

THE GARB OF MEDIEVAL SATIRE

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Medieval satire was directed mainly at the ill practices in the society. As the society was perceived in fixed classes with fixed functions forming a whole, with various duties distributed to certain sects, satire took the form of an 'estates satire'. In the medieval context 'estate' implied status, standing, position in the world, degree of rank and occupation. It was used to group the society with reference to the occupations and the social standing of the constituents. In such a classification women formed a separate class and a further sub-classification according to their marital status, that is, as maid, wife, and widow was possible. The perception of the society in various sub-groups, as the estates led to the criticism of the society to be formulated according to these estates. The satire aimed at the malpractices of these estates could take a definite form embodying various characteristics. As Jill Mann briefly states, the strictly formulated genre of medieval estates satire embodied four main characteristics:

First an enumeration of the 'estates' or social and occupational classes, whose aim seems to be completeness. Secondly, a lament over the short comings of the estates; each fails in its duty to the rest. Thirdly, the philosophy of the divine ordination of the three principal estates, the dependence of the state on all three, and the necessity of being content with one's station. And last, an attempt to find remedies, religious or political, for the defects of the estates.¹

In the formalized genre the estates are presented either with their shortcomings and malpractices or in their ideal states. However, the portrayal of the estates failing to perform their duties outweigh the ideal. The representation of the ideal was an indirect way to expose the shortcomings of the same estates by means of presenting the standards they were expected to live up to.

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1. *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: UP, 1973), 3.

In the portrayal of the persons of various estates the writers refer to their habits relating to their social status, their practices in relation to their costumes. The costumes generally are not given in full detail but certain items exposing the habits, pretences and ways of thinking of the wearer are mentioned. In this procedure some items of costume have become almost cliché because of their relation to the certain malpractices of various estates.

The use of the items of costume and the physical details of the characters in the estates satire have their roots in medieval literary theory. Medieval manuals of writing such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf's **Poetria Nova** clearly defined character delienation; **descriptio**, with the two complementary devices: the **notatio** which was the listing of the moral qualities and the **effictio**, which was the description of the character's outer appearance.² As Atkins points out, the physical characteristics were treated in detail and the face, body and the clothes were described.³ The delienation of the most admired and desired physical traits of the characters resulted in the formulation of various cliché.⁴ A similar process was also valid for the attire of these characters. This crystallization of various items of costume had behind it the facts existent in contemporary social life. Especially the highly satirized elements of costume were adopted from the social application. Certain sins, ways of behaviour, vanity, worldliness and of course idealization were reflected with the help of these items of costume in many literary works. It was not essential that these cliché items of costume be used only in the formally set genre of medieval estates satire, but these items were of common use in other literary works as well. Therefore, a study of these items of costume employed to satirize the various sects in medieval literary works are not limited to works of only estates satire but include various types of literary works.

One of the main targets of social satire that found its expression in the depiction of costume, was the satire of the rich, both the aristocracy and the newly rich bourgeoisie. In an age of wars, plague and hunger, the extremes and frivolities of fashion provoked satire. Although the church preached humility and charity towards the needy, the rich followed the extremes of fashion in worldly vanity and pride. Hence they are equated to peacocks, the symbols of pride, in their elaborately em-

2. **Poetria Nova**, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Wettern: Universa Press, 1967), 61-62, 65.

3. **English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase** (1934; Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1961), 104.

4. See Walter Clyde Curry, **The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty** (1966; New York: Ams Press, 1972).

broidered, furlined and grotesque costumes. In the fourteenth and the fifteenth century, fashions became very exaggerated; in men's costume the cotehardie became shorter and shorter towards the end of the era, and in contrast to this short gown the sleeves became exaggerated and extremely long and even reached the ground.⁵ Rich materials, costly furs, beles, pauches and embroidery were favoured. These fashions followed by the rich aroused bitter satire. In Langland's "faire felde full of folke" some display their pride and self assumed worth through their rich clothes: "And some putten hem to pruyde. apparailled hem there after, / In contenance of clothyng. comen disgised."⁶ Rich costume is used as a symbol indicating man's indulgence in worldly vanity and pride. Also in the accusations of Winner directed at Waster, he says:

