the same nunnery, Isabella Polifayt had been found guilty of incest\textsuperscript{13} with Thomas de Rayneville in 1324, and at Arden Priory Archbishop Greenfield had "dealt with the case of Joan de Punchardon, one of the nuns who had become a mother in 1306."\textsuperscript{14} Incidents of monastic abuse were just as frequent in German nunneries. In the fifteenth-century
convent of Sonnenburg in the Fusterthal, "the young
daughters of the Tyrolese nobility led the freest and most
luxurious life under cover of the veil," and in an
Augustinian monastery in Friesland, for instance, priests
and lay brothers were accused of "'keeping nuns with
them . . . with whom they slept and sometimes begat chil-
dren'. "16

As we review more examples of lewd conduct in the
nunnery and before investigating the reasons for such a
phenomenon, it may help us understand it to consider the
identity of the nuns' lovers, and whether perhaps some of
the sisters fell to the charms of a seducer without fully
weighing the consequences of such a reprehensible act.
While the latter may have been the case on some occasions,
most of the evidence, however, seems to indicate that only
seldom was a religious woman seduced or forced to submit
to sexual advances by either a priest or a civilian;
actually the punishment imposed by the Church on those
found guilty of violating a bride of Christ was severe
enough to discourage most would-be assailants. It was
considered a very serious crime by the state as well as
the Church, and under a law passed by Edward I, the
ravisher of a nun had to make restitution to the convent
somehow and could also be condemned to three years in
prison. If the accused failed to prove his innocence
before the bishop by submitting the required number of
witnesses that could attest to it he would be ex-
communicated if unrepentant, or given a penance if other-
wise. The latter could range from fairly mild to quite
severe as may be seen from the following two excerpts:

For committing the sin of incest with Isabella
Folifayt, nun of Hampole, . . . Thomas de
Rayneville was to stand, wearing a tunic only
and bare-headed, holding a lighted taper of a
pound weight of wax in his hand. 17

Dated 1286, this fragment of a letter taken from the
Register of Godfrey Giffard, Bishop of Worcester, discloses
the penance imposed by the Bishop of Salisbury on his
relative, Sir Osbert Giffard, accused of abducting and
seducing two nuns of Wylton:

The bishop enjoined upon him that he should
restore the aforesaid sisters and all goods
of the monastery withdrawn and should make
all the satisfaction that he possibly could
to the abbess and convent. And that on Ash
Wednesday in the church of Salisbury, the
said crime being solemnly published before the
clergy and people, he should humbly permit
himself to be taken to the door of the church,
with bare feet, in mourning raiment and un-
covered head, with other penitents and should
be beaten with sticks about the church on
three holy days and on three Tuesdays through
the market of Salisbury and so often and in
like manner about the church of Wylton and
through the market there; and he should be
likewise beaten about the church of Amesbury
and the market there and about the church of
Shaftesbury and the market there. In his
clothing from henceforth there shall not
appear any cloaks of lamb's wool, gilt spurs
or horse trappings, or girdle of a knight,
unless in the meantime he should obtain
special grace of the king, but he shall
journey to the Holy Land and there serve for
three years. 18
Aware, then, of the consequences that a love affair with a nun could bring to the men involved in it, we wonder even more at the kind of man who would approach a sister with such a purpose in mind. Who were these men willing to lead—or follow—into sin a "Sponsa Dei?" For the most part they were naturally those with whom the nuns could have frequent and easily disguised contact, such as a married boarder at the convent,\textsuperscript{19} or the bailiff of a manor,\textsuperscript{20} or maybe one of the workers who were allowed into the inner cloisters for needed repairs (a nun of Watton made the acquaintance of one of the lay brothers who were engaged in repairing the women's dwelling "and the two contrived to meet frequently out of doors until at last the nun's condition became obvious"\textsuperscript{21}), or perhaps even a wandering minstrel\textsuperscript{22} whose art and whose charm may have captivated the heart of an amorous sister. The most common liaison, however, seems to have been between nuns and priests since the vicars, chaplains and chantry priests who moved about the convent had perfectly easy and justified access to the sisters, even in broad daylight. Furthermore, because these men were all under the same vow of celibacy as the nuns they knew very well how to break it, and they could practically tempt and absolve a sinner in the same breath. There is very strong evidence in the historical documents and the literature of the Middle Ages that priestly corruption was rampant, and the affairs
between religious men and women aroused the fury and condemnation of every guardian of monastic morals. As late as the fourteenth century, the Franciscan Alvarus Pelagius, for example, fulminates against the "causes and matters of unchastity to Religious":

Another cause is conversation with nuns. For in the convents they have their lady-devotees—"devotas suas"—with whom they too often talk too long without witnesses, extracting rather than obtaining leave from the superiors. There are undisciplined laughter and ogling glances exchanged; there are words of levity and vanity and carnality, and amorous touches; there are hearts aflame with fire, and every window open to the deadly things around (Jerem. ix, 21). The rest is indecent [for me] to write; but it is most wicked [for them] to do.  

Sometimes the priestly lover did not belong to the nunnery but lived in a nearby village where he might be a clerk, a chaplain or a vicar. At the priory of Villa Arcelli in 1249, for instance, Archbishop Estes Rigaud found among other irregular activities that
the Prior of Cisorcium is always coming to the house for Idonia. Philippa de Rouen is suspected with a priest of Suentre, of the diocese of Chartres; Marguerita, the treasurer, with Richard de Genville, a clerk. Agnes de Fontenei, with a priest of Guererville, diocese of Chartes. All wear their hair improperly and perfume their veils. Jacqueline came back pregnant from visiting a certain chaplain, who was expelled from his house on account of this. Agnes de Monsec was suspected with the same.

At Nunkeeling Priory in York, "Avice de Lelle was strictly forbidden to go outside the inner cloister of the house, in any manner, or to talk to Robert de Eton, chaplain, or
any other secular person whomsoever. She had confessed incontinence..."and at Keldholme Priory," also in York, "Archbishop Melton wrote to the prioress and convent directing them to compel Mary de Holm to undergo the penance enjoined for the vice of incontinence committed by her with Sir William Lyly, chaplain."25 At Swine Priory in 1310 Archbishop Greenfield wrote a letter to Roger de Driffield, abbot of Meaux, "concerning Brother Robert de Merflet and Stephen de Ulram his fellow monks, who had been guilty of incontinence and incest with Elizabeth de Ruda, nun of Swine."26 Their office naturally gave these priests easy access to the convent, and at the same time it allowed a nun to arrange for visits to different gardens or houses in the town where she could meet her lover away from the eyes of the indiscreet.28 A nun of Catesby Priory, for instance, reported "that the prioress is wont to go by herself to the town of Catesby to the gardens with one man alone, a priest by the name William Taylour."29

A few pages back we mentioned the punishment often given by the Church to those men found guilty of a liaison with a nun; if we compare it with the measures taken by the same ecclesiastical authorities against an erring sister this time, we may at once notice a disparity. This could, in fact account—even if only partially—for the apparent ease of mind with which some religious women
seemed to abandon the path of virtue, perhaps in emulation of the lifestyle of certain noble ladies whose clothes and fads such as pets, headdress and fancy collars they also imitated. When a nun committed a carnal sin, the punishment was not overly severe provided she repented and returned to the convent. The penance for a lapse or two was actually rather light in view of the crime, probably because the Church, beset with incidents of monastic abuse came more and more to regard scandal as worse than sin and, therefore, attempted whenever possible to conceal the fact that a nun had sinned. It was often not too difficult to do this since the episcopal visitations which took place every few years were the only occasions when grievances, disturbances and sinners were exposed either by the prioress or the other sisters. Thus, rumors of an illicit affair could be kept secret within the convent or its existence even denied for a while, except when a sister became pregnant as a consequence of her trespass. There is naturally no official record of any abortions that might have been performed in the medieval convents and the reports are extremely hazy as to what happened to the children born to religious women. Although according to the thirteenth-century writer Augustus Jessopp they were immediately disposed of—"et proles obiit immediate post"—certainly not all of them died, and sometimes their fathers publicly acknowledged them. In
this case the children's names appear in the wills of their fathers together with those of their other progeny. 32

As mentioned above, the punishment for a crime of such magnitude as moral turpitude seems to us extremely benign; thus a guilty nun could be made to sit last among all her sisters, for example, or walk at the head of a solemn procession of the convent on Sunday dressed in white flannel and wearing no veil. A recalcitrant sister might be "shut up in a room by herself, and on no account go outside the convent precincts for a year," 33 or perhaps in extreme cases, "be bound by the foot with a shackle ('ad modum compedis'), but without hurting her limbs or body." 34 In the case of Johanna Trimelet, a nun of Cannington Priory who "had been frequently guilty of incontinence, and had given birth to a child," the bishop's deputies in charge of the inquiry enjoined that the said Johanna should remain for a whole year imprisoned in one house within the precinct of the Monastery; that, with a view of repressing her youthful ardours, "suos calores macerans juveniles," she should fast on bread and water on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays, and that on all other days during the time aforesaid she should have for her maintenance bread, pottage, and ale only. 35

In addition to the punishments just described, a nun found guilty of immoral behavior was automatically barred from holding any office in the nunnery, but even this
injunction sounds more forbidding than it actually was. Since many of the sisters came from influential court-related families, a dispensation annulling the ban was often arranged. The reason for the leniency of the Church's measures against some religious women's transgressions was probably that most bishops preferred to bring their erring daughters back to religion, rather than lose them to a world always too ready to heap condemnation on the entire Church every time a sheep left the fold. There was one sin, however, which the Church would not pardon, and this was apostasy or abandoning the nunnery permanently to return to the world. An apostate nun obviously broke all monastic vows and if allowed to do so with impunity, there was a danger her example might be followed by others who, even if holding out for the moment, were subject to the same pressures and the same temptations. In order to prevent apostates from remaining in the world unpunished and free, the Church reached out with a mighty arm and through a combination of threats and pleas generally succeeded in luring them back to the nunnery. When these efforts failed, though, the bishops resorted to more forceful means by enlisting the help of the state's machinery to regain their hold over a sinner. Such was the case of Elizabeth Arundel, for instance, who ran away from her house in 1382, and whose arrest was ordered by the king at the petition of the prioress of
Haliwell, in the diocese of London, and also of Joan Adelesheyn, a nun of Rowney who became an apostate in 1400. The records indicate that both Elizabeth and Joan were apprehended by the king's men and forcefully returned to their nunneries.

Despite the fact that the odds were against her when a nun left the convent, the list of apostates seems quite long, and between the years 1290 and 1360 the names of eleven out of thirty-four houses in the diocese of Lincoln appear in the records. Three of the nuns were from Godstow (1290); one from Woitherpe (1296); another from Sewardley (1300); one from Markyate (1336), and one from St. Leonard's (1337). At St. Mary in the Meadows, Northampton, things were in a very bad state for a while between 1300 and 1311 with four nuns excommunicated for apostasy in that period, and at Ankerwyke Priory in 1441, Bishop Alnwick notes that "six nuns have now left the house in apostasy." Among the recorded cases of apostasy which have come down to us, one of the most colorful and complex ones is probably that of Agnes de Flixtorpe, also known as Agnes de Wissendun, a nun of St. Michael's, Stamford, whose tragic story begins to unravel in 1309 when Bishop Dalderby excommunicated her for apostasy. Brought back to the convent by the sheriff of Nottingham, she refused to repent and by order of the bishop was then placed in a room with her legs fettered
as punishment. In 1312, after a year's confinement in a remote little Devonshire priory, Agnes broke down and declared her repentance but was still kept in solitary confinement until 1314, at which time she was considered "cured" and allowed to return to Stamford. Two years later, however, Agnes was once more out in the world, having again left the veil that she obviously should never have adopted. Nothing more is said about the unfortunate Agnes in the records, and how she spent the rest of her life is left to our imagination.

We have up to now considered the different kinds of trespasses committed by certain medieval nuns; what we have not discussed yet are the possible reasons for such behavior among women supposedly cut off from the world. In an effort to understand this contradiction we will attempt to ascertain the motives that led medieval women to adopt the religious life and, despite their differences in education, taste and temperament to live together as members of a community ostensibly dedicated to the glorification of God's love. The circumstances under which these women entered the cloister were precisely the determining factor for their behavior once inside. Those who took the veil of their own volition because of a strong religious vocation, still found the fourteenth-century nunnery the ideal place for a spiritual communion with God that it had been when St. Jerome founded the
first convent in Rome around the year 400. There were other women, however, forced into the nunnery for social, economic or political reasons and often totally unsuited for the religious life who seem to be the ones guilty of the immodest or indecent behavior described above. Among these are the nuns who took the veil much too young to be able to decide on a religious vocation for themselves, but who were forced into the convent by relatives either out of a genuine desire to protect them (like the youngest of King Stephen's daughters who was "when old enough placed in the convent of St. Leonard's at Stratford-at-Bow") or merely to dispose of them. Thus, an entry in Dugdale's Monasticon for the year 1298 says that "Robert de Albini and Cicely his mother placed Amice, a little maid, the sister of Robert and the daughter of Cicely, in this Cell, to serve God continually," and during a 1441 visit to Ankerwyke Friory Bishop Alnwick observed that three nuns, "sisters Isabel Coke, Elizabeth Londine and Ellen Moretone were of tender age and slender discretion, seeing that the eldest of them is not more than thirteen years of age." Sometimes young girls were also sent to the nunnery in an attempt to deprive them of an inheritance that was rightfully theirs. Such was the case of the daughter of Sir Philip de Coverle, Isabel, kept from her rightful share of her mother's inheritance because she was a professed nun at Sewardley in 1293, while at
Anderwyke Priory, "'A. the daughter of W. Clement',"
fifteen years old when professed, in 1197 "was bold
even to claim a share in her father's property on the
ground that she had been forced into the monastery against
her will by a guardian who wished to secure the whole
inheritance."48 A mandate dated June 1204 to the canon
of Lincoln and the rector of Bareswith enjoins them "to
take proceedings in the cause of Agnes, whose father and
stepmother, in order to deprive her of her heritage, shut
her up in the monastery of Haverholm."49 Obviously, the
practice of sending to the nunnery very young girls must
have been common enough even in the fifteenth century to
arouse the anger of the German prelate Johann Geiler, who
comments that "some come into religion because against
to their own will, they have been cast or thrust in by their
parents, like puppies for the drowning, for the sole pur-
pose of getting rid of them and being able to give richer
dowries to the other children."50

Other circumstances probably contributed to in-
crease the number of young girls made to enter the convent
without much regard for their particular inclination. One
was perhaps, the fact that it was an almost established
custom in large families for one or more daughters to
become nuns,51 and the other the concern of well-to-do
fathers about their daughters' future—enough to inspire a
popular proverb of the time: "aut virum aut murum oportet
mulierem habere." The latter made it imperative for them to make provision in their wills to assign the girls' dowries for marriage either to an earthly lord or to Christ. This last circumstance is evident in the collections of medieval wills from the last centuries of the Middle Ages which are a veritable "Who's Who" of the medieval nunnery. Nevertheless, the reasons why this practice of sending to the cloister the young unmarried females of means appears to have flourished during the late Middle Ages was not only social—it offered a suitable arrangement to their parents—but also economic. Because the nunneries were always in need of financial support, they welcomed the wealthy women who could contribute to the usually depleted conventual treasury.

For a similar economic reason older women, generally widows with considerable incomes and often vast estates, were also received with gratitude as they endowed the nunnery of their choice with grants of money or land. It may be interesting to note here that the practice of demanding a fee from postulants was severely condemned by the Church as "simoniacaal depravity" but that the nunnery, by neglecting for economic reasons to observe this dictum, contributed more and more to the change in its own character. Therefore, by continuing to accept as novices only women of the upper classes, the convent consistently encouraged the presence within its walls of a number of
females lacking the basic ingredient for the life of a nun, that is, a religious vocation. These were the women who would obviously find it extremely hard to adapt to the almost unrelieved monotony of a day punctuated solely by the singing of the litany of the divine services.\(^{55}\)

Besides the overriding external concerns mentioned above and because of which vocation had apparently ceased to be an impelling force for the religious life by the fourteenth century, there was another economic factor affecting the character of the nunnery which had begun to make itself felt about two hundred years before. This was the firmly established existence of a class of "nouveaux riches" who also often opted to send their daughters to the nunnery. Proof of this phenomenon are some of the wills of the enriched tradesmen of the time, such as John Syward and William Wyght, "stokfisshmongers" of London, for example, who left the following instructions: "To Dionisia his daughter forty pounds sterling for her advancement, so that she either marry therewith or become a religious, at her election" and "to each of his daughters Agnes, Margaret, Beatrix, and Alice, fifty pounds sterling for their marriage or for entering a religious house." The will of William Marowe (1504) leaves "to Elizabeth and Katherine his daughters forty pounds each, to be paid at their marriage or profession."\(^{56}\)

At Ludlow, the Palmers' gild established that
"if any good girl of marriageable age cannot have the means found by her father either to go into a religious house or to marry, whichever she wishes to do . . ." and at Berwick-on-Tweed the gild provided that "if any brother die leaving a daughter true and worthy and of good repute, but unendowered, the gild shall find her a dower, either on marriage or on going into a religious house."\textsuperscript{57}

There is no specific record of how many of these young women conducted themselves with the proper decorum once professed, but quite clearly as in the case of the daughters of the upper class, only those taking the veil in response to a genuine spiritual calling could have become true religious women.

Apart from the girls who took their vows because they had no alternative due to the conditions we have just described, there was in the nunnery another group of women, sometimes older and definitely more seasoned, other times just as young but perhaps equally unsuited for the religious life that were thrust into it by external circumstances, again either social, political or economic. Among these were the widows, wives or daughters of vanquished enemies placed in the convent by the victor;\textsuperscript{58} thus "immured" for all time, the women could never become rallying forces for any supporters of their defeated lords who might still refuse to give up the fight. They were often joined by the illegitimate offspring of the higher
classes or even of the clergy themselves; thus, the 1346 will of Hugh de Tunsted, rector of Catton, leaves "unum lectum integrum cum tapeto de begin" to his daughter-- "dominae Johannae, nepthe mes, Sanctae Monialí de Wilberfosse"--\(^59\) while one of Cardinal Wolsey's own children was a nun of Shaftesbury at the time of the Dissolution. Also sent to the nunnery to wither away were those girls afflicted by some deformity or an incurable disease for whom there was no hope of marriage and whose families could not--or would not--provide care.

Now earth to earth in convent walls,
To earth in churchyard sod.
I was not good enough for man,
And so am given to God,\(^60\)
sings a girl in an anonymous medieval song, and in 1441 the prioress of Ankerwyke Priory was accused by one of the sisters before Archbishop Alnwick of accepting as novices "some that are almost witless and others that are incapable."\(^61\) It is probably right to assume that only a few of these nuns would actually become truly devoted religious women, a possibility which was probably quite as remote for those older women who came to the nunnery of their own volition but prompted by motives other than a religious vocation. These were the widows and inconsolate lovers who took the veil hoping to find in the cloister a refuge from their sorrow or their shame like Abelard's own Heloise, one of the most famous among them. The list
of these women contains many other illustrious names, such as the Earl of Warwick's widow, Margaret Beauchamp; Katherine, wife of John de Ingham, and the daughter of Ralph de Neville, Eleanor Lady Scrope, among others. It is important to note here that these well-endowed ladies were always received enthusiastically at the convent because of the usually considerable dowry they brought with them. At the same time, however, they imported into the nunnery something much less desirable, that is, some of the turbulence and excitement of the outside world which still lingered in their attitudes and behavior after a lifetime spent in a position of influence and superiority. Thus, quarrels frequently arose between self-willed and domineering widows and certain equally forceful abbesses, a circumstance that led to the formation of factions among the nuns and that could only have had a detrimental effect on conventual discipline as a whole. At Wroxhall Priority in 1323, for instance, Bishop Cobham attempted to settle the quarrel between the prioress Agnes de Alesbury and Isabel, Lady Clinton of Maxsteke, widow of the priory's patron, who had taken the veil there. The bishop "'found grave discord existing between the Prioress and dame Isabel Clinton, some of the sisters adhering to one or the other'!"63

It seems evident, then, as was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, that misconduct among religious
women ranged from petulance and minor infractions to the most heinous crimes such as sexual contact in and outside the cloister. In order to understand, not only the diversity of the transgressions but also the apparent ease with which some were committed by the sisters, we should perhaps look into the character of some of the women appointed to lead such communities of nuns. These leaders provided role models for their followers, even in their transgressions. Who were, then, these ladies chosen as heads of a convent on the basis of their alleged spiritual and moral fortitude? Medieval abbesses appear to have been mostly aristocratic, temperamental, often indomitable women whose influence on the community under their care was of the utmost importance and whose conduct set the norm for the rest of the nuns. Most of the time, the abbess was "a woman of some social standing in her own right," says Eileen Power. Once in office she was vested with all the authority and powers of an abbot, that is, she was the landlord of the estates and properties belonging to the convent and if her house held these by feudal tenure, she actually became a feudal "lord." As a lady of noble blood, the abbess wielded notable power and influence. The apogee of authority was reached in the tenth and eleventh centuries by the abbesses of royal nunneries in Saxony who reigned over vast tracts of land; as barons of the king they summoned their own armed knights to war, and they held
their own courts. The abbesses of Quedlinburg and Gandersheim struck their own coins. Royal abbesses were even called to the Imperial Diet... Sometimes these abbesses took an active part in politics, like German emperor Otto III's aunt, Matilda, abbess of Quedlinburg, who served unofficially as regent.66

An abbess remained in office for life or until she resigned or was removed under some extraordinary circumstance, such as embezzlement of conventual funds or clearly immoral behavior. Although obviously the majority of medieval abbesses and prioresses were women of strong moral principles, some of them deviated from the right path and were not even too circumspect about what they did. Prioress Denise Loweliche, for example, was forced to resign after a board of inquiry found her guilty of consorting with Richard, the steward of the priory for over five years "so that talk and rumor during the said time were busy touching the premises in the town of Markyate and other places, neighbouring and distant, in the diocese of Lincoln and elsewhere,"67 and Joan de Barton, prioress of Moxby, resigned and the records indicate that "the reason for resignation is apparent from a penance enjoined upon her for having been guilty 'superslapsu carnis' with the chaplain, Laurence de Systeford."68

As the mother superior of a convent in charge of the physical and spiritual well being of her daughters (and sometimes her sons too, since in the few dual monasteries
that existed for a while in the early Middle Ages the
head was usually a woman\(^{69}\), the medieval abbess enjoyed,
among other things, incredible freedom of movement as well
as the power granted by the control of the nunnery's
treasury. Unfortunately, sometimes she would abuse one
or the other. This was the case at Bawburgh, for
instance, where in 1441 the bishop found that

the prioress' extravagance had run the house
into debt . . . . She was constantly out of
the convent, feasted sumptuously wherever she
went, and wore a mantle . . . [with] fur
trimmings.\(^{70}\)

Bishop Alnwick's records indicate that in 1441 also the
prioress of Ankerwyke Priory had "on her neck a long
silken band, in English a lace, which hangs down below
her breast, and thereon a golden ring with one diamond."\(^{71}\)

Nevertheless, a much more serious charge against a
prioress or an abbess than indulgence in rich clothes
and delicacies, or even the throwing of lavish parties for
her friends and relatives as some were in the habit of
doing, was that of moral turpitude.

Most instances of misconduct in the nunnery came
to light, as we already know, during episcopal visitations
which were followed, whenever there were any serious
accusations, by an investigation conducted by the bishop's
own deputies. After a visit to the Priory at Redlingfield
in Suffolk, for example, there was an inquiry into the
conduct of the prioress, Isabel Hermyte, who confessed
among other things, that
she had been alone with Thomas Langelond, bailiff, in private and suspicious places, such as a small hall with windows closed, "and sub haggarowes;" that no annual account had been rendered; that obits had been neglected; that goods had been alienated, and trees cut down and sold without knowledge or consent of the convent; and that she was not religious or honest in conversation.  

A twelfth-century abbess of Amesbury "was accused of incontinence" and her evil ways were followed by the nuns, around 1274 Pope Gregory X deposed Bishop Henry of Liège and accused him of taking "a Benedictine abbess for your public concubine," saying that "one (or two?) other abbesses and a nun were among his concubines too." In 1316, Alice de Chilterne, prioress of Whitehall, was charged "with the crime of incontinence with John de Passelewe, Chaplain," and during an episcopal visit in 1396 the nuns of Arden, Yorkshire, said that their prioress "was defamed with a certain John Beaver, a married man, that they had slept together in a house at night, and that on one occasion they lay alone together within the priory, in the prioress's chamber." As we review the list of names of certain abbesses and prioresses and their crimes, we cannot help but wonder what effect such reprobate behavior had on the community in their charge. According to the records, the bad example set by their leader would not only confer a bad name on that particular nunnery, but often led some
sisters to violate their own sacred vows in emulation of the head of the house. Thus, Joan Tates, for instance, a nun of Redlingfield, upon "being questioned as to incontinence, said that it was provoked by the bad example of the prioress."77

Confronted with so many abuses in the convent, the church authorities searching for an answer to the seemingly unsolvable problem appear to have coincided throughout the centuries that the "radix malorum" of conventual misconduct was the nun's habit of wandering outside the cloister—

They visited their friends in the neighborhood and elsewhere; . . . some of the sisters . . . were accustomed to wander through the streets and lanes of Ivelcestre, . . . and sometimes, which was worse, did without scruple or fear enter the houses of secular and suspected persons, . . . to the scandal of holy religion and the manifest peril of their own souls.78

Nuns allowed to leave the convent on justifiable errands often stayed out longer than their permission granted and spent too much time engaged in worldly pursuits. On a 1303 visit to Greenfield Priory, for example, Bishop Dalderby heard that the prioress "had been absent from her house for two years,"79 while Dame Isabel Morgan, Prioress of Romsey Abbey in the early thirteenth century, complains that "the nuns frequent taverns and continually go into town without leave," so she asks the bishop "that
they may not go outside the monastery without her leave."\textsuperscript{80}

In vain did the Church exhaust her power and resources to keep its daughters within the cloister. Evidently those who had chosen a life of seclusion in the nunnery out of a true spiritual vocation needed no encouragement to persevere in their vow of claustration. It was the others, however, for whom the lure of the world seems to have been too strong, who disregarded episcopal injunctions through the centuries to remain loyal to the rule of enclosure. The nuns' motives for abandoning the quiet of the convent for the bustle of the outside world were valid most of the time. The account rolls of their houses, for example, show some of them out collecting tithes from farmers who forgot to pay or rents from tenants who were remiss, while others went to market to buy what their land did not produce or to sell what it did. The conventual records and the bishops' visitations' reports note that the nuns went on visits to sick relatives, business trips and pilgrimages; sometimes they went to weddings, christenings and funerals, all of which meant renewing those ties with the world that many seemed to find difficult to break.

Because the need to secure an income for the community and to buy and provide for it was so pressing, the enforcement of enclosure became extremely complicated.
The sisters were constantly requesting permission to leave the convent, and although this was usually granted with many restrictions, it was up to each individual nun to abide by them. In January of 1320, Bishop Stapledon sent a pastoral letter to the prioress and convent of Polsloe, near Exeter, in which sundry regulations for the better government of the house are given. The following, setting up travel restrictions on visits, are evidence of one bishop's concern on this matter:

That any religious who had leave to visit her friends in a certain place was not to go to any other without express permission; that any Nun who should take refreshment in Exeter, or elsewhere, should return the same day, or the day following at the very furthest, together with her companion, and that the Chaplain, or some esquire of good name and fame, should be appointed by the Prioress as their escort; that, while in Exeter, they were not to wander from house to house, to the dishonour of their estate and religious profession; that, should the family or friends whom the Nun was to visit reside at a greater distance, the duration of absence was to be regulated by the circumstances of the case and the command of the Prioress; and that, in the event of any disobedience to this rule, the punishment should follow of enclosure for two years within the outer gate of the Priory. 81

Inevitably, the fear that wandering in towns or spending too much time at friends' or relatives' houses would lead to greater abuses elicited from the bishops countless injunctions, the tenor of which whether in English or Latin was always the same: "It is forbidden to eat, drink or spend the night in the town of Romsey"; "No Nun
is to go out except in staid company, nor is she to stay with secular folk beyond three days"; \(^{82}\) "Item, volumus et ordinamus quod nulla monialis vel soror monasterii claustrum exeat sine licencia priorisse, et, si aliquam ad exeundum licenciaverit, sine competenti et securi testimonio non vadat . . ."\(^{83}\) Sometimes, the bishops' worst fears were confirmed and in 1442, for example, a nun of Catesby Priory went on a trip to Northampton and "spent the night with the Austin friars 'saltando et citharizando', and, not content with this, went on next night to the Black Friars and enjoyed herself in the same way."\(^{84}\) By the end of the thirteenth century the situation had deteriorated to such a degree despite previous papal fulminations, that in 1298 Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed his famous statute on monastic claustration based on the sixty-sixth chapter of the Benedictine Rule. The text of the bull was widely quoted throughout the next two hundred years as a deterrent to monastic wandering, specifically the section beginning:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Perículosó et detestábilí quarandum monialíum} \\
\text{statuí que honestátis laxátis abenis et} \\
\text{monachálí modestíam sexusque verecundíam} \\
\text{impuínter abjctís extra sua monasteríá} \\
\text{nonnunquam per habitaculá seculárum personarum} \\
\text{discurrunt et frequénter infra eadem} \\
\text{monasteríá personas suspectas admittunt in} \\
\text{illíus cu síam integritátém voluntáte} \\
\text{spontanea devóverunt grave offensam religionísis} \\
\text{oppróbrium et scandalum plurímorum proinde} \\
\text{salubríter cupientes presenti constituíctione} \\
\text{irrefragábiliter valítura sanccímus universáss}
\end{align*}
\]
et singulas moniales presentes atque futuras
cuiuscunque sint religionis vel ordinis in
quibuscumque mundi partibus existentes sub
perpetua in suis monasteriis debere de ce-
tero permanere clausura ita quod nulli earum
religionem tacite vel expresse professe sit
vel esse valeat quacumque racione vel causa,
nisi forte tanto et tali morbo evidenter
earum aliquam laborare constaret quod non
posset cum aliis absque gravi periculo seu
scandalo in simul commorari, monasteria ipsa
deinceps egrediendi facultas nulli
aliquatenus inhoneste persone nec et honeste,
nisi rationabilis et manifesta causa existat
ac de illius ad quem pertinuerit speciali
licencia, ingressus vel accessus pateat ad
easdem ut sic a publicis et mundanis
conspectibus separate omnino Deo servire
valeant liberius et laciviendi opportunitate
sublata eidem corda sua et corpora in omni
sanctimonia diligencius custodire.

