

## Better than a sack full of Latin: Anticlericalism in the Middle Dutch *Dit es de Frenesie*

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### Abstract

This article offers the first substantial survey of the Middle Dutch satire *Dit es de Frenesie* since the work of C.P. Serrure in the mid nineteenth century. It contests much of the conventional wisdom surrounding *De Frenesie*, challenging the poem's usual classification as an early *boerde* or *fabliau*. Instead it is argued that the text is an experimental work, which blends together elements of several satiric traditions without committing itself to any one. The implications of this maneuver and others within the text are considered, revealing the poem's clear sympathy with the newly educated and articulate laity. *De Frenesie* itself is appended in both the original Middle Dutch and an English verse translation.

### Keywords

Middle Ages, medieval satire, complaint, comedy, poetry, anticlericalism, Low Countries, venality, reformist apocalypticism, *fabliau*

For critics in the Low Countries, the brief satire *Dit es de Frenesie* ('This is the Madness') is considered notable for two main reasons. On the one hand, it has been singled out as the earliest example of the *boerde*, a Middle Dutch off-shoot of the French *fabliau*. In Cornelis Kruyskamp's authoritative edition of the *boerden*, *De Frenesie* is hailed as 'kostbaar' or 'valuable' for being the first extant witness to the form.<sup>1</sup> The poem has also invited similar comments from Willy Braekman.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the poem has received notice for

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<sup>1</sup>) Cornelis Kruyskamp, *De middelnederlandse boerden voor het eerst verzameld* (s-Gravenhage, 1957), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>) *Medische en technische Middelnederlandse recepten. Een tweede bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de vakliteratuur in de Nederlanden*, ed. Willy L. Braekman (Ghent, 1975), pp. 9–10.

the astonishing virulence of its anticlericalism. Jan te Winkel, for instance, describes the piece as “remarkable for its tone of animosity towards the papacy,” while P.H. Moerkerken states that “the composer of the peculiar piece *De Frenesie* does not display the least respect” in his portrayal of the clergy.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of the present essay to examine the second of these features, and analyze the ways in which *De Frenesie* coordinates its attacks on the church. In particular, it will consider the wider currents of hostility the poem draws on, and what its usage of this material can reveal.

*De Frenesie* has survived in one imperfect and unsigned copy which is datable to 1313–1325 on the strength of its manuscript context.<sup>4</sup> Its manuscript, the so-called ‘Amsterdamsche handschrift,’ is now held at the Library of the Royal Academy of Sciences. This seems to have preserved a fragmentary version of the poem. Not only has damage all but deleted two lines of verse, but an unknown amount of text may be missing from the end. *De Frenesie* is the final item in the manuscript, and the last page of the codex is lost. The poem itself is anonymous, although there has been some speculation regarding its authorship. The nineteenth-century scholar C.P. Serrure suggested that it might be an early work of Heinric or Hein van Aken, thought to have composed a number of romances and courtesy books at the close of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Serrure based his attribution on the fact that the Amsterdamsche handschrift also contains an early Dutch translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, known as *Die Rose* (c. 1290), which is sometimes assigned to Van Aken. Yet despite this evidence, Serrure admitted that his theory was little more than “bloote gissing” or “naked conjecture.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the attribution of *Frenesie* to Van Aken has never gained wide acceptance. It has even been directly contested by W.J.A. Jonckbloet and Eelco Verwijs, who point

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Merkwaardig om den hatelijken toon tegen dat paepscap’: Jan te Winkel, *De ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, 7 vols. (Haarlem, 1922–1927), 2 (1922): *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde van Middeleeuwen en Rederijkerstijd*, p. 20; ‘De dichter van het zonderlinge stukje *Dit es de frenesie* heeft er tenminste niet veel eerbied’: P.H. Moerkerken, *De satire in de Nederlandsche kunst der middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam, 1904), p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> See Jan Willem Klein, “Het getal zijner jaren is onnaspeurlijk”. Een herijking van de datering van de handschriften en fragmenten met Middelnederlandse ridderepiek,’ *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 111 (1995), 7.

<sup>5</sup> See *Hein van Aken, Van den coninc Saladijn ende van Hughen van Tabaryen*, ed. P. de Keyser (Leiden, 1950).

<sup>6</sup> C.P. Serrure, *Vaderlandsch museum voor Nederduitsche letterkunde, oudheid en geschiedenis*, 5 vols. (Ghent, 1855–1863), 3 (1861): 59.

out that *De Frenesie*'s allusions to Coudenberge, Biesterveld, and Kempen place the author in North Brabant, whereas Van Aken had stronger ties to Flanders or the Rhineland.<sup>7</sup> The attribution is further complicated by the fact that Van Aken's authorship of *Die Rose* is itself insecure.<sup>8</sup> It therefore seems unlikely that the composer of *De Frenesie* can be identified with any certainty.

The poem itself takes the form of a *biecht* or literary confession.<sup>9</sup> It is delivered by a Dutch student at Paris while he is apparently in bed with a local prostitute. In the space of the poem's ninety-four surviving lines, the student relates the romantic misfortunes that drove him to school, his preference for pies and dice over books, and his difficulty in obtaining a profitable benefice. As the poem concludes he attempts congress with his bedfellow. Judging from the fruitlessness of this coupling, the girl and her client are equally inexperienced: "ende legt mi ouer dander side/ Mi dunct altenen dat ic ride/ also nv langes, also nv dwers" ("She lies over on my other side: I think she means that I should ride first one way, and then the other").<sup>10</sup>

Aside from these episodes, the poem's most striking feature is its satire against the church. The narrator weaves several complaints against ecclesiastic institutions into his speech. These are bitter and wide-ranging: the poem inveighs against consistory courts, systems of preferment, the ignorance of secular clerics, and the futility of academic learning. The attacks reach perhaps their highest pitch in the ambiguous declaration "paepscap es al loes": "the papacy contains nothing," or "the papacy is all void" (56). The very fact that no further explanation is given for this remark renders it all the more corrosive. A number of potential meanings are brought into play at once, as the poem does not specify whether its statement describes emptiness of virtue, wisdom, honesty, or even spiritual authority or divine sanction. Instead, it gestures towards all of these possibilities at the same time, without limiting itself to

<sup>7</sup> W.J.A. Jonckbloet, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde*, 2 vols. (Groningen, 1889), 2: *De Middeleeuwen*, p. 219; Hein van Aken, *Die Rose*, ed. Eelco Verwijs (Utrecht: H.E.S. Publishers, 1976), p. xxv.

<sup>8</sup> Dieuwke van der Poel, 'The *Romance of the Rose* and I: Narrative Perspective in the *Roman de la Rose* and its Two Middle Dutch Adaptations,' in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, ed. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 573–585.

<sup>9</sup> J.W. Muller, 'Reinaert-studiën. III. Aernout en Willem. B. Het dubbel auteurschap van Reinaert I A en B,' *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche taal- en letterkunde* 53 (1934), 163.