Thou ledis renkes in thy rowte wele rychely attyrede,
Some hafi girdills of golde, that more gude coste
Than alle the faire fre londe that ye before haden⁷

In the depiction of Chaucer's Squire, who belongs to the aristocracy, these cliché items of costume are listed:

Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede

Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde.⁸

The Squire's dress is embroidered with floral and most probably animal designs. Although Chaucer does not explicitly criticise him, through the use of these cliché items he is classified as a disciple of the God of Love in the **Romance of the Rose**, who is clad similarly. The Parson in the **Canterbury Tales** elaborates on the satire of costume and classifies embroidery, soft materials, furs and the use of abundant material as a sign of vanity (**Parson's Tale** 412-415). The second item of the Squi-

5. See F.W. Fairhold, **Costume in England: A History of Dress from the Earliest Period to the Close of 18th Century** (London: Chapman and Hall, 1964) 110-141, Iris Brook, **English Costume of the Later Middle Ages** (London: A and C Black, 1935), 10-22 and by the same author **A History of English Costume** (London: Methuen, 1972), 20-39.

6. **The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman**, ed W.W. Skeat, rew.ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1924), **Prologue**, 23-24, all further citations will be from this edition, the two middle English letters cannot be given due to printing problems, their equivalents in modern spelling will be given in square brackets in the text.

7. **Winner and Waster** ed. Thorlacturville-Petre, in **Medieval Literature Part One: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition**, Vol. 1 of **The New Pelican Guide to English Literature** ed. Boris Ford rev. ed. (Penguin, 1982), 270-272.

8. **The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer**, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1957), all further citations will be from this edition (**GP** 89-90, 93).

re's costume common in satire, is this short gown, which was in fashion among the rich. Short gowns provoked criticism because they exposed the human body. The flesh and the fleshly desires had to be subdued, not exposed. Chaucer's Parson comments on this point:

...to speken of the horrible disordinat scantnesse of clothyng,
as been thise kuttet sloppes, or hayn selyns, that thurgh hire
shortnesse ne covere nat the shameful membres of man, to
wikked entente. / Allas! Somme of hem shewen the boce of hir
shap, and the horrible swollen membres, that semeth lik the
maladie of hirnia, in the wrappyng of hir horses / and eek
the buttokes of hem faren as it were the hyndre part of a she-
ape in the fulle of the moone. / ...of the hyndre part of hir but-
tokes, it is ful horrible for to see. For certes, in that partie of
hir body ther as they purgen bir stynkyng ordure, / that foule
partie shewe they to the peple proudly in despit of honestitee,
which honestitee that Jhesu Crist and his freendes observede
to shewen in hir lyve.

(**Parson's Tale** 421-23, 427-28)

The long and wide sleeves were the other items of costume that were used to satirize the pride of the rich. They represented the pride and selfishness of the rich and their lack of charity towards the poor and the needy. As in the poem **Winner and Waster** the defendant of such luxurious items was only the Waster. The fashionable wide sleeves were accepted as a manifestation of high social status for the rich and an aspect for satire for the moralists. Chaucer's Squire is clad in similar sleeves. Hoccleve also uses this item of costume in his satire directed at the people putting on a rich appearance:

But this me thinketh an abusion,
To see one wals in gowns of scarlet,
Twelve yards wide, with pendant sleeves down
On the ground, and the rich fur therin set
Amounting to twenty pound or bet;
And if he for it have paid, he no good.
Hath left him with for to buy a hood.⁹

This item of costume is used to ridicule the rich and the presumptuous who parade in these attires. The rich gowns with long wide sleeves inflate the wearers pride and vainglory but deflate his material means and his ability to defend himself. The wearer becomes helpless in his costume as Hoccleve states:

9. **The Regement of Princes** quoted in **Chaucer's World** comp. Edith Rickert (New York and London: Columbia UP, 1948), 334.

