PART THREE

FRANCISCAN CRITICS AND CRITICS OF THE FRANCISCANS
WILLIAM OF ST. AMOUR'S
DE PERICULIS NOVISSIMORUM TEMPORUM:
A FALSE START TO MEDIEVAL ANTIFRATERNALISM?*

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In the gallery of medieval antifraternal authors, no figure features more prominently than that of William of St. Amour, the “Hammer of the Friars.” Master of theology at Paris in the 1250s, at the height of the mendicants’ so-called golden age, William led an audacious assault on the friars which would resonate down the centuries, despite the utter failure of his own campaign. Indeed, it is probably as a literary fountainhead rather than an able ecclesiologist that William earned his fame. It is in this sense that the relations between his magnum opus, De periculis novissimorum temporum (On the Dangers of the Last Times, written in 1256), and his putative followers require fuller elucidation. For the appropriation of Williamine arguments and topoi was in no way as straightforward as is often thought. It was John Fleming who pioneered this observation in his 1966 article, “The Antifraternalism of the Summoner’s Tale.” And although scholars continue to debate the nature of medieval antifraternalism (as this very volume demonstrates; see especially the contributions by Lawrence Clopper and Penn Szittya), it has become increasingly difficult to draw a straight line between the acidic polemics of the mid-thirteenth century and later confrontations, whether literary, doctrinal, or physical, between mendicants and their various antagonists.

* This essay develops several observations made in my broader study, William of Saint Amour’s De Periculis Novissimorum Temporum: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Introduction, Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 8 (Louvain: Peeters, 2008) [henceforth DP], which is the source of all quotations from the treatise.