<sup>10</sup> Lines 91–94. For the text of *De Frenesie*, see appendix below. Subsequent line references appear in parentheses in the text.

one alone. Furthermore, the context in which this charge is made renders it even more piquant. It in fact serves as a mock-apology for the shady practice of embroiling low-ranking clerics in expensive lawsuits. The author argues that the curia needs to seize revenue from poor churchmen because it has no substance of its own:

Ic en behoude niet.  
 Dus es den menichgen gesciet  
 die sonder recht tsine verloes,  
 want dat paepscap es al loes. (53–56)

(I must walk away poor.  
 It's happened to many men before.  
 They found they'd lost everything,  
 For the papacy contains nothing.)

The irony of these lines drives home an unmistakable point. Corruption in the church is emphatically presented as indefensible: even an attempt to rationalize the pope's rapacity leads to further, more explosive charges. There is no secure ground on which current practices are based, as trying to find underlying validity only uncovers further layers of abuse. The poem, in short, is unequivocal in its condemnation of the "paepscap," a hostility it extends to the church as a whole.

For a number of decades, it has been customary to regard the poem's derogatory treatment of the clergy as singular, even eccentric. The observations of Moerkerken and Te Winkel epitomize this tendency, as they respectively describe the poem as "zonderlinge" and "merkwaardig," or "peculiar" and "remarkable." Nonetheless, such a view of the piece is misleading in many crucial respects. It would seem to imply that there is something exceptional, even unique, about the poem's satire, that it represents a marginal or individual set of criticisms. The opposite is in fact closer to the truth. Although the poem is in some respects unusual, the antipathies it registers are in every case highly typical. Each of the complaints it makes against the priesthood can be traced to a specific tradition of medieval satire or complaint against the church. Its arguments are, in other words, largely derivative. While the poem does use its material in interesting ways, the substance of its satire is in every case second-hand, taken from existing sets of tropes and accusations.

Perhaps the most obvious source of the poem's satire is the fabliau. Its classification as a *boerde* would already suggest some connection to this genre. Most of the extant *boerden*, such as *Vanden vesscher van Parijs* (c. 1475) or

*Ic prijs een wijf* (c. 1400), are translated directly from the fabliaux or related sources.<sup>11</sup> *De Frenesie* certainly follows many of the contours of the French form. Even a cursory glance reveals sufficient reference to “scatology, scattered body parts and sexual explicitness” for the poem to qualify as a fabliau.<sup>12</sup> From the opening claim that “menichgen, als hi slaept,/ sijn ers herde wide gaept” (“many people, while they are sleeping, their arses are widely gaping”), to its concluding episode of unsuccessful sexual acrobatics, the text seizes on the scandalous aspects of the fabliau with consistency and relish (5–6). Along similar lines, the very persona of its narrator seems to be imported from the fabliaux, and the older goliardic songs which underpin the French poems.<sup>13</sup> His poverty and lechery recall the archetypal “clers escoliers” found in such texts as *La Borgoise d’Orliens* or *Des trois Avugles de Compiengne*, while his appetite for gambling and wandering (“lopen”) are reminiscent of the ‘Confessio Goliae’ and similar pieces (44).<sup>14</sup> However, away from these fairly straightforward borrowings, the text also displays further traits of the genre. In particular, it shares the fabliau’s antagonistic relationship with higher discourses, especially the romance. From the start *De Frenesie* systematically inverts many romantic conventions. Its narrator complains of love-sickness, bemoaning that his love will “mi steruen daede” (“kill me dead”), although the metaphors he selects to describe his suffering are markedly more mundane than elevated: at one point he laments “ic worden ... graeu als ene catte” (“I have become ... as grey as a cat”), a simile that doubly undercuts his extravagant pining, suggesting homeliness on the one hand and animality on the other

<sup>11</sup> See Kruyskamp, *De middel nederlandse boerden* (see above, n. 1) pp. 100–108, 80–83; Germaine Dempster, ‘Some Old Dutch and Flemish Narratives and Their Relation to Analogues in the *Decameron*,’ *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 47 (1932), 923–948; Karel Eykman and Frederik Lodder, *Van de man die graag dronk en andere Middel nederlandse komische verhalen* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 32–47.

<sup>12</sup> Jerry Root, ‘The Old French Fabliau and the Poetics of Disfiguration,’ *Medievalia Et Humanistica* 24 (1997), 17.

<sup>13</sup> On the goliardic roots of fabliaux, see Edmond Faral, ‘Le fabliau latin au moyen âge,’ *Romania* 50 (1924), 321–385; Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and his World* (Rome, 1984), pp. 145–165.

<sup>14</sup> *Fabliaux et contes des poètes français des XI, XII, XIII, XIVe et XVe siècles*, ed. Etienne Barbazan and Dominique Martin Meon (Paris, 1808), pp. 161–168, 398–408; Archpoet, ‘Estuans intrinsecus,’ *Medieval Latin Lyric*, ed. by Penelope Rainey, 3 vols. (Bryn Mawr Pa., 1993), 2: 37–50. See Elizabeth Baldwin, ‘Chaucer, Medieval Drama and a Newly Discovered Seventeenth-Century Play: the survival of medieval stereotypes?,’ in *Farce and Farcical Elements*, ed. Wim N.M. Hüsken and others (Amsterdam, 2002), p. 89.

(17, 15).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he also allows boredom or self-preservation to overcome the “depression and self-abasement” that *amor hereos* usually induces.<sup>16</sup> He eventually leaves his mistress for the fleshpots of Paris, reflecting that “want hine dult algader niet/ die te haluen wege weder tiet”: “it is not foolish in any way if one turns back after halfway” (21–22).

Other high discourses are exposed to similar ridicule. The opening section of the text parodies the rhetorical exordium, reading as a sort of distorted *captatio benevolentiae*. The narrator claims that he works all night on his compositions, provided that he is not asleep, before comparing his verse to the “blaest” (“blasting”) of nocturnal flatulence (7). His work is therefore less divine inspiration and more earthly exhalation.<sup>17</sup> All of this clearly recalls the fabliaux, sharing in its commitment to “invert the proprieties of official culture.”<sup>18</sup>

What is more, the poem itself registers some degree of French influence. Although it is unlikely that the poem simply follows a French source, since many of its jokes rely on the narrator’s poor grasp of the language and would not be possible in a francophone text, its very title suggests some French inspiration. The word ‘frenesie’ is itself borrowed from French, and is not commonly used in Dutch. In fact, to this day some commentators are obliged to render it as the more familiar *waanzin*.<sup>19</sup> When this is added to the Parisian setting of the poem, and the incorporation of French phrases and idioms, it is clear that the piece demonstrates a firm connection to French comic literature.

Given the *De Frenesie*’s proximity to the fabliaux, it is tempting to see its attacks against the church as a natural extension of this kinship. After all, hostility to priests is a staple part of the fabliau tradition. Since the work of George Staintsbury it has been noted that the form consistently ‘lampoons’ the priesthood: Daron Burrows’s recent survey of the issue only reinforces this point.<sup>20</sup> In fact, a high proportion of surviving fabliaux display a marked

<sup>15</sup> On similar metaphors in the fabliaux, see Anne Elizabeth Cobby, *Ambivalent Conventions: Formula and Parody in Old French* (Amsterdam, 1995), p. 70. Compare also the ‘Estuans intrinsecus’ (see above, n. 14), pp. 21–24.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia, 1990), p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Herman Pleij, ‘Literatuur als medicijn in de late middeleeuwen,’ *Literatuur* 2 (1985), 30.

