Mariella Gable & Kristin Malloy: The “Wicked Nuns” (book banning at CSB)

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Some civil liberties wax and wane over time. Book banning is one that seems to be gaining momentum nowadays. Here is a notorious but little-known case of book banning on our own campuses. It is the case of “The Bishop, the Chaplain, and the Wicked Nuns.” That’s the title of the story told by one of its principles – i.e. one of those “wicked nuns”! But she didn’t start telling the story until almost 40 years after it happened.

Left: Mariella skating0001.2.jpg, from SBMArchives
O:\Archives\csbarchives\Photos\People\Sisters - OSB\Carey, Thomas OSB\from IA - SBM 1 - with Kristin Malloy.jpg
Background: rye field, Rye Grain Harvest https://www.dreamstime.com/yellow-rye-grain-harvest-field-landscape-image123660568#_
You can also read an account of it in Annette Atkins' book, *Challenging Women Since 1913*, the history of CSB she wrote for St. Ben's 2013 centennial, and in *Stories Teachers Tell*, a 2004 anthology in which the “wicked nuns” story was published.

Available in the CSB and SJU Libraries' General Collections: LD7251.S185 A96 2013. See pages 118-123.

Our story begins in 1958, the same year that this photo appeared in *Facula*, the St. Ben’s yearbook, showing two of the professors in CSB’s English department, Sister Mariella Gable and Sister Kristin Malloy. About 25 years younger than Mariella, this was Sister Kristin’s first year teaching in the English Department.

1958 *Facula* p. 11

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3521/rec/2

Headshots on right are from the 1957 *Facula*, p. 94

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/8560/rec/19
By this point, Sister Mariella, who had received her PhD in 1934 from Cornell, was teaching in and chairing the English department. She had become a nationally-recognized authority on Catholic fiction, and had published several collections of Catholic short stories. Sister Kristin later noted that Mariella had focused on “what was revived in the Catholic literary revival, and what was Catholic in Catholic fiction.”

Scans of covers of and pages from Mariella Gable’s books

[They Are People, 1943, was the second edition – now with Gable’s choice of title – of Great Modern Catholic Short Stories, initially printed in 1942. She had written to the publisher about the title: “The book isn't that. It is just one small section of the whole.” See Hynes intro.]

Text insert from 1985 Spring article in St. Benedict’s Today, p. 9
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/4156/rec/1
Mariella photo in the SBM and CSB Archives, sbmgablemoh060 p004.jpg
Sister Mariella had also created the Saint Ben’s Pageant, a huge annual production involving every student, and which introduced new students to the history of Benedictinism...

O:\Archives\csbarchives\Pageant\PageantSlide08 Peasant Dance in front of Chorus.jpg
...featuring readings, songs, and dances, and using historical characters to represent the then-14 centuries of Benedictinism.
Upper right image: 1955 *Facula* p. 74 (p.40 of the pdf)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3501/rec/14
Other images from O:\Archives\csbarchives\Pageant
Mariella demanded a lot of herself, and of her students, including requiring them to enter creative writing contests like the annual one at the national magazine *The Atlantic Monthly*. In addition to several high rankings and honorable mentions, her students won that magazine’s top prize in both 1942 and 1944.

[May 1944 Issue - The Atlantic](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/toc/1944/05/)

Left image from SBM Archives, CSB Archives, sbmgablemoh060 p004-2.jpg
The 1944 winner was a story about the Sisters at Saint Ben’s, titled “These Gentle Communists.” You can read or listen to it on the CSB Archives website.

May 1944 Issue - The Atlantic https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/toc/1944/05/

She had

From Hynes: Her writing students consistently placed in The Atlantic Monthly writing contest, two of them winning the top prizes in 1942 and 1944.46 ...The Atlantic Monthly first prizes were for short story, "The Hanky and the Sins" by Bernadette Loosbroek (1942) and essay, "These Gentle Communists," by Mary Thomes (1944). ...The 1942 prize sent her student, Bernadette Loosbroek, and Gable, to the Breadloaf School of Writing in Vermont that summer. During this decade she read voraciously, keeping up on the new writers, and hailing a young, then unknown American, J.F. Powers, in her article, "Catholic Fiction Arrives in America"47

Left image:
http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/CSBArchives/id/6078/rec/7
Eventually, Mariella Gable would be listed repeatedly in *American Catholic Who’s Who* and in the *Directory of American Scholars*.