What would a lord without attendants be?
 Supposing that his foemen him assail
 Suddenly in a street, -what help will he
 Whose sleeves so wid and cumbrous trail.
 Give to his lord? He is of no avail.
 He helpeth no more than a woman can;
 He can not stand to aid him like a man.
 His two good arms have right enough to do
 And somewhat more, his sleeves to uphold.¹⁰

Hoccleve elaborates his treatment of the item of costume, that is given more generally in the estates satire, and touches upon the unhygienic aspect of the sleeves:

Now have these lords but little need of brooms
 To sweep away the filth out of the street,
 Since the long sleeves of impecunious grooms
 Will lick it up, whether it be dry or wet.¹¹

Various expensive items of costume such as silk gowns and fur lining became cliches of not only pride and vainglory but also a symbol of ill-acquired wealth and avarice. They reflected the change of attitude of the estates to each other. Instead of helping each other in times of need out of the love of God, a materialistic mentality began to rule man. The fur-lined expensive gowns of the doctors and the lawyers reflected this materialistic and avaricious attitude. When Hunger is giving advice to Piers on dieting, he refers to various items of costume which have satirical significance:

And (if) thow diete the thus. I dar legge myne eres,
 That Phisik shal his furred hodes. for his fode selle,
 And his cloke of Calabre with alle the knappes of golde,
 (**Piers** VI. 270-72)

Later Langland refers to another "fisicien with a forred hood" (**Piers** XX. 175). The rich costumes and the furred hoods are the result of accumulated wealth through medical practices. However, as Langland's Hunger states (**Piers** VI. 275) their cures are not always beneficial; he calles them murderers.

Chaucer's Doctor's costume is also in the same vein but as Jill Mann states it is more individualized than the cliché characteristics common to the estates satire.¹² Chaucer lists the details of the Doctor's costume:

10. Hoccleve 335.

11. Hoccleve 336.

12. Mann 97.

"In sangwyn and in pers clad was al, / Lyned with taffata and with sendal" (GP 439-440). Being made of expensive materials and of lively colours, it conforms to the main outline of the cliché items of costume used in satire. The bright colors are of significance as their use is confined to the aristocracy; the Doctor's use of these clothes points to his manifestation of self-importance.¹³ Chaucer implies his dishonest and uncharitable transactions in times of hardship through his close relationship with the apothecary and his explicit statement that he had earned a great deal during the pestilence (GP 442). He has benefited from the crisis.

The other estate accused of making a fortune through the abuse of its profession is the lawyers. The avarice of the lawyers is reflected through their rich gowns made of silk. Langland describes the lawyers among the "folk":

[it] houed there an hondreth in houues of selke,
 Seriaunt[z] it semed that serueden atte barre,
 Plededen for penyes and poundes the lawe,
 And nou[gh]t for loue of owne lorde vnlese here lippes anis.
 Thow my[gh]test better mete the myste.on Maluerne bulles,
 Than gete a momme of here mouthe. but money were shewed.
 (Piers, Progl. 210-15)

The rich costumes of the lawyers have another implication and that is the fact that they may be taken as bribes. Langland implies this in the passage when he King states that only Honesty will rule in the courts and: "shal no seriaunt for here seruyse were a silke howue, / Ne no peure in hir cloke for pledyng atte barre" (Piers III 293-94). Similarly Chaucer's Sergeant of Law "of fees and robes hadde he many oon" (GP 317) and he is dressed richly in his questionable wealth: "He rood but hoomly in e medlee cote. / Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale" (GP 328-29). The Sergeant of Law's rich attire is the proof of his good income which may have been obtained by questionable means. His efficiency in winning his cases and his habit of putting on a busy appearance support the impression of dishonest deals.