(Desiring to provide for the perilous and
detestable state of certain nuns, who, having
slackened the reins of decency and having
shamelessly cast aside the modesty of their
order and of their sex, sometimes gad about
outside their monasteries in the dwellings of
secular persons, and frequently admit sus-
ppected persons within the same monasteries,
to the grave offence of Him to Whom they have,
of their own will, vowed their innocence, to
the opprobrium of religion and to the scandal
of very many persons; we by the present
constitution, which shall be irrefragably valid,
decree with healthful intent that all and
sundry nuns, present and future, to whatever
order they belong and in whatever part of the
world, shall henceforth remain perpetually
enclosed within their monasteries; so that no
nun tacitly or expressly professed in
religion shall henceforth have or be able to
have the power of going out of those monas-
teries for whatsoever reason or cause, unless
perchance any be found manifestly suffering
from a disease so great and of such a nature
that she cannot, without grave danger or
scandal, live together with others; and to
no dishonest or even honest person shall entry
or access be given by them, unless for a
reasonable and manifest cause and by a special licence from the person to whom [the granting of such a licence] pertains; that so, altogether withdrawn from public and mundane sights, they may serve God more freely and, all opportunity for wantonness being removed, they may more diligently preserve for Him in all holiness their souls and their bodies."

The injunction that nuns should remain within their convents which was repeated through the following centuries may actually be seen as the most powerful indication of its failure. Despite the efforts of councils and synods things remained unchanged even up to the seventeenth century, when Thiers published his *Traité de la Clôture des Religieuses* prompted by the feeling that this was a point of ecclesiastical discipline almost wholly neglected at the time. If to keep the nuns inside the nunnery, tightly enclosed in what the Church saw as their safe cocoon had become almost impossible by the fourteenth century, to shut out the world entirely was even harder, as it kept intruding in the form of a multitude of visitors—"the grete and contynuelle accesse and recourse of seculere 'and regulere' persones." The presence of these visitors provided for the nuns a constant reminder of that other life which they had left, or had perhaps been made to leave behind. Thus, in an attempt to avoid this, the episcopal injunctions against conventual visitors mingling with the nuns in the dorter or sisters' dormitory, ranged from mild admonitions--
"Inter sorores autem mulieres jacere nolumus seculares"—to vivid threats of excommunication against transgressors—

. . . because of the continual sojourn of seculars, we find the tranquillity of the nuns to be much disturbed and scandals to arise in your monastery, ordered (on pain of excommunication and deposition of the Abbess, Prioress, and greater officials of the Convent, if they be found disobedient or negligent in this), that secular women, married and single ("coniugatas et solutas"), staying there, from the time of the receipt of the presents, shall be wholly removed from the Abbey without hope of return.

All the efforts, however, seem to have been in vain and again the evidence provided by the episcopal visitation records as well as numerous entries in other historical documents shows that the stream of noble visitors remained unabated during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, eliciting complaints from some of the less worldly sisters. A nun of Campsey in Norwich, for instance, asked to be allowed to transfer in 1363 to another monastery "in order to escape the number of nobles coming to Campsey," and in 1375 "the prioress, and the majority of the nuns of the Benedictine monastery of North Berwick . . . [were] much molested by the neighbourhood and visits of nobles and other secular persons." Since so many of the nuns came from the upper class they had friends about the Court who could, under various pretexts, obtain leave to visit and lodge
in the convents for a while. The fourteenth-century Calendar of Papal Letters records a large number of "indul"s" granted to such noble ladies and gentlemen to enter different religious houses, where their visits not only burdened the meager resources of the nunnery but must have played havoc with conventual discipline as well. This was probably what happened in October 1391, for example, when Queen Anne was given "indult to enter as often as she pleased with a suite of fifty honest persons of either sex, any monastery of enclosed religious women and to eat and drink therein." It was, somehow, unavoidable that the visitors should exert a pernicious influence on the nuns' morale, as they brought unbearably close to them the temptations of a life which, for their own individual reasons they had vowed—or been forced—to renounce. Furthermore, almost more harmful even to the physical and spiritual peace of the cloister than the high-living style of such guests as earls and countesses or various members of the royal family was the presence in the nunnery of their train of assorted followers. At Nunburnholme Priory, for example, scandal having arisen from the frequent access and gossiping between certain nuns and the secular persons who accompanied the noble visitors, both men and women, "the prioress and sub-prioress were ordered by the Archbishop not to allow such access to the
nuns." In an attempt to curb the possible abuses involved in entertaining noble company, the bishops continually issued new injunctions or refurbished old rules that had been allowed to expire. One of these was the 1295 Cistercian statute which established that nuns were forbidden to eat with secular guests "on account of the perils which beset cloistered persons if they live among the gentiles, and lest their good manners be corrupted by evil communication." It was, perhaps, a mild reproof masking the extreme fear of the much more serious consequences of such an intimacy.

One thirteenth-century bishop who was absolutely adamant about not allowing any secular women to lodge in the nunnery was Johannis Peckham, whose indefatigable zeal produced several volumes of injunctions on monastic conduct; also one of the Praecepta Recte Vivendi of the twelfth-century bishop Robertus de Arbrisello steadfastly maintains that "at nullus extraneus recipiatur in conventum fratrum absque licentia abbattissae." As in the case of the wandering nuns, however, the restrictions and the punishment imposed on the congregation for receiving visitors did not stop the practice, and as Theobald lamented before the Council of Constance in 1417, the convents were frequented "not without very great scandal, as if they were public places, even more than the theatres, and even by great folk." Another circumstance
revealed by the records is that even if the visitors were not allowed to sleep in the dorter or enter the inner cloisters, the nuns apparently found a way to enjoy a little gossip with them by occasionally slipping out to the guest house. A sister confessed during Alnwick's visitation of Heynings in 1440 "that the nuns do hold drinkings of evenings in the guest-chamber even after compline, especially when their friends come to visit them," while another complained to the bishop during a visitation to Canons Ashby Priory in 1442 "that secular folk have often recourse to the nuns' chambers within the cloister, and talkings and junketings take place there without the knowledge of [the prioress]." This situation and others like it naturally brought on more injunctions from the bishops, all along the lines of Alnwick's--

... for as much as we founde that there are vsede late drynkynges and talkyng by nunnes as wele wythe yn as wythe owte the cloysters wythe seculeres, where thurgh some late ryse to matynes and some come not at thayme, ex-pressly agayns the rule of your ordere, we charge yow and yche oon singulere that fro this day forth ye neyther vse spekyng ne drynkyng in no place aftere complyne, but that after collacyone and complyne sayde ych oon of yow go wythe owte lengere taryng to the dormytorye to your reste."

What really concerned the ecclesiastical authorities, however, was not so much to keep visitors out of the con-
vent, since this seemed to have become a losing battle,
but to keep them out of certain parts of the house and
during certain hours. Thus, regulations were passed
forbidding any secular person from entering after sunset
or curfew, while at the same time the most elaborate
arrangements were made to lock and unlock the doors at
specific times. At Esholt and Sinningthwaite, for
instance, Archbishop Lee commanded that the prioress
should furnish enough locks and keys for the convent
doors.

incontinent after receipt of thies injunctions
and that the same doores surely be lockid
every nyght incontinent as complane is doone,
and not to be unlocked in wynter season to
vij of the clock in the mornyng and in sommer
vnto vj of the clock in the mornyng; and that
the prioresse kepe the keyes of the same doores,
or committ the custodie of them to such a
discrete and religious suster, that no fault
nor negligence may be imputed to the prioresse,
as she will avoyde punyshment due for the
same, 100

and after a visit to Catesby Priory in 1442, one of
Bishop Alnwick's injunctions to the prioress was

that in dwe tyme, specyally whan complyne is
saide, ye do close and sperre alle the dorres
of your kyrke and cloystere and dortour, and
kepe the keyes of thise dorres to your selfe
vnto dwe tyme on the next morne, so that in
the meen tyme no man ne womman come yn ne go
owte wythe owte your specyalle leye askede and
had, and for a resonable cause. 101

Sometimes the ordinances became so strict that the nuns
must have felt like prisoners finding themselves locked
in too early on summer evenings when nature was most
appealing, but the wise bishops obviously knew how the warm air and the fragrance of the new flowers could affect the cloistered sisters and they would not relent. An example of such disciplinary action is the following injunction from 1441:

To prevent the Benedictine nuns (of Augsburg) from receiving friends in their convent and from going out as freely as though they had not been cloistered, the iron railings had to be replaced by walls, and then the walls had to be built higher and guarded by town soldiers.102

No matter what measures were adopted, though, it seems to have been almost impossible to keep the world from penetrating the cloister; therefore, attempts were made through regulations to prevent, at least, any secret communication between nuns and secular persons in secluded corners and passages or through darkened windows. Such a plan naturally involved blocking up certain doors which could give access to undesirable visitors and with this purpose, Dean Kentwode of St. Helens, enjoins the prioress and convent there,

that ye, ne noone of youre sustres use nor haunte any place withinne the priory, thorghe the wiche evel suspeccyone or sclaundere mythe aryse; weche places for certeyne causes that move us, we wryte here inne owre present iniuncyone, but wole motyfie to yow, prioress: nor have no lokyng nor spectacles owtewarde, thoght the wiche ye mythe fall into worldly dilectacyone. 103
Once visitors were admitted to the nunnery, the rules established that before speaking with them the nuns had to request permission from the head of the house, and they could only engage in conversation with them in the "locutorium" or parlor or perhaps in the abbess's hall. Most important of all, at least one other nun of "sound character" or even two had to be present during the meeting and furthermore, the conversations should not last too long: "Let it not be permitted to any nun," admonished Archbishop Peckham to the sisters of Romsey Abbey,

to hold converse with any man save either in the parlour or in the side of the church next the cloister. And in order that all suspicion may henceforth be removed, we order that any nun about to speak with any man, save in the matter of confession, have with her two companions to hear her conversation, in order that they may either be edified by useful words, if these are forthcoming, or hinder evil words, lest evil communications corrupt good manners.  

Even more disruptive to the nuns' peace of mind than the temporary contact with the visitors, however, must have been the constant presence in their midst of the secular boarders and corrodians who dwelled in the nunnery. Sometimes the ladies residing there, whether permanently or for a brief period of time, brought their servants or gentlewomen with them. Sir John Pateshull's widow was granted permission in 1350 to live in Elston with her maid and daughters; in 1328 Lady Margery
Treverbyn, also a widow, went to Canonsleigh as a boarder accompanied by "a certain priest, a squire and a damsel",¹⁰⁷ and in 1398 the widow of the Earl of Warwick had an indulg from the Pope to live at the Minoresses Without Algate "with three matrons as long as she pleased."¹⁰⁸ A thirteenth and fourteenth-century list of boarders at Carrow Priory which mentions a number of ladies and their servants also includes the names of several men, a circumstance that was rather unusual but quite possible as the much publicized case of the Paston family proves. When Margery Paston fell in love with her brother's bailiff, Richard Calle and, against her family's wishes became engaged to him, her mother shut her out of the Paston home. The bishop then seems to have placed her in the same nunnery where Richard was staying because Margery's brother John says about him in a subsequent letter: "As to his abiding it is in Blakborrow nunnery a little fro Lynn and our unhappy sister's also."¹⁰⁹

The boarders' presence in the convent must have been very disrupting not just because they were there all the time, but also because, on occasion, they seemed to assert themselves through somewhat eccentric behavior. Lady Augley, for instance, a lodger at Langley had an array of dogs living with her at the priory, and the beset prioress complained to Bishop Alnwick on a visitation
that

Lady Audley, . . . has a great abundance of dogs, insomuch that whenever she comes to church there follow her twelve dogs, who make a great uproar in church, hindering them in their psalmody and the nuns hereby are made terrified.\(^{110}\)

Another lady, Margaret Ingoldesby, a boarder at Legbourne was accused of sleeping in the dorter with the nuns, sometimes "bringing with her birds, by whose jargoning silence is broken and the rest of the nuns is disturbed."\(^{111}\) It is rather amusing to imagine the bleary-eyed sisters trying to stay awake at matins after a sleepless night filled with cackling and cawing! Not all the disturbances caused by the secular boarders were quite as innocent, though, and at times they seemed to have been the reason for grave scandal, particularly in the case of male boarders. During a 1422 visit of St. Michael's, Stamford, Bishop Alnwick found out that Richard Gray, who was boarding in the priory with his legitimate wife, "'procreavit prolem de dominia Elizabetha Wylugby moniali ibidem',"\(^{112}\) while at Easebourne in 1478, it was proved that "a certain Sir John Senoke much frequented the priory or house, so that during some weeks he passed the night and lay within the priory or monastery every night, and was the cause . . . of the ruin of two nuns."\(^{113}\) Once again, then, episcopal injunctions and prohibitions obviously failed to eliminate such a problem
because the nuns refused to cooperate since they could not afford to lose the money they received from their boarders.

The reason why such an income was probably so important to the nunneries stemmed from economic circumstances beyond their control. Sometimes, however, they found themselves in financial straits through mismanagement of conventual funds, a situation that also affected the men's houses and which could not have enhanced life in the cloister. Such was the case, for instance, of the nunnery of Whitehall, Ilchester, "reduced to beggary" after the regime of an unscrupulous prioress and two wardens at the beginning of the fourteenth century,114 and of the abbeys of Romsey and St. Mary's where in 1351, Bishop Edyndon of Winchester had to come to their aid. At the time the nuns, "overwhelmed with poverty, ... were brought to the necessity of secret begging."115 Another extreme case was that of the nuns of Cheshunt Priory who had previously appealed to Edward III for assistance and who "represented their extreme want to him again in 1367, saying that they had often had to beg in the highways,"116 a practice not only demeaning for the sisters, but which must have increased the danger of their breaking their already tenuously held claustrophobia vows. Paradoxically, therefore, poverty was one more deterrent
to maintaining the celibate ideal of the monastic life intact in an environment actually designed precisely with the purpose of shunning all worldly comforts and possessions.

It is clear, then, as we approach the end of the Middle Ages that everything seemed to conspire to make the monastic ideal harder and harder to attain. Intended originally as enclaves of peace and devotion during one of the most turbulent periods of mankind, the medieval convents as well as the Church were torn by inner struggles reflecting the turmoil of medieval society. As indicated earlier in the chapter, the same social, political and economic forces at work in society affected life in the nunnery casting together the young and the old, the saintly and the sinful. Although at times it may seem from our survey that the latter were in the majority, it must be remembered that only incidents of bad behavior are signaled out in the visitation reports. However, since the actions of the good and dedicated sisters are taken for granted and nothing is said about them officially, the reader may feel inclined to concur with Eileen Power's remark, "happy the nunnery that has no history." 117

We will proceed in the next two chapters of this study to consider the literary aspects of the phenomenon of
the wayward nun of the late Middle Ages in view of the historical, political and socio-economic context just sketched.
FOOTNOTES

1 "All the veiled aren't virgins, believe me."
Desiderius Erasmus, Colloquies, trans. C. R. Thompson

2 Furthmore we monyssh e yow and ylke one
of yow alle that now are and shalle be here
aftere that ylk one of yow duely kepe and
obserue thise our iniuncyones as thai are
afore writene vndere payne of cursyng, the
whiche we purpose to gyfe in eueryc of your
persones that duely obey ne kepe the saide
iniuncyones ouere alle the peynes obofe
writen.
Yeven ant writene vndere our seale ad
causas in the priory of Newenham the xvij
day of January, the yere of our Lorde mccccxlij,
and of our consecracyone xvij and translacion
vij.

Alnwick's Visitations: 1436-1439, Vol. II of Visitations
of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln, ed. A.
Hamilton Thompson (London: Lincoln Record Society and

3 Matins was the service around midnight.

4 St. Catherine of Siena, Dialogo della Divina
Provvidenza, Chapter XXXV, ed. P. Enrico M. di Rovasenda
(Torino: U.T.E.T., 1946), cited by G. G. Coulton, Five
Centuries of Religion (Cambridge: University Press,
1950), II, 573.

5 This will be dealt with in detail in Chapter II.

6 Calendar of Documents Preserved in France, ed. J.
Horace Round (London, 1899; rpt. Mendeln, Liechstenstein:
Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1967), I, 384.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.


13. . . . the word "incest" is used in its religious sense; it was properly used of intercourse between persons who were both under ecclesiastical vows and thus in the relation of spiritual father and daughter, or brother and sister, but soon came to be used loosely to denote a breach of chastity in which one part was professed. Eileen Power, Medieval English Nunneries (Cambridge, 1922; rpt. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1964), p. 459, n. 2.


15. Coulton, Five Centuries, IV, 133.

16. Ibid., I, 408. For more examples of immoral conduct in the nunnery, see Henry C. Lea, History of Sacerdotal Calibacy in the Christian Church (London: Williams and Norgate, 1907), I, 343 and Taylor, The Medieval Mind, II, 495-96.

17. V.C.H., York, III, 164.


30 Two entries in Archbishop Estes Rigaud’s Regestrum Visitationum do mention abortions in the nunnery:

Visitavimus prioratum monialium Sancti Albini . . . . Item, Agnetem de Ponte misimus apud leprosarium Bothomagensem, quia consensit fornicacioni dicte Eustachie, et etiam procuravit, prout fana clamat, et quia dedit dicte Eustachie herbas bibere, ut interficeretur puer conceptus in dicta Eustachia, secundum quod dicitur per famam. (August 1256)

Per Dei gratiam, visitavimus prioratum monialium Sancti Sydonii . . . . Item, fana plurimum laborabat extra contra Nicholaam de Rothomago, canricem, et dicebatur communiter in villa quod ipsa nundum erat mensis elapsus fecerat abortivum . . . . (June 1264)


32 " . . . Twenty persons of illegitimate birth of the realms of France and England, whether sons of priests or married persons, or monks, or nuns, to be ordained and to hold two benefices apiece." Papal Letters, IV, 170. See also ibid., pp. 231, 33 and 377.

33 V.C.H., York, III, 240.

34 Ibid., p. 189.

35 Hugo, p. 32.

36 P.R.O. Chancery Warrants, Series 1, File 1759. See also Files 1762, 1764 and 1769, nos. 1, 15 and 18 for more examples. Cited by Power, p. 12.

37 Agnes Bowes, prioress, deserted the convent of St. Michael to which Wothorpe Priory had been united in 1354. V.C.H., Northampton, II, 101.

38 Joan de Pynemere "is said to have abandoned her habit and returned to a secular life." Ibid., p. 126.
The bishop in 1300 issued a mandate to the arch-deacon of Northampton to denounce Isabel de Clouville, Maud Rychemers, and Ermentrude de Newark, . . . who had discarded the habit of religion and notoriously lived a secular life, as apostate nuns . . . . In 1311 another sister, Agnes de Landwath, was denounced for apostasy and for forsaking the habit of religion.

Ibid., Northampton, II, 114.

43 Visitations of Religious Houses, II, 3.


45 Monasticon Anglicanum, ed. William Dugdale (London: James Bohn, 1846), III, 363. Even as late as the first quarter of the sixteenth century the Dominican Guillaume Pepin complains that "many nobles . . . finding themselves burdened with a multitude of children, and unable to make worldly provision for all, send some while they are yet children into Religion." Coulton, Five Centuries, II, 639.

46 Visitations of Religious Houses, II, 5.


48 Ibid., Buckingham, I, 383.

49 Papal Letters, I, 17.

50 Power, p. 25.

Jean Baptiste Thiers, Traité de la Clôture des Religieuses (Paris: Chez Antoine Dezallier, 1681), cited by Power, p. 342, n. 3.


Male religious houses also suffered economic hardship in the Middle Ages.

"Matins around midnight; lauds around three A.M.; prime, the first hour of daylight, at sunrise or about six A.M.; vespers at six in the evening, and compline at bedtime." Barbara W. Tuchman, A Distant Mirror (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 54.

Calendar of Wills, I, 588 and II, 299 and 606.


Sempringham was in high favour with the three Edwards, who sent thither wives and daughters of their chief enemies. Wencilian, daughter of Llewellyn, prince of Wales, was sent to Sempringham as a little child, after her father's death in 1283, ... In 1322, by order of the Parliament at York, Margaret, countess of Cornwall, was sent to live at Sempringham among the nuns. In 1324, Joan, daughter of Roger Mortimer, was received at
the priory. Two daughters of the elder Hugh Despenser were also sent to take the veil at Sempringham, and in 1337 an allowance of 20 a year was made for their lives.

V.C.H., Lincoln, II, 184.

59 Testamenta Eboracensia, I, 18.

60 Cited by Power, p. 31. No source given.

61 Visitation of Religious Houses, II, 4.


63 Ibid., Warwick, II, 71.


65 Power, p. 42.


68 V.C.H., York, III, 240.


Visitations of Religious Houses, I, 5. See also *ibid.*, p. 3.

*V.C.H.*, Suffolk, II, 84.

Eckenstein, p. 205.

Coulton, *Five Centuries*, II, 300.

Hugo, p. 24.


*V.C.H.*, Suffolk, II, 84.


*Records of Romsey Abbey*, p. 218.

Hugo, pp. 62-63. See also *ibid.*, p. 9. Travel restrictions appear throughout the visitation records as the bishops invariably included them in their injunctions to the convent.

Register of Bishop John de Pontoise, cited in *Records of Romsey Abbey*, pp. 101 and 84.


85 Registrum Simonis de Candavo: A.D. 1297-1315 (Oxford: University Press, 1934), I, 10-11, translation by Power, p. 344. It is interesting to notice that a short time after the statute was promulgated, Bishop Dalderby of Lincoln attempted to persuade the nuns of Elstow to comply with it and in response they "hurled the said statute at his back and over his head, . . . following the bishop to the outer gate of the house and declaring unanimously that they were not content in any way to observe such a statute." Coulton, Five Centuries, II, 312.

86 Alnwick's visitation to Godstow Abbey, 1445, in Visitations of Religious Houses, II, 115.


88 Records of Romsey Abbey, p. 102.

89 See footnote no. 91 below.

90 Papal Letters, IV, 37-38 and 212.

91 Ibid., pp. 38, 59, 212 and 394. See also ibid., I, 245 and 525; Petitions to the Pope, II, 502, 510, 531, 532, 533 and 534, and V.C.H., London, I, 518.

92 Papal Letters, IV, 397.


94 Coulton, Five Centuries, I, 320.

95 Peckham, III, 924. See also Records of Romsey Abbey, pp. 84 and 102; Register of Archbishop Henry of Newark, p. 223, and Hugo, p. 33.

Coulton, *Five Centuries*, II, 587.

*Visitations of Religious Houses*, II, 13 and 46.

Ibid., pp. 133–35, passim. See also *V.C.H.*, York, II, 117:

If any woman or man were admitted, that person would be expelled from the house, without hope of mercy, and the prioress would be deposed, and any other nuns who agreed would be condemned to fast on bread and water for two months, Sundays and festivals excepted.

See also, *ibid.*, pp. 126 and 163:

Special features are that the nuns were not to linger in the "hostiliaria" or elsewhere for amusement with outsiders after compline.

No nun, except the "hostiliaria," was to eat or drink in the guest-house, unless with worthy people, no secular persons were to sleep in the dormitory.

For more complaints on the drinking habits of certain nuns, see Alnwick's Visitations to Heynings Priory (144) and Ankerwyke Priory (1441), in *Visitations of Religious Houses*, II, 133 and 1, and also the *Regestrum Visitationum* of Archbishop Eudo Rigaud, where the report of one of his visitations to the priory of Villa Arcelli in July of 1249 discloses that "the prioress is drunk almost any night" (p. 43).


Coulton, *Five Centuries*, IV, 133.

*Monasticon*, IV, 554. See also *Visitations of Religious Houses*, II, 68.

Peckham, II, 664. See also *ibid.*, II, 652, 851 and 662–63.
A corroyd was "a sum of money or an allowance of meat, drink and clothing, granted by the Superior of the House, or exacted by the king to maintain some servant or other dependant," Hugo, p. 36. Also: "a corroyd was so called because it corroded or gnawed upon monastic finances," A. Hamilton Thompson, The English Clergy and their Organization in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p. 17. See also: Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1896), I, entry no. 134201419.


Visitations of Religious Houses, II, 175.

Ibid., p. 185.


Sussex Archaeological Collection, 9 (Sussex Archaeological Society, 1848-1873), p. 18.

Hugo, p. 21.

Records of Romsey Abbey, p. 145. See also Visitation of Religious Houses, II, 4, where the nuns of Ankerwyke Priory are said to "go about in patched clothes."

117 Power, p. 473.
CHAPTER TWO

THE WAYWARD NUN IN THE MORAL AND SATIRICAL LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

"La piours amors c'est de nonains."

—Thirteenth-century proverb

Chapter I documented the historical presence of the wayward nun in the medieval convents. The present chapter will deal with her literary presence in the works of the moralistic and satiric writers of the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, to continue tracing a pattern of the attitudes toward the profligate nun of the late Middle Ages leading up to the Archpriest of Hita's and Chaucer's own nuns. The choice of material surveyed is determined by its effectiveness in corroborating our contention that the literary figure of the wayward nun is closely related to the real-life one in the convent. The presence of dishonest sisters in the nunnery is confirmed by the work of the moralists, because their aim is precisely to single them out as examples of reprehensible conduct among the religious. The satirists, on the other hand, also with an ideal in mind, promote it through
mockery of improper behavior in the nunnery by means of satire. This was a method that had become very popular by the end of the twelfth century, and medieval writers knew quite well how to use it, overtly to provoke laughter and subtly to condemn what they saw as immoral and corrupt in the life of the Church. Furthermore, the satirical pieces reviewed serve a double purpose; they not only provide evidence of the diffusion of the literary theme of the wayward nun, but also very appropriately lead the way to the discussion in the last chapter of this study—the ambiguous portraits of the Archpriest of Hita's and Chaucer's nuns. Their literary and historical ancestors are to be found in the satires, songs and tales of the previous centuries and ultimately in the dark corridors of certain medieval convents.

As we review the work of the moralist and the satirist who wrote about profligate nuns, we find that whether attacked by one or mocked by the other, the wayward nun of the Middle Ages comes to life in the complaint and the parody as a type of "femme fatale," and her conduct and her "amors" are alternately extolled and condemned depending on the writer's point of view. It is true that both the moralist and the jongleur tell the same tale, but while the purpose of the latter is to provoke laughter, the moralist is interested in drawing edifying
conclusions; it is not the story that matters to him but the ideas it allows him to set forth. Thus, in tones that range from mere animosity to deadly wrath, the moralist conducts his campaign against the "false, felonious" nuns, "malicious ones who would the habit wear / But never would subdue their evil hearts."² The tirades vary in length and virulence, although they generally agree that it is the ease with which some nuns are allowed to come and go, more often and more freely than they should, that is responsible for the licentiousness of their morals. Among the fiercest castigators of ecclesiastical sins, specifically those attributed to women, are some of the best known church figures in the last four centuries of the Middle Ages, a period in which moral turpitude among the religiously professed stood side by side with the most pristine examples of apostolic purity. In the practically endless register of monastic offenders available to the critic, however, the nuns seem to have occupied a prominent position. Although in the misogynistic world of the Middle Ages the mere fact of their sex already made them prey to the worst possible faults--"more envious than a serpent; more malysceous than a tyrante; and more deceytfull then the devylle"³--their often loose behavior, even if no worse than that of their male counterparts, was censured with extreme harshness. Because of the vastness
of the material covered in this chapter it becomes necessary to approach it from a somewhat unorthodox point of view, and rather than a more conventional chronological sequence, the guiding principle for the order in which the selections appear is the degree of indignation or animosity evidenced by the different authors in their outlook. (This is precisely what we feel sets the tone for the Archpriest of Hita's and Chaucer's approach to their nuns.)

To the men and women directly involved in the religious life as well as to the lay moralists of the period, the alleged misconduct in the nunnery was only one symptom of the vice and corruption threatening to destroy the old monastic order. The pamphlet, the poem, and the pulpit all carry the same message: condemnation of breaches in conventual discipline from the most trivial to the most serious; from lateness at chapel to unchastity. Sometimes with dismay and often with disgust, a number of high-minded ecclesiastics lash out at those wicked sisters who break their sacred vow and abandon the love of the Heavenly Spouse to embrace the world instead. Echoing this feeling of consternation, Gerhoh, provost of Reichersberg in the early twelfth century remarks in his Liber de Aedificio Dei, that "it is shameful to say what they do in secret," while abbot Eckbert, brother of Elizabeth of Schonau complains in a letter to the archbishop of Cologne written
sometime in mid-twelfth century: "I beheld the nuns' convents; some of these I should rather call Satan's living-twigs and decoy-cages; . . . the lilies of chastity had withered."\(^5\)

The Dominican Albert the Great, master of St. Thomas Aquinas, compares religious women to sirens "who with their deadly chants lure the souls that sail over the ocean of the world."\(^6\) In the Planctu Ecclesiae, written by papal command between 1335 and 1340, the Franciscan Alvarus Pelagius attacks with considerable ardor the sad state of religious institutions and the immoral conduct of some of their inmates: "Scarce any nun is without her carnal devotee, whereby she annulleth her first promise to Christ."\(^7\) St. Brigitta of Sweden, mystic and founder of the convent of Vadstena, felt that because certain nuns received visitors night and day, clergy and laity alike, "such convents resemble brothels rather than hallowed cloisters."\(^8\) In his Book of Nine Cliffs—an account of the soul's ascent toward God—another mystic, the Swiss Rulman Merswin accuses nuns of being immersed in the sins of avarice, pride, wrath and unchastity and adds that "many sorts of sins are done in these nunneries, both secretly and openly."\(^9\) St. Catherine of Siena is even more acerbic in her remarks about religious women; she thinks they lead a wanton life, engaging in sexual relations with the monks
assigned to the nunnery as advisors:

It does not long maintain this colour of
devotion; therefore it is not long before
their devotions bear fruit. First appear
the stinking flowers of unhonest thoughts,
with the rotten leaves of words; and in
miserable fashion they fulfill their lusts;
and the fruits which appear are such as I
know well you have seen, children to wit."

Equally caustic in his comments is the well known
fifteenth-century churchman and chancellor of the
University of Paris, Johannes Gerson, who urges those who
are either ignorant of the situation or who pretend to
be: "Open your eyes again and see whether nowadays the
cloisters of nuns have become as it were brothels of
harlots." Johann Nider, the Dominican prior of Basel
in the fifteenth century, observes with the bitterness
characteristic of a prelate dealing with a subject of such
distressing nature that "sometimes nuns prostitute them-
selves abominably," while Dionysius the Carthusian,
after pointing out that many nuns wear clothes "so close-
fitting and so pleated," wonders if they are
daughters of Babylon and of devils, who seek
to please the lovers of this world and to
challenge men's looks to themselves; who even
wander thus forth from the cloisters, and
kindle more lust in the beholders than secular
girls and ladies do."

Finally, in fourteenth-century Spain, observing life with
a sharp eye, Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, is a harsh
critic of dissolute morality among the religious, both men
and women, particularly the latter, whom he accuses of
infinite wiles. In turn this leads to the bitter remark that an unchaste nun is worse than rotten fruit—"religiosa non casta es podrida toronja."¹⁴

Somewhat less severe in their criticism of monachal misconduct are two churchmen writing in the twelfth and thirteenth century, respectively: Giraldus Cambrensis and Caesarius of Heisterbach. Giraldus, a Welsh archdeacon whose work evidences a stern attitude toward any form of corruption whether political, ecclesiastical or royal shows considerable moderation in his denunciations of the alleged profligacy of religious women. In his Gemma Ecclesiastica there are many edifying stories of monks, priests and nuns who were sometimes able to resist temptation or were punished for succumbing to it, but none displays the extreme bitterness evident in other writers.¹⁵ Caesarius, a monk of Heisterbach and author of the Dialogus Miraculorum, a collection of religious miracles from various sources is not a very acrimonious critic either. In most of the tales in the Dialogus involving a nun she either repents and is forgiven or is "cured" of her lust through reasonable means, as in the example that follows. There was once a young sister in a community in England over which a holy man presided who, "by often gazing upon him, began to be so tempted that at last she put away all modesty and opened to him her passion." He tried in vain to dissuade her with
reminders of her monastic vow until in the end he agreed to meet her, only to show her that the body she coveted was "eaten with vermin, scarred with the hair shirt, covered with sores and black with grime."\textsuperscript{16} Upon seeing this, she no longer felt any desire for the monk and threw herself at his feet asking for forgiveness.