<sup>18</sup> Lillian M. Bisson, *Chaucer and the Late Medieval World* (New York, 1998), p. 257.

<sup>19</sup> See Pleij, ‘Literatuur als medicijn’ (see above, n. 15), 30.

<sup>20</sup> George Staintsbury, *The Flourishing Of Romance And The Rise Of Allegory* [Periods of

antipathy towards clerics. John Baldwin's examination of 50 fabliaux finds that no fewer than 23 contain scurrilous portrayals of the clergy.<sup>21</sup> Ivan Fonagy produces some comparable data, noting that around 70 texts out of 152 depict the priesthood as lechers, schemers or hypocrites.<sup>22</sup> This animosity also crosses over into the Dutch *boerden*. Several feature lecherous and stupid clerics, such as Willem van Hildegarsberch's *Vanden monick* (c. 1400) and the anonymous *Wisen raet van vrouwen* (c. 1399). A further example is *Een speel van drie minnen* (c. 1520), which features a priest and sexton pursuing the same woman, and ends in their mutual humiliation, closely following the fabliau *Constant du Hamel*.<sup>23</sup> There are at least some grounds, therefore, for linking *De Frenesie*'s anticlericalism with its foundation in the fabliau.

However, this conclusion is not without its problems. Although it is usually classified as a typical *boerde*, and even named as the initiator of this tradition, the fact is that *De Frenesie*'s relationship with the fabliau is not merely one of simple imitation. While the piece has a clear resemblance to the form, it does not completely or exclusively adhere to its parameters. In fact it demonstrates much the same difficulties as the handful of Middle English fabliau-texts, such as *Dame Sirith* and *De Interludium Clerico ad Puella*. Like them, it "shows the fabliau in the process of becoming theatre," since its structure seems more dramatic than poetic.<sup>24</sup> Like the English pieces, it appears to be intended for performance rather than private reading; the fact that it has an explicitly characterised narrator suggests that it should be played rather than simply recited. The incorporation of another brief speaking part, in the form of the prostitute's interjection, also implies a performative design. The poem therefore demonstrates the same features which move Keith Busby to brand *Dame Sirith* an atypical fabliau at best.<sup>25</sup> If anything, it looks forward to later traditions of

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European Literature 2] (London, 1897), p. 282; Daron Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest in the Old French Fabliaux: Anticlerical Satire and Lay Identity* (Bern, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago, 1994), pp. 252–255.

<sup>22</sup> Ivan Fonagy, *Languages Within Language: An Evolutionary Approach* (Amsterdam, 2001), p. 335.

<sup>23</sup> Ben Parsons and Bas Jongenelen, 'A Play Of Three Suitors: A Neglected Middle Dutch Version of the "Entrapped Suitors" Story (ATU 1730),' *Folklore* 119 (2008), 62–74.

<sup>24</sup> Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative In the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Keith Busby, 'Dame Sirith and De Clerico et Puella,' in *Companion to Early Middle English Literature*, ed. N.H.G.E. Weldhoen and H. Aertsen (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 67–78.

comic monologue in the Low Countries, such as the *tafelspeel* (“table play”) or *refereynen int zotte* (“refrain of foolery”), as much as it looks back to the fabliau.<sup>26</sup>

This discrepancy also has implications for the text’s criticism of the clergy. It is clear that *De Frenesie*’s anticlericalism does not simply replicate the ecclesiastic satire of the fabliaux. As Alison Williams notes, in the fabliaux ridicule of the clergy generally assumes one particular form. It is actively punitive, as the priest-figure is aggressively punished by the events of the narrative: “clergy ... usually meet their downfall in one of two ways: threatened or actual castration; or violent death.”<sup>27</sup> A particularly graphic instance of this is provided by the *Prestre crucifié*. In this story, a priest conceals himself from his mistress’ husband, a sculptor, by hanging his naked body from a cross in the man’s workshop: although the ruse is initially successful, the husband thinks the “coilles” or balls excessive for a figure of Christ, and consequently hacks them off.<sup>28</sup> Parallel events occur in the Dutch counterparts of such texts: the Dutch *Van den vos Reynaerde* (c. 1225–1275), for instance, contains a fabliauesque segment in which Tybeert the cat tears apart the “burse” (“purse” or “scrotum”) of a priest after finding him in bed with his maidservant.<sup>29</sup> As these examples make clear, fabliaux do not address corruption within the clergy in general terms, or as a cause for moral reflection or complaint. Instead, they treat abuse as the localised transgression of a single churchman, who is savagely penalised at the conclusion of the story.<sup>30</sup>

More importantly, fabliau satire also possesses its own peculiar behavioural code. In the texts, the standards which form the basis of judgment and attack have a highly distinctive character. As a number of critics have noted, the code at the centre of the fabliau is emphatically secular. In Larry Scanlon’s

<sup>26</sup> See Dirk Coigneau, *Refreinen in het zotte bij de rederijkers*, 3 vols. (Ghent, 1980–1983); Wim Hüskens, *Noyt meerder vreucht—compositie en structuur van het komisch toneel in de Nederlanden voor de Renaissance* (Deventer, 1987), pp. 100–105; *Veelderhande geneuchlijke dichtren, tafelspelen ende refereynen*, ed. E.J. Brill (Leiden, 1899); Herman Pleij, *Van schelmen en schavuiten* (Amsterdam, 1985); *Een nyeuwe clucht boeck*, ed. Herman Pleij (Muiderburg, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> Alison Williams, *Tricksters and Pranksters: Roguery in French and German Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> *The French Fabliau B.N. MS. 837*, trans. and ed. Raymond Eichman and John Duval, 2 vols. (New York, 1985), 2: 62–67.

<sup>29</sup> *Van den vos Reynaerde*, 1240–1295, ed. F. Lulofs (Groningen, 1983), pp. 114–116.