The costumes of the higher classes were imitated by the estates of the lower classes. They tried to assert their self-importance through their costumes. They paraded in costumes made of expensive materials, bright colors; they adorned their bodies with silver and gold ornaments, daggers with ornamentation. As Max von Bohlen draws attention:

13. For the use of bright colors see Max von Bohlen, *Modes and Manners*, trans. Joan Jashua, 4 vols. (London: Harp, 1932), 1: 223.

In their arrogance of its newly acquired wealth the rising middle class recognized no bounds, it must and would enjoy life. It did not desire to emulate the knights but to outshine them. This aim naturally manifested itself most obviously in dress, for dress is the agency through which any new consciousness of the world and one's particular milieu is most speedily proclaimed.¹⁴

Chaucer's Guildsmen, Miller, Yeoman, Symkyn the miller are the characters representing the lower estates that are satirized through the use of the items of costume. The common point in their attire is that in their desire to display pomp they are breaking certain laws relating to the prohibition of the use of certain items of clothing by the lower classes.

The Guildsmen are dressed in the same livery. They are exhibiting their new outfits:

And they were clothed alle in o lyveree
Of a solempne and a gereet fraternitee.
Ful fressh and newe hir geere apiked was;
Hir knyves were chaped noght with brass
But al with silver; wroght ful clene and weel.
Hire girdels and hir pouches every deel.

(GP 363-68)

They have completed all the items that fashion required: purses, belts and silver studded knives. According to an act passed in 1363 concerning the restrictions on the array of handicraftsmen, the following items were banned: "knife karnessed, ring, garter nor owche, riaband, cahins, nor such other things of gold norof silver."¹⁵ However, their array is designed to create an effect of respectability by the use of these items. The poet ridicules their pomp and the airs they put on by assigning them the seat of honour next to the mayor: "Well semed ech of hem a fair burgeys /To sitten in a yelde halle on a deys" (GP 369-70).

Similarly the Yeoman accompanying the Squire in the **Canterbury Tales** is satirized through the various items of his costume. His obsession with his occupation and proficiency are displayed by the means of the long list of arms:

14. Bohen 1: 215.

15. Matthew Browne, **Chaucer's England**, 2 vols. (1869; New York: Ams Press, 1970), 2: 15-16.

A sheef o pecok arwes, bright and kene,
Under his belt he bar ful thriftily,
And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe.
Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,
And by his syde a swerd and a bakeler
And on that oother syde a gay daggere
Harneised wel and sharp as paint of spere;

(GP 104-105, 108, 111-114)

He is armed to the teeth. He is also an overreacher as evident from his desire to show his efficiency. He wears a silver St-Christopher medal and his dagger is decorated-both of which were forbidden for his estate. The impressive image he has tried to create is reminiscent of the frequently employed medieval metaphor of the peacock displaying its feathers. In fact Chaucer reinforces the association by stating that his arrows were made of peacock feathers. The use of these feathers for the manufacture of arrows was neither a common nor an advised practice in the Middle Ages.¹⁶

The two millers of Chaucer who belong to this group of presumptuous lower estates are Robin and Symkyn. Both of them are portrayed as clad in bright colored clothes; Robin is wearing a blue hood and Symyn a pair of red hose. Their aspirations of higher social status and worldly vanity are evident from these items. As George F. Jones states "blue hast and brightly coloured hose were theoretically illegal for the lower classes."¹⁷ The second item of costume which is used in the depiction of both of the millers is the assortment of arms they bear. The list of arms are given to satirize the aggressiveness attributed to this estate. Robin has a sword and a "bokeler" and Symkyn has "a long panade", "a swerd" "A joly poppere" and "A Sheffeld thwitel". The sumptuary laws had forbidden the use of swords by the lower classes but the miller possesses one.

The use of items of costume in the satire of woman, who were classified as a separate estate, was a prominent convention. The satire which employed costume symbolism was generally directed at two aspects of women. The first aspect was their worldly vanity. The second was rooted in the misogynistic tradition that accused all the descendants of Eve of being evil and of tempting man into sin by using the charms of the flesh. Woman adorned her body with rich costumes, bright colored attires and with décolleté dresses to achieve her own ends. The earliest example of the satirical costume application representing this aspect of woman's nature is found in the whore of Babylon. She is described as:

16. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2nd ed. 7 vols, (Oxford: Clakendon, 1900), 5: 11.