Even less fulminating in his comments regarding nuns than Giraldus or Caesarius is a certain thirteenth-century monk of Cluny called Guiot de Provins, author of the \textit{Bible Guiot} written sometime between 1204 and 1224. Although the first four lines proclaim that the \textit{Bible} will be an outright denunciation of the "fetid and horrible world" ("Dou siecle puant et orrible") "to sting and prod and set a good example" ("Por poindre et por aguilloner / Et por grant esample doner"\textsuperscript{17}), Guiot's object seems to have been to amuse rather than to edify his courtly audience and he comes across throughout the book as "gossipy rather than thunderous, and more grumbling than indignant."\textsuperscript{18} He does, however, speak of certain monks and nuns, weak and infirm and with misshapen bodies, who keep with them their ill-begotten offspring merely to use them as lures for the alms-giving folk:

\begin{verbatim}
Moines retraiz, Noneins retraites
Ont trop et contraiz et contraites:

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
S'il feissent contrairaz,
Que des enfanz ont-il assez;
Touz li pais en est peuplez.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{verbatim}
Nuns are like pigeons, he says later on, they "nest" in churches and, like pigeons they keep an untidy house—
"Ont les Nonains et li colon: / Ne tienent pas lor maison nete"—possibly referring here to affairs of the heart and not of the home:

Je n'aim pas où mostier la plume
Ce colomp, por l'orde costume,
Ne poil de fame rooingie,
Se la costume n'est changie
Dont l'ame est en si grant dotance:
Por la mauvaise acoustumance
Rent-en le droit qui en acquite,
Ainz encombre bien est maudite,
Que de ce que rendent encombre,
Nuz forz nombriers n'en set le nombre
Pour ce que c'est rente qui trouble,
Qant en la tient et ele double.21

("I do not like the place where this pigeon shows its feathers or the woman with clipped hair has her baby. If the custom is not changed which imperils the soul and the nuns are not made to adopt again the habit they have abandoned, pregnant and despised are so many that we lose count because it is the wandering which turns one into two.")

There were certain moralists who were able to strike a position midway between unrestrained bitterness and only light concern and among them is Gilles li Muisis, abbot of St. Martin-de Tournai who, about 1350 began to record his reflections on the life and morals of the time in a "registre." In it he observes that in earlier times religious houses were under very strict rules but that now things have deteriorated in the extreme. As to the nunneries and their inmates, in a long section entitled Les Maintiens des nonnains,22 Li Muisis indicates that the
permissiveness which characterizes the life of some religious women is due to the ease with which they are allowed to leave their convent and wander abroad, something that greatly displeases him because, if it could be stopped, many scandals would be avoided:

... je le vois aller souvent, dont moulte m'anoie;
Et s'en osteroit-on un grandment de diffames.

(pp. 213-14)

Nowadays, he says, the "tres douces nonnains" (the very sweet nuns") behave like noble ladies in the world: everyone is received at their house and feted grandly; men go there willingly and the young are even more welcome than the old:

En maisons de nonnains aucun sont bien venut,
Et as gens festyer n'a nul règne tenut;
On y va volentiers et souvent et menut,
Mais mieuls sont festyet jovene que li kenuyt.

(p. 215)

This situation often leads to love affairs but, should they abandon the love of God for that of a man?—"Doit-on l'amour de Dieu pour un homme laisser?" (p. 216).

According to li Muisis the sisters' prospective lovers pretend to be faithful and are constantly sending messengers to the nunnery, while the nuns there rise early every day because their hearts spin like weathercocks in the wind. They take letters or tablets from the messengers and there are words of love in them—"Ah! sweet nuns, all of you who do this, beware lest you lose the flower of your honor," warns the good abbot:
Tel amant font samblant de tenir leur convent,
S'envoient messagiers et menut et souvent;
Tost sont nonnains levées, s'elles sont en couvent,
Car leur coers leur volette comme coches dou vent.

A ches messagiers prendent lettres out tavelettes;
Là dedens sont escrites parolles d'amourettes.
Hé! très-doulces nonnains, vous toutes qui chou faites,
Wardés que ne perdés del honneur vos florettes.

(p. 216)

Today, he continues, nuns want to be worldly; they love
easily and make themselves accessible, thus turning their
love affairs into a career. "Alas! formerly they were
good"--

Au jour d'ui ces nonnains voelent yestre moult cointes;
Toutes sont loyemières, se font plusieurs accointes;
Se fait-on des amours des ordnances maintes:
Hélas! jadis estoient des nonnains plusieurs saintes.

(p. 216)

"Religious ladies, white, black and all," goes on li
Muisis, you cause the people to talk when they see you
leaving your house and fools then say, 'See now, these
wantons!' The pope would be right if he enclosed them at
once (we know he tried, as attested by Boniface VIII's
bull "Periculoso"\textsuperscript{23}) and he would do it without delay if
he heard us talk:

Dames religieuses, blankes, noires et toutes,
Vous donnés à parler à ches gens et des douteus;
Car quand on voit de vous hors de vos lieus les routes,
Li fol ont tantost dit: "Or rewardés ches gloutes!"

\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots
Li Paes feroit bien, se tost les enclooit;
Asses tost le feroit, se parler nos coit,
Che semble que cescuns le feroit s'il poot,
Pour chou que d'yestre coie nonne jadis voot.

(pp. 217-18)
Later on in the *Lamentations*, li Muisis stresses how important the role of the abbess is in setting a good example for her nuns and keeping them within the convent, instead of granting them permission to visit abroad and accepting very young novices into the monastery. As has already been seen in Chapter One, nuns on leave from their house are prone to give in to deceitful practices:

> Abesses ont grand couples en ces desordenanches,  
> Par leur congies legiers et par leurs gras souffrances,  
> Pour chou que convenir les laissent des enfances:  
> Nonnains en congies prendre font moult de decevances.  
> (p. 229)

Li Muisis feels that it is useless to preach to these reckless women; even with a tongue of steel he could not wrench their hearts from the world and they will continue to go there and enmesh themselves in trouble:

> On poroit tous les jours a ches nonnains praiachier,  
> Et poroit-on user une langhe d'achier,  
> Anchois qu'on puët les coeurs d'auncunes resachier  
> Dou siecle: la se vont, quand puëient, enlachier.  
> (pp. 230-31)

However sparing, *Les Maintiens des nonnains* is by far the longest, most detailed literary denunciation of the misconduct of nuns in the Middle Ages; each stanza seems to corroborate different pieces of evidence from some of the visitation reports and other historical documents reviewed in Chapter One. Voiced in a calm and dignified manner, li Muisis' indictment is, then, a superb example of the response evoked in some of the less irate moralists of the Church by the presumably wanton
behavior of certain religious women. As to the non-religious moralists, some mordant and full of righteous fury, others speaking with the sad seriousness of philosophers or the calm understanding of sympathetic fellow sufferers, most of them seem to agree with the others that broken claustrophobia vows are the "radix malorum" of conventual debauchery.

Among the most mordant lay critics of unchaste behavior in the nunnery is the fifteenth-century Italian writer and moralist Tommaso Guardato, known as Masuccio il Salernitano who, as a keen observer of the contemporary scene spares no one in his bitter attack on the licentious practices of certain religious men and women. In his book of stories, Il Novellino, Masuccio accuses them of unrestrained concupiscence and of bringing into the world "little monks"—"de gentils moinillons"—whom they often destroy while still unborn—"elles se font avorter." Aware that some people might doubt his word on such a horrible practice, Masuccio suggests that in order to confirm it all one needs to do is search the conventual sewers where as many dead infants will be found as those in Bethlehem during Herod's rule:

Si quelq'un était tenté de soutenir que cela n'est pas vrai, il n'a qu'a fouiller dans les cloaques des couvents de nonnes, et il y trouvera une quantité d'essemences d'enfants, a peu pres comme à Bethlehem au temps d'Herode.
Considerably less gruesome and forbidding is a twelfth-century Gascon poet called Marcabru, whose work, however, does fulminate against the moral degradation of his age. In a poem praising the love of God which has given him the courage to face his enemies, Marcabru includes among those who offend the Lord by all manner of contemptible actions "seducers, drunkards, false priests, false / abbots, nuns, the false recluse." Also numbered in this illustrious company are such miscreants as

lip servicers and convent crackers,
and these flaming whores who'll do
agreeable things with other women's
husbands . . . . . . . . . . .

The list goes on; in the poet's mind each of these men and women is equally perverse and deserving of punishment "for each one has his seat reserved,"\(^{25}\) according to Marcabru.

Less severe than Marcabru is another Frenchman writing around 1220, Hughes de Berzé, "seignor" of a manor and noble lord who "prend gravement la plume pour donner une leçon à son siècle."\(^{26}\) He writes about the spiritual decadence of his time and the vice and corruption that gnaw at the moral order with the quiet gravity of a thinker whose spirit has already been tried by the crusades and the fall of emperors. His natural austerity, however, is tempered by a tolerance for the weaknesses of others even though he shows little mercy for the sins of those who only pretend to be pure, such as
some men and women of religion. A large number of them, it is true, "font bien" but there are many who deserve condemnation like certain nuns, says Berzé, because

\[\ldots\] eles ont mesons plusors
Où l'en parole et fet d'amors
Plus c'on ne fet de Dieu servir. 27

("They have many convents where there are more words and acts of love than of service to God.")

"Ecce sonat in aperto / vox clamantis in deserto," 28 wrote St. Thomas à Becket two hundred years before and the feeling is echoed in the somber tones of Gower's Vox Clamantis, where man is the microcosm that reflects the evils of society's three classes: knights, peasants and clergy. Nuns, says Gower in a tone of gentle rebuke rather than anger, are much too frail and if they err in the cloister it is because their feet are not as firmly planted on the ground as those of men—"Si tamen in claustris fragiles errent mulieres, / . . . / Nam pes feminineus nequit vt pes stare viriles." 29 He also feels that often religious women are led astray by their own confessors, a very old and deplorable situation still prevalent even in the sixteenth century, as evidenced by a story in one of Erasmus' Colloques. In it two nuns attending a dinner party behave in the most indecorous manner, and their drinking and laughing so shocks the narrator that he fears "their conduct that night was hardly
virginal, unless the preliminaries, the sex games, nods and kisses deceived me.\textsuperscript{31} The interlocutor's comment further confirms the bad reputation attributed to confessors: "I don't so much blame the nuns for that waywardness," he says, "as I do the priests in charge of them."\textsuperscript{32}

Gower again chastises reprobate nuns in a section of the \textit{Mirour de l'omne}, a long poem dealing with the conflict between the Seven Deadly Sins and the Cardinal Virtues in society. This time the indictment is harsher than in the \textit{Vox Clamantis}, however. Though promised to God only, says the poet-moralist, religious women often allow their flesh to lead them to luxury:

\begin{quote}
Incest est folie de Nonneine,
Celle est espouse au dieu demeine,
Mais trop devient sa char salvage
Quant son corps a luxure meine.
\end{quote}

In the \textit{Rimado de Palacio}, a fourteenth-century poem by the Spanish moralist Pero López de Ayala, nuns are accused of the same sin, called here incest too which, as indicated in Chapter One was the name for adultery among the religiously professed:\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{quote}
Es de muchas maneras este, feo pecado:
en él es adúlterio que es de omne casado,
otro es el incesto de monja de sagrado,
del santo monasterio que Dios está fundado.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

The tone is considerably milder in a story in \textit{El Libro del Caballero Cifar} by another Spanish author of the time.
Here, a young girl whose father is upset at her knowledge of the world, confesses having learnt everything "en los monasterios mal guardados"—"the poorly guarded monasteries"—where those nuns who can read and write are worse than the others because they do not need intermediaries or messengers to arrange gentlemen's visits to them—"y ciertas de éstas que saben escribir y leer no han menester medianeros que les procuren visitadores y veedores."  

A long fifteenth-century English poem entitled "Why I Can't Be a Nun" also expostulates against those religious women who do not abide by the rules of chaste behavior enjoined by their order but again, as in the case of Gower and the two Spanish poets, the author merely names the undeserving inmates of a certain convent while almost excusing herself for having done it:

And a nother lady was there wonnyng
That hyȝt dame loue vn-ordynate,
In that place bothe erly and late
Dame lust, dame wantowne, and dame nyce,
They were so there enhabyted, I wate,
That few token hede to goddys servyse.
Dame chastyte, I dare welle say,
In that couent had lytelle chere,
But oft in poynte to go her way,
Sche was so lytelle beloved there.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Such bene the nunnes in every worde,
As for the most part, I say not alle,
God forbede, for than hyt were harde,
For sum bene drowte, holy and towarde,
And holdeyn the hyȝt way to blysse.

(11. 233-316)

The poem is generally attributed to a woman because it
concerns a woman's experiences and seems to have been written by someone not attached to a nunnery but with precise knowledge of the religious life. It is actually an adaptation of the legend of the "Ghostly Abbey," a popular medieval literary device whereby a religious house is peopled with personified virtues and vices, although in the case of "Why I Can't Be a Nun" those living in the convent are mostly vices. Life in the nunnery, then, as reflected in some of the moralistic literature of the period just reviewed was far removed from the ideal that had inspired the great monasticism of the early Middle Ages. Whatever motives they might have had for abandoning their sacred vow of chastity, the nuns who strayed usually come across as wicked and debauched in the most accusing portraits or as merely dishonest and weak in the mildest. The writers, dismayed at the moral—or rather immoral—climate in the monastery vary conspicuously in their approach as we have just seen, and what seems like fair treatment of the subject in some is no more than disguised ranting in others. The tainted virtue of certain religious women is made the rallying cry for those who would wish to see the Church proud of all its children once again.

Among the literature dealing with the profligate nun in the late Middle Ages there is another group of
works, written in its entirety by churchmen expressing
consternation at the ruinous moral condition prevalent
in many religious houses at a time when the ecclesiastical
order "lay lower than the other, and Christ's bride was
for sale":

Iacet ordo clericalis
in respectu laicalis
Sponsa Christi fit mercalis. 38

The concern of these men found expression in poems and
manuals praising virginity and books or treatises in which
nuns are either admonished or encouraged to keep their
monastic vows intact. The fact that this kind of
literature existed, that religious men and women had to be
reminded at all times of the vital importance of remaining
pure both in thought and deed could be taken as further
evidence of the need for such advice in religious com-
munities of either sex presumed guilty of immoral conduct.
Although addressed to religious women in general and not
intended specifically for those either accused or suspec-
ed of committing sins of the flesh, three thirteenth-
century English poems written in praise of heavenly love
warrant a second look in these pages as examples of what
could be called "roundabout" attempts to encourage young
women to pursue the true religious life. In A Luue Ron, Of
Clene Maydenhood and Halie Meidenhad earthly love is pre-
sent in varying degrees of undesirability, from unful-
filling to abject. The tone in the three poems also
covers a wide emotional range with each author revealing himself as tenderly solicitous, poetically inspired or rudely vociferous in his approach.

The basic theme of *A Luue Ron*, written by the Franciscan Thomas Hales at the request of a nun—"A mayde cristes me bit yorne / at ich hire wurche a luue ron"—is that the love of this world is false and fickle—"is worldes luue nys bute o res." After a long section in which heavenly love is said to be the fairest and truest and the only one that may bring total happiness, the author tells us that Jesus has given religious women a treasure more valuable than silver or gold which they must guard with total devotion, because once lost it can never be recovered. This precious jewel is called virginity, he says—"His ilke ston, ßat ich nemne. / Mayden-hod icleoped is." Of *Clene Maydenhod* is an anonymous poem dedicated to a maiden who must learn how to love Christ. Although poetically inferior to *A Luue Ron*, it also compares heavenly and earthly love much to the disadvantage of the latter, and it encourages young women who wish to devote their life to Christ to please him, above all else, by remaining chaste:

\[
\text{3if ßou wolt ßi lemon queme} \\
\text{And to his brihte boure he brouȝt,} \\
\text{In Chastite kep ßou ße clene.}^{10}
\]

The last poem of this group, *Halî Meidenhad*, is an
alliterative homily seeking to persuade young women to
enter the religious life by describing it as the sweetest
of all, one which may be led in the most perfect spiritual
ease—

Whatsoever God sees will be of advantage to

dem. Nor may any worldly mishap bereave
dem of their weal, for they are rich and
wealthy within the heart.\(^41\)

At the same time, to emphasize the undesirability of
everly love and, possibly by contrast, to stress the
perfect spiritual ease available to those who refrain from
any carnal contact, the author offers a singularly
twisted and brutal picture of matrimony and childbirth:

Now you art wedded and from so high estate
alighted so low: from being in likeness of
angels, from being Jesus Christ's leman, from
being a lady in heaven fallen into the fill of
the flesh, into the manner of life of a
beast . . .

When it came to fat at last, there is sore
sorrowful anguish, a strong piercing pang,
sore comfortless ill, the pain upon pain, the
miserable wail.\(^42\)

Similar in tone to Héli Meidenhad, though not so violent
in its portrayal of the sorrows of a woman who chooses the
married state over chastity, a twelfth-century poem by
Serlo, canon of Bayeux, to a nun named Muriel also offers a
bleak picture of conjugal life:\(^43\)

ferrea iura subit mulier quo tempore nubit;
non vacat a poema, quia lex premit hanc aliena.

("A woman must submit to iron laws when she
marries, and she never lacks punishment, as
she must abide by someone else's rule.")
This is followed by some lavish praise of the religious life where peace and security abound, and then by an injunction to choose the enduring love of Christ instead of the temporary love of man: "elige quod durat, nil te quod praeterit urat."  

It may be interesting to note here that already in the eighth century the pressing need to admonish religious women to value virginity above all else had been evident. In his De Laudibus Virginitatis, written for abbess Hildelith and some of her nuns in the monastery at Barking, Essex, Aldhelm starts by praising their virtues and comparing them to bees who go about gathering knowledge from different sources. He exhorts them to chastity in the manner of the Church Fathers and then urges them to beware of the sin of luxury into which they may be led by "gaudiness of dress." "It says in the Apocalypse," he quotes,

'And the woman [i.e., the whore of Babylon] was clothed round about with purple and scarlet' [Apoc. xvii, 4] Let chaste and modest women flee from the dress of adultresses, from the appearance of strumpets, from the furbelows of prostitutes and the trumperies of whores!'  

From the survey of literature concerned with the good life that a religious woman was supposed to lead but in some cases did not, we will now proceed to consider certain works whose authors, as pointed out at the beginning of the chapter are also troubled by reports of
dishonorable behavior in the nunnery. Their attack on monastic corruption, however, is carried out in the satirical mode. "Occasionally they use the gay satire of the writer of fabliaux; their condemnation is an undercurrent beneath a lightly flowing stream, their moral is implicit, they poke fun at the erring monk or nun, rather than chastise them." \(^{46}\) This is the case of *The Land of Cokayne*, for example, a thirteenth-century English poem quoted as follows in an Anglo-Irish version. \(^{47}\) The poem describes Cokayne as incomparable:

Vnder heuen n'is lond iwisse.
Of so mochil ioi and blisse.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Ser beþ riveres gret and fine
Of oile, melk, honi and wine.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Al is solas and dedute.
Ser is a wel faer abbei.
Of white monkes and of grei.
Ser be bowris and halles.
Al of pasteiis beþ be walles. \(^{48}\)
Of fleis, of fisse, and rich met.
Se lifullist ßat man mai et.
Flureen cakes beþ be scingles alle.
Of cherche, cloister, boure, and halle.

(ll. 23058)

There is a cloister made of crystal where the monks live in absolute comfort, busy at times with prayer or else seeking diversion elsewhere. To make everything more pleasant even,

anoþer abbei is ßerbi.
For soth a gret faer nunnerie,

(ll. 147-48)

where all is just as splendid and there is an equal
abundance of riches and of ease. Down the river of milk,

Whan þe somer-is dai is hote.
De þung nunnes takith a bote.
And doth hæm forth in that riuer.
Both with oris and with sterre.
When hie beth fur from the abbeir.
Hi makith hæm nakid for to plei.
And lepith dune in-to the brimme.
And doth hæm sleilich for to swimme.
Þe þung monkes þat hi seeth.
Hi doth hæm up, and forþ hi flee.
And commþ to þe nunnes anon.

(11. 151.-61)

Obviously the monks and the nuns know how to enjoy themselves in the Land of Cokayne!

The same spirit of unmitigated mockery of monastic corruption is evident in a thirteenth-century French poem called L'Ordre de Bel-Eyse. In it all the vices associated with each religious order are combined into the fabulous "Order of Fair Ease," open to all fair ladies and gentlemen but which, like real life monastic orders does not accept anyone of low birth. There will be no walls separating the men and women of this order as there are in the double monastery of Sempringham on which it is modeled; in fact, nothing will stand between them to hinder the monks from visiting the sisters, neither ditch nor wall, clothing or even their own skin:

... en cest Ordre de Bel-Eyse
Ne doit fossë ne mur aver,
Ne nul autre destourber,
Que les frères à lur pleysyr
Ne pussent à lor sueres venyr,
Jà n'i avera ne lyn ne launge  
Entre eux, e si le peil y a,  
Jà pur ce ne remein dra.  
(p. 67)

After such a startling requisite there follows a long list of the orders from which that of Fair Ease will adopt certain traits, such as the Secular Canons—"que dames servent volenters" ("who willingly serve ladies")—from whom the brethren must learn, since it is commanded very strictly, on pain of excommunication, to "play the game of love" with the sisters before matins and afterwards too:

Si est, sur eschumygement,  
Comaudé molt estroitement  
Que chescun frere à sa sorour  
Deit fere le giw d'amour  
Devant matines adescement  
E après matines ensement.

The next section of the poem shamefacedly insists on the activity just mentioned by poking fun at the Grey Monks who are in the habit of going to matins without breeches—"Quar à matins vont sans breys" (p. 72). With merry piquancy the point is pursued even further by encouraging the brethren of the Order of Fair Ease to emulate this custom of the Grey Monks so as to be more at their ease; and when they are not engaged in prayer they should kneel for more effective devotion. At the same time, also in a show of great devotion, the sisters of the order must lie on their backs to pray too!
E quant il fount nul oreysoun,
Si deyvent estre à genu lloun,
Pur aver greindre devocioun.

... nos sueres deyvent envers
Gysyr e orer countre-mount,
Par grant devocioun le fount.

(p. 72)

After more of the same coarse humor, the poem ends with a reminder that the Order of Fair Ease pleases many very well:

E c'est l'Ordre de Bel-Eyse,
Qe à plusours trop bien pleyse!

(p. 77)

The satirical perspective from which monastic abuses were often viewed is also found in two long thirteenth-century poems. In the first one, the *Gestis Regum Anglorum*, William of Malmesbury claims that William of Aquitaine founded at the castle of Niort an abbey of prostitutes and announced he would install there a "notorious" abbess, a prioress and other officials:

Denique apud castellum quoddam, Niort,
habitacula quaedam, quasi monasteriola,
construens, abbatiam pellicum ibi se
positurum delirabat; nuncupatim illam et illam, quaecunque famosioris prostitutuli
esset, abbatissam vel priorem, ceterasere officiales instituturum cantitans.

(p. 510)

The possible reason for William of Aquitaine's obvious resentment regarding monasteries may not be totally unexplained, as he could be parodying here the Abbey of Fontevrault, of doubtful reputation at the time where
his first wife Ermengarde and his second wife Philippa had become inmates. In the second poem, *A Disputison by-twene a cristenenem and a Jew* \(^{54}\) again a picture of a religious house where all is not as it should be is presented, although in this case it is done only in passing. During a journey a Christian and a Jew accidentally come upon a nunnery where

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{\textbf{The}}} & \text{ was Bordes I-clo\'ed clene} \\
\text{Wi\' schire cl\'e} & \text{es and schene.} \\
\text{Riche metes was for\' brouht,} \\
\text{\textit{\textbf{The}}} & \text{ was wyn ful clere} \\
\text{In mony a feir Maseere,} \\
\text{And o\'er dryinke\'s bat weore clere} \\
\text{In coupes ful gret.} \\
\text{\textit{\textbf{The}}} & \text{ was schewed hem bi,} \\
\text{Mur\'e and Munstralsy.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(11.198-222)

The description ends here and nothing further is said about any other unusual goings-on at the convent; it really seems like an odd fragment to be included in a poem illustrating a religious argument between two men of opposite faith, although it does attest to the popularity of the theme of the wayward nun in the satiric literature of the time.

One of the most prolific French satirists of the reign of Louis IX was the poet Rutebeuf, whose work covered a wide range of subjects from the historical to the frivolous. It was only natural, then, that he too should express concern at the deterioration of religious
ideals that marked his age. Thus, in his long satirical poem *La Vie du monde* there is a section on the Church and the monastic orders called "L'Eglise, les ordres mendiants, l'université" in which, after ridiculing the friars, Rutebeuf comments with sardonic humor on the dangerous consequences of an inveterate custom of certain religious women: wandering outside the convent—

Quant ces nonnains s'en vont par le pays esbattre,  
Les unes à Paris, les autres à Montmartre,  
Teiz fois en moinne hom deulz c'on ne ramaine quatre.  
(11. 109-11)

They leave the convent in groups of two, he says, but return as four, perhaps a reference to the "bad habit" of some nuns of becoming pregnant during such outings. Also included in *La Vie du monde* are a few verses on the beguines—women who lived in communities consecrated to the performance of good works and acts of devotion but without taking vows. The poet again conveys a most unfavorable opinion of outwardly pious women with inwardly profane longings, jokingly but pointedly accusing them of doing under their long robes things that they do not talk about:

Beguines à ou mont  
Qui larges robes ont;  
Desous lor robes font  
Ce que pas ne vous di.  

There is an early fourteenth-century poem, the "Satire on the People of Kildare," written by a friar Michael of
Kildare which, though a much lesser work than Rutebeuf's
La Vie du monde, also ridicules friars, monks and nuns as
well as the other two estates of medieval society. The
author says that religious women--"God's bower maidens and
His own spouses"--often wear the wrong shoes, their feet
are too tender for them and, therefore, he wishes "a
curse" on those who tanned the leather:

Hail be 3e monnes of seint Mari house,
Goddes bourmaidnes and his owen spouse,
Ofte mistredith 3e 3ur schone, 3ur fete beth ful tendre,
Datheir the setter that tawith 3ure lethir.58

In the light of the rest of the satire, a good-humored
catalogue of the foibles of the people of his town, it is
probably safe to interpret the verses just quoted as the
poet's mild indictment of the nuns of Kildare who, like
so many others of the time "wore the wrong shoes for their
tender feet," that is, did not have the spiritual strength
required to be brides of Christ.

We have so far dealt with the work of the writers
whose satire on the subject of profligacy in the nunnery is
mild rather than caustic; they are the ones, as was pointed
out at the beginning of the section, who choose to ridicule
rather than to rave. The impact of their satire, then,
is never felt as strongly as that of those others whose
message, conveyed in lines of unrelenting bitterness
lampoons the weak and the corrupt with the true fury of
the righteous. One such author is William Langland, in
whose Piers Plowman there is a description of a convent
where Wrath is cook and his aunt the abbess, and where
some highly dishonorable things seem to be happening:

. . . Ioannes was a bastard
And dame Clarice a kniȝtes douȝter, ac a kokewolde was
hire syre
And dame Peronelle a prestes file' priouresse worth she
neuere
For she had childe in chirityme, al owere chapitere it
wiste.59

In just four lines we are given here a picture of con-
ventual life in a work of fiction which could have
actually come directly from the pages of an episcopal
visitation record; the nunnery as a place to send an un-
wanted child (lines 1 and 2) or to hide her if her father
was a man of the cloth himself (line 3). The prioress of
line 4 could have been one of several guilty of the same
sin as reported by any of the bishops in charge of visi-
tations to the medieval convents and whose names are so
often quoted in Chapter One.

Slightly more sardonic even is the passage on re-
ligious women in the anti-feminine poem, Le Livre des
lamentations, written in the late thirteenth century by
Matheolus, an obscure clerk from Boulogne-sur-Mer whose
work eventually became a symbol of French medieval
misogyny. According to Matheolus, nuns may appear very
devout but they are as much prey to sexual appetites as
other women; for this reason they are always thinking of
excuses to go out in search of "carnal knowledge." One
of their favorite excuses is that their relatives
("cousins, parents, sisters, brothers") are in bad health
and sometimes about to die; this often allows them to
roam the countryside in total freedom from monastic
restraint. Matheolus believes nuns cannot be trusted
because they "pluck and fleece" other people more than
robbers do:

Les nonnains, les religieuses
Se tiennent pour trop précieuses
Par leur espiritualité.
Mais asséz y a cruauté,
Pour ce que de char ont deffaulte.
Peu en y a, basse ne haute,
En toute la religion,
Qui n'ait charnel affection
De soy conjoindre charnelment.

Nonnains feignent pères et mères,
Cousins, parens et suers et frères
Languereus et en maladie.
Elles le font, quoy que l'on die,
Afin d'isir hors de leur cloître,
Pour faire charnelment connoistre
Leur "quoniam" et leur "quippe."
Tout est par elles dissipé;
Par le pais s'en vont esbattre.

Mieulx sera plumes et tondues
Que se les larrons le tenoient.

They are also much too fond of receiving gifts from
their lovers and will not deign grant any favors unless
they and their entourage are rewarded in advance:

Ne vous priseront une prune,
Se vous ne leur donnés souvent;
C'est l'usage de leur couvent.
Dons veult avoir la messagiere,
La maistresse et la chamberiere,
Et la matrone et la compaigne.