<sup>30</sup> On this point, see also R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 61–63.



summary, fabliaux “tend to be concerned with the politics of gender and class” rather than “ecclesiology.”<sup>31</sup> Melissa Furrow raises a similar point, observing that “sexual allegiances” provide the main precepts of these texts.<sup>32</sup> They are rooted in social and practical values: duties to one’s neighbours, respect for existing relationships, regard for the property of others. It is this set of implicit values that priests are accused of violating in the texts. Examples include *Du segretain moine*, in which a monk is beaten to death while pursuing the wife of a merchant, and *De Connebert*, in which a priest’s genitals are nailed to an anvil after his seduction of a blacksmith’s wife.<sup>33</sup> In either case, the clergyman is basically a trespasser into another’s domain, and receives punishment for this offence. But what is most significant here is the material that the fabliaux omit by appraising priests against such standards. They do not raise any religious or creedal objections to the clergy, and do not judge them against spiritual concerns or abstract virtues. Priests are punished for violating earthly ideals alone, not for crimes against their office.<sup>34</sup> In Norris Lacy’s phrase, the fabliaux are “anti-priest but not really anticlerical,” showing little interest in theological or doctrinal issues.<sup>35</sup>

The fabliau’s attacks on the church therefore follow a well-defined course. The main instrument of satire is physical violence, and the principles championed are lay and pragmatic. *De Frenesie*, on the other hand, does not adhere to this pattern in its own satire. Both the fabliau’s characteristic method of executing satire, and the behavioural code at its centre, are absent from the text. For instance, in the poem’s curious dream sequence, the narrator describes a calf becoming a cardinal, and dealing in pardons. This creature apparently owes its position to the fact that “het was sire suster kint”: “it was the pope’s sister’s son” (79). Here the charges go beyond the neighbourly respect demanded by the fabliaux. *De Frenesie* addresses curial nepotism, greed, and the sale of indulgences rather than simple social values. Moreover, the confusion of the human and animal here, with its strong hint of sexual transgression on the

<sup>31</sup> Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority and Power: The medieval exemplum and the Chaucerian tradition* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 163.

<sup>32</sup> Melissa Furrow, ‘Middle English Fabliaux and Modern Myth,’ *English Literary History* 56 (1989), 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Twelve Fabliaux: From MS F. Fr. 19152 of the Bibliothèque Nationale*, ed. T.B.W. Reid (Manchester, 1958), pp. 34–36; *Nouveau recueil de fabliaux et contes inédits des poètes français*, ed. M. Meon (Paris, 1823), pp. 113–123.

<sup>34</sup> See Burrows, *Stereotype of the Priest* (see above, n. 20), p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux* (New York, 1993), p. xviii.

part of the pope's "suster," adds a further dimension. It strongly suggests the church is offending against the natural order, transgressing the boundaries instituted by God himself. There is a sense therefore that the church is disrupting a divine scheme, rather than mere human convention. This is also quite at odds with the satire of the fabliau, with its focus on worldly practicality.

What is more, the way in which *De Frenesie* implements its satire differs from the rough-and-tumble of the fabliau's anticlericalism. The poem allows itself to pass direct comment on the abuses it cites, rather than drawing priests into episodes of vicious slapstick. For instance, instead of enmeshing the Bishop of Bremen in a narrative which concludes with his mutilation, the narrator reflects openly on his flaws as a judge: the bishop apparently "sal v te rechte houden," or "gives whatever verdict you want" (51). Owing to these factors, it is perhaps more accurate to regard *De Frenesie*'s usage of the fabliau as strategic. The fabliau is being used as little more than a stem on to which other satirical elements may be grafted. No doubt the author has chosen it for its generalised hostility towards the church, which is conducive to his own projects, but he is not bound to its form. The text is employing the fabliau simply as a frame in which other material can be arranged. In terms of its anticlericalism, the poem uses the fabliau only for its loose 'anti-priest' sensibility, rather than for its specific tactics or outlook.

In the main body of the poem, in fact, fabliau elements give way entirely to other satiric discourses. Here the poem begins to draw on several different forms of satire, using their characteristic idioms and modes of attack. One of the most conspicuous cases of this occurs in poem's attack on "symonien" or "simony." Complaining that he is likely to be cheated out of his stipend once he has secured it, the narrator remarks:

Soe leecht ment in de vouden  
 dat ic en behoude niet ...  
 Ende constu spreken geen latijn?  
 Ay here, een florijn  
 es daer beter, geloeft mi des,  
 dan een sac vol latijns es. (52–60)

(They'll twist my case back-to-front  
 So that I must walk away poor ...  
 Well, don't you understand Latin?  
 Aye, I do, my lord, a florin  
 Is much better, believe you this,  
 Than a sack full of Latin is.)

This brief sequence contains numerous echoes of Latin venality satire which, according to John Yunck, received its greatest impetus during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>36</sup> For instance, the final reflection that money is superior to Latin makes use of a device which occurs with great frequency throughout money satire. Such ironic comparisons are often created: the earlier poets refer to “lucre overcoming Luke, the mark outweighing Mark,” and to “the miraculous power of the cross of the coin.”<sup>37</sup> The same idea is dramatised in mock masses and parodic gospels, which literally “substitute money for God,” praising cash in place of Christ.<sup>38</sup> As Alexander Murray writes, such satires routinely claim that “money could do miracles,” as “what official doctrine predicated of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” was made to be “true of money.”<sup>39</sup> In issuing a comparable statement regarding the official language of the church, the Dutch poet alludes to this tradition. He similarly hints at “money’s appropriation of miracle and sacrament.”<sup>40</sup>

Further echoes of money-satire appear in the narrator’s suspicion that his case will be “twisted back-to-front” or “contorted.” The phrase used here recalls the commonplace that money has the ability to invert and distort, to “bring about the fraternization of incompatibles” in Marx’s phrase.<sup>41</sup> The opening lines of one thirteenth-century piece show this convention clearly: “The hand bearing bribes makes the scandalous holy ... the coin smoothes over sharpness.”<sup>42</sup> The suspicions of *De Frenesie*’s narrator strongly resemble the twisting action attributed to money here, also describing the reversal of “proper relations” and the conversion of “values” into their opposites.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> John Yunck, *The Lineage of Lady Meed: The Development of Mediaeval Venality Satire* (Notre Dame, 1963), p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Lucrum Lucam superat, Marco marcam praeponderat’: ‘Song on the Bishops,’ in *The Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Thomas Wright (London, 1839), p. 11; ‘Crucis denarii mira potentia’: ‘De Cruce Denarii,’ in *Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes*, ed. Thomas Wright (London, 1841), p. 223.

<sup>38</sup> Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin tradition* (Ann Arbor, 1996), p. 201.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), p. 76.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas G. Round, ‘Juan Ruiz and Some Versions of *Nummus*,’ in *The Medieval Mind: Hispanic Studies in Honour of Alan Deyermond*, ed. Ian Macpherson and Ralph Penny (London, 1999), p. 393.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T.B. Bottomore (New York, 1964), p. 192.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Manus ferens munerat/ pium facit impium ... nummus lenit aspera’: ‘De Nummo,’ in *Latin Poems* (see above, n. 37), p. 226.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern: Signs, Coins, and Bodies in the Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, 1999), p. 88.

Perhaps even more significantly, the general legal framework in which such complaints are usually framed is also maintained by the poem. This template seems to have been fixed by Bernard of Clairvaux's influential treatise *De consideratione* (c. 1148), which warns against "advocates and prosecutors who make profit out of evil," denouncing such figures as "followers of revenue" who "conceal their wealth from you."<sup>44</sup> Several later pieces follow Bernard's lead, also identifying the law as the arena in which money's power is most keenly felt. For instance, in the 1170s Walter of Châtillon states that "the coin commands all, frees plaintiffs, binds the just, captures and sets free," while an anonymous contemporary registers a similar complaint: "Where the coin speaks, it makes a muddle of the law."<sup>45</sup> The ease with which *De Frenesie* drifts between the law-courts, simony, and money stems from this tradition of Latin satire, and the links already established there.