17. "Chaucer and the Medieval Miller," *MLO*, 16 (1955), 3-15.

a woman mounted on a scarlet beast which was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet and bedizened with gold and jewels and pearls.¹⁸

Her red ornamented dress later becomes a cliché item in satire. If the argument is based on the use of these satirical elements of costume it can easily be asserted that Lady Meed is the heir of the whore of Babylon, She makes her first appearance in a similar garb:

I loked on my left half as the lady me taughte,
And was war of a womman wortheli yclothed,
Purfiled with pelure the finest vpon erthe,
Y-crounede with a corone the syng bath non better.
Fetislich hir fyngres were fretted with golde wyre,
And there-on red rubyes as red as any glede,
And diamantz of derrest pris and double manere safferes,
Orientales and ewages enuenymes to destroye.

(**Piers II.** 7-14)

The costume has been elaborated in detail and a few fashionable items such as the fur lining and the chaplet have been added, but on the whole the main points are the same. Woman is presented as attired most fashionably and seductively to defeat man. In the **Romance of the Rose** the old woman gives a few more items that are later frequently used by the satirists. She states that women should use their wares attractively to ensnare men by displaying their bodies with a low décolleté; she says:

"If she has a lovely neck and white chest, she should see that her dressmaker lower her neckline, so that it reveals a half foot, in front and back, of her fine white flesh; thus she may deceive more easily."¹⁹

These properties of women's costume that appear in satire as weapons of seduction are also used in non-satirical works in the same vein. In **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight** Lady Bertilak approaches Gawain in the third testing scene in a similar garb; she is:

18. **The New English Bible** (Harmondsworth: Oxford UP, Cambridge, UP, 1961, 1970), Rev. 17: 3-6.

19. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, **The Romance of the Rose**, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1971), 230. All further quotations will be from this edition and the page numbers will be given in the text.

In a mery mantyle, mete to the erthe,
That was furred ful fyne with felles well pured,
No hues goud on hir hede both the hager stones
Trased aboute hir tressour be twenty in clusteres;
Hir thryren face and hir throte trowen al naked,
Hir brest bare bifore and bihinde eke.²⁰ (1736-41)

The theme of the exhibition of the body is further developed in the exhibition of the feet in tight footwear. In the **Romance of the Rose** the old woman provides advice in this respect; she says:

“If her dress drags or hangs down near the pavement,
she should raise it on the sides or in front as if to have
a little ventilation or as if she were in the habit of
touching up her gown in order to step more freely.
Then she should be careful to let all the passersby
see the fine shape of her exposed foot. (**Rose**, 233)

This satirical item occurs in Chaucer's portrayal of the Wife of Bath: “Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed, / Ful streite yteyd, and shoes fl moyste and newe” (**GP** 456-57). Chaucer makes use of two items of footwear in the portrayal of the Wife of Bath; first of all the color red is the established color of misogynistic satire and secondly she exposes her feet and well-made shoes to all viewers. The exposition of fine costume and footwear are the symbols of worldly vanity.

The display of clothes to impress the onlookers was ridiculed by the satirists who often resembled such useless vanity to the purposeless show of the peacock. The old Women elaborates on this technique that later satirists also adopt:

New she will want to show off her body and the cloth
in which she is dressed ... particularly to show off her
purse, which should be right out for everyone to see;
therefore she should take the coat in both hands and
widen and extend her arms, whether on clean streets or
on muddy ones. Remembering the wheel the peacock
makes with his tail, she should do the same with her
coat, so that she displays openly both her body and the
fur lining of her clothing, squirrel or whatever costly
fur she has used, to anybody she might see staring at
her. (**Rose** 233).