(ll. 1758-63)
Much stronger than *Li Livre des lamentations* in its attack on the vices and corruption of the monastic orders in his time is the *Speculum Stultorum*, a long poem written in Latin by Nigellus Wireker. Its hero, Brunellus the ass, is supposed to represent the monastic order—"Asinus iste monachus est, aut vir quilibet religiosus in claustro posit" (Introduction). Nuns in the *Speculum* are divided into two startlingly simple categories—"quaedam steriles et quaedam parturientes—("those who are sterile and those who give birth"), both of whom cover it all with the name of virgin: "Virgineoque tamen nomine cuncta tegunt."61 A few lines before Wireker describes them in typical anti-feminine fashion as sirens—or temptresses—who sing with high, sweetly-modulated voices, beings who sound like mermaids but who have the body of snakes:

\[
\text{Vocibus altisonis adeo modula mine dulci}
\text{Cantant, sirenes quod cecinisse putes,}
\text{Corpore serpentes, sirenes voce . . .}62
\]

There are two Spanish poems of the fifteenth century where the anti-monastic satire definitely surpasses that of any of the works on the subject considered so far. These are the *Doctrina y reprehensión de algunas mujeres* and the *Coplas de Vita Christi*. The former, written by a priest, fray Ambrosio de Montesino is wholly dedicated to castigate vices in women, and the section addressed to the sisters once again reveals the bitterness
felt by a representative of the Church at the immoral
closeby prevalence in the nunnery. Fray
Ambrosio thinks nuns are flatterers and full of "twisted
alettes"--"monjas lisonjeras, / De entrincados apetitos."
He complaints that it is useless to lock them up in the
cloister because their thoughts run constantly to the
court and the towns:

¿Qué vale el encerramiento
De los cuerpos enclaustrados,
Cuando está el entendimiento
En las cortes y poblados? 83

The *Coplas de Vita Christi*, also the work of a priest,
fray Íñigo de Mendoza, is even more acerbic in its
comments on the behavior of religious women who are
satirized together with virtually every member of medieval
society. Suggesting that they "circumcise" or excise
their particular vices, fray Íñigo castigates the nuns
who busy themselves climbing walls and writing letters,
applying ointments and perfumes to make their bodies more
attractive and who engage in those "crude delights than
only lead to hell":

¡O monjas!, vuestras mercedes
¡deuen de circunvidar
aquel parlar a las redes,
el escalar de paredes,
el continuo cartear,
aquellas ganas y azeytes
que fazen el cuero tierno,
aquellas mudas y afeytes,
aquelles torpes deleytes,
cuyo fin es el infierno. 84
By far the most merciless medieval satire on the seemingly profligate life of the nunnery is included in the Spill, Libre de les dones or Libre de consells written in Catalan by Jacme Roig. The whole book is an open attack on the female sex but there are two episodes in Book II that deal specifically with several wicked religious women. In the first one (Book II, part 2) the narrator plans to marry a beguine—"la vil beguina"—who turns out to be totally corrupt and whose crimes range from idolatry to adultery and abortion; in the second episode (Book II, part 4) he does marry a novice who has not yet taken final vows. This young woman, educated in a convent and without knowledge of the world has learned the most gruesome things in the nunnery. Her fellow nuns have given her advice on practically every aspect of conduct and each suggestion is equally abominable. The prioress told her to feign arrogance if she bore a child so her husband would not feel he owned her—

si fill parís,
m'ensenyoris,
may no m prostras;
masque m mostras
un tant altiva,
no/m fes cativa
de marit vell;
(11. 5985-91)

the sacristan said that nursing made a woman grow old fast and should be avoided—
car lo criar,
filla alletar,
prest fa envellir,
(ll. 6015-17)
and the abbess advised her to pretend to be ill—"que me
fes malalta" (l. 6025)—adding to that a few tips on how
to fool the doctor, such as pricking the palate with a
needle to cough and spit blood:

ab una agulla
te pots punchar
lo paladar
secretament,
poras sovent
ab sed tossir
sanch escopir.
(ll. 6084-90)
An old nun taught her how to induce a miscarriage and how
to fake virginity:

Fer avortir;
saber fingir
virginitats,
(ll. 6123-25)
while another sister recommended she take a young lover
and even offered her cell for the trysts—

e si volreu
guardat vos sia,
la cambra mia.
(ll. 6280-82)
The description of all these perversities certainly com-
bines to create one of the most infamous pictures of con-
ventual life in the late Middle Ages.

In this brief survey of the satirical literature
aimed at medieval nuns we must include a little known
twelfth-century Latin poem called The Council of Remiremont as an example of a satiric parody on religious figures. Written in a typically medieval tone of good-humored blasphemy and dealing jocularly with a solemn subject, The Council of Remiremont presents a debate on love among the nuns of Remiremont. It is not spiritual love that occupies them, however, but rather the kind of love whose rewards are temporary no matter how satisfying. The poem, regarded as a prototype of the "debats du clerc et du chevalier" that flourished near the end of the Middle Ages appears without a title in the original manuscript, and was published for the first time in 1849 by Georg Waitz with the name Das Liebesconcil. The Council is probably the "work of a clerk, a poor Latinist but a spiritual libertine, . . . one of those that a few years later became known as Goliards," says a well-known French critic and scholar. It is an impudent parody of a church council designed to entertain the nuns of Remiremont themselves or perhaps the poet's own friends with a description of something which had in all probability not taken place but that was not entirely impossible either, since the records report alleged dissolute practices at Remiremont from early times. By the twelfth century it is obvious that morals had become so lax at the abbey that a bull of Pope Eugene III dated
March 17, 1151 assails them for engaging in "carnal exchanges":

. . . . quod ille jam pridem conversatio carnalis subventionis vestre indignas exhibuerunt, quam quod sacre religionis cultum in eodem loco credimus processu temporis reformandum et peccati lasciviam in [ar]gorem spiritualibus convertendum . . . .69

The action of the Council takes place in spring—"Veris in temporibus, sub aprilis idibus"70—and the council is meeting with a most singular purpose: to deal with love—

In eo concilio, de solo negocio
Amoris tractatum est, quod in nullo factum est.
(11. 7-8)

Except for some "honeste clerici" from the diocese of Toul, all men are excluded from attending and also excluded are those older women perhaps now insensitive to the joys of love:

Veterans domine arcentur a limine,
Quibus omne gaudium solet esse tedium.
(11. 20-21)

The gospel of Ovid, master of the "ars amatoria" is substituted for that of the Church at this gathering:

Lecta sunt in medium, quasi evangelium,
Precepta Ovidii, doctoris egregii,
(11. 24-25)

and in charge of reading such teachings to the assembly are Eva de Danubrio, "potens in officio / Artis amatorie" and Elizabeth, also well acquainted with the laws of love.
The session is opened by the "cardinalis domina," delegate of the god of love for the occasion who has come dressed in resplendent robes and glittering jewels and "hung with a thousand May flowers":

\[
\text{Hec vestis coloribus colorata pluribus,} \\
\text{Gemmis fuit clarior, auro preciosior,} \\
\text{Mille mali floribus hinc inde pendentibus.} \\
(\text{ll. 39-41})
\]

She proceeds to question the nuns on their deportment and promises to pardon or chastise depending on the sin committed—"Meum est corrigere, meum est parcare" (l. 57). This is followed by Elizabet de Granges' speech in the name of the entire congregation, in which she declares that they are all devoted servants of love who prefer the company of clerks to that of any other men:

\[
\text{Nos, ex quo potuimus, Amori servivimus} \\
\ldots \\
\text{Sic servando regulam, nullam viri copulam} \\
\text{Habendam eligimus, sed neque cognovimus,} \\
\text{Nisi talis hominis, qui sit nostri ordinis.} \\
(\text{ll. 58-63})
\]

Elizabet de Falcon then explains the reasons for such a preference: the clerks know how to charm and to flatter; they are pleasing, gracious and affable, skilled in love and generous too. They keep their promises and never abandon their loved ones:

\[
\text{Clericorum gratiam laude [m]et memoriam} \\
\text{Nos semper amavimus, et amare cupimus,} \\
\ldots \\
\text{Quos scimus affabiles, gratos et amabiles;} \\
\ldots 
\]
Amandi pericam habent, et industriam;
Pulchra donant munera, bene servant federa,
Si quid amant dulciter, non relinquent leviter.
(11. 64-74)

As to the love of knights, it is well known that
"detestable, ill-fated and short-lived" are the words to
describe it--"detestabilis, quam miser et labilis" (l.
81)--therefore, no nun should ever love a knight but only
clerks who follow the god of love and the joy of youth--

Amor, deus omnium, juventutis gaudium,
Clericos amplexitur . . .
(11. 95-96)

That is the life that the nuns of Remiremont will con-
tinue to live if they are all in agreement--"Tali vita
vivimur, in qua permanebimus" (l. 98).

Despite this declaration of allegiance to clerks,
however, there are some sisters present at the council
who prefer the love of knights; they find them brave in
combat and courteous with women, ready to please and to
possess. The knights' well-being is these nuns' happi-
ness, their house is always open for such lovers, they
say:

Audaces ad prelia sunt, pro nostri gratia,
Ut sibi nos habeant et ut nobis placeant,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Eorum prosperitas est nostra felicitas,
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Nostrum illum atrium est, et erit pervium.
(11. 110-22)

The clerks' supporters are adamant, though, and they
will save for them all the delights that a woman can
offer a man—"Quotquot oblectamina viro debet femina"
(l. 133). The clerks are always praising the nuns in all
forms of verse so they remain their beloved by Venus's
decree; with them there is sweet love and glory:

Laudant nos in omnibus rhythmis atquae versibus,
Tales, jussu Veneris, diligo pre ceteris,
Dulcis amī [cī]cia, clericis est et gloria.
(11. 141-43)

The majority agrees and the "cardinalis domina" now
orders those nuns who love knights to be excluded from
the group till they repent; they will then be absolved
and allowed to return if they promise to be satisfied
with one lover only:

. . . eas in consorcio
Nostre non recipiant, nisi satisfaciant:
Sed si penituerint, et se nobis dederint,
Detur absolucio . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Uni soli serviat, et ille sufficiat.
(11. 167-74)

No nun should ever allow a knight to touch "her body,
her neck or her thigh" (!)—"Tactum nostrī corporis, vel
collī vel femoris" (1. 180). There follows a fierce
threat of excommunication 71 for the disobedient with all
manner of sorrow and pain to be visited upon them by
order of Venus herself:

Maneat confusio, terror et contricio,
Labor, infelicitas, dolor et anxietas,
Timor et tristicia, bellum et discordia,
. . . . . . . . . . . .
Pudor et ignominia vobit sint per omnia.
Laboris et tedium, vel pudoris nīmium.
(11. 210-29)
The poem ends amid a chorus of "Amens" from the nuns and an amused smile from the twentieth-century reader for whom such satire has lost much of its edge. This concludes our brief survey of the moralistic and satiric literature of the late Middle Ages on the subject of profligate nuns. The next chapter will be a review of the medieval "chanson de nonne" and the fabliau as we come closer to identifying the possible sources for the portraits of the Archpriest of Hita's enigmatic Doña Garoza and Chaucer's seductive Madame Eglentyne.
FOOTNOTES


5. Cited by Coulton, Five Centuries, II, 508.

6. Ibid., II, 523.


8. Coulton, Five Centuries, II, 566.

9. Ibid., p. 568.


17 La Bible de Guiot de Provins in Fabliaux et contes des poètes français des xiè, xiiè, xiiiè, xive et xve siècles, ed. Etienne Barbazan (Paris, 1808; rpt. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1976), II, 1-4. My translation. (All subsequent translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.)


20 Ibid., p. 377, 11. 2067-68.

21 Ibid., p. 379, 11. 2194-98.
Gilles Li Muisis, Poèmes, pub. Kervyn de Letterhove (Louvain: Imprimerie de J. Lefever, 1882), I, 209-36. The following seven references to passages from Les Maintiens des nonnains will be identified in the text by page number.

See Chapter I, pp. 44-45.


Lenient, p. 110.

La Bible au Seignor de Berzé in Fabliaux et contes, II, 402.


Ibid.

See Chapter One, Footnote No. 13.


"Why I Can't Be a Nun," in Early English Poems and Lives of Saints, ed. F. J. Furnivall (Berlin: Transactions of the Philological Society, 1858), pp. 138-48. Subsequent references to passages from this poem will be identified in the text by line number.


Ibid., pp. 24 and 34.

In the De Virginibus ad Marcellinam, a treatise on virginity, Ambrose echoes the attitude of the Church Fathers, first affirming the institution of marriage and then pointing out the disadvantages of the married state, such as pregnancy, morning-sickness and breast-feeding among others. Cited in Aldhelm, The Prose Works, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield and Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, Ltd., 1979), p. 53.


47 The Land of Cokaygne in *Early English Poems*, ed. Furnivall, pp. 156-61. The next three references to this poem will be identified in the text by line number.

48 The notion of a "food country" was fairly common in medieval literature. It appeared sometimes as part of a legend of a golden age long gone, as in the twelfth-century Irish "vision of Mac Conglinne":

> The fort we reached was beautiful,  
> With works of custards thick,  
> Beyond the lake.  
> Fresh butter was the bridge in front,  
> The rubble dyke was fair white wheat,  
> Bacon the palisade.


49 *The Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Thomas Wright (Edinburgh: privately printed, 1884), pp. 137-48. The following five references to "L'Ordre de Bel Eyse" will be identified in the text by page number.

50 The notion had already appeared in the twelfth-century *Speculum Stultorum* by Nigellus Wireker.


53 See p. 96 above.


58 Ibid., p. 175.


62 Ibid., p. 93.


Jacme Roig, Spill o Libre de les dones, ed. Roque Chabés (Barcelona: "L'Avenc," Madrid: Librería de M. Murillo, 1905). For more on this monstrous nunnery see the entire section (Book II, part 4).

Ibid., Book II, part 2, p. 3937. Subsequent references to the Spill will be identified in the text by line number.


All quotes from the Latin text of the Council of Remiremont are from Oulmont, Les Débats du clerc et du chevalier, pp. 93-100, and will be identified in the text by line number.

According to F. M. Warren, the "Excommunicatio rebellarum" is given in terms appropriate to pagan mythology. "The Council of Remiremont," Modern Language Notes, 22 (May 1907), p. 139.
CHAPTER THREE

THE WAYWARD NUN IN THE MEDIEVAL "CHANSON DE NONNE" AND THE FABLIAU

Il était une religieuse
Fort amoureuse
Son père l'avait mise au couvent,
Parc' que'elle aimait trop son amant.¹

According to one prestigious French critic the question of the allegedly indecorous behavior of the medieval nun is "un lieu commune de la litterature amoureuse du Moyen Age."² Because the wealth of material available to illustrate the presence of the wayward nun in the literature of the Middle Ages in Europe is overwhelming, an attempt to survey it in its entirety would be beyond the scope of the present study. Its ultimate goal is an attempt to establish the elements of a powerful--albeit totally overlooked--literary convention dealing with certain medieval nuns and which affected the portraits of the two best known and most controversial religious women in fourteenth-century literature: the Archpriest of Hita's Doffa Garoza and Chaucer's Madame Eglentyne.

Since this literary convention was still strong one hundred years later (and for many centuries to come too)
and because they serve to confirm its lingering presence and influence in medieval literature, some of the examples reviewed go beyond the Archpriest's and Chaucer's time well into the fifteenth century. There is mention of profligate nuns throughout the entire literature of the late Middle Ages; the "chanson de nonne" and the fabliau, however, are the two genres which best illustrate the literary presence of the wayward nun. Thus, they can help us trace the continuity of the tradition in which these nuns occupy a significant position, and whose real-life counterparts seem to have co-existed in the convents of the period.

I. "Chansons de nonne"

Chapter One explored the socio-economic background against which lived the historical models for the nuns of the songs and the tales, as well as some of the reasons which led medieval women to the cloister. Since the women of the lower classes were barred from a career in the Church, the people could not have looked upon such a profession with sympathy. Nevertheless, if we consider the songs themselves, the dislike does not extend to the nuns, particularly to those forced into the convent without any regard for their preference, and whose plight invariably elicits from the singers a sympathetic response.
This is what the people sing:

Mariez-vous, les filles,
Avecque ces bons drilles,
Et n'allez jà, les filles,
Pourrir derrièr' les grilles. 3

("Marry your daughters to some
jolly fellow; do not let them rot
behind a convent's grille.")

Une jeune fillette de noble coeur
contre son grê l'on at rendu nonette.
Point ne le vouloit estre, par quoy vit en langueur. 4

("A young girl with a noble heart was
made a nun against her will and now she
pines away."

Most of the medieval "chansons de nonne,"
"Klosterlieder" or "Nonnenklagen" deal with the nun forced
into the convent against her will or the nun who regrets
her decision to enter the religious life. The songs never
attempt a philosophical justification of the singer's
attitude, and since they reflect the viewpoint of the
people the emphasis is usually on the merry and the
materialistic. The origin of the "chansons de nonne" is
to be found in the plaint of the nun unwillingly professed
common in French romances and German "lieder" of the
thirteenth century on. The "chansons de nonne" record the
emotions of the nun unwillingly professed as she
alternately cries and questions, laments and endures,
seemingly never losing all hope. Pining away in the
nunnery for the pleasures of the world or the arms of a
lover, the nuns of the "chansons" are often either
plotting to escape or actually running away from the cloister, much like the real ones seem to have done. Although all the "chansons" express the same feeling of frustration at the loss of physical freedom that the cloistered life entails, the tone in which such a feeling is conveyed varies widely. Thus, the selections that follow have been arranged to display the assorted moods of the singers from bitter resentment through benign resignation to almost blatant raciness.

The oldest version of the nun's complaint that has come down to us is the twelfth-century Latin "Planctus monialis" contained in a Vatican manuscript and printed for the first time by an Italian scholar at the beginning of the twentieth century. The following are Latin and English versions of the "Planctus":

Plangit nonna fletibus
ingenarrabilibus,
condolens gemitibus,
dicens socialibus--:
'Heu misella
nihil est deterius
tali vita,
cum enim sum petulans
et lasciva.

Sono tintinnabulum,
repeto psalterium,
gratum linguo somnium
cum dormire cuperem,
heu misella!
pernoctando vigilo
cum non vellem:
juvenem amplecter
quam libenter!
What tears the sister shed,
   wailing the life she led;
sighing, she shook her head;
then to the nuns she said:
"What joys I miss.
There is no life on earth
   so hard as this
for I've a wanton heart,
   I want a kiss.

"The echoing bells I sound,
I chant the whole year round,
in sleep I'd fain be drowned,
but still no sleep is found.
What joys I miss.
Rebelliously all night
   I toss awake.
Rather inside my arms
   a man I'd take."

From the very beginning, then, the bitter and the wanton mingle in the nun's complaint; the resentment and the pent-up desire to share once again in the pleasures of the world become intolerable and find expression in song. There is almost unbearable sorrow in the lament of the nun, but there is also anger at the memory of all that she has been forced to leave behind, therefore, no matter how mournful the song, the longings of the flesh still come through; "cupiditas" will not be vanquished by "caritas."

This is precisely the attitude evident in the following ten songs from the thirteenth and fourteenth century which have come down to us from many different regions of medieval Europe.

"May Jesus curse the one who made me a nun"—Kinnenne me fist, Jesus lou mal die"—sings the maiden in the first song, from southern France, while a new nun in
Angoumois curses the weavers of the fabric out of which her veil is made and the scissors that were used to cut off her lovely blond hair:

Maudit soit le faiseur de toile,  
Qu'a fait mon voile!  
Maudit ciseaux si dangereux  
Qui ont coupe mes blonds cheveux!  

In this fourteenth-century Italian song a nun, constrained by reasons of domestic interest to remain in the cloister, regrets the life she must lead; she used to wear a white shirt, soft and supple, she says, but now she wears a coarse and ugly dark tunic, her white skin has turned yellow, and she is seized by despair:

Soleva vestir camisa  
bianca, morbide e sotile;  
or vesto tenga bissa  
de stamagna, ed è sí vile;  
la mia carne bianca e umile  
è fata aspra, zala e verde,  
e ogno bel color perde;  
vünde mi despererazo.  

Very similar to her bitter lament are those of the novice in a Catalan song of the fourteenth century and the nun in a German "Lied" of the same period:

Lassa, mays m'agra valgut  
que fos maridada,  
o cortes amich agut  
que can suy mongada.  
Monjada fuy a mon dan,  
pecat gran  
han fayt sequons mon albir;  
mas cels qui mesa mi han,  
en mal an  
los meta Deus e ls ayr.  
Car si yo u agues saubut,  
mas fuy un poch fada,
In a tone almost as bitter as that of the previous five singers, a religious woman in the Spanish poem *Las doce Coplas Moniales* (The Twelve Verses of the Nun) complains about the desolate life she must lead in that "prison" where she lies buried and where she "will continue to die away until the day she finally dies." She was made a nun much too young to know what her fate would be, like so many of the real life novices of Chapter One.

Derelicta sum cautiva,
in florenti etate mea,
en esta cárcel esquivat
do viviré cuanto viva
dolorosa afflita y rea.

Sepultada estoy aquí
do muero hasta que muera.
Desventurada de mi . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . .
Yo, desque monja metida,
inocente de mi daño
hasta después de crescida.

(p. 221)

The same feeling of unrelieved sorrow and loss voiced by the Spanish nun is evident in the next two German volkslieder. In one a young girl regrets having become a nun—

Each morn, when I to chapel go,
I chant the psalter lonely,

My true love I am remembering,
O love, what have I done!

And I am shrouded in cord and cowl.
O love, what have I done!}

while in the other an older sister laments that she must bear her grief in secret:

Awe meiner jungen tage,
wauffen meiner senden clage
da man mich wil in ain closter twingen!
da gesich ich nimmer me
laup, gras, plumen noch grunen cle,
noch gehor der clainen fogelin singen;
daiz ist ain not, mein freude ist tot
daiz man mich wil schaiden
von den lieben freunden mein
und stirbe auch in dem laide.
wauffen wauffen meiner clage
die ich tougenlichen clage!17

("Alas for my young days, alas for my plaint. They would force me into a convent. Nevermore then shall I see the grass grow green and the green clover flowers, nevermore hear the little birds sing. Woe it is, and dead is my joy, for they would part me from my true love, and I die of sorrow. Alas, alas for my brief, which I must bear in silence!")
The following two "chansons de nonne," both from the fourteenth century, come very close in spirit to the "Planctus monialis." In the first one a young novice from Germany wishes only unhappiness to him who would put her in the cloister:

\[ \begin{align*}
gott \text{ geb dem klasser ungluck wil} \\
der \text{ mich armes magdlein} \\
is \text{ kloster haben wil!}^{18}
\end{align*} \]

while the second one is the complaint of an Italian nun who feels entombed in the monastery, abandoned like a "lost thing":

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{E} \text{ sta} \text{ va en quel} \text{ lo m} \text{ onasterio} \\
\text{C} \text{ om'} \text{ una cossa perduta:} \\
\text{S} \text{ ense nullo reffrigerio;}^{19} \\
\text{N} \text{ on vedia, ni era veduta.}
\end{align*} \]

Judging from the words of the next two songs, the years of enclosure in the convent sometimes had on a young woman unwillingly professed precisely the opposite effect from the one expected, that is, to curb her rebellious spirit. Sometimes, in fact, they seem to have strengthened her resolve never to accept what she saw as an unjust fate. Thus, the nun in this old French song can still lash out at the world that forced her into the cloister when she was much too young, and wish that only the crippled and those born deformed should be made to enter the religious life:
Par may foy, dist Robinette,
Je fu mise trop joliette
Monnaïn en religion,
Et pour ce prophesion
Ne sera ja par moy faite.

. . . . . . . . . . .
Ou l'en doit rendre contrette
Ou corps de rude façon,
Femme borgne ou contrefette,
Non pas fille joliette,
Qui sçet bale du talon. 20

("I was made a nun too young, says Robinette, and I am not meant for such a life. Only cripples should be sent to the cloister, or those who are deformed, women born with ill-shaped bodies, not young girls who know how to dance.")

Equally defiant is the attitude of the girl in the second song, also professed against her will, who tells her mother that if she wishes her dead, she should not hesitate to kill her because if love is a crime, she is truly guilty and will not repent:

Si je suis renfermée,
Ah! c'est bien sans raison.
Ah! mère téméraire,
Qui m'en veut à la mort.
Achève ta colère,
Punis mon triste sort.
Je suis donc la victime
Que l'on ne nomme plus.
Si l'amour est un crime. 21
Vaut mieux que tu me tues.

Sometimes the resentment of the nun unwillingly professed is much less obvious and although in the following songs the singers still complain about their fate, their tone is no longer bitter but rather wishful,
and in some cases even frivolous. The sister in this fourteenth-century Italian song, for example, has been in the cloister a long time now—"Ancora non avea dezone ani / che fu' serata e streta in quella mura" ("I was barely ten years old when I was locked up within these walls")—yet she can still imagine the joys of an earthly love she will never know:

Stagando sola sola sul mio letò
un dolze sono alora me vignía:
credando ch' el fosse el mio dileto
che in le soe braze streta el me tegnía;
e in quel dolze tempo che volea
conpir nostro desío,
io me! dolor mio. 22

Lighter in spirit than the Italian song is one from Provence in which a novice denounces the parent who forced her to abandon her lover and become a nun:

La mounget' a maudich soum pero,
que la fourceio
a m' en quitter soum bel amic
per pendre lou voil' et l'habit.

She then goes on to curse the masons who built the church where she took her vows, the priest who ordained her, those who made her veil, and the rope she has to wear about her waist:

La mounget' a maudich la tiblo
qu' a fach l' egliso;
e lou magoun que l' a bastid',
les manobros que l'ant servit.
La mounget' a maudich lou pretro
qu' a dit la messo,
et les clerzons que l'ant servid'
et lou monde que l'ant ausid'.
La mounget' a maudich la toilo
qu' a fach lou voilo,
et lou courdoun de Sant Frances
que n'en pouerto a soun constat drech. 23

Even more frivolous in spirit than the Provençal song is
the fourteenth-century chanson where a nun sees a monk
coming her way as she stands one day in church lamenting
her fate. "Wait a while," she says, promising him that if
she is no longer a nun before vespers, she will "die of
pleasurable pains" with him:

Se plus suis nonette,
Ains ke soit li vespres 24
Je morai des jolis malz.

The tone, as we pointed out at the beginning of
the chapter varies from bitter to frivolous in the
"chansons de nonne." A few songs, however, seem to stand
in the middle of the scale of feeling as it were, and in
them the singer, though lamenting her fate, is neither
resentful nor flippant about it. An example of such an
attitude is this Bavarian "lied" where the nun's mournful
question to her sisters—"Dear sisters, shall we be
parted from the world and never wear flowers in our
hair?"—is followed merely by a sigh of regret at all the
joy, the dancing and the merry-making that is no longer
theirs. The singer feels that if the little birds felt
her grief they would probably sit silent in the woods:
Swester, lieben swester mein!
sullen wir geschaiden sein
von der welt, daz ist mein maistiu swäre;
sol ich nimmer schapel tragen
so muz ich wol von schulden clagen
wan ich gerne bi der werlde wäre:
ain schapel clar auf meinem har
trug ich für den weile
als man siht die nunne tragen
zainer churzeweile.

Ich muz der welde ain urlaup han
wenn ez wil an ain schaiden gan,
ellen freude muz mir sere laiden;
tanzen, springen, hoher mut,
fogelin singen, meigen blut

trugin fogelin den jamer mein
möhten si wol sweigen
in dem walt und anderswa
uff dem grunen zweige.

The next group of songs, from Spain now, again illustrates the wide range of feeling usually found in the "chansons de nonne." In them, certain young maidens forced to enter the convent against their will are determined not to do it meekly, however, and in tones ranging from the plaintive to the defiant refuse to accept their fate. They wish to remain in the world free to love and be loved; there is no tinge of bitterness in their plaint, though, only a mild regret at the thought of all that they will lose if they are forced into the cloister:
¿Agora que sé d'amor me metéis monja?
¡Ay Dios, qué grave cosa!
Agora que sé d'amor de caballero,
agora me metéis monja en el monasterio.
¡Ay Dios, qué grave cosa! 26

"Now that I know of love you make me a nun; now that I know the love of a man, you put me in the convent? Oh God, how unfair!" complains one girl, while another declares that she is young and wants to be happy; she will be no good serving God as a nun:

Agora que soy niña
quiero alegría,
que no se sirve a Dios
de mi monjía. 27

The same conviction of her inability to be a good nun may be prompting the maiden in this song to warn everyone that though her reflection may appear dark in the water (a reference to her black habit, perhaps), she will not be a nun:

Aunque me veed
morenica en el agua
no seré yo fraila. 28

The singers in the next four songs also refuse to become nuns. They are more explicit, however, as to the reasons for their attitude: they already have a lover and will not think of exchanging such joy for a life of religious devotion. Thus, while one simply wants to be left alone with her pleasures and her joys because she is a girl who has found a boy—
No quiero ser monja, no,
que niña enamorada so.
Dejadme con mi placer
con mi placer y alegría,
dejadme con mi porfía,
que niña malenadica so,

another pleads with her mother to understand she cannot
serve God when her love follows her all the time:

¿Cómo queréis, madre,
que yo a Dios sirva,
siguiéndome el amor
a la continúa?

and a third is ready to be married and will not take the
veil--

Monja yo no entiendo ser
aunque mi padre lo quiera:

... ... ... ... ...

Yo soy moza casadera.

In the last of the four songs the tone is actually
flippant, even though seemingly firm, and to a mother who
has vowed to make her a nun ("pues para monja profesa/
os prometí y mandé"), the singer responds with complete
nonchalance that she has promised a gentleman three
kisses and she will grow up and give them to him:

Aquel caballero, madre,
tres besicos le mandé
cresceré y dárselos he.

It is interesting to observe as a sign of the extreme
popularity of the theme of the nun unwillingly professed
that even a Spanish nursery rhyme picks it up, and thus,
children are told to go to "doña Guiomar," because when-
ever it is time to pray she always says, "I do not want
to be a nun":

Ve para doña Guiomar,
porqu' al tiempo del rezar
dice siempre este cantar:
'No quiero ser monja, no.'33

Similar in tone to the Spanish songs and with the singers
displaying an equal disregard for parental wishes, the
girls in the next two songs clearly—and merrily—announce
that the convent is not for them. One has no desire to
be a nun, "no desire at all,"

On me veut donner un cloître,
Mais point d'envie ne m'en prend;
Ma mère m'en parlé,
Et plusiers de mes parents.
Point de couvent je ne veux, ma mère;
Point de couvent je ne veux, maman.34

and the other declares she has a joyful heart—"Comme a
le cuer joly"—and would like to marry and never have
anything to do with the nunnery at all:

Adieu le moniage:
Jamais n'y enterrai;
Adieu tout le mainage
. . . . . . . .
Plus ne seray nonnette. 35

A variation of the theme of the nun unwillingly
professed has her proclaim to the world her true feelings,
actually just like the sister in the original "planctus"
does. Thus, with unabashed candor some religious women
sing of their longing for a lover's embrace and,

There is no life on earth
so hard as this,
For I've a wanton heart,
I want a kiss,36
says a novice, while the refrain from a thirteenth-century French song proclaims the singer's motives for not wanting to be a nun: "Je sens le doux mal sous ma ceinturette, / Maudit soit de Dieu qui me fit nonette" ("I feel the sweet pain below my waist, / Cursed be the one who made me a nun"). It is a similar longing that the novice in this song from the Gascon region experiences, and she grows pale yearning for something she cannot have in the convent—"some white apples and a young man":

Il y a une nonne malade dedans.
--Dites-moi, nonnette,
De quoi avez-vous faim?
De pommes blanchettes,
Et d'un garçon jeune.

The song, as is usual with all the "chansons de nonne" is sympathetic to the young nun, and although this particular song does convey a warning to someone who strays—even if only in her mind—it is all done in the same spirit of lighthearted banter that is the distinguishing feature of so many of the chansons. The nun is cautioned:

--N'en mangez pas, nonnette.
On vous enterrait,
Pas dans une église
Ni même au couvent.
Mais au cimetière,
Avec les pauvres gens.
The moral, however, "sits all awry" as the punishment is not actually that severe; all that might happen to her is that when she dies, she will not be buried with the other sisters in hallowed ground, but in the graveyard with all the poor who have died before.