The next important set of borrowings in the poem come from a form of writing defined as "reformist apocalypticism" by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton. While this comprises more of a mode or set of tactics than a firm tradition, particularly before the later fourteenth century, its vocabulary does leave a clear mark on *De Frenesie*. According to Kerby-Fulton, apocalypticism emerged as a distinct type of criticism in the twelfth century, with Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* (c. 1151) and Joachim of Fiore's *Expositio in Apocalipsim* (c. 1184) containing important early examples. Broadly speaking, the discourse operates by using prophecy to redress contemporary abuses. Apocalyptic texts forecast a particular future in order to upbraid the present, employing visionary language and imagery in order to criticise, condemn or ridicule the church as it currently conducts itself. As Kerby-Fulton summarises: "The state of the Church's religious orders or of one particular order or heretical group is nearly always at the heart of the apocalypticist's concern ... they handed down judgments on contemporaries, envisioned Church reform by brute force, and reacted indignantly to current political, social, and religious events."<sup>46</sup> In effect,

<sup>44</sup> 'Advocatos et procuratores, qui ex iniquitate quaestum faciunt ... sectatores lucrorum ... abscondant aes suum a te': Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Consideratione libri quinque ad Eugenium tertium*, I.xi, in *Sancti Bernard Opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq, C.H. Talbot and Henri Rochais, 8 vols. (Rome, 1957–1977), 3: 410.

<sup>45</sup> 'Nummus cunctis imperat/ Reos solvit, iustos ligat, impedit et liberat': Walter of Chatillon, *Moralische-Satirische Gedichte*, ed. Karl Strecker (Heidelberg, 1929), p. 110; 'Nummus ubi loquitur/ fit juris confusio': 'De Nummo,' in *Latin Poems* (see above, n. 37), p. 227.

<sup>46</sup> Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* [Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 7] (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 4–5.

this form of satire works by applying “characteristics that were expected to occur at the end of history to reform of the church.”<sup>47</sup>

*De Frenesie* evokes the apocalyptic mode in its concluding segment. After holding a brief discussion with the prostitute character, the narrator begins to describe a dream he has had. He claims to have seen “een calf singen messe” (“a calf singing Mass”) which later became a cardinal at Rome, where it had a lucrative career “vercochte om gelt pardoen,” “hawking pardons” (81). This is followed by a vision of a priest in Kempen, who remains strangely indifferent as a child he is baptising is transformed into a goat: he merely continues “dattie dinc bet vore,” or “thinking all he’d thought before” (87). Aside from the fact that this sequence occurs within the visionary framework of a “drome,” other details link it to prophetic literature. Much of the material here contains biblical resonances. The lucrative calf that proves “den paeus willecome” (“to the pope most welcome”) not only suggests the golden idol of Exodus 32,4–35, which leads the Israelites into a “heinous sin” to be paid for “in the day of revenge,” but also evokes similar creatures in the prophetic books (78).<sup>48</sup> The teleology of the New Testament is also echoed here. The coincidence of the goat and calf recalls the Epistle to the Hebrews, mirroring its description of the future salvation secured by Christ’s sacrifice: “But Christ, being come an high Priest of the good things to come ... neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption.”<sup>49</sup> The fact that the narrator has witnessed what the author of Hebrews specifically rules out adds to the sense of catastrophe, as ‘things’ in the vision drift badly away from the ‘good’ promised here. Such use of biblical prophecy is wholly consistent with the apocalyptic rhetoric Kerby-Fulton describes. Like other examples of this strategy, *De Frenesie* is attempting “to fit the present time and coming periods of time into a pre-eschatological pattern,” and is doing so for satiric ends.<sup>50</sup>

The manner in which the poem shapes its satire in the dream sequence is also in line with apocalyptic writing. In design this section resembles the most overtly critical of such texts. In particular, it recalls William of St Amour’s *De periculis novissimorum temporum* (1256), the work which initiated an entire

<sup>47</sup> E. Randolph David, ‘Abbot Joachim of Fiore: a reformist apocalyptic,’ in *Fearful Hope: Approaching the New Millennium*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz and Fannie LeMoine (Madison, 1999), p. 207.

<sup>48</sup> See for instance Hos. 14,2; Mal. 4,2; and Apoc. 4,7.

<sup>49</sup> Heb. 9,11–12.

<sup>50</sup> Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism* (see above, n. 46), p. 9.

tradition of antifraternat satire.<sup>51</sup> In this work, William listed a series of thirty-nine “signa” by which the “pseudo-praedicatores” or “false apostles” of the Antichrist will make themselves known. These portents strongly suggest the behaviour of the friars, even if this is never openly stated: William’s false apostles are “penetrantes domos” and “gyrovagi,” or “stealers into homes” and “aimless wanderers,” charges which resemble the general practices of the mendicants.<sup>52</sup> Such a marriage of cosmic upheaval and caricature of the church is comparable to the dream sequence of *De Frenesie*, with its own bewildered priest, grasping pope, and sense of forthcoming doom. The role allocated to the church in this turmoil is also similar in both texts. Unlike more serious-minded prophecies, both works implicate the church in the collapse of the existing order, not in the new order that will emerge from it. William’s fraternal “lupi graves” or “ravening wolves” are catalysts of Armageddon, as they herald the arrival of Antichrist. In much the same way *De Frenesie*’s clerics are aligned with chaos: the pope directly colludes with the singing calf, raising it to the level of cardinal, while the brainless Kempen priest is unable to recognise the disintegration at his fingertips, and therefore unlikely to challenge it. Both texts place the church on the side of destruction, rather than the life everlasting that will survive the disorder.

However, despite these echoes of Latin satire, it is also interesting to note that the author adapts his sources in subtle but pivotal ways. The poet had no hesitation in modifying the themes he inherited, often contradicting the central thrust of his material by his revision. For instance, his deployment of venality satire forces a new shape on to the form’s conventions. Although *De Frenesie*’s accusations owe much to money-satire, it is a curious fact that money itself receives scant mention. Only at the end of this embedded episode does the poem refer to any form of cash at all, in the form of “a florin” (58). Instead, the poem’s attention is fixed on simony and the anticipated trial itself. In other words, it is less interested in money and more inclined towards the actions that money facilitates and influences. This represents a fairly radical break with the Latin poems which the Dutch writer is imitating. It is more common for money satires to present money as an absolutely independent

<sup>51</sup> See Arnold Williams, ‘Chaucer and the Friars,’ *Speculum* 28 (1953), 499–513; Penn R. Szitty, ‘The Antifraternat Tradition in Middle English,’ *Speculum* 52 (1977), 287–315; Penn R. Szitty, *The Antifraternat Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, 1986). Kerby-Fulton discusses *De periculis* in *Reformist Apocalypticism* (see above, n. 46), pp. 133–161.

<sup>52</sup> William of Saint-Amour, *De periculis novissimorum temporum: a critical edition*, ed. Guy Geltner [Dallas Medieval Texts 8] (Paris, 2008).

agent, which directs and commands all other beings. In fact, to literalise its agency, it is often converted into such authoritative personifications as Dan Denier, Regina Pecunia, Nummus or Dominus Denarius.<sup>53</sup> *De Frenesie* effectively repersonalises this form of satire: it tacitly rejects the notion that money is an actor in its own right, with power over human action. By dissolving a fiction prevalent in the Latin satire, it succeeds in reasserting human responsibility for the effects of money. The poem is concerned with performers of sin, rather than the object of wrongdoing. It refuses to let corruption be separated from specifically human actors and be regarded as an agency in itself, even in ironic play.