**American Catholic Who’s Who 1980-81**

1240_003.pdf

1 & 240_001.pdf


Mariella photo in the SBM and CSB Archives: gable, mariella, osb 6.jpg
It was her anthologies of Catholic fiction that first got her into trouble with the local bishops. One objection was to the title of the first one, *Great Modern Catholic Short Stories*, because the authors weren’t all Catholic. The title had actually been chosen by the publisher over Mariella’s objection. She prevailed when the second edition came out a year later, under her chosen title, *They Are People: Modern Short Stories of Nuns, Monks and Priests*.

Scans of covers of and pages from Mariella Gable’s books

*They Are People*, 1943, was the second edition – now with Gable’s choice of title – of *Great Modern Catholic Short Stories*, initially printed in 1942. She had written to the publisher about the title: “The book isn't that. It is just one small section of the whole.” See Hynes intro.

Text insert from 1985 Spring article in *St. Benedict's Today*, p. 9
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/4156/rec/1
Among the bishops’ objections: confession should not be written about because it is confidential; that an author was a good person was more important than what they wrote; and “people do not expect Sisters to know anything about sex, so to include a story about birth control is unbecoming for a Sister.” Also, she had included a story by Ernest Hemingway, whom co-adjutor Bishop Bartholomew considered “a threat to Catholic faith and American democracy.” And Bishop Busch thought Mariella should have chosen more stories with happy endings.

The Literature of Spiritual Values and Catholic Fiction – CSB+SJU
https://www.csbsju.edu/csb-archives/othercsbpublishations/literatureofspiritualvaluesandcatholicfiction

Center image: 1955 Facula
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3469/rec/17
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1766/rec/1
So when a new chaplain, Father Jerome Doherty, was assigned to St. Ben’s, he was forewarned by the bishop to be on the lookout for Sister Mariella, who, as a published author of note, was regarded as guilty of “intellectual pride.” (In archival sources his name has various spellings: Docherty, Dougherty, and Doherty.)

1957 October page 1 The Benet “Students meet new faculty”
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1785/rec/1

Right: 1958 Facula p.7
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3519/rec/2


Left photo and caption from 1958 Facula p. 100
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3571/rec/2
Fr. Jerome was Australian, and a monk at St. John’s, but had transferred in; Atkins observes that “he had missed the socialization that had allied the St. John’s and St. Ben’s Benedictines, so rather than taking his worries to the abbot or the prioress, he went to the bishop.” [Atkins, Challenging Women, p. 120]

Left: 1959 Facula p.53 (of the pdf)
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/13425/rec/16

On right: 1959 Facula p.20
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/13393/rec/16
S. Mariella Gable, chair of the English department, to whom being up in her field was a matter of honor, also paid it some due. *The Catcher in the Rye* never appeared on the Index, so there was no official, Catholic reason for excluding it and none for asking permission to read it. Every self-respecting English teacher in the middle 1950s was reading, assigning, and most certainly talking about it.

Fr. Jerome Doherty, the college chaplain, got wind of Bennies reading this controversial and, in his judgment, morally dangerous novel. Sister Kristin, fresh out of graduate school and up on contemporary literature, included it on a class reading list. Not to do so would be to announce that she was out of step in her field.

He condemned the novel as pornographic, referred to it as "Catcher in the Sty," and set out to remove it—and Sisters Kristin and Mariella, if necessary—from the college. He called the two sisters "occasions of sin" and ordered them to withdraw the book.

[Atkins, *Challenging Women*, p. 119-120]

1958 cover of *Catcher in the Rye*  https://www.bing.com/images/
As related in Sister Kristin’s “Wicked Nuns” account, with Bishop Bartholomew backing the chaplain, Sister Kristin was summoned to a meeting with Father Jerome, Prioress Mother Richarda, CSB President Sister Remberta, Academic Dean Sister Johanna, and Sister Mariella. The chaplain forbade Mariella and Kristin to receive the sacraments until they confessed to this “terrible sin.” He proposed a public burning of the books, and demanded that Kristin retract what she’d told her students about the book — and stood outside her classroom to listen as she did so.


Left image: 1958 Facula p.77
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3554/rec/2

Right image: 1958 Facula p.37
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3534/rec/2
When none of the students returned their copies as requested, Kristin and the dean went to each student's dorm room to collect them. Few copies were turned in. But some students made other offers: "Here's my Shakespeare, Sister! His language is really sexy at times. And here's my Old Testament. You'll find pretty raw stuff in some of those stories. Here's my Chaucer, the raciest language you'll find." An alum from the class of 1959 recently told me that the students “thought Fr. Jerome was just weird, and we totally sympathized with the nuns.” (E. McCormick, class of 1959, in an Oct. 19, 2022 email to the archivist.)