The tone of the "chansons de nonne" becomes more and more frivolous in a few songs where the feelings conveyed speak more openly of the desires of the flesh that some unfortunate sisters cannot—or will not—repress. Thus, in a highly irreverent display of dishonest thoughts, a nun in a thirteenth-century song clearly explains the reasons why she feels she does not belong in the nunnery—she likes a good life full of pleasures and love much more than she does prayers:

J'amaixe trop muelz bone vie
Ke fust deduissantz et amerousete,

while in an old Spanish song, a prioress whose noble lover now disdains her, begs him to grant her his favors once more:

Gentil caballero,
dédesme hora un beso,
siquiera por el daño
que me habéis hecho.

In the next three songs, first found in what appear to be fifteenth or sixteenth-century versions, the spirit remains consistently light. In the first one a girl laments she has lost her lover because she was too coy. She is her father's only daughter and he has sworn
a hundred times that he will put her in a convent, which
is too bad because she would much rather have a husband
who would kiss her three times:

Mon père n'a fille que moy,
Il a juré la sienne foy, guoy,
Trépignez-vous, trépignez,
Trépignez-vous comme moy.
Il a juré la sienne foy
Que nonnette il fera de moy, guoy,
Trépignez-vous, . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
J'aimerois mieux marier avoir,
Qui me baisast la nuit trois fois, guoy,
Trépignez-vous, . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

In the second song a maiden rejects the life of the
nunnery for the best of reasons and with complete
assurance: she has a lover--

Derrière chez mon père,
il est un bois taillis
(serai-je nonnette, oui ou non?
serai-je nonnette? je crois que non).

Le rossignol y chante
et le jour et la nuit.
Il chante pour les filles
que n'ont pas d'amis.

Il ne chante pas pour moi,
j'en ai un, dieu merci. 43

("Behind my father's house there
is a thick wood; should I become
a nun, yes or no? I guess not.
The nightingale sings night and
day; he sings for the maidens
who do not have a lover, he does
not sing for me, thank God, for
I have one.")
The girl in the third song, found in the region of Poitou, playfully asks her parents to wait a year before sending her to the convent as she hopes to find a lover soon:

Peut-être au bout de l'année,
Trouverai-je un pauvre amant.

Then she goes on with considerable irreverence:

Il vaut mieux conduire à vêpres
Son mari et ses enfants,
Que d'être dedans ces cloîtres,
A faire les yeux doulents;
Point de couvent, je ne veux, ma mère,
C'est un a-mant qu'il me faut vraiment.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
A jeûner tout le carême,
Les quatre-temps et l'avent;
Point de couvent, . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Et coucher dessus la dure
Tout le restant de son temps;
Point de couvent, . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

("Much better to go to vespers with a husband and children than to be sad-eyed within the cloister; to fast all through Lent, the Four Seasons and Advent too, and to lie on the hard floor the rest of the time. No convent for me, I do not want it, mother, a lover is what I really need.")

The song above, then, hints at what the dissatisfied young woman singing it would like instead of the religious life which may be forced upon her, but the next song tells with remarkable audacity the story of the recent love affairs of an Italian nun with three
different men. First there was a preacher who left her
for a more beautiful woman:

è son sì desventurata
Che per una più bella
intra a la santa favella!

then there was a friar from a minor order who did not
know how to accept a woman's love:

El me portava poco amore,
sempre stava a dio pregare,
Non savea che cosa è amore,
se non laldar el dio beato,

and last a hermit friar, the only one who knew how to
assuage "her great pain":

... ben m'abe contentata
del mio gran dolore.46

If the last song was a grim reminder of how
abominably certain real-life religious women conducted
themselves, the next two songs are also reminiscent of
a historical situation discussed in Chapter One: the
fate of the high-born woman once she reached a certain
age. As pointed out in Chapter One, this was a matter
of social and economic concern to her parents; to the
people, however, it was a matter of song. Thus, when an
affluent mother and father are asked in a song what they
will do with so much money, in a parody of the alleged
plight of certain well-to-do parents, "We will put our
daughters in a convent," is their answer, "and if they
do not want the convent we will marry them richly," they
say, evidently without any consideration for the young
women's wishes exactly as it often happened in real life:

Que ferons-nous de tant argent?
Nous mettrons nos fill's au couvent.
Si nos fill's ne veul point d'couvent,
Nous les marierons richement. 47

Again in a cruel but fitting mockery of the medieval
practice of marrying rich young daughters either to God
or a feudal lord, 48 the father in this Italian song from
the thirteenth or fourteenth century announces with
obvious disrespect for the ancient institution of
monasticism: "I leave my beloved daughter to St. Claire's
monastery, and if it does not please her to stay there,
she should go to a bordello. My other daughter I leave
to St. Catherine's; let her live in the convent in hard-
ship and shame":

Io lascio la mia fia cara
al monester de santa Clara
et se non li piace de stare in quelo
vada a stare a lloj bordelo.
L'altra mia figliattina
lascio a santa Catarina,
ch'ella stia nel monester
fazza stento e vitopero. 49

We have until now only reviewed those "chansons
de nonne" where a religious woman laments her fate ex-
pressing either sorrow or outrage at what the world has
done to her vowing, sometimes, to abandon a life for
which she knows she is not suited. Much more common,
however, than the theme of the nun leaving the monastery
by herself—though this was common enough in real life as seen in Chapter One—are the songs dealing with a nun's escape from her convent-prison. The flight is usually accomplished with the aid of a lover who, through a clever disguise or a well-worn ruse manages to get past the portress and reach the cell of his loved one.

Naturally the tone is one of unrestrained frivolity in these songs as we will see in the next three, which have come down to us in either French or Italian versions. In the first one, a young nun is rescued from the cloister by her lover who enters the abbey posing as a gardener; he quickly gains the abbess's confidence, and he and his lady plan to run away from the convent at midnight soon after:

La mère abbesse va se promener, la jeune fille a son côté.
"Quel accent oh! il travaille! belle, demandez-lui une fleur."
La belle et le monsieur, tout deux n'on changé de couleur.
Tout en prenant le bouquet, lui dit: "Vous viendrez me trouver,
À minuit, dedans ma chambre, prendrai mes habillements;
Sans dire adieu à mes compagnes, nous irons abattre les champs.

Another version of the same song is slightly more serious, as it ends with a promise from the young nun, placed in the convent "sans demander son consentement." to follow her lover until death:
Je suis venu, belle maitresse,
A fin de vous mener dehors,

("I have come, my beautiful
mistress, to take you away")
says the youth, and she responds:

Je te suivrai jusqu'a la mort.\textsuperscript{51}
The second song of this group dealing with escapes from
the nunnery carried out with outside help is considerably
more piquant than the first one. In it, a youth stopping
to pick some flowers in a garden as he strolls down the
road one morning in May hears a nun lamenting her fate.
She says vespers and compline with distaste:

Je di trop envis vespres ne conplies,
and then cries out, "How troubled I am!"; she wonders who
put her in that nunnery and vows to leave and never to
wear her habit again:

Elle s'escrirait 'com seux esbahiie!
e deus, ki m'ait mis en ceste abaie!
maix ieu en istrai pe sainte Marie:
ke ni vestirai cette ne gonnet.

The young man's heart fills with joy at the words of the
charming "prisoner" and coming to the door of the convent
he immediately rescues her from her lonely cell:

Quant ces amis ot la parolle oie,
de joie tressaut, li cuers li fremie,
et vint a la porte de celle abaie:\textsuperscript{52}
si en getait fors sa douce amie.

The last song of the group tells of a girl whose father
placed her in the cloister because he had found her with
a lover of whom he disapproved and who, soon after,
effects a hilarious escape. The young man bribes a worker
who has access to the convent's grounds; this man then
feigns an attack of some strange illness, and the lovers
are reunited after the worker hides the girl in a sack
which he promptly carries out the gate:

Le ramoneur est retourné
Tout droit au monastère;
Dans un d' ses sacs a enfermé
La jolie demoiselle.
A haute voix s'est écrié,
Poussant des cris étranges;
Ouvez la porte du couvent,
Car la charge est pesante.
Il a traversé tout l'couvent
Avec la mère abbesse,
Et dans les bras de son amant
Il a r' mis sa maîtresse.53

There is a Piedmontese version of the song which seems a
little less contrived as it describes the young gallant's
misery upon hearing of his lady's distress: "They want
to make her a nun"—". . . munigheta la volo fè!" he ex-
claims. He dashes to the convent on his steed, rescues
the girl as she is about to go through the gate and,
placing a ring on her finger takes her away:

A l'è rivà gius t a cult'ura, ch' la bela a
intrava 'ntól munastè.
--Ch'è scuta sì, madre badessa, na parolinha
ch'i j'ai da dir,--
An bel dizend je la parolinha, s'a j'è buta-je
l'an el al dè.54

As we have tried to indicate, the interest aroused
in the medieval mind by the phenomenon of the wayward
nun is evidenced by the number of songs on the
subject that have come down to us and which the people supposedly sang throughout the last few centuries of the Middle Ages. Some tell of grieving nuns, others of obstinate ones, practically all are sympathetic to the women unwillingly professed, and many look upon the way-ward nun with considerable amusement. To the last cate-
gory belong two dialogues between a mother and a daughter in which the latter refuses to enter the religious life because she would much rather stay in the world and be loved by a young man. The first one, from the French region of Fontenay-le-Marmion, is a playful conversation where a fifteen-year-old daughter confesses to her mother she wants a lover, to be told, in no uncertain terms that she will go to a convent and learn to read. When the daughter asks if they wear ribbons and beautiful clothes at the convent and whether they go dancing and enjoy themselves, the mother, plainly ignoring the wish-
ful tone of the question, answers that they do not and that all she will need when the time comes will be a white veil and a black robe. The girl then promptly responds that she will not go; she has a friend standing nearby:

Au couvent, ma mère, non je n'irai pas;
Le garçon que j'aime je ne le quitterai pas;
Le garçon que j'aime n'est pas loin d'ici,
Il est à la porte, je le vois venir.
Just as frivolous is the second dialogue, also from Fontenay-le-Marmion, in which a seventeen-year-old girl pleads with her mother to get her a husband. Thereupon the mother shouts that she will get a broomstick instead and will put her daughter in the nunnery which, as we have seen in Chapter One could often serve as either cell or sanctuary:

Voilà bientôt le temps, ma mère,
Qu'il faut me donner un mari,
Car j'ai dix-sept ans et demi;
Maman, cédez à ma prière.

Effrontée, hélas! que vous êtes!
Si je prends le manche a balai,
Au couvent de la sœur Babet
Je te mets pour la vie entière.

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, most "chansons de nonne" sing of the plight of the nun unwillingly professed. Nevertheless, as was mentioned in Chapter One, there were some women who entered the cloister of their own free will, in search of a spiritual refuge when earthly love failed to fulfill its promise of joy. Thus, in a few songs the convent appears as a haven for unhappy lovers. In this charming French ditty, for example, a young man finds his former love after a long search, and to his question--"Where are you going, my sweet one?" she answers that she is on her way to a small convent to become a nun because he now loves someone else and she is in pain. "Alas, all dressed in black I will show that I have suddenly begun to live in
despair," she cries:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hesas, toute vestue} \\
\text{je serai de drap noir} \\
(m'amour), \\
\text{monstrant que despourvue} \\
(helas) \\
\text{je vis en desespoir.}^57
\end{align*}
\]

Most of the time, however, despite the theme, the spirit of frivolity characteristic of the "chansons" remains unchanged. In this old French song, the singer regrets having been too coy with her lover; now she has lost him and all she has left is the nunnery—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Las! si je le puis revoir,} \\
\text{Je ne ferais la desdaigneuse,} \\
\text{...} \\
\text{Je ne m'y marieray jamais,} \\
\text{Je seray religieuse.}^58
\end{align*}
\]

while in the next two songs a girl says she will take the veil if her family will not allow her to marry the man she loves. Thus,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si mes parents le veul bien} \\
\text{Pour moi je suis contente;} \\
\text{Si mes parents ne le veul pas} \\
\text{Dans un couvent j'y rentre,}^59
\end{align*}
\]

declares the maiden in the first song. In the second there is actually a new twist to the "threat"; if her lover could only join her in the cell, the prospective nun knows they would be happy together:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mon Dieu s'il se pouvoit faire} \\
\text{Que tous deux ensemblement} \\
\text{Fussions dans un monaster,} \\
\text{Pour y passer nostre temps,} \\
\text{Capuchin et capuchine,} \\
\text{Nous vivrions tous deux contents.}^60
\end{align*}
\]
The same notion of the nunnery as a refuge from the world after a disappointment in love, again conveyed in a tone of cheerful irreverence is evident in this song about a young maiden. She once had fifteen lovers in seven days but is now about to become a nun because she lost them all; she was too "dangereuse":

Adieu les plaisirs du monde,
Je m'en vais dans les couvents.
M'enfermer avec les noires 61
Dans des lieux étroitement.

("Goodbye to the pleasures of the world, I am going to the convent to seclude myself with the women in black in the 'narrow place'.")

Among the variety of medieval "chansons" dealing with the theme of the wayward nun or the nun unwillingly professed there is a quaint group of songs called "jeux de transformation" in which the girl, in an attempt to evade an unwanted lover will adopt various shapes. These old "jeux de transformation" are always found in the form of a dialogue between an elusive maiden and her persistent lover and are still popular today. One of the changes that the girl might undergo is to become a nun with the lover immediately announcing that he will then become either a priest or a monk and eventually get her. The following are different versions of the stanza in the "jeux de transformation" that has the girl proclaiming she will be a nun. The lover's response is included:
from the north of France:

Si tu te mets en dame dans un couvent,
Je me mettrais en prêtre, gaillard chantant,
Confesserai les dames de ton couvent;\textsuperscript{62}

from Bourbonnais:

Je m'y mettrais nonne
Dans un couvent;
... ... ... ... ... ...
Si tu te mets nonne
Dans une couvent,
Je m'y mettrais prêcheur
Pour te prêcher;\textsuperscript{63}

from the Pyrénées:

Si tu te fais la nonne,
Nonne dans un couvent,
Je me ferai prêcheur
Prêcheur pour te prêcher,
Je prêcherai
Par amitié;\textsuperscript{64}

from the Pyrénées also:

Se tu te fas la mounjo
D'aquel coumbent tant grand,
Ieu me farèi le mounje, \textsuperscript{65}
T'aurè 'n te confessant;

from Catalogne:

Si tu t' tornas una monja,
en convent te ficaran;
mes jo m' tornarè un fràret
y t' anirè confessant;\textsuperscript{66}

from the area around Brest:

Si tu te fais nonne
Dans un couvent
Je me ferai prêtre\textsuperscript{67}
Pour te confesser.
from Bretagne possibly:

Si tu te fais nonne
Dans un couvent
Je me ferai
Moine chantant
Pour confesser la nonne
Dans le couvent.68

from England today:

If you become a nun, dear,
A friar I will be;
In any cell you run, dear,
Pray look behind for me.69

It may be interesting to observe that in five of the
"jeux" just quoted, the lover announces he will become
either a priest or a monk so he can hear the new nun's
confession. This is a rather significant point, as we
will see in the next chapter of this study how pernicious
the influence of certain unscrupulous confessors was
deemed to be, when an irate prelate blames them for a
religious woman's alleged misconduct.

Although the "jeux de transformation" invariably
depict the female as the elusive one who retires to the
convent for a secluded life, in the next three songs the
opposite situation is presented: girls who will not give
up their lovers appear ready to take the veil when the
young men decide to become monks:

Je m'en iray rendre bigotte
avec les autres,
et porteray le noir, aussi le gris
(sont les couleurs de mon loyal amy).70
("I will become a nun with the others
and wear the grey and the black,
they are the colors of my loyal
friend")

sings the young woman in the first song, while in the
second one a girl who was once very nice and loved music
and musicians too, has lost her lover because he became a
monk:

Il était une fille,
Une fille de bien,
Qui aimait la musique
Et mieux les musiciens.
Hélas! hélas!
Celui qu'elle aimait le mieux,
Il s'est rendu religieux.

The priest to whom she confesses that she is lost without
her lover gives her most remarkable advice: "Oh well, my
dear, you must do the same, and wear the grey robe and the
white veil":

Eh bien, ma jeune fille,
Il faut en faire autant,
Prendre la robe grise
Avec le voile blanc.71

In the third song a pregnant girl whose lover has become
a monk plans to take the veil for the rest of her life
but he tells her that she is not chaste as a nun should
be. She remains undaunted, however. "If I am not pure,
you fickle one, it is your fault; I would be chaste if it
weren't for you," she sings:

Si je ne fus pas chaste,
Volage,
La faut en est à vous;
Vous en êtes la cause,'72
Je le serai sans vous.
In a couple of other songs the nunnery is present not as a haven for someone crossed in love, but rather as a refuge from marriage. "I want to be a nun," says the maiden in this old Spanish song, "because I do not want a bad marriage":

Monjica en religión
me quiero entrar, 73
por no malmaridar.

With a similar idea in mind, this young woman from the French Pyrénées confesses she would like to enter the nunnery because she does not want the possible troubles of a married life:

Je ne veux plus m'embarrasser
Des tracas du ménage: 74
Je veux aller au couvent,

and the girl whose father married her against her will to an old man when she was very young will become a nun in some "jolly convent" to pray to the god of love for someone she can love:

Mon père m'a mariée
Que je n'estois qu'un enfant;
A un vieillard m'a donnée
Qui a près de soixante ans;
Et moy qui n'en ay que quinze,
Passeray-je ainsi mon temps?
Vous qui estes en prescence
Je vous en prie, jugez-en

M'irai'je rendre nonette
Dans quelque joly couvent,
Priaant le dieu d'amourette
Qu'il me donne Allegement
Ou que j'aye en mariage
Celuy là que j'aime tant? 75
Nevertheless, much less common than the last three songs which, despite their unusual theme still retain their light-hearted tone are the few "chansons de nonne" with a tragic or even a semi-tragic denoument, such as the one in which a young woman's decision to become a nun proves ill-fated for her lover. When, after a long absence, he returns to look for his loved one in the nunnery where she is now living, he falls dead at her feet as he puts on her finger the gold ring that will symbolize his eternal love:

En lui passant son anneau d'or,
Le pauvre amant a tombe mort.

Now all is tears and laments:

Oh! que de pleurs, oh! que de larmes!
Chacun y deplorait son sort. 76

Because, much to the Church's dismay 77 some nuns were constantly breaking their claustrophobia vows, "it would have been no unusual circumstance in medieval times to meet a sister of Canynington or Buckland in the busy streets of Taunton or Bridgewater." 78 Once out in the world, though, a nun was exposed to the same dangers and the same temptations as any other member of her sex; she could fall in love or be the object of someone's love and in either case be condemned as reprobate. If we trust the historical evidence cited in Chapter One, a nun often did not need to leave the convent to break her vow of
chastity, and as was indicated in that chapter, another phenomenon that appears to have been a fairly common occurrence in medieval life was the love between religiously-professed men and women. The following two Latin poems from the eleventh and thirteenth centuries approximately, although written by educated men and not the product of the imagination of the people taking shape in a song, are too significant in the context of what we have just mentioned regarding the love of nuns and priests to be left out from this survey. Both are in the form of dialogues in which a nun and a clerk are involved in a matter of love.

In the first of the two Latin poems which is generally attributed to a "clericus vagantes" or goliard poet possibly of the thirteenth century, a nun assumes the role of temptress as she attempts to seduce a clerk. In the best tradition of all the allegedly reprobate nuns of centuries past, she begs the clerk for love in the most passionate terms, but despite her ardent appeal he will not accept her:

Nun: Deponam velum, deponam cetera quaeque, ibit et ad lectum nuda puella tuum.

Clerk: Ut velo careas, tamen altera non potes esse, et mea culpa minus non foret inde gravis.  

("N: I will remove my veil and everything else, and your maiden will go naked to your bed."

80
C: Even if you take off your veil, you will still be what you are, and my guilt would not be less.

The situation is reversed in the other dialogue, a very famous one, half-Latin and half-German, found in the eleventh-century Cambridge Manuscript, where a clerk asks a nun to love him. Unfortunately, almost all of the dialogue was deleted with black ink by the monks of St. Augustine, Canterbury, who were in the habit of censoring in this manner any material they considered morally offensive. On the evidence of the few verses which scholars through the centuries have painfully reconstructed, the poem seems to contain the declaration of love to a nun from a clerk who points out that spring is in the air, nature is in bloom, and it is again the time for love.\(^{81}\) (And a time to lock all the doors of the nunnery, according to certain episcopal injunctions.\(^{82}\)

II. Fabliaux

In the second part of this chapter we will review another medieval literary form where the figure of the profligate nun is also often found: the fabliau or ribald tale. The same stories of misconduct used by the Church in its sermons to illustrate a moral were used by the jongleur to provoke laughter. His business was to tell ludicrous, often crude tales which were eventually put
into French verse and became what we know as fabliaux. Numerous collections of these medieval "contes gras" have come down to us, such as Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles and Le cento novelle antiche or Il novellino, although the best known stories are those in Boccaccio's Decameron.

In Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles there are three extremely coarse tales where one or more licentious nuns figure prominently, such as numbers 15 and 21. Number 15 tells of the much too friendly relations between two neighboring houses of monks and nuns, "known locally as the Barn and the Flailers for, God be thanked, the generosity of this house of nuns was so very liberal that few men were excluded from their amorous almsgiving." Tale number 21, The Abbess Cured, tells the story of a sick abbess who is finally convinced by the sisters to follow her physician's suggestion and take a lover in order to regain her health. To ease her conscience, the nuns volunteer to do the same thing as their spiritual leader and they tell her, "In this way you need never imagine or fear that in the future any one of us might reproach you." Thereupon, "monks, priests, and clerks were summoned, and they had plenty to do." Tale number 16 of Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles, Payment for Pears, begins: "It is not unusual for friars to chase after nuns." We are immediately told, then, that a Dominican's
much too frequent visits to "a goodly house of religious
cwomen" cause the abbess to give strict orders to pre-
vent any further contact between the friar and the nun who
is the object of his affections. She has all the access
gates to the cloisters locked, a measure often adopted in
real-life convents too as mentioned in Chapter One. 86
One day, though, the undaunted friar-lover manages to
avoid the abbess's vigilant eyes and finds himself once
more inside hallowed--and forbidden--territory. Yet, be-
fore he and the nun can carry out their wicked intent
under a pear tree in the garden, they are interrupted by
a visitor to the nunnery who suddenly pelts them with
pears. The Dominican flees the scene and the stranger
then takes over, saying to the nun:

"My dear, you'll not be going off like this"
. . . . "First, you have to pay off for the
pears." Taken unaware as she was, she saw
very clearly this was no time for refusal,
and agreed to let the fruit man complete what
Brother Aubrey had left undone. 87

Le cento novelle antiche or Il novellino is a
collection of Italian ribald tales displaying almost the
same lack of taste as the French ones just quoted.
Novella LXII of Il novellino is the story of the abbess
and nuns of a convent 88 who were in the habit of enter-
taining any knights that visited there by providing them
with food and companionship. If we keep in mind the
eagerness with which some of the inmates received visitors
from the outside world, as pointed out in Chapter One, we may find that, though considerably immoral, the situation in Novella LXII could have taken place in any nunnery of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Once inside the convent, the visitor was asked to choose from among all the sisters the one that pleased him the most and she would then accompany him to dinner and to bed—"E la badessa e le suore li veniano incontro, et in sul donneare, que ela que piu li piacesse, quella il servia, et accompagnava a tavola et a letto."89

Probably the most notorious nun stories in Italian literature are those in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, such as the tale of the abbess who dashes out of her room one night because she has just been told that one of her nuns has a man in her cell:

That night the abbess was in the company of a priest, whom she often had brought to her in a chest. She was afraid that the nuns in their zeal and haste might beat so hard at the door that it would open; so she got up quickly and dressed herself in the dark. Thinking she was picking up her nun's veil she took the priest's breeches, and, such was her haste, that without noticing it she put them on her head instead of the veil; and came out of her room.90

As the harried abbess launches on a heated speech on the sinfulness of the young nun's conduct, everyone notices her curious headdress enhanced by the suspenders still attached to the pants and dangling on either side of her
head. Naturally, she is now forced to change her tone and ends up explaining to the sisters that it is "impossible for anyone to defend herself from the appetites of the flesh . . . everyone should secretly, as they had done until then, enjoy themselves when possible"—"impossibile essere il potersi dagli stimoli della carne difendere; e perciò chetamente, come infino a quel di fatto s'era, disse che ciascuna si desse buon tempo quando potesse." 92

Another fourteenth-century version of the same story is Le Dit de le nonnette, a poem by Jean de Condé, where the sister is imprisoned by the abbess as a punishment for her incontinency. Three of her friends attempt to get the abbess to give the nun a reprieve by threatening to disclose that they saw this "worthy lady wearing the priest's pants on her head instead of her veil." The incident is reported in much the same words as in Boccaccio's tale:

Laidement au prendre mesprist,
Car les braies a l'abbe prist,;
Et puis les jeta erranment
Sour son cief, . . . . . . . . 93

Besides Le Dit de le nonnette there are three other well-known versions of the tale of the abbess. One of them, a scabrous Italian song of the fourteenth or fifteenth century beginning "Kyrie, kyrie, pregne son le monache!" ("Kyrie, kyrie, pregnant are the nuns") tells exactly the
same story of the abbess and the breeches as it describes
the licentious practices of a group of cloistered nuns:

Io andai in un monastiero,
a non mentir ma dir el vero,
ov'eran done secrete:
diezi n'eran tute infoiate,
senza dir de la badesa,
che la tiritera spesa,
faceva con un prete.94

("I went to a monastery where
there were consecrated women;
ten of them were deflowered,
not to mention the abbess who
spent long hours spinning
yarns with a priest.")

The two other versions appear in La Fontaine's tale Le
Psautier and in Albion's England, a sixteenth-century
metrical British history with mythical and fictitious
episodes, where the story of the abbess is told as
follows:

It was at midnight when a Nonne, in travell of
a childe,
Was check'd of her fellow Nonnes for being so
defil'd;
The Lady Prioresse heard a stirre, and starting
out of bed,
Did taunt the Nouasse bitterly, who, lifting
vp her head,
Said, "Madame, mend your hood" (for why so
hastely she rose,
That on her head, mistooke for hood, she donde
a channons hose).95

Another famous--infamous?--story from the Decameron
involving profligate nuns concerns a young man by the
name of Masetto who pretends to be deaf and dumb in order
to be a gardener at a convent. Once there, some of the
young sisters who have heard from visitors about certain forbidden pleasures in which worldly men and women indulge, decide to find out what kind of an animal a man is—"che bestia fosse l'uomo." Since Masetto is believed to be deaf and dumb, the nuns feel quite safe experimenting with him and, as for the young man, he is only too pleased to oblige. "Afterwards, when they talked it over," says the narrator, "they agreed that was even more pleasant than they had heard. So henceforth, at suitable times, they enjoyed themselves with the deaf mute." Soon after all this everyone else in the convent, including the abbess, finds out about Masetto, who eventually becomes unable to cope with the nuns' demands for his "attention." He decides, then, to put an end to the deceit. In order to avoid exposure in the community, though, Masetto was allowed to remain in the convent as its steward, and while thus employed "begot a large quantity of little nuns" until the death of the abbess, at which time he returned home "old, rich and a father."

There is a story reminiscent of the one about Masetto in _Del reggimento e costumi di donne_ by the late thirteenth-century Italian author Francesco da Barberino. In it, a group of Spanish nuns, after having acquired a great reputation for sanctity have become totally
neglectful of their religious duties, so in order to test their true spirit God grants permission to Satan to send there an emissary by the name of Rasis who will tempt the nuns. Rasis disguises himself as an old woman and arrives at the monastery accompanied by three young boys posing as maidens whom Rasis begs the abbess to accept as novices. To make the newcomers more at ease, she decides that all three should take turns sleeping with each of the twelve sisters under her care, although naturally, no sooner is the arrangement carried out than the real nuns discover the true identity of their new companions. Everyone conspires to keep it a secret, however, and in six months the whole nunnery is filled with pregnant women—"in sei mesi erano tutte gravide."\(^{100}\) The situation at the convent is kept secret from the outside world until it is no longer possible to hide the condition of the nuns. At this time the abbess threatens to expose them to their families, but being a young woman herself, at the last minute she too succumbs to the charms of the false novices and all is forgiven for a while. When the time comes for everyone's new baby to be born the three young men inform the sisters that they cannot stay in the nunnery any longer, and with a "sia vostro tutto il tesoro"\(^{101}\) ("let the entire treasure be yours"), they leave the convent for good. The story
ends with the whole town storming the nunnery after they find out what has happened there whereupon, in a fit of righteous fury, they stone the wayward nuns to death.\textsuperscript{102}

Verse fabliaux where the figure of the unchaste nun plays a significant part are also common in late medieval literature and among these, \textit{Des trois dames de Paris}\textsuperscript{103} and \textit{Des trois chanoinesses de Cologne},\textsuperscript{104} both by Watriguet de Brassenal are two of the most indecent ones. Almost equally ribald is a debate between some aristocratic canonesses and a group of nuns, in which they argue over who has more right to the love of certain amorous knights. When the canonesses, who call themselves love's "votaries" complain at the court of Venus that their lovers are lured away from them by the nuns--"these saucy foes"--the latter respond that they attract the knights because their charms are as powerful as those of the canonesses:

\begin{quote}
Ours are the tender glance, the winning smile,
The sweet solicitudes that life beguile.
\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots
Our softness charms, our modesty invites,
And hence our train of gentle and of knights:
These are our arts, and these our forceful snares.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

With a flourish then, the canonesses accuse the nuns of shameless deeds:

\begin{quote}
What knight, what noble, who of high degrees
Would deign to cast away a thought on these,
But for their forward ways, their wanton wiles,
Looks void of shame, and loose lascivious smiles?\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

Venus, however, will not be influenced by the canonesses'
high rhetoric and in the end delivers a verdict in favor of the nuns:

. . . drive not from my court away
These nuns, sequester'd from the blaze of day,
Whose hearts such constancy in secret prove,
Whom harsh constraint inspires with mightier love. 107

A religious woman well acquainted with the ways of the world is also present in Daz Maere von dem Sperwaere, 108 a thirteenth-century German version of the popular French fabliau called The Crane. 109 In the German poem, much less offensive than the original tale, an innocent young nun looks over her convent wall one day and sees a knight carrying a sparrow hawk. When she asks him for it, he promises to give it to her in exchange for "love," the meaning of which he proceeds to explain to her. When the novice's schoolmistress-nun hears about the trade she becomes enraged and berates her for what she has done; the next time the knight rides by the novice then "forces" him to return her the "love" and take the sparrow hawk with him:

"hebet mich von der mûre nider,
und gebet mir min minne wider,
und nemet ir iuwer vogelîn." 110

Besides presenting nuns as profligate, some of the literature of the late Middle Ages seems to have been fond of the theme of the nun impersonator, that is, someone who would pretend to be a religious woman for purposes less than honorable in every case. We met false nuns in
the story in Barberino's book; the same idea appears, for
instance, in a song from the Piedmont region, where a
prince disguises himself as a religious woman to gain
access to the room--and bed--of a maiden:

S'a l'è lo prinsi di Carignan,
Sa vestî-se da munigheta
Pr'andè dûrnu cun òna fieta, lll

and also in a Catalan song in which a student does the
same thing for the same purpose:

Lo traidor del estudiant- se'n guarneix una tampeta;
se'n vestexe de cotó blanch,- com si fos una
monjeta.112

A similar theme is found in a few songs from Holland,
Germany and France, 113 and also in a long thirteenth-
century French didactic poem, Le Castoiement d'un père a
son fils. This time in a work composed for an educated
audience, as opposed to the fabliaux aimed at the less
literate, the pseudo nun appears in a dishonorable context
in one of the stories that make up the poem. In Number
XI--"De la male vielle qui conchia la preude Feme"--"une
pute vielle" ("an old prostitute"), disguised as a nun--
"en guise de Nonein velêe"--gains the confidence of a young
wife and talks her into granting her favors to an unworthy
suitor, an affair that has the most disastrous results for
the young woman. 114

Besides prose and verse fabliaux there are lewd nuns
also in a few popular songs, such as these two from the
French regions of Angoumois and Poitou called "Le Nez de Martin" and "Il était trois nonnes." In the latter there were once two nuns who had lovers, a monk and a capuchin, and a third nun who was furious because she had no one:

Il était trois nonnes
.
L'une avait un moine,
L'autre un capucin;
La troisième enragé
De n'avoire rien.