Similar changes are evident in the poem's treatment of apocalyptic complaint. Here the text forces the mode to undergo revisions that are no less critical. Just as its money satire does not focus on money, its vision is not in fact prophetic. Although couched in the language of prophecy, with several allusions to scripture, the narrator's dream sheds any pretence of forecasting the future. When the narrator recounts his dream, he gives no impression that the events he has seen are about to happen: the entire episode is phrased as though it was directly witnessed by the dreamer. He has no expectation that his vision will eventually come to fruition, but treats it as though it occurred as he dreamed it. The poem thus dispenses with the usual rhetorical stance of this form of protest. Although Kerby-Fulton's apocalyptic writers are also concerned primarily with the here and now, *De Frenesie* avoids the customary circumlocutions they assume. It does not shift its focus from the contemporary by mediating its critique through a projected future, but keeps its gaze trained on the current time. The poet again strips away a device habitually deployed by the form he inherits, much as he does with venality satire.

There is also a third alteration at work in the poem, which is perhaps the most important that the author introduces. This is simply the fact that various forms of anticlerical satire are collected together in a single work. The assemblage of material from the fabliau, the venality satire and apocalyptic complaint also marks a level of innovation on the part of the author. Unlike the texts which *De Frenesie* imitates, the poem is not approaching the genres of medieval satire as self-enclosed frameworks, which are to be inhabited to the exclusion of one another. Instead it takes a broader view, seeing them not as discrete forms, but as a range of devices which are combinable into a single attack.

<sup>53</sup> See *Latin Poems* (see above, n. 37), pp. 355–359; John A. Yunck, 'Dan Denarius: the Almighty Penny and the Fifteenth Century Poets,' *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 20 (1961), 207–222.

This is not to say that the poet is completely successful in deploying the various elements he draws on. There is a clear tension at work in *De Frenesie* between the different forms of satire it contains. Especially problematic is its dependence on the persona of the lecherous and lazy student, drawn from the fabliau, and earlier goliardic verse. Using this mouthpiece presumably serves to legitimate the poem's attacks, as it exploits the dispensation conventionally awarded to foolish speakers: the same device would be used two centuries later in another work of satire from the Low Countries, Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium*. Nonetheless, in the case of *De Frenesie* the student persona impedes as much as it liberates, depriving some assertions of their full force. This becomes most conspicuous during the prostitute's interjection. It is at this point that the only explicit moralisation in the poem occurs. The girl issues the proverbial statement "Ki bien fra bien ara" or "who does good will receive good" (69). The narrator is not equipped to understand this simple moral precept. All he knows is "hets walsch dat gi spreect" ("it is French you have spoken"), and begins to complain that the prostitute has disturbed his sleep with her "clapt" or "clattering" (71, 89).

On the one hand, this is a clear joke at the narrator's expense, which extends the general anticlerical thrust of the poem. The point seems to be that his learning and his residence in France, which is supposed to install him into the church as an intermediary between layman and God, has left him unable to decode even a plain statement of how virtue is to be attained. However, this moment also serves to mark the limits of his power as a satiric persona. It is interesting to note that his inability to understand the prostitute's French is not consistent with his performance elsewhere. At other points in the poem he boasts of his fluency with French culture and language, as he bets "cinq contre six" at the dice-table, and knows how to cook with garlic (30). This inconsistency calls attention to the contradictory role that *De Frenesie* forces him to play. On the one hand, he is a preacher, a revealer of moral truths, attacking the papacy for its emptiness, and the prevalence of simony in the church; on the other he is a *cler escolier*, an amoral goliard who regards "life as a quest for sensual gratification," and whose commitment to "obmittamus studia ... et carpamus dulcia" ("throwing away study and seizing pleasure") leaves him incapable of comprehending direct moral pronouncements.<sup>54</sup> Just as

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<sup>54</sup> Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, 'Cecchi and the Reconciliatio of Theatrical Traditions,' in *Drama in the Renaissance: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York, 1986), p. 140; *Les poésies des Goliards*, ed. Olga Dobiache-Rojdesvensky (Paris, 1929), p. 229.



his French suddenly fails him when he encounters a piece of direct exhortation, his ability to use the language of satire is only partial: it founders before the ethical implications of its arguments. The full meaning of his attacks on the papacy and simony are not only never spelled out, but never can be, owing to constraints imposed by their speaker, who is better suited “to overturning the hierarchy of vice and virtue” that demanding its renovation.<sup>55</sup> The poem’s foundation in the fabliau results in a figure that cannot claim the moral sanction that his forceful denunciations demand. What remains therefore is an uneasy tension between vigorous attack and playful irony. The collage of different strands of satire generates friction in the text, as the forms of text carry differing levels of gravity in their propositions.

Nonetheless, the very fact that *De Frenesie* makes an attempt to coordinate disparate material in a single text is revealing. This manoeuvre suggests that the text is trying to articulate a new position or set of concerns, one which is not covered by existing satiric discourse. The ease with which it moves between different traditions, and the freedom with which it incorporates material from each one, suggests that it has no strong affinity with any one of them. It is able to bring these forms of satire together because it is outside the scope of any one of them, viewing each one from a point beyond its framework.

This in turn suggests that it is not pinned to the particular set of interests or concerns demonstrated by Latin satire. As is well-known, most Latin satire composed against the church is marked by its specificity. The various traditions of medieval Latin anticlericalism tend to be based in particular conflicts and positions. As John Van Engen writes:

Whenever a religious movement attained an institutional status surpassing and threatening the privileges of others ... satire commonly sprang up ... so it was with Cluny ... then with the Roman curia as it centralised law ... then with the Cistercians as their economic power built up ... then with the mendicant friars.<sup>56</sup>

Most forms of Latin satire are therefore situated in larger disputes or feuds, involving one order within the church against another. The Latin forms that *De Frenesie* calls on are no exception to this rule. Venality satire seems to owe its existence to the Investiture Controversy, while the satiric vein of apocalypticism

<sup>55</sup> Fabian Alfie, *Comedy and Culture: Cecco Angiolieri's Poetry and Late Medieval Society* (Leeds, 2001), p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> John Van Engen, ‘Late Medieval Anticlericalism: the case of the new devout,’ in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman [Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 51] (Leiden, 1993), pp. 19–20.

arose out of the conflict between mendicants and seculars at Paris in the 1250s.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the satiric forms that *De Frenesie* inherits took shape in definite tensions, taking aim against specific targets for specific ends. As a result of this, they have predetermined sympathies, being intended to defend the claims of one order against its opponents. Each one is designed to impute a set of charges against a particular group, while championing the order or party which issued it.