20. **Sir Gawayne and the Greene Knight**, in **The Age of Chaucer** Vol. 1 of **The Pelican Guide to English Literature**, ed. Boris Ford (1959; Middlesex: Harmondsworth, 1975).

All classes of women tried to assert their value and importance by parading in clothes generally imitated from the upper classes. The wives of the Guildsmen in the **General Prologue** and Symkyn's wife in the **Reeve's Tale** are ridiculed through their attires. The Guildsmen's wives parade before everybody in their long mantles in the vigils. Similarly, Symkyn's wife walks through the town on holidays in "a gyte of reed."

The headdress of women provided another target for satire in literature. Until the end of the fifteenth century the women's headdress became more and more exaggerated.

It was an age of fantastic decoration, and the woman who devised a new method of adorning her head, be it with horns, pads or boxes, or of course a new variety of henin or sugar-loof, was immediately fashionable; apparently the more absurd and inhuman the encumbrance, the more in vogue the wearer became.²¹

Such efforts made by women to be noticed did not escape unscathed by the satirists of the Middle Ages and these outrageous items of costume speedily found their place in the list of satirical costume. Most ridiculously, in the **Romance of the Rose** women are advised to: "wear such horns that they could not be surpassed by stag, billy goat, or unicorn, even if they had to burs their forehead" (229-30). Exaggerated headdress is held up to ridicule in the portrait of the Wife of Bath also. Her headdress is in vogue if the standard is exaggeration as it weighs "ten pound" in addition to its ridiculous proportions. Langland makes his disapproval known through his statement stressing the waste of money for such vanities. Reason compares the headdress of the husband and the wife: "He warhed Watt his wyf was]to blame, /That hire hed was worth halue a marke his hode nou[gh]te worth a grote" (**Piers** V.30-31).

The fashion of wearing the headdress designed so as to portrude from the sides of the head above and over the ears and covered with golden nets and veils provoked the satirists. A satirical poem written during the reign of Edward I describes this headdress as the meeting place of the devil and condemns those who use them of being the companions of the devil in the other world:

Furmest in boure were boses y-broht,
Levedis to honoure ichot he were wroht;
Uch gigelot wol loure, bote he hem habbe soht;
Such shrewe fol soure ant duere hit hath a-boht;

21. Brooke, **A History of English Costume**, 29, see also figures 30, 31, 32.

in helle
 With develes he shule duelle,
 For the clogges that cleveþ by here chelle.
 Nou ne lacketh hem no lyn boses in to beren;
 He sitteth ase a slat that hongeth is eren.
 Such a joustynde gyn uch wrecche wol weren,
 Al hit cometh in declyn this gigelotes geren;
 upo lofte
 The devel may sitte softe,
 Ant holden his halymotes ofte.²²

Not only did the laity enjoy worldly vanity in luxurious clothing, expensive furs, jewels and fine shoes but the clergy also indulged in materialistic comforts and fashions. Originally spiritual concerns, disregard for material satisfaction and poverty were the basic rules for all the clergymen. However, in an age of increasing material benefits and corruption the clergymen emulated and even surpassed the laity in the use of luxurious items of costume. The various items of costume forbidden for clerical use were associated with the seven deadly sins and became clichés in the depiction of the different sects of the clergy. They became completely worldly and were involved in all the activities that were forbidden to them as Langland points out:

Ac now is Religion a ryder a rowmer bi stretes,
 A leder of louedayes and a londe-bugger,
 A priker on a palfray fro manere to manere,
 An heep of houndes on his ers as le lorde were.

(Piers B X. 306-309)

The worldly pursuits and interests of the clergy were also evident in their imitation of the fashions and attractive clothes. Langland demands the clerics to give up their fondness for rich costumes: "For-thi, wolde[y]e lettered leue the leccherye of clothing" (Piers B XV. 101). The friars, monks, priests, pardoners and the nuns were the sects of the clergy explicitly satirized for their vanity with conventionally formulized items of costume.