The third nun, then, pretends to be unable to talk and a physician is called. He leaves his book in a corner, pulls back her sleeve, and puts his medicine in the hollow of her hand:

Lui met son remède
Dans le creux d'la main.

In Poitou the last part of the song is slightly different and considerably more malicious:

Il lui donne une herbe,
Qui croît dans la main,
Qui fait pusser l'ventre
Et grossir les seins.

("He gave her an herb that grows in the hand, makes the belly get large and the breasts too.")

Less explicit than "Il était trois nonnes" but equally piquant is the song from Poitou, "Le Nez de Martin," alive with the joys of double entendre and where three nuns walking in the woods one day notice a nose attached to a
tree. It had apparently been placed there by its owner, Martin the monk, who cut it off after it froze on his face one night in the woods:

Dans le trou d'un arbre
Martin le plaça.

The sisters plan to take the nose with them to the convent; at the end of a pole it will put out the candles in the chapel or better still, perhaps, the fires that burn below the sisters' hearts?

Dans notre monastère
Il nous servira,
Au bout d'une perche
Les cierges étendra.
Ah! quel dommage,
Quel dommage, Martin,
Martin quel dommage!

In English literature there are very few examples of ribald tales that make use of the "bad" nun theme, and the two that come to mind are literary works written for an educated audience. The tale of the abbess and the "breeches" appears in a sixteenth-century piece by Thomas Twyne called The Schoolmaster, while a light-spirited fourteenth-fabliau attributed to John Lydgate tells the story of a prioress and her three frustrated suitors. The Tale of the Lady Prioress and her three Suitors, which scholars have little doubt today is a translation from a French fabliau of unknown origin, gives a detailed and hilarious account of the hardships endured by a knight, a priest and a merchant as they attempt, unsuccessfully, to
gain the love of a reluctant—and shrewd—prioress. Notice there is no mincing of words in the knight's protestations:

All is for your love, madam, my life would I venture, So that you will grant me, I have desired many a winter Underneath your comely cowl to have my intent. 119

We have merely skimmed the surface of a fascinating aspect of the European literature of the late Middle Ages; countless other songs and stories must still be waiting to be told again. The figure of the unchaste nun, repentant or defiant, hiding her shame from the world or flaunting her sin in a mockery of religious ideals, still looms large and mysterious amid the strange mixture of banter and pathos, anguish and frivolity that mark a vast area of the literature from the last three centuries of the Middle Ages.

Adieu vous di, dame nonnain:  
L'en ne parle a vous qu'a dangier,  
Dire faut quant on a grant fain:  
Adieu vous di, dame nonnain, 120

sings a French "trouvère"—poet, but we cannot say goodbye to the "dame nonnain" yet. In search of the possible truth behind the figures of the professed women in the "chansons de nonne" and the fabliaux we will now attempt to trace the pattern of the tradition which nurtured them a little further. We are now ready to proceed to the last chapter of this study. We have observed the figure of the wayward nun playing a prominent role in four major genres of medieval literature; by the fourteenth century she had
become part of a well established literary tradition. It is our intention to demonstrate in the next chapter that the portraits of Doña Garoza in the *Libro de Buen Amor* and Madame Eglentyne in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* are, in their startling ambiguity refined composites of countless other nuns in medieval literature and life. We hope to establish that this is one of the strongest and most blatantly ignored literary conventions of the Middle Ages. The extent to which such a convention appealed to the Archpriest of Hita and to Chaucer will be the topic of Chapter Four where we will attempt to prove that the portraits of Doña Garoza and Madame Eglentyne illustrate the satiric impulse on the subject of medieval nuns in its most highly polished form.
FOOTNOTES


3. *Chants et chansons populaires*, I, 137. (All translations of foreign material are mine unless otherwise specified.)


10. T. Casini, *Studi di poesia antica* (Città di Castelo: Casa editrice S. Lapi, 1913), p. 156, No. XXI.


15 See p. 30.


17 Alte-Hoch und Niederdeutsche Volkslieder, II, 853, No. 327.

18 Ibid., II, 854, No. 129.


20 Deschamps, IV, 233, No. 751. The singer's lament corroborates the historical evidence of Chapter One in this regard (the convent used as a repository for women with incurable diseases or severe physical or mental deformities). In a fourteenth-century song a young woman complains:

I am not good enough for man,  
And so am given to God.

(Cited by Power, Medieval English Nunneries, p. 526).

21 Chants et chansons populaires, I, 263.

22 Casini, p. 157, No. 22.

24 Altfranzösische Romanzen und Pastourellen, p. 29.


27 Ibid., pp. 956-57, No. 457.

28 Ibid., p. 924, No. 383.

29 Ibid., p. 934, No. 411.


31 Ibid., p. 176.

32 Ibid., p. 174.

33 Ibid., p. 175.


37 Altfranzösische Romanzen und Pastourellen, p. 29, No. 33.
Another Provençal song ends on a sterner note: after the nun has despaired at her fate and cursed those who placed her in the convent, one day the devil appears and takes her away as punishment for her rebelliousness:

Lou diable a pres la moungeto,
tant pourideto,
la pourtad' du plus haut des airs
et puis la tracho dans l'infers.


Altfranzösische Romanzen und Pastourellen, p. 29, No. 33.

Poesía española medieval, p. 954, No. 439.


Chants et chansons populaires, I, 137-38.


Recueil de chansons populaires, I, 253.

See Chapter One, p. 32.

Casini, p. 257, No. 87.

"Vieilles chansons recueillies en Velay et en


52 Altfranzösische Romanzen und Pastourellen, pp. 28-29, No. 33


54 Canti popolari del Piemonte, ed. Constantino Migra (Torino: Ermano Loeschler, 1888), p. 410, No. 80. Migra cites ten other versions of the song from different regions of Italy.


56 Ibid., p. 395.

57 Französische Volkslieder, p. 64.

58 L'Ancienne Chanson populaire, p. 356.

59 Recueil de chansons populaires, p. 227.


61 Chants et chansons populaires, II, 323.


66 *Cansons de la terra*, p. 127.

67 *Recueil de poésies populaires*, IV, 33.


73 *Poesía española medieval*, p. 924, No. 380.

74 *Chansons populaires des Pyrénées françaises*, I, 23.

75 *Recueil de poésies populaires*, II, 81.

76 *Littérature orale de la Basse-Normandie*, p. 313. Also in "Vieilles chansons," ed. Smith, p. 73 and in *Chants populaires recueilles dans le pays Messin*, pp. 35-36. To these two songs may be compared Schiller's "Le Chevalier de Toggenburg," where a soldier returns from the war to find his love in a convent. He sees her one day at a window, but after waiting in vain for another glimpse, he dies while keeping his lonely vigil.

77 See Chapter One.

79 See Chapter One, p. 22.


82 See Chapter One, pp. 51-52. Dealing with the same subject but in a much lighter vein than the Latin poems as befits a composition sung by the people, this old song from Flanders also presents a monk and a nun in an amorous context. It is the month of May and they are walking along the river holding hands:

   Daer wandela' a patertye langst de kant;
   Hy greep â nonnetyje by der hand.
   Het was in den midderen dey,
   Het was in den mey.


86 See Note 82 above.


88 The location of the convent varies in the different versions of the tale, but it is believed to be Remiremont in the Vosges region, a monastery notorious

Le cento novelle antiche (Il novellino), ed. Gualteruzzi (Milano: Paolo Antonio Tosi, 1825), pp. 84-85. The same story is in Novellino e conti del duecento, pp. 392-94, No. 60 (151).


Ibid., p. 460.


Casini, pp. 126-27.


Boccaccio, Il Decamerone, p. 182.


Ibid., p. 139.

Ibid.

Ibid.

The same story appears in French in Oeuvres
galantes des conteurs italiens, ed. Ad. van Bever et
Ed. Sansot-Orland (Paris: Société du Mercure de France,
1908), pp. 24-30.

Recueil général et complet des fabliaux, III,
145-55.

Ibid., pp. 137-44.

Fabliaux or Tales abridged from French
Manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth Centuries
(selected and translated into English verse), ed. M. Le
Grand d'Aussy (London: W. Bulmer and Co., Shakespeare
Press, 1796), I, 61. Nuns are said to be the best
lovers also in El Libro de Buen Amor by Juan Ruiz,
Arcipreste de Hita, ed. Joan Corominas (Madrid:
Editorial Gredos, 1967):

en noblezas de amor ponen toda su hemencia.

... an mucho buenas maneras:
muchos encobiertas son, donosas e plazenteras;

todo el plazer del mundo e todo buen doñear,
solaz de mucho sabor e el falaguero jugar,
todo en las monjas es más que en otro lugar.

stanzas 1338, 1340 and 1342

(And such their virtues are that passion is by
them inflamed.

... a nun is so well trained that in her sleep
she straddles,
Is secretive, yet tutors men just how to dip their
paddles.

For every pleasure in the world, ...
The peace of sated ecstasy—a bliss you've been
ignoring—
All this you'll find in nuns, and thus they'll
merit your adoring.)

106. *Fabliaux or Tales*, I, 62.


111. *Canti popolari del Piemonte*, p. 407, No. 79.


113. See *Canti popolari del Piemonte*, p. 409.

114. *Fabliaux et contes des poètes français*, II, 92-98.


CHAPTER FOUR

THE AMBIGUOUS PORTRAITS OF THE ARCHPRIEST
OF HITA'S DOÑA GAROZA AND CHAUCER'S
MADAME EGLENTYNE

"Religiosa, non casta es podrida toronja."¹

But the historian knows; he has all sorts of historical sources in which to study nunneries, and there he meets Chaucer's Prioress at every turn.²

By the fourteenth century, the stereotyped figure of the wayward nun in literature had acquired remarkable notoriety, as the examples from the chansons, the fabliaux, and the moral and satirical works cited in Chapters Two and Three will attest. Although the cultural products of Western Europe were available only to a limited sector of the population, as always, certain current themes and ideas knew no boundaries and what would today be called a scholarly exchange seems to have taken place among the men of letters, mostly religious men or else those attached to a noble house as poets or tutors. In either case, since "the Goliard, like the Latin tongue, knew no frontiers,"³ works by wandering scholars or learned authors traveled freely across Europe. As early as the twelfth century,
for instance, the writings of the controversial Peter Abelard seem to have been so widely circulated that one of his foes was led to say in desperation:

I would that his poisonous pages were still lying hid in bookcases, and not read at the crossroads. His books fly abroad . . . . His books have been passed from nation to nation . . . ."

For Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, living out his life (c. 1280-c. 1350) as a minor prelate in a small Spanish town, international exchanges literary or otherwise must have been virtually impossible. Nevertheless, judging from the materials used for the portraits of the two nuns, one in the Libro de Buen Amor (LBA) and the other in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, the Archpriest of Hita seems to have had access to some of the same sources used later by the English poet, although no evidence has been uncovered yet of any possible contact between them. As for Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400), a man whose library by fourteenth-century standards was vast and whose court contacts took him on several missions to the continent precisely during his most productive literary years, an acquaintance with the stock literary themes and figures of the period would have been not only logical but inevitable.

It is important to remember here that if we are ready to acknowledge the existence of opportunities of cultural contact ("aside from peaceful modes of diffusion
of books . . . war and invasion frequently broke up and scattered collections"\(^5\) between England and the continent, we must also take into account two highly probable effects of such a contact. First, that regardless of its geographical location or its political environment, no country could be viewed as wholly isolated from prevalent fourteenth-century trends and second, that if the literature produced by learned men could have such ample diffusion despite the scarcity of available books, the songs and the stories that the people loved, more accessible by their very nature, probably reached an even wider circle. Let us turn briefly to history once again in an attempt to justify this last assertion. According to the chroniclers, the routine and the hardship of castle and courtyard alike were broken and relieved every time by the joyful presence of the traveling minstrels and troubadours. By the mere fact of their constant wandering across every land, they unwittingly came to fulfill the role of couriers bearing, not messages, but the entire lore of centuries to all corners of the medieval world. Whether repeating the ancient ballads and tales or making up new songs, these old poets of the high road eventually made the creations of the people the common property of every man. Besides the wandering minstrels and troubadours, there was another channel through which stories and songs
traveled from place to place and across the ocean to faraway lands, and this was the pilgrimage, one of the most popular endeavors of the Middle Ages as denoted by history and literature alike: "pilgrimages were incessant; they were made to satisfy a vow as in case of illness, or in expiation of sins." It was well known, however, that the men and women who went on pilgrimages, though ostensibly engaged in a holy venture,

occasioned did they strive to shorten the weary length of the way by song and music. As often as a crowd of pilgrims started to go from one place, they seem always to have hired a few singers and one or two musicians to go with them.  

While the most popular pilgrimages were undoubtedly those to the closer, local sanctuaries, the lure of the road and the possibility of seeing other places attracted many English pilgrims to distant shrines. They crossed the Channel to Calais and rode on to Boulogne where they could view the relics of a miraculous virgin, like the Wife of Bath herself had supposedly done or they went to Amiens "to worship a head of St. John the Baptist." Most interesting for the purpose of this study, though, is the fact that there were also Spanish pilgrimages undertaken from England among which the one to world-famous St. James Compostella was particularly recommended. This would naturally have provided an excellent opportunity for the satire, the song and the story from the country of Juan Ruiz to make their way to the country of Chaucer and
vice-versa. Furthermore, by the fourteenth century, so much material was already shared by so many thinkers, writers and religious men that it was becoming increasingly difficult to determine the source; the stock figures of medieval literature such as the Gluttonous Monk, the Disobedient Wife or the Wayward Nun were known to everyone and held up to ridicule or scorn without compunction by poet and preacher alike.

Among the genres popular in the twelfth through the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, satire, especially of things religious seems to have had a particular appeal for the medieval mind. We have already seen in Chapter Two how cruel and blatant some monastic satires could be especially those aimed at such well-known targets as monks, friars and nuns. We must bear in mind, though, that satire is a cousin to caricature and that the smallest foible is often magnified to distortion for the sake of effect: to enhance the incongruities in someone's portrait. Ridicule, then, is an ancient and trusted tool of satire designed by the master satirist himself in his portraits of flawed men and women. It is Horace's immeasurable achievement that a successful satire's "militant irony,"11 "its persuasive voice," so binds the readers that the point of view of the satirist becomes their own and they begin to share what one critic calls
his "emotional strain."\textsuperscript{12} Horace's famous "castigat ridendo mores" with its promise of a reasonably mild indictment cuts more deeply, yet, than any invective would, and his vaguely amused tone, totally deprived of either bitterness or anger has successfully exposed the follies of men to countless generations. It is precisely this gentle sarcasm that marks the satire of the Archpriest of Hita and Geoffrey Chaucer, especially their satire on the figure of the wayward nun. Chaucer's "rippling undercurrent of satire, mellow, amused, uncondemning,"\textsuperscript{13} and Ruiz's painless satire, of the kind that "does not draw blood,"\textsuperscript{14} make their targets visible at times but always real. While devoid of tears or savage indignation their method is, however, astonishingly effective in its portrayal of individuals whose weaknesses are exposed by their own behavior. Chaucer does not level any general, abstract accusations against religious women as was traditional in medieval satire, but through the use of dramatic description causes both the type and the individual to come alive. Juan Ruiz, on the other hand, does bring certain charges against nuns but he invariably tempers them with praise of their accomplishments, even though these, in agreement with his unfailing attitude of merry criticism are usually in the field of "amor":
... aman falsamente a quantos las amavan;
son parientes del cuervo: de cras en cras andavan;
tarde cumplen o nunca lo que afiuzavan;
todo su mayor fecho es dar muchos sometes,
apalbrillas pintadas, fermosillos afeites,
con gestos amorosos e engañosos juguetes:
trayen a muchos locos con sus falsos risetes.
Mío señor Don Amor, si él a mí creyera,
el combit de las monjas aqueste, recibiera;
todo vicio del mundo, todo plazer oviera:
si a dormitorio entrara, nunca se arrepentiera.

( All nuns love falsely whomso'er they catch within their claws. Since nuns are kith and kin of crows who cry, "Ah pause! Ah pause!" And late or never yield that thing which trusting lovers draws. Their greatest feat is foisting off some wretched scurvy trick. With painted words and blandishments, and pretty rouge laid thick; With gestures amorous and smiles that catch one in the quick, While they, with bursts of laughter false, a host of lovers pick. )

There is not in either poet any trace of the reformer's zeal, but rather "a bountiful sense of humor" which leads them to mirror the life of their time in their work. With characteristic wit, both Chaucer and the Archpriest present a portrait of a medieval nun that resembles many nuns known to their audience, and no attempts are made to embellish or to blacken the picture created with infinite care as an object of satire.

This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that through the manipulation of suggestive detail provided by hundreds of years of literature on the theme of the wayward nun, the Spanish and the English poets portray two
intriguing ecclesiastical figures. Madame Eglentyne and Doña Garoza illustrate the very essence of their creators' satirical approach, subtle and intangible, something that "depends on an attitude which cannot be pinned down, which is always escaping to another view of things."17 It is precisely the carefully wrought ambiguity of both portraits that has baffled critics through the centuries, and has led some to pronouncements later deemed invalid by other critics who, in turn, were proved wrong by another group and so on till the present.18

One of the most important things that needs to be kept in mind when dealing with descriptions of fourteenth-century nuns is that these women cannot be judged by twentieth-century standards. For medieval man, the body was considerably less important than the soul, therefore, the sins of the flesh such as gluttony, vainglory and even incontinence were regarded as less abominable than those of the spirit, such as apostasy, for example. Because the emphasis in the portraits of Madame Eglentyne and Doña Garoza is on what the Middle Ages would have called venial sins, the satiric intention of the authors is often missed. A closer look, nevertheless, reveals a striking contrast between what the two nuns seem to be and what they should be, the result of "a delicately poised ambiguity"19 created by a mass of ironic details.
For our present purposes, it will be necessary to disassociate the Prioress's portrait from her tale. Any consideration of their relationship in the light of our approach to the portrait would require an analysis of the potentially satiric overtones of the tale which would be entirely beyond the scope of this study. There are in the portrait of Madame Eglentyne and in the episode of Doña Garoza clear vestiges of conventional monastic parody, but what is really striking in both is the intimation of Menippean satire where, what is questioned are not so much the deviations from an ideal standard, but actually the possibility of the existence of such a standard. The next two sections of this chapter will attempt an analysis of the portraits of the Spanish and the English nun focusing on their satirical traits. Doña Garoza will be studied first.

Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita was born around the year 1280 in a small village near the Spanish city of Alcalá where he died probably in 1350. Little is known about this "jongleuresque" priest, except that he spent some time in jail by order of the Archbishop of Toledo for writing verses parodying Church rituals.

His masterpiece Ruiz calls The Book of Good Love. It is an unusual work. Its purpose, he tells us, is to "teach success to one whom women have forsaken." Yet it opens with a prayer to God and the Virgin and a poem on "The Joys of Saint
Mary"; contains several poems on the Passion of Christ and on the different sins; and closes with five other songs to the Mother of Christ. It describes his artful seductions of several women, yet from time to time it interrupts these accounts of sexual enterprise with homage to chastity and purity. It throbs with lust, yet it is full of moral exempla and of fables rich in practical wisdom. It is a strange medley indeed.  

There is in Juan Ruiz a very marked strain of Horatian-Goliardic-Rabelaisian irony and, as has already been noted at the beginning of this chapter, no animosity in his satire. Like Chaucer, he reveals a profound understanding of human nature and is acquainted with people in all walks of life despite his restricted provincial background; he shows familiarity with courtly romance and the medieval "ars amatoria" which delight in playing with the distinction between "buen amor" or courtly love (Provençal "bona amors" and French "bon amors") and "loco amor" or lechery. In the episode of Doña Garoza, the longest in the LBA (stanzas 1332-1507) the Archpriest-narrator whose identity is never revealed apparently seduces a religious woman with whom he then seems to have a love affair. Nothing is clear cut except the narrator's proclivity for women and the fact that he gains access to the nun through the ministrations of an old bawd, a direct descendant of Ovid's Dipsas and sister to the Duenna of the Roman de la Rose and Chaucer's Wife of Bath. Her name, Trotaconventos, is a veritable "coup de maître" and one of Juan Ruiz's
most felicitous satiric touches in the *LBA*. It is made up of the verb "trotar," to trot or run from one place to another and the noun "conventos," convents, but although in translation the word naturally loses some of its original flavor, in Spanish it retains, even today, much of the color and piquancy of the medieval notion—a woman who "trotted" from one religious house to another procuring for her clients:

. . . messagera de unas negras pecegas
que usan mucho fraires e monjas e beatas:
son mucho andariegas, merecen las capatas;
estas trotaconventos fazen muchas baratas.

( . . . from that tribe accursed, some vile, black-hearted bawd
Employed by nuns and monks and others sanctified by God.
Such well deserve the shoes they wear in prowlings much abroad—
There's not a maid these convent-trotters cannot win by fraud.)

st. 441

In the episode of Doña Garoza, framed by a discussion of the pro's and con's of loving nuns and thanks to the magic of Ruiz's superb characterization, the figure of the nun, at first only a mere feature in a general situation, comes alive in action. Religious women participate in the procession gathered to celebrate the arrival of the god of love, an event that coincides with the beginning of spring and they are in illustrious company:

mucho omne ordenado que otorga perdones,
los clérigos seglares con muchos clerizones.
En la procesión iba el abad de Berdones,
órdenes de Cistel con la de Sant Benito,
la orden de Cruniego con su abat benedito,
quantas órdenes son: non las puse en escrito;

Todas dueñas de orden, las blancas e las prietas,
Cistel, pedricaderas e muchas menoretas,
todas salen cantando, deziendo chançonetas:
"Mane nobiscum, domine, que tañen a completas."

(For there one saw now hallowed men who
pardoned sinners pained,
Now brothers lay, now some who wore the
cloth but weren't ordained,
Besides an abbot marching there who for
Saint Bernard reigned.

I saw some Blessed Saints and some which I
Cistercians guessed,
With monks of Cluny, sable-crossed, who
brought their abbot blest—
Indeed, the orders that I saw can't be in
verse expressed.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Dear Sisters Black and Sisters White and
every order went,
Cistercians, querulous Dominics, Francis'
nuns love-bent,
All singing as they marched this song which
showed their hearts' intent.
"Abide with us, oh Lord, 'tis eve, and far
the day is spent."}

Their attitude on this occasion seems to be in agreement
with that reflected in the satires and the fabliaux re-
viewed in previous chapters:

Even as the disciples of Jesus, when He appeared
to them after His resurrection, constrained Him
to abide with them at evening, so these nuns, the
professional "brides of Christ," greet the lord
of love with the same salutation and invite him
to their beds.22

It is, then, in the satiric tradition of Jean de Meung,
the Council of Remiremont and Boccaccio that religious
women are first mentioned in the LBA throughout which they remain enveloped in a strange aura of "devotion and lubricity." Thus, when the nuns again approach the god of love to offer their services to him, the sexual innuendo in their words has become more obvious—"señor, vete conmigo, prueba nuestro celicio" ("Come, dally with us, Sir, awhile, and try our hairy shirts," 1255d), they say. Without any circumlocution, Elisha Kent Kane points out that in his opinion, the Archpriest's intention here was to create

a double-entendre between the hair shirt or cilix put on by a nun to chasten her nature and that other hairy thing put on by nature to chasten a nun. The witticism was a favorite one in the middle ages, . . . but as Rabelais said, "Folle à la messe, molle à la fesse."24

The next three stanzas begin what María Rosa Lida, the critic par excellence of the LBA, calls the "game of zig-zag" that will continue to the end of the episode, and whose premise is to "lead the reader in one direction, immediately to surprise him with a sudden turn."25 It is in this spirit, therefore, that we are told it is dangerous to love nuns, because

. . . aman falsamente a quantos las amavan; son parientes del cuervo: de cras en cras andavan; tarde cumplen o nunca lo que afiuziavan; todo su mayor fecho es dar muchos sometes, palabrillas pintadas, fermosillos afeites, con gestos amorosos e engañosos juguetes:
After pointing out very specifically the dire consequences of becoming involved with a religious woman, a circumstance that should be quite familiar to us having already encountered it in a number of monastic satires, Ruiz provides instant relief. The narrator steps in and, in a complete turnaround, presents an exceedingly seductive picture of the delights awaiting those who venture into a liaison with a nun:

todo vicio del mundo, todo plazer oviera: 
si a dormitorio entrara, nunca se arrepentiera.

( Since every pleasure in the world and appetite he'd hent, 
For once he found their sleeping quarters ne'er would be repent. )

The satire is light and does not jolt with any sudden epithets, and the humor resulting from the incongruity between matter and style—religious women and goliardic poetry—is typical of such medieval raillery. What is strikingly different is that, although in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth-century poetry of Italy and France, for instance, love had for a long time been treated either very solemnly or very casually, Spanish poetry, written almost exclusively by religious men, had shunned any erotic topics. For the Spanish monks love was a sin and everything related to it an object of shame. Again, of course, the irony of the passage—of
the entire episode, in fact—is enhanced because, as has
already been pointed out, the object ridiculed was so well
known to the reader.

So far, then, we cannot be sure whether Ruiz is in
favor of or against loving nuns; we have to wait for
seventy-four stanzas before he ever mentions the subject
again and when he does, it is doubtful once more whether
he is praising or admonishing:

Amat a alguna monja e creedme de consejo;
luego non se casará, nin salirá a concejo,

( Go love a nun; believe me, son make that
your one ambition,
For they can't marry afterward, nor dare
breathe their condition,

1332 b,c

says Trotaconventos to the Archpriest. Feeling lonesome
on a day when everyone else is in good company--

Los que ante eran solos, desque eran casados
veñálos de dueñas estar acompañados.

( All those who erst were single soon were
housed and bedded double;
I saw them in the company of girls who
loved to bubble--

1316 a,b

the Archpriest has just asked his go-between for "alguna
tal garrida" ("some pretty girl to make my very own,"
1317 c). The old bawd makes two failed attempts at pro-
curing and then, in the stanza cited above (1332 b,c)
suggests that he "love a nun," obviously expecting better
results from such an affair. Trotaconventos is well
acquainted with religious women—"Yo las serví un tiempo, moré i bien diez años" (I once was servant to a nun, God knows how many a year, 1333 a), she says, and this marks the beginning of one of the best known passages in the whole LBA, the famous catalogue of uncommon and wonderful concoctions that religious women reputedly can prepare for their lovers.

Tienen a sus amigos viciosos, sin sosaños;
quién diríe los manjares, los presentes tamaños, los muchos letuarios, nobles e quan extraños!

(And I learned how they kept their sweethearts pampered without fear;
Why who could tell what wondrous presents, condiments and cheer
They make them with elixirs potent and prescriptions queer,

Trotaconventos tells the Archpriest, and the next four stanzas are taken up with a list of exotic substances, many of which were certainly "not intended for mere sweet-meats." After reciting the wonderful electuary with its promise of rapturous delights, Trotaconventos is now determined to break the Archpriest's resistance towards having an affair with a nun and she talks for four stanzas about the infinite joys awaiting anyone willing to surrender to the love of a religious woman. In an obvious display of the poet's satiric talent on the subject of nuns, she describes them in the most glowing terms as not only well-mannered and discreet, but also as very beautiful, generous and forthright, excellent lovers,
thoughtful and responsive, "en noblezas de amor ponen toda su hemencia" ("ready to devote all their ingenuity to feats of love"). The tirade ends with the comment that "a man who loves no nun has wits not worth a copper" ("quien a monjas non ama non val maravedí" 1338 d, 1339 d) and is followed by a section listing the pleasures awaiting those who will love a nun:

Sin todas estas noblezas, an mucho buenas maneras: mucho encobiertas son, donosas e plazenteras; más saben e valen más las sus moças cozíneras para el amor del mundo, que unas dueñas de sueras; como imagen pintada, de toda fermosura, fijas dalgo, muy largas e francas de natura, grandes doñeadoras: amor siempre les dura; comidíñas, cumplidas e con toda mesura; todo el plazer del mundo e todo buen doñear, solaz de mucho sabor e el falaguero jugar, todo en las monjas es más que en otro lugar.

( Besides a nun is so well trained that in her sleep she straddles, Is secretive, yet tutors men just how to dip their paddles. Why when it comes to worldly love and merry fiddle-faddles, The servant of a nun knows more than dames with leather saddles. E'en like the Virgin's image painted every wondrous hue Which men may worship with a kiss that thrills them through and through, The figure of a nun inflames a man to have her too, And since she knows the art of love, to learn from her to woo. For every pleasure in the world, the latest styles in whoring— The peace of sated ecstasy (a bliss you've been ignoring); All this you'll find in nuns, and thus they'll merit your adoring. )

1340-1342 a,b,c
The image conjured by Trotaconventos must be just what those other lovers of the medieval nuns mentioned in earlier chapters of this study had in mind when they approached them for their favors, because the Archpriest is finally convinced. He wants to know how he could possibly gain access to one of the keepers of such a garden of delights. Trotaconventos promises she will arrange everything, and soon after we find her talking with a nun "que avía servida" (whom she had served some time, 1344 a). It is not clear in what capacity the bawd had served this nun but the Archpriest is careful to envelop this first meeting with an air of immorality and license that we recognize only too well: here is a religious woman listening with the utmost familiarity to the advances of a procuress with whom she actually seems to have a long-standing relationship! Yet, just when we may be ready to accept the fact that this nun really is like those countless others from other works in other medieval literatures, the poet again chooses to confuse us. In typical "Juan Ruiz" fashion the direction of the narrative changes abruptly and we are told that

\[
\begin{align*}
Aquesta buena dueña avié seso bien sano, & \\
\text{era de buena vida, non de fecho liviano.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

( . . . this good woman certainly was sensible and wise, And all her life was virtuous and ne'er did sin devise. )

1347 a,b
The next one hundred and twenty-six stanzas find Trotaconventos and Doña Garoza engaged in a rhetorical duel of wits as each attempts, with all the elements at her disposal to prove her point. Trotaconventos wants to convince Doña Garoza that to accept the Archpriest as a gallant would bring her only joy—the irony here is, of course, that it would be the wrong kind of joy altogether for a religious woman. The nun valiantly resists, however, arguing that she would rather continue to live in the austerity of the convent than lose her honor and become an object of scorn:

Más valen en convento las sardinas saladas
fazer a Dios servicio conas dueñas onradas,
que perder la mi alma con perdizes assadas
e fincar escarnida com' otras desterradas.