The fact that *De Frenesie* is able to gather several types of Latin satire into a broader, more miscellaneous attack suggests that it is informed by quite different sympathies. It does not have to remain within the generic limits of any particular tradition since it has no affinities to any of the priorities they express. It may call on all of them freely because it stands outside all equally. This in turn reveals something about the position in which the poem is situated: a position which, in some respects, resembles the “new anticlericalism” Wendy Scase identifies in late fourteenth-century poetry.<sup>58</sup> The fact that the poem’s attacks are far-reaching and contain no endorsement of any particular group firmly suggests that the poem is issued from, or at least manages to draw on or otherwise register, a lay standpoint.<sup>59</sup> Its ability to see the church as a single structure, and not a collection of contending positions, suggests that it is stationed outside the priesthood. It can treat the clergy as a single broad target since it is not anchored to any point within the church.

Its other modifications are certainly consistent with this stance. The poem’s revisions of Latin satirical forms display similar commitments. For instance, its refusal to make money the direct target of complaint, even as it follows the idioms of venality satire, have similar implications. By moving its attention away from money as a supposed actor, and towards the actions it facilitates, *De Frenesie* emphatically makes the church the focus of its attacks. The poem does not escape into the fantastic belief that money itself is an autonomous director of sin, and instead stresses the role of the priesthood themselves as the perpetrators of corruption. The poem is therefore not interested in localising ecclesiastic greed, in pinning it down to an abstract cause inside the church:

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<sup>57</sup> Pascale Bourgain, ‘The Image in Rome in Literature: Anti-Roman Satire,’ in *The Papacy: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philippe Levillain and John W. O’Malley (London, 2002), p. 750; Williams, ‘Chaucer and the Friars’ (see above, n. 51), p. 501.

<sup>58</sup> See Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge, 1989); Wendy Scase, ‘Satire,’ in *Medieval England: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and others (New York, 1998), pp. 665–667.

<sup>59</sup> See also Herman Pleij, *Het gevleugelde woord* (Amsterdam, 2007), p. 424.

instead it implicates the church itself as a whole in its attacks. It is taking a broader view, disregarding details and subtleties in favour of attacking the church more even-handedly and comprehensively. Again, the form of satire that *De Frenesie* deploys seems to show marked sympathies with the laity. It addresses the clergy from outside its parameters, coalescing it into a single group, rather than concentrating on only one limited point.

The poem's alterations of the prophetic tradition follow much the same course. Removing any teleological elements from the vision section produces a comparable effect. Usually the satire of apocalyptic literature relies on its predictive intention. The texts generally satirise their targets by promising them some future recompense: hence Bridget of Sweden foresees that judges "will fry in the hottest pan" while Langland vows that "þe abbot of engelond and the abbesse his nese/ Shal haue a knok on vppon here crounes."<sup>60</sup> By turning away from the future as a whole, *De Frenesie* is ignoring such penalties, directing its focus away from retribution. What the poem is doing, therefore, is concentrating on the church as a subject rather than an object. It is not concerned with what will happen to the church later, but with what the church itself does in the present. It focuses on the priesthood as a performer rather than a prospective victim. This in turn suggests that the church is seen here as an active or functional institution. The poem has no interest in the identity or destiny of the priesthood, only in the actions it implements. This again seems to reveal a lay position underpinning the poem. The laity would naturally regard the church in terms of the roles it performed. As A.R. Myers writes, medieval laymen saw "the clergy as only one profession among others": it was for them a pastoral or ministerial structure primarily, designed to carry out rituals, services, and other such duties, for the benefit of its public.<sup>61</sup> *De Frenesie*'s emphasis on what the church does, rather than what the church experiences, is in keeping with such a point of view. The poem again appears to stand outside the ecclesiastic structure.

In sum, the manner in which *De Frenesie* uses its satire suggests a basic affinity with the laity. The fact that it is free to draw on several different forms of satire places it outside the priesthood, while the revisions it introduces inject distinctly secular concerns into the material it borrows. What *De Frenesie* therefore represents is the emergence of a sense of moral authority within the

<sup>60</sup> *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. and ed. Denis Searby and Bridget Morris, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2006), 1: 156; William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the C version*, V.176–177, ed. George Russell and George Kane (London, 1997), p. 92.

<sup>61</sup> A.R. Myers, *England in the Late Middle Ages: 1307–1536* (Harmondsworth, 1959), p. 68.

laity, one which is sufficiently well-established to confront the church directly, and broach subjects that had previously been confined to clerical discourse alone. Even if the poem is not entirely secure in exercising this authority, cloaking its assertions in self-effacing play and ribaldry, it is at least sufficiently certain of itself to deploy complaint in a vernacular text. At the very least, it shows a clear willingness to critique contemporary abuses and ridicule wayward clerics.

This lay confidence is something of a new development in satire. Although the fabliaux had been able to criticise the priesthood while drawing on recognisably lay values, this was at the expense of doctrinal or ecclesiological engagement: in the words of V.A. Kolve, “transcendental meaning and spiritual destinies” had little place in the “fabliau system.”<sup>62</sup> *De Frenesie* on the other hand comfortably directs its attention towards moral and ethical issues, even if it does not entirely transcend the remits of fabliau. There is underlying the poem, then, a sense that the laity do have a religious awareness that may be legitimately voiced, that commentary on such matters is not the exclusive province of the priesthood. That this position should have existed in the Low Countries at the beginning of the fourteenth century should not surprise us. Since the late twelfth century various popular movements had proliferated in the area, such as the beghards, the beguines, and the urban fraternities that would develop into the Chambers of Rhetoric.<sup>63</sup> The laity of the region were therefore relatively well-educated and informed, having sufficient knowledge of religious affairs to involve themselves in them directly. In fact by the time that *De Frenesie* was written Flanders had already produced one vernacular author who showed a similar willingness to criticise the church: Jacob van Maerlant’s *Van den Lande van Oversee* (c. 1291) angrily denounces a range of contemporary abuses in its reflections on the loss of Acre.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, 1984), p. 214.

<sup>63</sup> Wim Husken, ‘Civic Patronage in Early Fifteenth-Century Religious Drama in the Low Countries,’ in *Civic Ritual and Drama*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Wim N.M. Husken (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 107–123; Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia, 2003); Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge, 2005); Herman Pleij, ‘The Rise of Urban Literature in the Low Countries,’ in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context*, ed. Erik Kooper (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 62–80.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob van Maerlant, *Van den lande van ouer zee*, ed. Garrit Stuiveling (Amsterdam, 1967).

It is this background of growing lay subjectivity that the poem channels and reflects, as the ideas it uses in its attacks are made possible by these conditions. Consequently, *De Frenesie* should be regarded first and foremost as a significant step in the progression of anticlerical satire in Northern Europe, rather than an isolated text or a mere reprisal of fabliau forms. It is an important witness to the emergence of a lay religious awareness, and of a critical sensibility within this. Although its chosen persona stands on the margins of the priesthood, in minor orders awaiting a lucrative benefice, the poem's position outside the church is more important than the narrator's desired entry into it.