The prominent satirical items of costume in the depiction of the friars were the rich and flowing gowns, and their long hoods. The rich cut and material of the Friars' clothes symbolized their desire to arouse respect and to provide the benefits of authority. Boccaccio comments on the deviation of the habits and costumes of the contemporary friars with a comparison of the original and contemporary situation:

22. F.W. Fairholt, ed., **Satirical Songs and Poems on Costume: From the 13th to the 19th Century** (London: Percy Society, 1849) 41-42.

There was once a time when friars were saintly and worthy men, but those who lay claim nowadays to the title and reputation of friar have nothing of the friar about them except the habits they wear. Even these are not genuine friars' habits, because whereas the people who invented the friars decreed that the habit should be close-fitting, coarse, and shabby, and that by clothing the body in humble apparel, it should symbolize the mind's disdain for all the things of this world, your present day friars prefer ample habits, generously cut and smooth of texture, and made from the finest of fabrics. Indeed, they now have elegant and and pontifical habits, in which they strut like peacocks through the churches and the city squares without compunction, just as though they were members of the laity showing off their robes. And like the fisherman who tries to take a number of fish from the river with a single throw of his casting-net, so these fellows, as they wrap themselves in these capacious folds of their habits, endeavour to take in many an overpious lady, many a widow, and many another simpleton of either sex, this being their one overriding concern. It would therefore be more exact for me to say that these fellows do not wear friars' habit but merely the colours of their habits.²³

The rich costumes also implied the sins of gluttony and lechery of the friars. The roundness of the cape could be supported not only through the cut but by the well-fed body of the friars, who indulged in good food instead of practicing abstinence. Chaucer uses this item of costume to set Friar Hubert as a healthy, strong and authoritative figure parading in his clothes:

For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer
With a threadbare cape, as is a povre scoler,
But he was lyk a maister or pope.
Of double worstede was his semycope,
That rounded as a belle at the pesse.

(GP 259-63)

23. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. Mac Millan, ed. E.V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 283.

The impressive gowns of the friars made their access to women easier. Chaucer employs the tippet for this function in the portrait of his friar, whose "tippet was ay farsed ful of knyves/And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves" (**GP** 233-34). In other works furs and trinklets that the friars carry about them are employed for the same lecherous practices as evident in the following lines of poetry:

They deal with purses, pins, and knives,
With girdels, gloves, for maids and wives;
But ever the worse the husband thrives
 As long as they haunt him still.
For when the goodman is from bome,
And the friar comes to our dame,
He spares neither for sin nor shame,
 But that he does his will.

. . .
Some friars carry furs about,
For great ladies and maids stout,
To reverse there with their clothes without,
 All after that they are.
For some **vair**, and some **gris**,
For some **budge**, and for some **bis**

. . .
All that for woman is pleasant
 Ful ready certes have they;
But little care they for the husband
 That for all shall pay.²⁴

The life of ease and enjoyment pursued by the monks as opposed to the ideals of seclusion, poverty and hard work was satirized frequently. As the monasteries became richer through trade the monks became more worldly and corrupt, forgetting their monastic rules completely. Instead of spiritual riches, material riches became the desire of the monks. The costumes of the monks reflected their changing attitudes and plain humble clothing was replaced by good materials, fur lining, gold and silver pins for ornamentation and fashionable footwear. Chaucer employs these commonly used items of costume to satirize the Monk's worldliness:

24. T. Wright, ed., **Political Poems and Songs**, 1: 263-68, quoted in Rickert 375-76.

I seigh his sleves purfiled at the hond
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
And, for to festne his hood under his chyn,
He hadde of gold ywroght a fōl cgrious pyn;
A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.