(I'd rather in my convent eat sardines
preserved in salt,
Accompanied by honest dames (whose lives
may God exalt)
Than sell my soul for roasted quail, to
one who would not halt,
When I had lost my soul for him, to spurn
me for my fault.)

1385

The lively argument between the two women goes on for many lines as they both resort to fables whose morals serve to strengthen their respective positions. Since a detailed analysis of the Archpriest's fascinating dialectical method is outside the scope of the present study, let us merely point out that the reader is tossed rapidly from one side to the other as if on a swing going too fast throughout the debate. Here and there things are
said by one or the other woman that provide a glimpse of
Doña Garoza’s past as well as of her spiritual posture
at this particular moment in her life. Stanzas 1355 and
1356, for instance, throw some light on the old relation-
ship between Trotaconventos and Doña Garoza as first the
nun and then the old procuress speak:

    tú estavas coitada, pobre, sin buena fama,
    onde oviesses cobro non tenías adama;
    ayudéte con algo, fui grand tiempo tu ama:
    conséjasme agora que pierda la mi alma.

"Señora," diz la vieja, "por que só baldonada?
Quando trayo presente, so mucho salaga-da;
oy vin manos vazías: finco mal estultada."

( You once were in distress and poor, a woman
of ill fame;
You had no livelihood nor e'en a penny to your name;
I gave you money then and long your mistress I
became,
Yet now you counsel me to lose my soul and sink in
shame.

"My lady," said the crone to her, "why is it I'm
reviled?
When formerly I brought you what you wished, on me
you smiled,
But now you see my empty hands, on me are insults
piled."
)

Nothing further is said about these "gifts" that Trota-
conventos used to bring to Doña Garoza, but the old woman's
words concerning the nun's fondness for such presents
seems to echo those of Li Muisis and the *Roman de la Rose*.
There, religious women are accused of "insatiable greed" and
of accepting presents from their lovers in exchange
for their favors. Little by little, then, through
innuendo and suggestion interspersed with bold statements
on the false honor of religious women the figure of Doña Garoza begins to emerge, drawn by the poet with incredible ingenuity in a satirical portrait unparalleled in the Spanish literature of the Middle Ages. The Archpriest has already proved his acquaintance with the stereotyped figure of the wayward nun of previous centuries; that he is also aware of circumstances in a fourteenth-century nunnery becomes strikingly clear too in this brief description of life in the convent for the sisters who choose to ignore the offers of prospective lovers. The picture is one of unredeemed gloom:

comedes en convento sardinas, camarones, berquelas e lazeria, e los duros caçones, dexades del amigo perdizes e capones: ¡perdédesvos, coitaðas!, mujeres sin varones;
con la mala vianda, con saladas sardinas, con sayas d' estaneña, passades vos, mesquinas: dexades del amigo las truchas, las gallinas, las camisas froncidas, los paños de Melinas.

( You munch sardines and prawns within a cheerless monastery.
Chew garden truck, and tough old steaks of shark, in portions chary,
While shunning quail with which your lover wants to make you merry--
You wreck your lives by shunning men, you wretched dames contrary!

With noisome victuals like sardines, besoaked in bitter brine,
You give your bellies punishment—you wear coarse shirts of twine,
And scorn your lovers' trout and capons, partridges and wine,
Besides the flouncy gowns they offer, made of fabrics fine. )

1393-1394
Also, the nuns seem to be always either singing or reading or else quarreling with one another, the latter an echo of a major complaint in the diocesan bishops' visitation reports cited in Chapter One:

... señora, qué negra ledanía!
En aquest roido vos fallo cada día:
O vos fallo cantando o vos fallo leyendo,
las unas con las otras contendiendo, riéndose.

(. . . . God choke that priest, the dull,
long-winded drone.
Why do I find you every day attracted by his moan?
I find you singing hymns or prayers (it's always either one)
Unless it's catervauling with some other pious nun.)

1396 c,d-1397 a,b

From the beginning of the episode the voice of the satirical narrator has been hinting that Doña Garoza is a nun like many others—hiding beneath a mask of decency two of the most abhorred sins a professed woman might commit: indecency and unchastity. The poet, however, deftly manipulating the reader's expectations, has the apparently wayward Doña Garoza suddenly say something that seems quite out of character for her: "religiosa non casta es podrida toronja" ("an unchaste nun is like a rotten orange," 1443 d). This is a statement almost on a par in its ferocity with the angriest medieval diatribes against monastic corruption in the nunnery studied in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, as if to offset such an incongruency and to safeguard the satiric intent of his creation, the
most salacious comment of the whole episode, one pointing out the corruption undermining the old monastic order comes precisely from Doña Garoza. While telling Trotaconventos the fable of the thief protected by the devil, the nun quotes him as saying:

luego seré contigo, desque ponga un fraile con una fraila suya que me diz: "traile, traile!"

( I will be with you as soon as I get a friar together with his nun, Who's always nagging me, "Bring him, bring him!") 32

1466 a,b

In view of what will happen later and bearing in mind some of the Archpriest's earlier comments on cloistered women in general, the reader cannot help but wonder here if this might not be an expression of Doña Garoza's own subconscious desires. The satire again shows through and the poet's inspired touch allows the reader to observe the nun in action; as was mentioned at the beginning of this section of the present chapter, Doña Garoza and Trotaconventos "are made to reveal themselves through their spontaneous actions and equally spontaneous language." 33

Thus, proving again that she is much wiser in the ways of the world than she should have been, the nun tells the procuress that it is not customary for a lady to be the first one to speak of love to a man and that, therefore, the most she will do is take a good look at the Archpriest-- "cumple otear firme" (1483 c). She wants to know what
he looks like, and she wants to hear the truth:

que desse arcipreste me digas su figura:  
bién e atal qual sea, dim toda su fechura;  
non respondás escarnio do t' preguntan cordura.

( See if you can describe this man, his gait,  
his countenance,  
His figure, manner, everything, but mind  
you don't enhance  
And stuff me full of pretty lies, for I take  
all askance. )

1484 b,c,d

Doña Garoza's request elicits from the old woman a description of the poet not so much as he actually was or even as she may have perceived him, but with as many erotic qualities as possible. Stanzas 1485 through 1489, then, contain the portrait of the Archpriest of Hita and, to judge from Trotaconventos's growing fervor as she proceeds with the description, this was "a man enough to bedazzle the imagination of any female, pleasurable or not", of her

. . . Par las gafapas mías!  
tal ombe qual yo digo, no es en todas las erias!

( . . . by my slippers! You could not find  
his equal anywhere ),

she shouts at the end, carried away by her own enthusiasm. Every detail of the Archpriest's portrait is intended to convey the image of an exceptionally virile man, from the abundant dark hair to the long nose regarded by the symbol-loving Middle Ages as indicative of "the proportions of the male generative member." That a religious woman might engage in a love affair is no surprise to us any
more; the irony of the Archpriest's portrait lies rather in the fact that this prospective lover's description pointedly includes certain traits that the readers of the LBA (as familiar with medieval superstition as Chaucer's audience) would have regarded as signs of extreme sexual potency—dark hair, long nose, deep voice, strong neck, thick lips, and large ears.38 According to the narrator, Trotaconventos has surpassed herself in her description of the lover to the nun—"A la dueña mi vieja tan bien que la enduxo" ("How exquisitely was this nun persuaded by my whore," 1490 a). The old woman now makes a few general remarks on the dissolute habits of some religious men and women and for a brief moment the Archpriest's benevolent satire becomes a harsh commentary on monastic corruption tempered, though, as always, by the prevailing mood of almost irrepressible gaiety which emanates from Trotaconventos and by her choice of words:

Sodes, monjas, guardadas, desosas, loganas;
cochiciosos, los clérigos desean las ufanas;
todos quieren nadar: los peces e las ranas!
à pan de quinze días, fambre de tres semanas.

( You cooped up nuns are passionate, and burning up with lust,
But sporting monks desire to be with gayer women trussed,
Howe'er as all things like to swim, they'll wriggle where they must;
For people starved a month will hunger for a week-old crust. )

1491
At last the nun is ready to accept a visit from the potential lover and thus openly confirm our suspicions of her profligacy. With his usual skill, though, the poet compounds the irony of the moment of decision by allowing Doña Garoza one more face-saving stratagem that may permit her to retain some sense of propriety: the demand that other nuns be present when she talks to the Arch-priest. This request, of course, is the last straw in the long list of satirical touches already observed in the episode; religious women had always wanted to receive their visitors alone and it was the archbishop who invariably fought for their compliance with the rule that they should have one or more sisters in the room with them. 39 Despite the attempt at a last stand, however, there does not seem to be any doubt in Trotaconventos's mind any more that Doña Garoza could refuse his advances once she sees the Archpriest in the flesh. After all, nuns are known to be "deseosas" (passionate) and he is a most desirable man, and a priest too. 40

The poet is now almost through with his portrait of Doña Garoza. Inspired perhaps by other examples of medieval monastic satire or by the reports of real transgressions in the nunnery available in the episcopal records, the Archpriest adds to the portrait one more element suggested maybe by the long list of complaints
made against religious women by the Church: the ease with which lovers' messages traveled in and out of the convent. The Archpriest sends a letter to Doña Garoza through the old bawd who also conveys to him the nun's reply, evidently not quite as inviting as he had hoped but still encouraging—

guardas tenié la monja más que la mi esgrima,
pero de buena fabla vino la buena cima.

(Yet guards she had more than my sword, but guards can't ward off crime
And pleasant conversation oft results in merry times.)

1498 c,d

As with "buen amor," the phrase "buena cima" has caused much controversy among critics over the centuries. Nevertheless, Joan Corominas, one of the great twentieth-century scholars of the LBA has no doubt that "del trato o negociación bien llevada vino el buen resultado, el triunfo final . . . la frase 'buena cima' es, pues, inequívoca y no cabe entenderla en sentido piadoso." ("The good effect, the final victory, was the result of a negotiation well conducted . . . the phrase 'buena cima' is, therefore, unequivocal and may not be interpreted in a pious sense.")\(^1\) For the Archpriest of Hita, as for all the poets of the courtly tradition love is an ennobling passion, one which restores a man's youth, sharpens his wit and renews his spirit—
al mancebo mantiene mucho en mancebez,
e al viejo perder faz mucho la vejez.

( Love keeps a young man in his prime (a
physiologic truth);
Love helps a senile patriarch retain the
sap of youth. )

157 a,b

The result of "buen amor" à la Juan Ruiz happens to be
"buena cima" or the total enjoyment of the beloved up to
but excluding the sexual union, a state seen by the
troubadours as "falso amor" or "false love." 42

We are finally near the end of the episode when
the eager lover at last gets a glimpse of the up to then
evasive nun. We also see her for the first time through
his eyes:

. . . loçana,
alto cuello de garça, color fresco de grana.

( Her girlish neck was slim, her face was
flowerlike and fair. )

1499 b,c

The emotion of this first encounter so perturbs the Arch-
priest that he wrings his hands in frustration at the
sight of so much "wasted" loveliness while he exclaims,
"desaguisado fizo qui l' mandó vestir lana" ("Whoever made
her put on sackcloth did her wrong, I swear," 1499 d).
Interestingly enough, this is a complaint that we have
heard many times before but always spoken by the "victim"
herself, that is, by the young woman forced to become a
nun and made to wear the dark forbidding habit against her
will by someone who "did her wrong." 43

¡Valme, Santa María!, mis manos me aprieto:
¡quién dio a blanca rosa ábito e velo prieto!
mas valdría a la fermosa tener fíjos e nieto
que atal velo negro, nin que ábitos ciento.

( So help me, Holy Virgin, but I raise my
hands, alack,
Who gave a rose as white as she that ugly
habit black?
'Twere better that a radiant girl should
never children lack
Than take the veil of chastity and fight her
yearnings back! )

1500

This is unmistakably the language of passion; the irony of
the situation in which an Archpriest, himself enjoined by
his own religious vows to shun all physical love falls in
love before our eyes with, of all women, a nun is over-
powering. The next six stanzas are saturated with the
same tenacious ambiguity that characterizes the entire
episode; in 1501, the lover-priest, aware of the punish-
ment awaiting those who commit a sin so foul yet overcome
with desire, is ready to transgress as long as there may
be promise of forgiveness later. In stanza 1502 it seems
that neither will be able to resist the urge of the carnal
appetite; the words rush out of the narrator's mouth as in
a torrent, as if he were no longer capable of coherent
thought:

Oteóm de unos ojos que pareció candela;
yo sospiré por ellos, díz mi corazón: '¡héla!
Fuime para la dueña, fabléme e fabléla:
enamoróm la monja e yo enamoréla.
She gazed on me with eyes that shone like altar candles bright,
'Till like a prayer my spirit rushed out towards her at the sight;
She spoke to me and I to her as though from some far height,
And then she loved me with a kind of tremulous delight.

The old "game of zigzag" already in progress early in the
episode is in full swing now. If stanza 1502 appeared to indicate that all restraints were gone and that Doña Garoza belonged to the tradition of reprobate nuns of Nigellus Wireker and Li Muisis among others, in stanza 1503 such a position is no longer clear; the battle between "cupiditas" and "caritas" may not be quite over after all:

Recibióme la dueña por su buen servidor:
siempre le fui mandado e leal amador,
mucho de bien me fizo con Dios en limpio amor;
en quanto ella fue biva, Dios fue mi guiador.

Still she received me only as her loved retainer true,
And always loyally I did whate'er she'd have me do,
With clean and chastened love my spirit close to God she drew
So that as long as she still lived, that God I loved and knew.

Because, as was just mentioned above, "limpio amor" like "buen amor" may be interpreted as the heavenly love of God or one faithful lover's earthly delights up to the sexual union, the irony that has pervaded the entire
episode is even more powerful here. If the poet's early remarks on religious women (stanzas 1340-1342) are to be taken as the expression of his true beliefs, then stanzas 1503 through 1505 a,b are a further display of his satiric bent. Though the language is purposefully and brilliantly veiled, the description of Doña Garoza (st. 1504) and the general comments on nuns (1505 a,b) must be written tongue in cheek:

con mucha oración a Dios por mí rogava,
con su abstinencia mucho me ayudava,
la su vida muy limpia en Dios se deleitava:
en lucura del mundo nunca se trabajava;
para tales amores son las religiosas:
para rogar a Dios con obras piadosas.

( Through many prayers to God for me she did her life exhaust;
She helped me too by abstinence, though passion paid the cost;
She yearned for God, and in His love her spotless soul was lost--
Ne'er in this frenzied world's delights her being was engrossed.

For loves like that are holy women made,
That is, for praying God and bringing pious persons aid. )

When we get to stanza 1505 c,d the lines are once again familiar and so is the tone:

que para amor del mundo mucho son peligrosas,
e son muy escuseras, perezosas, mintrosas.

( As far as sensual love is concerned they are dangerous, hypocrites, idlers and gossips. )

The episode of Doña Garoza is now ended in the same way it began, with a comment on the unseemly habits of certain religious women. It is our contention that the
Archpriest's attitude towards them and towards Doña Garoza in particular, gently satirical most of the time, is inspired by the medieval tradition of literary wayward nuns whose existence we have attempted to demonstrate in the first chapters of this study. It is to this same tradition that the figure of Madame Eglentyne, the most famous religious woman in fourteenth-century literature also belongs. Therefore, although there is very little to be said about her that has not been said before, the following section of this chapter will be a reappraisal of the portrait of Chaucer's Prioress in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. Through a detailed analysis of her portrait aided by some of the major criticism of the last eighty years as well as a review of primary sources old and new, we hope to view her for the first time from a totally different perspective. Thus, even though the ensuing study of Madame Eglentyne may not actually offer anything startlingly new, it aims at a better understanding of Chaucer's Prioress as heir, with the Archpriest of Hita's Doña Garoza to what we called in the Introduction a long line of prototypical wayward nuns dating back to the early stages of monasticism. The historical evidence for the existence of the real-life profligate nuns who served as models for the literary ones was reviewed in Chapter One, while the presence of the
latter in certain medieval genres is attested by the material presented in Chapters Two and Three. The Prioress is the superbly polished end-product of all the literary religious women of the previous centuries.

Madame Eglentyne was "a very conspicuous lady."\(^{46}\) Her head dress, her manners, her rosary and her brooch caused her to stand out among the other pilgrims; in fact, her very presence in such company ought to have attracted everyone's attention since nuns were not allowed to go on pilgrimages by ecclesiastical ruling. Already in the year 791 a council had forbidden religious women to participate in pilgrimages and in 1195 the Council of York had decreed: "In order that the opportunity of wandering may be taken away from nuns, we forbid them to take the path of pilgrimage."\(^{47}\) The reason for the injunction, aside from the fact that Church authorities were fighting to keep nuns within their cloister was that pilgrimages, as has already been noted earlier on in this chapter, were known to be not only religious occurrences but social occasions as well where, in the opinion of that "professional" pilgrim, the Wife of Bath, one could go

\[
\ldots \text{to playe,} \\
\text{And for to see, and eek for to be seye} \\
\text{Of lusty folk . . .}
\]

According to Jacques de Vitry many pilgrims "weary of wayfaring, used to drink themselves tipsy,"\(^{48}\) and in
Roger Bacon's commentary on the *Secretum Secretorum*, cited by Bridges in his edition of the *Opus Majus* (I, 403) Venus is said to be favorable to pilgrimages when in conjunction with the Moon. 49 Besides the morally dangerous consequences risked by anyone going on pilgrimage in the fourteenth century, there were physical perils too such as highway bandits lurking behind every tree along the road, while illnesses and inadequate lodging also plagued the travelers. Another, and much more important circumstance which should have kept the Prioress from riding to Canterbury on pilgrimage was the fact that she was bound by oath to remain within the cloister and not "go wandering forward into the world," 50 particularly such distance as there was between her presumed nunnery of Stratford atte Bowe and the Canterbury shrine. One critic actually figures that the trip must have taken at least twelve days, as it was approximately three to four days with three overnight stops or three days with two overnight stops; in addition to the three days on the road, there would be one or two days in Canterbury, three days to return to Southwark, and then four days' round trip to and from Southwark to Stratford. 51 This would have meant an exceedingly long absence from her house for any nun, let alone a Prioress, whose behavior, as indicated in previous chapters, was meant to set an example for the
rest of the congregation. Therefore, we are inclined to agree with Muriel Bowden that "the mere fact that Madame Eglentyne is one of the Canterbury pilgrims is the first point of satire in a portrait that is satiric." 52

If the "illegal" presence of the Prioress in a pilgrimage were not already enough to cause a medieval audience to smile in tolerant amusement at a frequent real-life situation--and a well-known literary figure--step by step the next twenty-three lines build a portrait of "a Nonne, a Prioress" whose resemblance to a courtly lady of romance grows more and more striking with each succeeding verse. From "hir smyling" which was "ful symple and coy" to her superbly polished manners, Madame Eglentyne's picture is drawn from the same sources used by the most famous authors of medieval French romance such as Deschamps, Machaut, Froissart, and Watriquet de Couvin, in whose pages, ladies much like the Prioress smiled in a manner that was "symple and coy" and were often called "Eglantine." 53 However, not only had this courtly-lady-"Prioress" chosen a most unlikely name but she also swore. "Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy," says the narrator in the same tone of unsuspecting naiveté which characterizes some of his most outrageous pronouncements on other members of the Prologue's "convent crown." 54
There was a fair for the maistrie,
An outridere, that loved venerie

or,

A Frere there was, a wantowne and a merye,
"famulier" not only with "frankeleyns" but also
. . . with worthy wommen of the toun. ⁵⁵

The Benedictine Rule governing all aspects of monastic
life in the nunnery urges its followers "not to swear,
lest perchance one foreswear oneself,"⁵⁶ and even though
neither Chaucer nor his audience would have known the
exact words of this (or any) section of the Rule, the fact
that a religious woman swore would have been understood as
a violation of proper monastic conduct. Despite this,
though, critics through the centuries have both vehemently
attacked and defended the Prioress's "right" to swear by
"Seinte Loy." To the latter, it is just another indica-
tion of what they call her "daintiness" not seen as in
any way affecting her image as a devoted ecclesiastic;⁵⁷
these are naturally the critics who refuse to accept the
satiric implications in her portrait. Those who consider
that it would be highly irregular for a nun, let alone a
Prioress to swear, no matter how mild her oath may be
considered, also point out that St. Loy was then and still
is invoked today by the "petites ouvrières" of Paris,
when they wish to see in their dreams the image of the
man they will marry.⁵⁸ (Most likely, Chaucer was not
aware of the added significance of the Prioress's taking an oath by St. Loy, but it certainly makes that particular line in the description much more relevant to twentieth-century readers.) The fact that Madame Eglentyne swears is only one instance of her misconduct in a portrait that almost reads like a catalogue of infractions to the Benedictine Rule. To go back once more to her "smyling," it should be noted that the Rule enjoined "silence at all times" and that a smile that looked as inviting as the one from a lady of romance would not only have been most unseemly in a nun, but could also have been taken as an indication of her desire for further social contact. This is, of course, confirmed a little later by the famous ten lines of the portrait that give a detailed description of her exquisite table manners.

We have now been introduced to Madame Eglentyne and know that she has an engaging smile and that she swears, albeit so gently. We are quite ready to hear something about this nun's religious life, but when that information finally comes it consists of a mere reference to the manner in which she sings the "service dyvyne"--"ful weel" and "entuned in hir nose ful semely" according to the narrator, and no more. It is becoming more and more obvious to the reader that this is a portrait of a religious woman where the emphasis is not going to be on
religion or even on facts in general, but rather on the way in which the narrator perceives them and presents them. The satiric overtone is alternately enhanced and diminished by these comments apparently intended only to create a picture without any attempt at moral judgement.

And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly, After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, For Frensh of Parys was to hire unknowe, is what we are told next and we may assume that though only mildly ironic, the observation on her French is meant to reenforce the impression previously created of a woman much more concerned with worldly than with spiritual propriety. The joke, however, is on Madame Eglentyne herself, so preoccupied with being "holdenigne of reverence" that she does not realize her efforts to speak French "ful faire and fetisly" become ludicrous when the listener detects her provincial accent, acquired at Stratford and unrefined by lack of contact with the court of Paris. Actually, as one critic points out, "a certain ineptitude with classical or foreign languages is a common satirical touch in medieval English literature," a remark which, in the particular case of Madame Eglentyne is rendered even more poignant by the fact that Stratford, although definitely not a second rate nunnery, somehow remained in the shadow of the much more prestigious and aristocratic Barking Abbey. Located on a branch of the
river Lea in Essex, Stratford atte Bowe was about a mile away from the powerful Abbey of Barking that would have been regarded by the less privileged nuns of Stratford as highly as the Westminster court. The following anecdote about Barking Abbey is reported by Ernest P. Kuhl:

An amusing tale was told me in the summer of 1922 by the attendant on the grounds. An underground passage, so I was told, formerly connected B. abbey with All Hallow's Barking near the Tower (in the patronage of the abbey) -- a distance of eight miles. My informant, when questioned, replied: "So that the nuns could travel to and from London unnoticed." 62

In view of the historical evidence cited in Chapter One, Madame Eglentyne's proximity to Barking, Chaucer's comments on her lifestyle, and her ambition "to countre-fete cheere / of court" would make her highly suspect of perhaps taking covert trips to London, where her efforts "to been estatlich of manere" would have had a better chance of being appreciated.

The next section of the portrait is such a minutely detailed description of the Prioress's perfectly dainty table manners, an art which a religious woman should have practiced but not to the point of obsession that the effect of the irony is overwhelming. Here we have "a Nonne, a Prioress," that is, a woman bound by her sacred profession and by what should have been years of austere living in the supposedly stern environment of the convent indulging in the ritual of eating a meal with the
most incredible elegance because, contrary to her vow of humility, "In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest" (1.132). Madame Eglentyne must have known, and Chaucer's audience must have suspected that she was not only violating another precept of the Benedictine Rule, "to keep aloof from worldly actions," but that she was in flagrant contravention of a cardinal dictum of the Church proclaiming that, "essus carnium, et potus vini . . . seminarium libidinis est" ("the eating of flesh and drinking of wine . . . is the seed of lust").

It was considered of extreme importance in the Middle Ages to avoid the sin of gluttony thought to be closely associated with lust. Already in the seventh century St. Gregory had said that "de ventris ingluvie, inepta laetitia, scurrilitas, immunditia, multiloquium, habetudo sensus circa intelligentiam propagantur" ("for from gluttony are propagated foolish mirth, scurrility, uncleanness, babbling, dullness of sense in understanding").

This is really an accusation that could be more easily leveled at the Monk than at the Prioress, it is true, but of which she may not be regarded as quite free judging from her exaggerated concern with the politest way to handle food, a concern that was, as already mentioned, more fitting in a worldly lady than a nun.
She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,  
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe.  

(11. 128-29)

What really makes Chaucer's already apparently incriminating words even more damaging when applied to a religious woman is the fact that the much vaunted manners of Madame Eglentyne, carefully rehearsed so as to make her exactly "à la mode" 66 may also be found in a passage in Jean de Meung's Roman de la Rose, cited by Muriel Bowden in A Commentary on the "General Prologue" to the "Canterbury Tales." It has been known for centuries now that they are part of the advice given by the Duenna--la Vieille--to Fair Welcome on how women should behave in order to gain a man's love:

She should not wet her fingers in the sauce  
Beyond the joint, nor soil her lips with soup,  
With garlic, or fat meat; nor pile a heap  
Of food and then convey it to her mouth.  
With tips of fingers she should handle bits  
That she should dip in sauce, white, yellow, or green,  
And very carefully the mouthful lift,  
That on her breast no bit of pepper falls,  
Or soup or gravy. Then so gracefully  
She should her goblet quaff that not a drop  
She spills upon her clothes, for far too rude  
Or gluttonous men might consider her  
If they should see such accident occur.  
The common cup should not approach her lips  
While yet there is some food within her chops;  
And ere she drinks she wipes her mouth so clean  
That on her lips no speck of grease adheres,  
At least not on her upper lip, for then  
Globules of it might float upon the wine. 67

As if the Duenna's counsel were not already suspect considering who that venerable lady represents in the Roman,
it becomes even more so when we remember that it
originally comes from the mouth of the Duenna's famous
ancestress, the highly disreputable procress in Book III
of Ovid's *Amores*. Here, in order to arm women against the
men to whom he has given so much advice in Books I and II,
Ovid tells the ladies some secrets on the art of love:

> Carpe cibos digitis: est quiddam gestus edendi;
> Ora nec inmunda tota perunque manu;
> Neve domi praesume dapes, sed desine citra,
> Quam capis: es paulo, quam potes esse, minus;
> Priamides Helenen avide si spectet edentem,
> Orderit et dicit "stulta rapina meast."

( Daintiness matters: be sure to help yourself
with your fingers
In the most ladylike way; don't feed your
face with a paw.
Don't just pick at your food, as if you had
had a big dinner;
Don't, on the other hand, gobble as much as
you can.
Even a Helen would seem repulsive, a horrible
creature,
Taking too much at a meal, stuffing herself
to the ears.68

What may be called an additional result

of the meticulous care with which Madame
Eglentyne's manners are described, is that not
only the satiric, but also the dramatic mode
is enhanced; the figure of the Prioress becomes
wonderfully animated,

and this "allows the reader to participate in an interview
at mealtime!"69

The last line of the section just analyzed—"Ful
semely after hir mete she raughte" (she reached for her
meat in seemly wise)—has traditionally been interpreted
as indicating one more accomplishment in the long list of
niceties in which Madame Eglentyne seems to excel. The
first hint that an extra touch of irony may be implicit in the word "raughte" came in 1914 in an article on the Prioress by C. M. Drennan, who pointed out that "raughte" could be connected with Old English "hroecan," "to spit," and that it should therefore be translated as Modern English "retched" instead of "reached." According to Drennan, this interpretation brings a "little Rabelaisian touch" to the description, one more in keeping with the aura of good-humored mockery surrounding the portrait of this and the other ecclesiastics. Although it does, somehow, sound like a most unkind remark for Chaucer to make about this nun who appears to be the object, throughout the Canterbury Tales of only mild and amused satire, the notion that such a refined lady as Madame Eglentyne could be caught in one of the most elementary physiological acts would probably have appealed to the rather primitive sense of humor of a medieval audience.

The portrait goes on:

And sikerly she was of greet desport,
And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,
And peyned hire to countrefete cheere
Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.

It is only after reading the lines several times, however, that the full impact of the irony becomes clear: all these marvelous traits, so desirable in a courtly lady, are actually being ascribed to a nun. Could what
one critic calls "this conflation of the courtly lady
and the nun"\textsuperscript{72} have been the product of Chaucer's
imagination alone or, in the words of Muriel Bowden, "is
she drawn from a living model?"\textsuperscript{73} If we trust once again
the evidence of the historical documents cited in
Chapter One and the available literature on the subject
reviewed in Chapters Two and Three we must answer yes to
the question posed above; we could have met Madame
Eglentyne in person at any fourteenth-century nunnery.
As for her literary counterparts, we have already met
them in the songs and the fabliaux, the sermons and the
satires of the last centuries of the Middle Ages. Be-
sides the collective importance of the lines recently
quoted as a confirmation of the general personality of
the Prioress already insinuated at the beginning of her
portrait, there is in them a key word holding the secret
to her character and that is the verb "to countrefete,"
Modern English "to imitate" or "to deceive." If she was
"of greet desport, / And ful plesaunt, and amyable of
port," then it cannot have been the court of Jerusalem
she was trying to imitate but rather that of Babylon, and
perhaps, as one critic says, "she follows the Squire and
could dance in his garden."\textsuperscript{74} Chaucer does not need to
intimate that Madame Eglentyne is a bad woman, through
his subtle manipulation of suggestive detail "it is enough
to intimate that she is not a good Prioress." At this point in the portrait all the readers' expectations still remain unfulfilled. Nothing in the description has so far matched the image of a religious woman we might have entertained, and although no single detail may be taken as exclusively satirical each one fails to correspond to what we may have anticipated when we first knew there was in the assembly "a Nonne." Yet, there seems to be now a shift in the direction of the portrait, and the next line begins with the adverative "But," followed by a mention of her "conscience":

But, for to spoken of hire conscience,  
She was so charitable and so pitous;
we think that perhaps now, finally, something will be  
said about the Prioress's spiritual make-up and then we read--

She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous  
Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bleddde.

Our expectations have been thwarted once again and we wonder what kind of charity this is that causes the Prioress to weep over a dead mouse. According to St. Thomas, true charity is the friendship of man for God which may be extended to other human beings. 76 Nevertheless, since we are prepared for a totally different kind of statement "a more bathetic substitution would be hard to imagine," 77 one whose effectiveness as a source of
humor is enhanced by the poet's anticipatory remarks on Madame Eglentyne's seeming aloofness from spiritual concerns. The Prioress's bent towards the mundane, evidenced by her "smyling," her "ooth," her chosen courtly name, her punctilious manners, and her "amayable port" have been hints of the anti-climax of lines 144-145. Everything appears to indicate that this nun's desire "to ben holden digne of reverence" may not refer to the respect owed her as a representative of the Church but rather as a noble lady. It is a striking phenomenon and one more proof of Chaucer's superbly polished craft that the tone of the description remains basically neutral throughout, thus conveying a disturbingly ambiguous picture.

Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.
But sore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
And al was conscience and tendre herte.

This passage, again delivered by the narrator in the most objective manner—as though having dogs were perfectly natural for a Prioress—actually reports, not a mere fact of her lifestyle but a total disregard for the rules prohibiting religious women to own pets. Furthermore, not only did Madame Eglentyne violate a rule but, as pointed out by Kuhl in his "Notes on Chaucer's Prioress," she seems to have done it with gusto, feeding her "illegal" dogs choice morsels from the nunnery table such as "rosted
flesh" and "wastel-breed." Could this blatant act of disobedience be taken as a sign that if she were capable of breaking one rather minor rule she might perhaps have been tempted to break other, more important ones? The last line speaks of her conscience once more--"And al was conscience and tendre herte"--but this time we are not so easily taken in as before at the mention of the word "conscience" and we no longer expect great things to follow. They do not. Lines 142 and 150 which provide the framework to the passage on the Prioress's misapplied charity and love may, however, have a much greater significance than is apparent in the satirical context of the portrait: they could actually be interpreted as extending the poet's reproach--no matter how veiled or how temperate--to all of the religious world. It would be quite fitting and very much in tune with Chaucer's fondness for "double entendre" to create an impression of such ambivalent force that the lines may be taken as a simple statement of fact about one flawed individual, or as an indictment of the whole ecclesiastic community of his time.

Nothing else is forthcoming on Madame Eglentyne's possible spiritual qualities but again the narrator turns from the brief mention of "conscience" to a detailed description of the Prioress's appearance. This is a section of the portrait that has caused considerable controversy
among critics, some of whose judgements have ranged from the extravagant to the ludicrous. In most cases the critics, like the reader, are struck by the seeming incongruency arising from the description of the physical charms of a beautiful woman who happens to be a nun, and as a result they are left with the uncomfortable feeling of having, somehow, found out something that they were not supposed to know. The Prioress, though, is an attractive woman and her physical attributes are listed by the narrator according to the purest canons of medieval rhetoric without the slightest hint of mockery. Why, then, does her "descriptio pulchritudinis" evoke such mixed reactions in the reader and where does the discrepancy resulting in some of Chaucer's finest ironic touches reside? The answer is perhaps that everything hinges on a "misuse" of the convention formulated by Geofroi de Vinsauf and long accepted by medieval authors. "If you wish to describe womanly beauty," says de Vinsauf,

let Nature's compass draw the outline of the head; . . . let lilies grow on the lofty forehead . . . . Let restraint rule the shape of the nose, lest it fall short of, or exceed, the proper bounds. Let the sentinels of the forehead gleam from both sides, twin little stars with emerald lights, like a constellation . . . . Let the swelling lips be moderately full, and red, fired with a mild flame. 80

The rules that should guide a description of female charms go on for thirty-seven lines 81 but what gives the physical
portrait of the Prioress an added ironic measure is the fact that, included in the set of de Vinsauf's famous "rhetorical injunctions" are two sentences that might have made the staid reader of the General Prologue blush if he had known them. They probably brought a twinkle or mischief to Chaucer's eye as he wrote them.

De Vinsauf says:

Let the snowy bosom present both breasts like virginal gems set side by side. Let the waist be slim, a mere handful. I will not mention the parts beneath: here the imagination speaks better than the tongue.\(^{82}\)

Does not the reader of--

Hir nose tretyys, hir eyen greye as glas,  
Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed;  
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;  
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;  
For hardly she was nat underrowe,

feel a little like a voyeur? In the twelfth-century Speculum Stultorum\(^{83}\) there is a section on religious women where the author hints at "the beauties beneath the gown" in the best rhetorical manner:

\[ \text{Nae caput abscondunt omnes sub tegmine nigro,} \]
\[ \text{Sub tunicis nigris candida membra latent.}\]  

( Beneath black veils they all conceal their heads,  
Beneath black skirts they hide their lovely legs. )

In the Prioress's portrait "recurring pattern of ambivalence"\(^{85}\) what is left unsaid is always more suggestive than what is explicit and banter carries more
weight than sobriety. In his illuminating article on the subject, "The Art of the Descending Catalogue," Kevin Kiernan points out that one of the "most shocking" things in the catalogue of the Prioress's physical traits is the realization that Chaucer followed closely Geoffroi de Vinsauf's precept to "let beauty descend from the top of the head to the very feet." The portrait, Kiernan says, is presented in two installments, and the first half "simultaneously descends and reverts from mouth to nose to mouth to fingers to breast to mouth" while the second half again goes back to the nun's head. In the General Prologue, though, the golden hair suggested by the rhetorician is replaced by a wimple, a device which almost compels the reader to encircle the subject with his mind's eye, since his gaze is directed around the body with the mention of clothing and, in the case of Madame Eglentyne, her wypul" and her "cloke."

Let us pause for a moment in contemplation of the Prioress's "wympul." Here is an article of clothing pertaining to a religious woman's habit which was not exactly like the one prescribed by the Benedictine order, officially supposed to be "not only puritanically plain, but also of Mohammedan amplitude" so as to hide as much of the face as possible, preferably down to the eyebrows. Madame Eglentyne's wimple, however, not only did not reach
to her eyebrows but barely covered her forehead that "was almost a spanne brood." This was quite in keeping with the latest medieval fashion that called for Madonnas and all beautiful women to display a very high forehead with a plucked hairline even as we can see from many fourteenth-century portraits. Actually, the phrase "she was nat undergroe" has intrigued scholars for centuries and while some see her as almost robust—"the Prioress is very large of forehead, and her bodily proportions are quite in keeping"—other critics such as Chauncey Wood feel it is merely another ironic stab of Chaucer's at a religious figure who "does not live for the spirit" as "is abundantly clear" from the attention she pays to eating. According to the Ancrene Riwle, the manual for anchoresses written in the thirteenth century,

true anchoresses are called birds because they leave the earth, that is, the love of all worldly things, and because of the longing of their hearts towards heavenly things, fly upward towards heaven . . . . Those birds fly well that have not much flesh, like the pelican, and many feathers. The ostrich and other such birds, because of their great weight of flesh, make only a pretense of flying, beating their wings while their feet remain always near the ground. So with the sensual anchoress who lives for the pleasures of the body and cultivates her own comfort; the weight of her flesh and bodily vices prevent her from flying, and though she makes a pretense and great commotion with wings . . . and though she has some appearance of flying and looks like
a holy anchorress, whoever looks closely will
laugh her to scorn, for her feet, that is her
desires, keep her always near the earth.93

Wood feels that if Chaucer could convey to his audience
the image of a nun who, like "the sensual anchorress"
was weighted down by her flesh, that is, by the
corpulence of her body as well as the magnitude of her
carnal appetites they, like us, would surely "laugh her
to scorn."94

As we continue to analyze the description of the
Prioress's head in the portrait we must not forget that
highlighting the section is the line that introduces it--
"Ful seymly hire wympul pynched was." As critics have
often pointed out, these words actually provide the
initial surprise of the section, since a "pynched wympul"
would definitely have been improper array for a woman that
had forsworn all worldly adornments. On the one hand,
the Bible enjoins, "Let a woman cover her head. She shall
cover her shame," but then the text goes on, "... and
not use the covering as a means of adorning herself, and
a matter of pride."95 Moreover, lay women also wore
wimples in the fourteenth century (the Wife of Bath had
one that was "wympled wel") although they did it to
complement their garb and not in an attempt to keep their
faces from men's eyes, but precisely for the opposite
reason. What a wonderful touch of fine Chaucerian irony
to have Madame Eglentyne wear a vimple as a nun naturally would, but to make it "ful semyly pynched," thus turning an element of potential monastic reticence into a piece of fashionable attire. At this point in the portrait, it seems as though the entire passage dealing with the Prioress's physical looks has been leading up to "Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war"; together with line 151, it forms the framework within which Madame Eglentyne's features come alive before our eyes. Again by a masterful stroke of satiric innuendo, what should have been merely part of a religious woman's garb--"hir cloke"--becomes, when described as "ful fetys" another instance of this particular nun's disregard for the rules of her order and the propriety which they attempted to enforce. Chaucer, and his audience, were well aware (as we are too) of the medieval Church's fruitless efforts to curb unseemly displays of finery among its female representatives, since "for more than six weary centuries the bishops waged a holy war against fashion in the cloister, and they waged it in vain." No better example, thus, of the failure of the ecclesiastical authorities in this matter than the clothes of the Prioress who, against regulations, wore not only an elaborately "pynched wympul" but also a "ful fetys cloke" and to complete her array,
Of smal coral about hire arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
And theron hang a brooch of gold ful sheene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after AMOR VINCIT OMNIA.

It may be of interest here to go back once more to the historical evidence provided by certain visitation reports of the diocesan bishops and archbishops, where the matter of improper clothing for religious women is discussed:

Year 1314, Keldholme Priory: Archbishop Corbridge issued an injunction against "secular finery and singularity of dress [which] were to be avoided by the nuns."98

Year 1397, Nun Monkton Priory: Thomas Dalby, Archbishop of Richmond, ordered the nuns to wear no silk clothes or veils, furs, "nor rings on their fingers, nor tunics pleated, or with brooches."99

Year 1445, Goring Priory, from visitation report by an assistant to Bishop Alnwick:

And then, because my lord saw with the evidence of his eyes that the nuns do wear their veils spread out on either side and above their foreheads, he enjoined upon the same prioress in virtue of her obedience proffered that she shall wear and cause her sisters to wear their veils spread down to their eyes.100
Year 1440, Langley Priory, from visitation report to Bishop Alnwick:

Dame Joan Groby says that certain nuns do wear silken veils. Dame Cecily Pole wears silken veils against the constitutions, as is clear to the eye. Dame Margaret Fox wears silken veils on her head against the constitutions. ¹⁰¹

Year 1441, Ankerwyke Priory, from visitation report by Bishop Alnwick:

Also the Prioress wears golden rings exceedingly costly with divers precious stones, and also girdles silvered and gilded over and silken veils, and she carries her veil too high above her forehead, so that her forehead, being entirely uncovered, can be seen of all, and she wears furs of vair. She confesses the use of several rings and girdles and silken veils and the high carriage of her veils; she confesses also the use of furs of vair. ¹⁰²

Year 1441, Ankerwyke Priory, from Bishop Alnwick's injunctions:

And also that none of yow, the prioress ne none of the courte, were no vayles of sylke ne no syluere pynnes ne no grydles herneyesd wyth syluere or golde, ne no mo rynges on your fyngres then oon, ye that be professedy by a bysshoppe, ne that none of yow vse no lased kyrtes, but butoned or hole be fore, ne that ye use no lases a bowte your nekkes wyte cruycifixes or rynges hangyng by thayme, ne cappes astat obeowe your vayles. ¹⁰³

The list goes on and it is not difficult to recognize some of Madame Eglentyne's oddities of dress among those causing so much anxiety to the visiting dignitaries.
There is one other Chaucerian touch which enhances even further the subtle irony of the description of the Prioress's clothes, and it is the fact that it is an excellent example of what Wood calls satire by omission.¹⁰⁴ Here, as has been already noted above when discussing Madame Eglentyne's non-religious qualities, the audience's expectations are left unfulfilled and no explanations are given. "Because nuns were such familiar figures in both fourteenth-century life and literature, Chaucer could depend upon his readers to anticipate his statements to a degree,"¹⁰⁵ and one of the things a medieval audience--and a modern one too--would expect in a description of a nun's habit would be some mention of the color black, customarily the one chosen by religious women to signify their renunciation of the world. "Blackness" is taken by the Church as a mark of unworldliness:

When a girl is to be a nun, first she is clothed in black garments and her hair cut off. She disfigures her body on the outside in order that her spirit within may be beautiful and grow pure white, being filled with love of God.¹⁰⁶

This inner meekness and modesty, traditionally associated with the unpretentious black habit of a nun, does not seem, however, to be part of the spiritual attributes of the Prioress who, on the outside, does not look unworldly but stylish. There is no mention of black in her portrait but rather of other, brighter, more cheerful hues: her
eyes are "greye" and her mouth is "reed"; she carries a "coral" rosary decorated with "grene" gauds, and the brooch on it is "of gold ful sheene." All in all, says Wood, Madame Eglentynye could easily be accused of displaying what the Parson in his sermon calls an "outrageous array of clothyng," a sign of one of the two kinds of pride he condemns with equal force:

Now been the two maneres of Pride: that oon of hem is withinne the herte of man, and that oother is withoute . . . . But natheles that oon of these spes of Pride is signe of that oother, right as the gaye leefsel atte taverne is signe of the wyn that is in the celer. And this is in manye thynge: as in speche and countenaunce, and any outrageous array of clothyng. For certes, if there ne hadde be no synne in clothyng, Crist wolde nat so soone have noted and spoken of the clothyng of thilke riche man in the gospel.

As to first synne, that is in superfluitee clothyng . . . .107

If the Prioress is "good at imitating the right things to do and is much taken by the appearances of things she associates with the fashionable world,"108 then we might apply to her the words of Hugo of St. Victor—"exterior ergo superfluitas, animi muntiat vanitatem" ("Superfluity which appears exteriorly is an indication of the mind's vanity")109—as well as those others of the Parson's:

Now, as of the outrageous array of wommen, God woot that though the visages of somme of hem seme ful chaast and debonnaire, yet notifie they in hire array of aytir likerousnesse and pride.110
As much as disobedience, overindulgence was in violation of the Benedictine Rule which cautioned against "soft living"—delicias non amplecti"—an ancient injunction from the Bible issued by Jesus to his Disciples: "Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on." Madame Eglentyne, a prioress on a pilgrimage, wearing clothes more suited to a courtly lady than a nun carried "aboute hire arm" a rosary made of coral "gauded al with grene," an ornament that would have been more proper in the hands of a courtly lady than a nun since "coral rosaries seem to have been the fashion in aristocratic households." The collections of old wills often cited in Chapter One also contain references to coral rosaries left as legacies; for example, in the 1351 will of Thomas de Hoton, rector of the church of Kyrkesbymyspertone, the following item is included: "... lego domino Thomae de Bouthum j par de bedes de corall." By wearing such a fine and costly piece of jewelry the Prioress is once more violating a major principle of the Benedictine Rule's "trea subsidialis"—obedience, claustration and poverty—and her conduct is, therefore, highly reprehensible. Chaucer's detailed description of the rosary with its veiled reproach at such vanity is in the best tradition of the French satires on nuns reviewed in Chapter Two such
as Gilles Li Muisis' *Les Maintiens des nonnains*,\(^{115}\) where religious women are chastised for their improper attire and obvious lack of humility.

Chaucerian critics have expressed their concern over the Prioress's rosary for centuries. In his perceptive critical study on the Prioress's portrait, Wood remarks that Madame Eglentyne's rosary is not "an outer sign of inner devotion, but an outer sign of inner worldliness"\(^{116}\) and the words immediately bring to mind those from a passage in the "External Rules" section of the *Ancrene Riwle*: "If anyone wants to be seen, it is no great wonder if she adorns herself, but she who is outwardly unadorned for the sake of God's love, is dearer in His eyes."\(^{117}\) A religious woman must avoid all worldly conduct—"saeculiacitibus se facere alienum"\(^{118}\)—says the Rule of St. Benedict, yet the Prioress does not appear to follow this injunction. The result of such behavior is to emphasize the satiric implications of each small but highly suggestive detail of "the description of a nun who is not a nun."\(^{119}\) Attached to Madame Eglentyne's rich rosary there "heng a brooch of gold ful sheene" as if coral "bedes, gauded al with grene" were not already conspicuous enough "aboute hire arm." "Do not wear any ring or brooch,"\(^{120}\) says the author of the *Ancrene Riwle* in an echo of countless episcopal injunctions and almost
as if addressing the Prioress; religious women had apparently been unable to eschew worldly finery throughout the centuries as the complaint of this eleventh-century nun (the earliest on record) seems to indicate:

Fibula non perfruor, flammeum non capio, strophum assumerem, diadema superem, heu misella!--monile arripere sem si valerem, pelles et herminie libet ferre.

( I have no brooch to enjoy, can wear no bridal veil; how I'd long to put on a ribbon or a coronet--woe is me!--I'd get a necklace if I could, and wearing ermine furs would be lovely.)121

The Prioress does have a brooch, though, and a magnificent one too, with a crowned A, / And after AMOR VINCIT OMNIA" written on it according to the narrator, who ends thus the portrait of Madame Eglentyne with the most controversial of all Latin quotes in the whole Canterbury Tales. Ambiguous and provocative, the motto on the brooch was long ago traced to Virgil's tenth Eclogue, where the soldier-poet Gallus in the role of an Acadian shepherd bewails the loss of his love, Lycoris, said to have been a famous actress. "Omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori"--"Love conquers all: we too must yield to Love"122--writes the poet, and although in the early
Middle Ages the phrase had been associated with divine love, by the fourteenth century usage had restored to it its original Virgilian sense as Richard Schoeck points out. It is with this latter meaning that we find it in Gower's *Vox Clamantis*—"Thus love conquers everything"—in the chapter describing "the beauty of a comely woman, for lust of whom knights' hearts are ensnared" and also in the section of the *Roman de la Rose* where Venus sets on fire and overthrows the Tower of Shame. Here Virgil is quoted as saying, "Love conquers all, and we must cede to him." Did Madame Eglentyne know that she was the bearer of an equivocal standard and that, as a result, she would hover dangerously for all time between "caritas" and "cupiditas" in the minds of Chaucer's readers? If she did, then the poet's irony would become mordant rather than mild since he would be satirizing a deliberate and blatant defiance of Christian dicta. In the opinion of one critic, Madame Eglentyne may not have been a very discerning woman—could it be that not only her "smyling" but also her character was "ful symple"—and just as she did not know the implications of imitating courtly manners dictated by an old bawd in a French romance, she might have also ignored the "common-place erotic sense" of the Latin words. It is most improbable that she knew Virgil at all. We need only to
glance once again at some of the satires, the fabliaux, and the songs of previous chapters of this study to realize that probably no medieval author would have agreed with Lowes's now famous contention that in the Prioress we see "the delightfully imperfect submergence of the woman in the nun." A satirist such as Boccaccio, for example, seemed to think that "'the feminine' was not even imperfectly 'submerged in the ecclesiastical'," and in story after story of the Decameron he depicts a number of religious women who are prey to the same carnal appetites as other members of their sex. The same view is maintained in the "De Monialibus" section of the Speculum Stultorum where there is a harsh indictment of the "velatarum mulierum" of whom the author says:

Harum sunt quaedam steriles, quaedam parientes, Virginesque tamen nomina cuncta tegunt.

(Some bear no children, others do; and yet They hide it all beneath the virgin's name.)

It is actually quite fitting that the Prioress should have chosen such an equivocal motto for her brooch, since her rosary was made of a stone well known in the Middle Ages to possess a highly equivocal power. On the one hand, coral was believed to have a strong apotropaic power, that is, to ward off phantasms from the dark side of man's mind and their concrete embodiment in the devil and his demons, who continually tempt mankind to the sins of the flesh. This power belonged to coral
because, in its branching natural state, it took the form of Christ's cross, one of the most powerful apotropaic signs in the Middle Ages.\footnote{133}

This particular virtue of coral must have been known to Chaucer's audience through one of the most popular encyclopaedias of the fourteenth century, Vincent de Beauvais's \textit{Speculum Naturale}, a book with which the poet was obviously familiar for, as John Friedman points out, he mentions it in \textit{The Legend of Good Women} ("What Vincent in his Estoryal Myrour?," 1.307). In his encyclopaedia Vincent talks about the "moral properties" of coral ("daemonibus quoque terribilis est, et hoc forte, quia frequentor ramorum eius extensio modum crucis habet"\textsuperscript{134}), an account which he acknowledges finding in Thomas de Cantimpré's thirteenth century \textit{De Naturis Rerum}. Vincent's encyclopaedia would have been readily available to Chaucer's audience who could have also come across other reports of the gem's power in sermons, popular stories of saints lives and the like. An allusion to the protective power of coral certainly would not have been lost upon a reading audience who owed most of its magical, medical, and astrological lore to lapidaries and encyclopaedias.\footnote{135}

Furthermore, the red color of coral was possibly thought to render it doubly effective against demons and evil spirits which were supposedly turned off by the threads of red wool that people attached to valuable property.\footnote{136}
The tutelar powers of coral clearly made it an ideal substance for the rosaries of pilgrims and travelers who would naturally be exposed to even more dangers and temptations than those less adventurous souls who stayed home. The following portion of the "corale" entry in the Sloane Lapidary, a free translation of the early thirteenth-century Second Anglo-Norman Prose Lapidary seems to confirm the latter notion: "It geueth man a good beginning and a good ending what contry yt he taketh."¹³⁷ In the Peterboroug Lapidary, however, another property of coral is mentioned which, although beneficial to man's well being, in a way runs counter to the effects just mentioned above: "... whoso bere's his stone vpone him or one his fynger, he schal get love."¹³⁸ It is highly probable that Madame Eglenythe was acquainted with the popular lore associated with coral both as an apotropaic and an erotic charm since she seems to have had a certain knowledge of precious stones—she calls the young boy martyred by the Jews in her tale, "This gemme of chastite, this emeraude, / And eek of martirdom the ruby bright," (ll. 609-10).

There could have been, then, several reasons for the Prioress to carry "aboute hire arm" a rosary made of coral beads; we are left wondering. Once again, and with incomparable subtlety, one last detail in Chaucer's
portrait of Madame Eglentyne is magnified and turned by our own reaction to it into an element of delicate yet overpowering ambivalence in the finest tradition of medieval monastic satire. It is within this tradition that the figure of the Prioress as well as that of Doña Garoza must be viewed. The mixture of sympathy and antagonism so evident in the Spanish poet's presentation of the nun, enhanced by his unparalleled sense of humor and the vitality of his style, is also present in Madame Eglentyne's portrait, as we have just now seen. What gives the ambiguity surrounding the personality of the Prioress a quality of refinement that the portrait of Doña Garoza seems to lack is the subtlety of her creator's ironic touch. Working with the same basic elements provided by literary stereotypes hundreds of years old, the Archpriest of Hita and Chaucer drew the ambiguous portraits of two religious women who come alive before our eyes as full-fledged satirical characters in two extraordinary poetical works of the late Middle Ages.
FOOTNOTES


5Ibid., p. 650.


8For detailed information on the number of pilgrimages, their origin and history, see Louise de Sivry et M. de Champagnac, Dictionnaire géographique, historique, descriptif, archéologique des pèlerinages anciens et modernes, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez L'Éditeur, 1850-1859).

9Jusserand, p. 363.
10 Ibid., p. 367.


15 LBA, stanzas 1256 b,c d-1258. Future references to the original Spanish and the translation will be identified in the text by stanza number only. If another version of the English translation of LBA is used it will be indicated in a footnote.


20 Emil Lucci, History of the Renaissance, Chapter II: "Dante, Petrarch, Juan Ruiz and Chaucer" (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965), II, 34.


22 The Book of Good Love, p. 260, n. 27.


26 "El amor era un pecado, y lo que con él se relaciona objeto de vergüenza," Puyal y Alonso, p. 131. My translation in the text.

27 Elisha Kent Kane, "The Electedaries of the Archpriest of Hita," Modern Philology, 30 (1933), p. 264. For a detailed analysis of the passage, see ibid., pp. 263-66. The narrator had already demonstrated his acquaintance with aphrodisiacs in stanza 941 a,b as he wondered by which means Trotacentos had succeeded in obtaining a certain woman's love for him:

Si la enfeichizó o si l' dio atincar,
o si le dio rainela o l' dio mohalinar.

("Perhaps she gave my dame a philter,
aphrodisiac drug,
A brew of herbs or love's potion from
a magic jug.")

The electuary reads as follows:
Muchos letuarios dan a ellos: a las de vezes
dicitrón, codoñate e letuario de nueces,
e otros de más quantía—de çanahorias, rehezes,
emñían unas a otras, cada día, a vezes—;
comisada alixándria, con el buen diagnostante,
el diacitronabatis, ' con fino jingibrate,
mielrosoado, diacímno, diantosio, vadélante,
la rosata novela, que devía dezir ante;
adragea e alfenique, con el estomaticón,
e la garicofilata, con diamargaritón,
tríasándalis muy fino, con diasaturión,
que es para doñear preciado e noble don.

Sabet que todo açúcar allí anda ballonado:
polvo, terrón e candí, e mucho del rosado,
åçúcar de confites e açúcar violado,
e de otras muchas guisas que ya he olvidado.

("They minister a lot of compounds to their
lovers oft;
Sharp, pungent citrons, quince, and sometimes
pastes of kernels soft,
Of carrots vile, at which perhaps the ignorant
have scoffed;
And these they alternate with brews to be at all
times quaffed.

Of camphor and of cumin seed they mix a recipe,
Of compound ginger, lemon, honey, equal parts
in three;
Of brew with cinnamon and pink, rose-honey
tinctured tea,
Or with sharp spice and honey prime their gallants
for love's spree.

Sometimes they feed them dragon weed with sugar
for a coat,
Or mash of cloves and marigold which burns the
tongue and throat,
Or saffron and satyrion which sexual lust promote
And goad a man to go for women like a very goat.

All kinds of sugars with these nuns are plentiful
as dirt,
The powdered, lump, and crystallized, and syrups
for dessert.
They've perfumed sweetmeats, heaps of candy—
some with spice of wort—
With other kinds which I forget and cannot
here insert.

1334-1337

28. The Book of Good Love, trans. Rigo Mignani and
Mario A. di Cesare (Albany, New York: State University


30. See Chapter I, p. 36.

31. Translation by Mignani and di Cesare, p. 277.

32. Ibid., p. 281.

33. Lucki, p. 35.

34. Nevertheless,

one should never blind one's mind to
the fact that the numerous details of
the conventional gallant's physique
may actually have happened to apply
to Ruiz. . . . The graphic picture
of the Archpriest, therefore, is very
real just because it easily could but
perhaps never did resemble the actual
Juan Ruiz.

Elisha Kent Kane, "The Personal Appearance of Juan Ruiz,"
MLN, 45 (1930), p. 106.

35. "Un hombre para encandilar la imaginación de
cualquier hembra placentera o no." Luis Beltrán,
Razones de buen amor: oposiciones y convergencias en el
libro del Arcipreste de Hita (Fundación Juan March:

36. Translation by Mignani and di Cesare, p. 284.

106.
For a full analysis of the erotic implications of each one of the Archpriest's physical features, see Ibid., pp. 103-109.

See Chapter I, p. 53.

We may recall here that in the Council of Remiremont examined in detail in Chapter II, pp. 106-11 a vast assembly of nuns had decided that priestly lovers were far superior to any others.

LBA, p. 556. My translation.

For a brief but enlightening analysis of the troubadours' "good" and "false" love, see Francisco Márquez Villanueva, "El buen amor," Revista de Occidente, 2nd series, 9 (1965), pp. 269-77.

See Chapter III, p. 124.

See p. 191 above.

See note 41 above.


See Chapter I, pp. 43-45.


56 *The Rule of St. Benedict,* ed. Oswald Hunter Blair (New York: Fort Augustus, 1948), Chapter IV, p. 29. All subsequent references to the *Rule of St. Benedict* will be to this edition unless otherwise indicated.

57 Eligius, Bishop of Noyon and Master of the Mint to Dagobert I, was once asked by his sovereign to take an oath. When Eligius not only refused to swear but also began to weep, Dagobert was apparently convinced of his integrity and said that he would believe him without an oath. Hales* concluded that to swear by St. Eligius was therefore not to swear at all.


58 Wainwright, p. 37.

59 *The Rule of St. Benedict,* Chapter XLII, p. 113.


63 The Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter IV, p. 29.


69 Kevin S. Kiernan, "The Art of the Descending
Catalogue, and a Fresh Look at Alisoun," Chaucer Review,

70 "Chaucer's Prioress, Canterbury Tales, Prologue,
136: 'Ful semely after hir mete she raughte'," Notes

71 Ibid.

72 Mann, p. 129.

73 Bowden, p. 100.

74 Alan T. Gaylord, "The Unconquered Tale of the
Prioress," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science,
Arts and Letters, 47 (1962), p. 622. Gaylord points out
that the Squire is also described in terms taken from
The Romance of the Rose.

75 Ibid., p. 621.

76 St. Thomas Aquinas, The Summa Theologica,
trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London:
1-4, pp. 538-45.

77 Wood, p. 89.

78 See Regestrum Visitationum Archiepiscopi
Rothomagensis: 1248-49 ed. T. Bonnin (Rouen: Auguste
Le Brument, 1852), p. 73.

79 For centuries wastel bread was considered "a
superior wheat bread (presumably white), and such no
doubt was Chaucer's view of it." Kuhl, p. 303. For
more on "wastel bread," see Ibid., pp. 302-303.

80 Geofroi de Vinsauf, The Poetria Nova and Its
Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine, ed. and trans.
81 See ibid., pp. 44 and 46 for complete Latin and English text.

82 Ibid., p. 45.


86 Kiernan, pp. 1-16.

87 Ibid., p. 9.


90 Harper, p. 309.

91 Wood, p. 96.

92 There were so many manuscripts of the Riwle in Middle French, Middle English and Latin circulating in fourteenth-century England, that Chaucer was probably acquainted with at least some of the most conventional ideas.

94. Wood, p. 96.

95. I Corinthians, xi. 6.

96. The adverb "ful" meaning "very" is used eleven times in the portrait of the Prioress, and "the net result of all this 'ful'-ness is, if you will pardon the pun, fulsome," according to Chauncey Wood. The effect, he continues, is "overpraise" and "a subtle and very entertaining irony" (p. 90). "Fetys" or "fetis" means "cleverly fashioned, neat, elegant. Middle English Dictionary, ed. Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1964-1975).


99. Ibid., p. 123.


101. The reference is to archbishop Langton's constitution "Ad haec." "Decernimus ut moniales et ceterae mulieres divino cultui dedicate velum vel peplum sericum non habeant nec in velo acus argenteas vel aureas audeant deportare . . . . Et sola monialis consecrata deferat annulum, et uno solo sit contenta."

Ibid., p. 176.
"'Varium' or 'varia pellis' was, as its name implies, a variegated fur." ibid., p. 3.

Ibid., p. 8. See also V.C.H., York, III, 122 and 181.

Wood, p. 86.

Ibid., p. 83.


The Parson's Tale, I, 410 and 412.


The Parson's Tale, I, 429.


Friedman, p. 303. See The Book of Courtesy, p. 102: "Ladies with beads of coral and amber."

Testamenta Eboracensia (London: Surtees Society, 1936), IV, 54. See also the entries for 'bedes' and 'coral' in Middle English Dictionary.


119. Wood, p. 100.

120. The Ancrane Riwle, p. 187.


125. The Romance of the Rose, p. 454, l. 98.

126. Friedman, p. 303.

127. Wood, p. 98.


129. Mann, p. 41.

131. P. 84, ll. 2371-2400.


133. Friedman, p. 302.

134. Vincent de Beauvais, Speculum Naturale (Douai, 1624), Lib. VIII, lvii, p. 523; cited by Friedman, p. 304.

135. Friedman, p. 304.


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