### Appendix

#### Dit es de Frenesie – This Is The Madness: a verse translation

From Cornelis Kruyskamp, *De middelnederlandse boerden voor het eerst verzameld* ('s-Gravenhage, 1957), pp. 96–99.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Het dich[t] al dat lepel lect:<br/>waendi dat ic bem vergeet,<br/>dat ic oec niet dichte ende make,<br/>des nacht als ic niet en vake?<br/>5 menichgen, als hi slaept,<br/>sijn ers herde wide gaept<br/>ende blaest als ene bosine.<br/>Ay ute vercorne fine!<br/>des es leden menichgen dach,<br/>10 dat mi v minne int herte lach,<br/>ende gine wilt mijns niet ontfarmen.<br/>Dicken hebbedi doen verwarmen<br/>mijn herte ende gemaect cout;<br/>om v bem ic worden out<br/>15 ende graeu als ene catte,<br/>ende gine achtet dit no datte.<br/>ocht v minne mi steruen daede,<br/>wie soude mi betren die scaede?<br/>Lachtijns, maecti v sceren,<br/>20 So willics mi af keren,<br/>want hine dult algader niet<br/>die te haluen wege weder tiet;<br/>anders waric in dole.<br/>Nv liggic te parijs ter scole<br/>25 ende bem daer een student.<br/>Selden coemt mi boec in die hant,<br/>maer ic lere ontginnen pasteiden;</p> | <p>Rhyming is like eating with a spoon:<br/>Do you think that I'm a buffoon,<br/>That I do not rhyme, or poems make<br/>During the night, if I'm awake?<br/>5 Many people, while they are sleeping,<br/>Still have their arses widely gaping<br/>And blasting away like a bugel.<br/>Ah, my chosen one, finest jewel!<br/>There has been, alas, many a day<br/>10 When love for you in my heart lay,<br/>But you refused when I entreated.<br/>Several times you have heated<br/>My poor heart, then made it cold;<br/>Because of you I have grown old<br/>15 And I am as grey as a cat,<br/>But you don't give a this or that.<br/>If my love would kill me dead,<br/>Who would see my pain repaid?<br/>Laughing, you will mock my heart,<br/>20 Because of this I shall depart,<br/>It is not foolish in any way<br/>If one turns back after halfway;<br/>If I did not, I'd be a fool.<br/>Now I lie in Paris at school<br/>25 For I'm a student in that land.<br/>A book rarely comes near my hand,<br/>More about cutting pies I learn;</p> |
|---|---|

- bem ic dan ter quader weiden,  
es een quaet dorp dan parijs?  
30 ic wedde sinc contre sijs,  
nochtan eysch ic toe twee aes:  
die seide dat ic ware .i. dwaes,  
hine ware mi niet willecome.  
Alsic dan weder thus come,  
35 so bem ic meester vander arten  
ende wille eten vleesch ende tarten  
ende hebbe gewonden den croec.  
Ic soude node stoeten een loec,  
maer ic songe wel een montet.  
40 Int leste hebbic an een net  
ende bem een everardijn.  
Ic dronke gerne goeden wijn,  
maer ic en weet waermet copen,  
dus moet ic achter lande lopen  
45 te minen moyen, te minen maegen,  
die mijn ongheual luttel claegen.  
so hebbic die prouende met ghewelde  
tusschen couden berge ende biestervelde;  
so coemt een ander ende wilse mi nemen:  
50 gaet ten biscop van bremen,  
hi sal v te rechte houden.  
Soe leecht ment in de vouden  
dat ic en behoude niet.  
Dus es den menichgen gesciet  
55 die sonder recht tsine verloes,  
want dat paepscap es al loes.  
Ende constu spreken geen latijn?  
Ay here, een florijn  
es daer beter, geloeft mi des,  
60 dan een sac vol latijns es;  
dit coemt al bi symonien.  
Nv willic scone vrouwen vrien  
ende moet gelt kosten mede  
al [...]  
65 mi bliv[...]  
die duuel soude mi bet hebben  
want ic bem al sonder goet  
ende ligge onder voet  
Ki bien fra bien ara.  
70 Waendi dat ic niet en versta?  
Hets walsch dat gi sprecht.  
Gi hebt mi vten slape gewect,  
wel leede moete v gescien!
- Have I taken a wrong turn,  
Is this the wrong place, Paris?  
30 At the dice I bet *cinq contre six*,  
Holding two aces in reserve:  
Call me a fool, if you have the nerve  
But my welcome you'll never know.  
When back to my home I go,  
35 I will be a master of arts  
And I will dine on meat and tarts  
And in curls I'll wear my hair.  
Garlic dishes I'll prepare,  
And I will sing a proper motet.  
40 At the worst I'll wear a net  
And become a mendicant friar.  
I drank good wine in times prior,  
But no-one now buys drinks for me,  
So through all lands I'll wander free  
45 To my aunts and relatives,  
I complain how little fortune gives.  
I'll wield my prebend, keen and bold,  
Between Wasteland and Mount Cold;  
If anyone tries to take it away,  
50 Bremen's bishop he must sway,  
Who gives whatever verdict you want.  
They'll twist my case back-to-front  
So that I must walk away poor.  
It's happened to many men before.  
55 They found they'd lost everything,  
For the papacy contains nothing.  
Well, don't you understand Latin?  
Aye, I do, my lord, a florin  
Is much better, believe you this,  
60 Than a sack full of Latin is;  
From simony all this grew.  
Now I want a sweet girl to screw  
And that will cost me money  
All [...]  
65 It stays [...]  
The devil has a tight grip on me.  
Because fine goods I wholly lack,  
I lie at the bottom of the stack.  
*Qui bien fera bien ira.*  
70 You think I don't hear? You're in error.  
I know it's French you have spoken.  
And my sleep you have now broken,  
You'll be sorry, of that be sure!

Ic hebbe in minen drome gesien  
75 een calf singen messe  
en kende lettren niet sesse,  
ende het wert cardinael te rome  
ende was den paeus willecome,  
want het was sire suster kint  
80 dus es die werelt nv gescint het  
vercochte om gelt pardoen  
Ic sach een kint kerstin doen  
van enen pape in kempin lande,  
ende onder des papen hande  
85 so wort dat kint een geet.  
hine gauer niet omme enen dreet  
dattie dinc bet vore.  
Wat wijt mi dese hoere?  
Si clapt mijn hoeft ontwee!  
90 deus, mi es herde wee!  
ende legt mi ouer dander side.  
Mi dunct alenen dat ic ride  
alse nv langes, alse nv dwers,  
op eens graeus moencs ers.

In my dream I clearly saw  
75 A calf sing the Eucharist  
It could not read, or get the gist,  
It became a cardinal in Rome  
And to the pope was most welcome,  
Because it was his sister's son  
80 This world is a shameful one  
It hawked pardons in my vision.  
I next saw a child's baptism  
By a priest in the Kempen lands,  
And right there in the priest's hands  
85 Into a goat the poor child turned.  
The priest cared not a fart, unconcerned  
He just thought all he'd thought before.  
What is she prattling now, this whore?  
She splits my head with her nonsense!  
90 Deus, the pain is most intense!  
She lies over on my other side.  
I think she means that I should ride  
First one way, and then the other,  
Up the arse of a Franciscan brother.

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