The Chaplain went to St. John’s abbot Baldwin, who sent him on to the bishop... (Meanwhile, the Prioress also went to the abbot – to ask him to replace the Chaplain! But the bishop overruled the abbot.)


[Abbot Baldwin Wilfred Dworschak, OSB](https://saintjohnsabbey.org/abbot-baldwin-wilfred-dworschak-osb)

[https://www.csbsju.edu/csb-archives/csbhistory/csbadministrators/mother-richarda-peters](https://www.csbsju.edu/csb-archives/csbhistory/csbadministrators/mother-richarda-peters)
So while Fr. Jerome stayed on campus for a few more years teaching scripture, participating in events...

Left article: 1958 Feb. The Benet
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1782/rec/3

Right image: 1960 Facula p.95
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/13105/rec/19

Left image: 1960 Feb. The Benet p. 4
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/1792/rec/9
...and taking the moral high ground with students and their parents...
April 1961 The Benet p. 4
...Sisters Mariella and Kristin were banished from the college. Mariella, almost 60 years old by then, and after almost 40 years of teaching, was sent to colleges in Oregon and Missouri. She continued to lecture, teach and study there and elsewhere. Four years later, with a new prioress in office, and a new chaplain, she was allowed back - but could teach only Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. Kristin was sent to teach in other Minnesota high schools for ten years, then worked in administrative positions at St. Ben’s. It would be 25 years before Kristin would return to a CSB classroom.

Headshots on right are from the 1957 *Facula*, p. 94
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/8560/rec/19

Images on right: 1953 *Facula*, p.49
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/8380/rec/13
In 1971 Mariella was presented with the President's Medal by CSB for her pioneering scholarship and excellence in teaching. She retired as Professor Emerita in 1973. Sister Kristin wrote the eulogy for her dear friend and mentor when Mariella passed away in 1985 at the age of 86.

Left: Gable photo in 1985 Spring article in *St. Benedict's Today*, p. 9
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/4156/rec/1
O:\Archives\csbarchives\Photos\People\Sisters - OSB\Malloy, Kristin OSB\Malloy, Kristin OSB SJUA PC04 Shelf103-1 v.2p.83.pdf
In 1996, English professor, feminist and namesake of the CSB Women’s Center, Sister Nancy Hynes, published a complete collection of Mariella Gable’s essays on Catholic fiction. Titled *The Literature of Spiritual Values and Catholic Fiction*...


Left: Gable photo in 1985 Spring article in *St. Benedict's Today*, p. 9
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/4156/rec/1

Right image: O:\Archives\csbarchives\Photos\People\Sisters - OSB\Hynes, Nancy OSB\From SBMA in 2021\Nancy&Kristin.jpg
...her introduction, available on the CSB Archives website, tells the story of the “wicked nuns” in great detail and with careful documentation. (The book is available at the CSB library.)

The Literature of Spiritual Values and Catholic Fiction – CSB+SJU.
https://www.csbsju.edu/csba-archives/othercsbpublications/literatureofspiritualvaluesandcatholicfiction

Image from https://www.ebay.com
Later, one of St. Ben’s first **apartment buildings** was named in honor of Mariella Gable, as was the prize for literature awarded annually by the College's **Literary Arts Institute**. Sister Kristin passed away in 2007, and Sister Nancy in 2008.

Left: Gable photo in 1985 Spring article in *St. Benedict's Today*, p. 9
https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/4156/rec/1

Right image: O:\Archives\csbarchives\Photos\People\Sisters - OSB\Hynes, Nancy OSB\From SBMA in 2021\Nancy&Kristin.jpg
Sister Kristin’s friend Sister Thomas Carey – pictured at right with Kristin – had also been banished from campus in 1958 for ten years, to schools in Utah, St. Paul and Cold Spring. Her case is less well documented, but her art, particularly her crucifixes, were banned as "too modern" by Bishop Bartholome. She passed away in 1999.

And what of Father Jerome? According to Atkins, Fr. Jerome was sent to a parish in North Dakota ca. 1960. He passed away in 1975 at age 71 and is buried in the St. John’s cemetery.

Carey account from Hynes, footnote 78, and “Wicked Nuns” by Malloy.

Left: Mariella skating0001.2.jpg, from SBMArchives
Right: O:\Archives\csbarchives\Photos\People\Sisters - OSB\Carey, Thomas OSB\from IA - SBM 1 - with Kristin Malloy.jpg

Docherty image: 1958 Facula p.7

https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/3519/rec/2
Main Sources

- Obituary, 1985
- *Mariella Gable, O.S.B.* page on the CSB Archives website

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Left: Mariella skating0001.2.jpg, from SBMArchives