

The Bad Behaviour of Friars and Women in the Medieval Catalan *fabliaux* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

Jerónimo Méndez

University of Valencia

Abstract

Medieval Catalan narrative works or *fabliaux* contain many examples of bad behaviour on the part of priests and particularly friars from mendicant orders (usually Franciscans and Dominicans). They perpetrate many deceptions in order to gain a sexual or monetary advantage over their victims and are portrayed as malicious mischief-makers and the protagonists of humorous and smutty stories. Women also feature in these either as deceived victims or as the perpetrators of deception, as they outwit their husbands in order to enjoy their own adulterous affairs.

The anti-clerical tales of Anselm Turmeda in his *Disputa de l'ase* [The Argument of the Ass] inspired by Boccaccio, the hilarious *Llibre de fra Bernat* by Francesc de la Via [Book of Friar Bernard], which contains stories similar in style to those of the *fabliaux* tradition, and the anonymous *Col·loqui de dames* [Symposium of Women], which is notably misogynist in tone (*Colloque of Dames*), are all fifteenth-century texts containing grotesque scenes which are a good source for studying some interesting aspects of humour in medieval literature. It is, however, important to keep in mind the true significance of these literary works: in all these examples of transgressive behaviour, there is no indication that the perpetrators of such extremely bad deeds will suffer any kind of punishment in the future; by negating the consequences of such deeds, these literary texts satirise the norms of moral behaviour.

The article reviews these Catalan works in order to demonstrate how bad behaviour is shown in the Romance narrative of the Late Middle Ages. In addition, it will relate some themes and characters to those found in Chaucer's works, in particular *The Canterbury Tales*. This highlighting points of contact between the Catalan and the English texts introduces new possibilities for the comparative research of the medieval comical culture.

Key words: Chaucer, Catalan narrative, medieval humour, bad behaviour, comical culture, *fabliaux*, *Canterbury Tales*.