

Uncovering Joyful Culture

Parodic Literature and Practices in and around the Low Countries (13th-17th centuries)

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This project uncovers three major aspects of the late medieval and early modern phenomenon of 'joyful culture' in France and in the Low Countries. Joyful culture can be defined as a shared system of sociability for groups and individuals organizing playful performances and activities in a ritualized way, in which parody has a central role. The project shows that joyful culture served as an important tool to bind together various social groups in pre-seventeenth-century society. Joyful, parodic texts and activities strengthened feelings of group identity and the sense of belonging to a community. Instead of being provocative or satirical, festivities are regarded as a way of securing social stability and cohesion. Here, one might think of various social contexts and communities, such as professional guilds, confraternities, chambers of rhetoric and different types of joyful groups.

The Laughing Jester (Netherlands, 15th century), National Art Museum of Sweden, Stockholm.



Urban Festivities – Katell Lavéant (project director)

In Lyon, in the second half of the 16th century, the joyful company of the printers organized annual festivities that gathered other guilds from the different neighborhoods of the city. They paraded on the streets and mocked weak husbands and unfaithful wives. They discussed current affairs in plays performed on the crossroads, evoking the cost of living and the wars of religion, but also celebrating life and good company. The goal of these festivities was therefore to strengthen social cohesion within Lyon's community.

To understand the importance of such festive events, this project analyzes the theatre plays and the descriptions of the parades left by the printers in their books, but also other material traces: coins made for the occasion, archival documents, and images on the same joyful themes...

Joyful Song Culture – Cécile de Morrée (postdoctoral researcher)

Coppelt aen een, den nacht is lanck,
Ey, goddanck!
Wel ghenere, druc ontberen,
Ghelt verteren en mach niet deren.
Dus moghen wi dansen vry ende vranck,
Ey, goddanck!

Wi hebben ghedroncken root ende blanck,
Ey, goddanck!
Brenghen, halen volle schalen,
Thooft van Malen salt al betalen!
Mijn daghe ic noyt beteren dranc en dranc!
Ey, goddanck!

(Antwerp song book, song 17 (Antwerp, 1544))

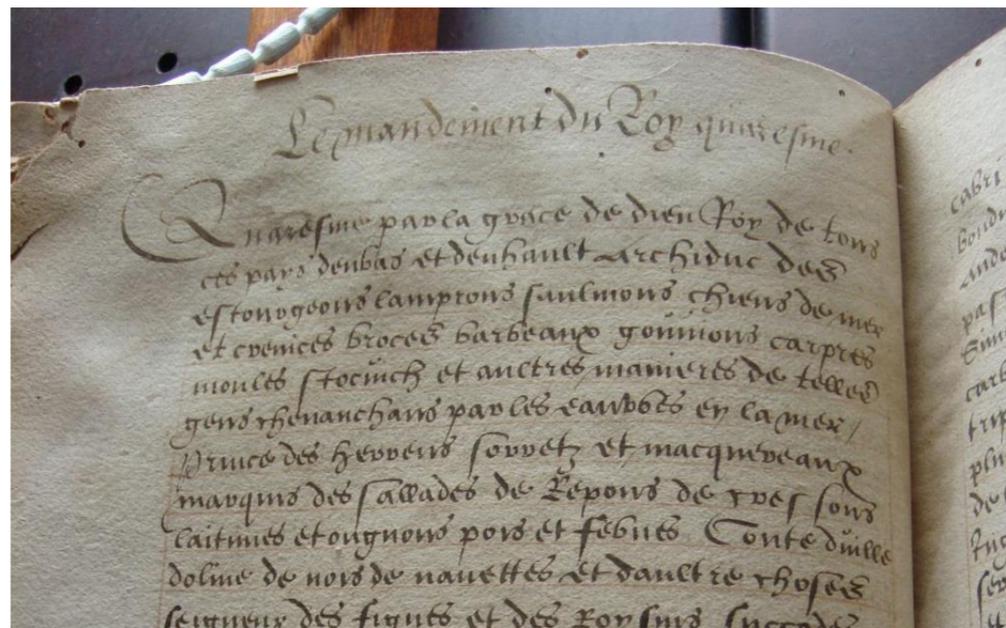
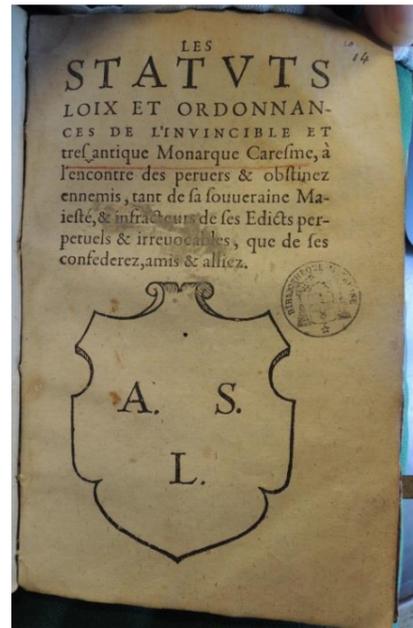
Join in, the night is long,
Hey, thank God!
Just getting by, without sorrow,
Spending money won't harm.
We will dance freely and frankly,
Hey, thank God!

We have drunk red and white wine,
Hey, thank God!
(We have) brought in full bowls,
The chief of Malen will pay it all!
I never drank a better drink!
Hey, thank God!



Musicians and singers in a clam, Pieter van der Heyden after Jheronimus Bosch, 1562, Rijksmuseum.

Singing joyful songs formed a set part of medieval festive culture. These songs about drunkenness, poverty and sexuality are not just popular – and sometimes: vulgar – amusement. When interpreted in relation to the complex of themes and metaphors that we refer to as 'joyful culture', these songs gain significance. They often demonstrate a clever verbal play and offer their users and listeners the opportunity to step outside convention and to comment on their situations. As such, joyful songs form a vehicle for both the expression and enhancement of individual identity and social cohesion.



Textual witnesses of the *Summons of Lent*: Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, Rés. 41915 (14) / Brussels, KBR, IV-541, fol. 64v –65v (pictures: Katell Lavéant).

The Joyful Summons in Europe – Rozanne Versendaal (PhD candidate)

Parody was a significant and important strategy for shaping joyful culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe. Parodies of official charters and episcopal ordinances became vehicles to express and exchange ideas on joyful themes. An example of such a joyful, parodic summons was the *Summons of Lent*, a mock ordinance that widely circulated in 16th century France and in the Low Countries. The text can be found in different kinds of manuscripts from the period, as well as in printed books and on single sheets. The text parodies the official Church's Lenten summons and the title refers to the mock authority – Lent – who sends out the ordinance. For several hundred years, the *Summons of Lent* remained a popular text that was read and/or performed during celebrations of Carnival in France and in the Low Countries. This reveals another important aspect of joyful culture: its long-lasting history, its importance beyond the late Middle Ages and its continuation in the early modern period.