(GP, 193-97)

Chaucer extends his description to include the Monk's jewellery elaborating on its nature to signify the lecherous aspects of the wearer; it has sexual connotations as it is a love-knot. The boots of Chaucer's Monk are "souple", that is, well made and tight as the fashion required. The same item appears in another poem ridiculing the love of luxury of the monks:

This is the penaunce that monekes don for ure lordes love:
Hii weren soches in here shon, and felted botes above;
He bath for sake for Godes love bothe hunger and cold;
But if he have hod and cappe fured, he nis noht i-told in
covent;²⁵

A fifteenth century poem reprimands the clergy for their fashionable apparel and demands them to dress humbly so as to set an example to the laity:

Ye poope hoy prestis ful of presomcion,
With your wyde fueryd hodes, voyd of discrecion;
Un to your own prechyng of contrary condition,
Whеч causeth the people to have lesse devocion.
Avauncid by symony in cetees and townys,
Make shorter your taylis, and broder your crownys.
Leve your short stuffede dowblettes and your pleytid gownys,
And keepe your own howsyng, and passe not your boundis.²⁶

In this instance the clergy are reprimanded for wearing the short and stuffed doublet which was the high fashion of the century. Chaucer's Bordoner and Absolon in the **Miller's Tale** are satirised through items of costume for their foppish airs. The Pardoner imitates the headdress of the young:

...hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,
For it was trussed up in his wallet.
Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;
Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare.
(GP 680-683)

25. T. Wright, ed., **The Political Songs of England From the Reign of John to that of Edward II** (London: Camden Society 6, 1839), 330 quoted in Mann, 23.

26. Fairholt, **Satirical Songs and Poems**, 56-57.

Absolon, who is in the minor orders, is satirized for similar reasons; he imitates the fashions and the colors of the rich class with disregard to his station:

With Poules wyndows corven on his shoos,
In hoses rede he went fetisly.
Yclad he was ful smal and properly
Al in a kirtel of a lyght waget;
Ful faire and thikke been the poyntes set.

(**Miller's Tale** 3318-22)

He is dressed in red and blue and his costume is short following the latest vogue similar to the Squire's outfit. The satirical outfit covers the footwear, which are shoes with carved ornamentation. The fondness of fashionable clothing of the clergy signified the laxness of their orders and their engagement in sinful practices.

The nuns were readily susceptible to worldliness and their failings were immediately recognizable from their costumes. Their failings were parallel to those of their lay sisters. As Eileen Power states in relation to the nuns: "It was the view of Authority that the Devil had dispatched three lesser D's to be the damnation of the nuns, and those three D's were Dances, Dresses, and Dogs"²⁷ In the portrait of the Prioress of Chaucer the banned fashionable items of costume appear through which the courtly assumptions and the worldliness of the wearer are satirized. The Prioress does not abstain from the use of rich and abundant material for her garment as "Ful fetys was hir cloke" (**GP** 157). Her headdress also follows the latest of the fashions in worldly vanity. Instead of the plain wimple "Full semyly hir wmpul pynched was" (**GP** 151). The prohibitions imposed on the nuns by the religious rule did not prevent her from following the advice given by the Old Woman in the **Romance of the Rose** stating that all the beautiful parts of the body ought to be exhibited.²⁸ Madame Englantyne exposes her fashionably high forehead. Although the possession of valuable gems, pins and brooches was forbidden, similar to the nuns of her age, the Prioress also has coral beads and a golden brooch. These items allow the satirist to elaborate on the concern of worldly riches and vanity in contrast to their shallow spirituality.

27. **Medieval People** (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 89.

28. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, **Romance of the Rose**, 230.

The items of costume constituted a basic part of character creation in literature in the Middle Ages as prescribed by the literary manuals. Since the sumptuary and cannon laws had strictly defined the attire of each estate any breach in these laws was significant in defining the aspirations and selfperception of the wearer. This provided the satirists ample material to comment indirectly on the abuses in the society and the worldly and fleshly ambitions of the people belonging to various estates through the use of the medium of their garb. This convention found its expression in the literature of the following centuries and led to the formulation of set types such as the fop country bumpkin, the aristocrat and the femme fatale. Similarly, in contemporary literature, drama and cinema the costume of the characters are used both for character delienation and satire.

