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A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: RITUAL SOCIAL ROLE  
REVERSALS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

By

Thomas M. Luitje

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: RITUAL SOCIAL ROLE REVERSALS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE**

**By**

**Thomas M. Luitje**

Throughout Europe entering the sixteenth century there were various traditions of social role reversal and ritual rebellion associated with the year-long festival cycle. In a highly stratified society did these role reversals act to break down social barriers and aid in social mobility? Or did these role reversals act to reinforce the status quo and restrict social mobility?

These two questions are examined in the context of a survey of some festival customs in Europe during the time 1400-1625. These two questions are also looked at in relation to the many social changes that were taking place during this time period.

Sources referred to were primarily secondary, with some primary sources used. In addition to history, some sociological and anthropological works were also cited. The sources examined indicate that role reversals served as a conservative force, reinforcing the status quo.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Dr. Richard Harms, friend and one-time boss, went to the extraordinary length of reading the entire manuscript in a very rough draft. Dick offered insights and his own expertise, which were extremely helpful in achieving an acceptable finished product. Few can understand the

painful process of reading a rough draft of mine, but Dick never flinched.

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Finally, there is the host of parents, family, and friends whose encouragement and good wishes were constant. To this host, whose greeting often was, "Hi, how's the thesis coming?" ha, it's done. To all these people, my sincerest thanks and best wishes. To any who read beyond this, mea culpa.

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## PREFACE

One of the things which characterize a society is how that society attempts to maintain control over the behavior of its individual members. This control can be viewed as the "glue" which holds the society together. This glue, the structures, that hold a society together, provides the framework within which the play of history is performed. An understanding of a society's structure, particularly class structure, when examining the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, will bring into focus the rest of that society's history.

As one views successive societies from earlier times to the present, the strength of the glue binding individuals to society remains relatively constant. But the type of glue and extent to which the glue acts upon individuals changes. For instance, in an early society the rules governing behavior were few in number and simple to understand; yet these rules were intensely felt. As societies developed, the number of rules increased and became more complex. Likewise, the definition of acceptable behavior changed. Actions that would merely be labeled eccentric in modern America would have been punished by death in earlier times. And modern strictures

against drug abuse were seldom addressed as harshly, if at all, in earlier societies.

Yet these controlling structures have in specific societies permitted a wide range of seemingly antisocial behavior. Such behavior occurred only under very controlled circumstances. Europe entering into the sixteenth century presents an excellent example of such a situation. Societies were highly stratified with clearly defined class lines, across which no one passed.<sup>1</sup> During Carnival and other religious fests, societies permitted and even encouraged role reversals.<sup>2</sup> The lower class assumed the trappings of power; the upper class assumed the trappings of a lower station. These trappings included dress and deportment. In many instances members from the lower classes became rulers; members from the upper class became beggars.<sup>3</sup>

The festival events provided for many things; in effect, legalized lewdness and drunkenness existed. Otherwise rigid social tensions were relaxed, and a break from the routine was permitted.<sup>4</sup> Yet each class had its own specific reasons for this behavior.

For the lower classes the role reversals usually took on a burlesque festival atmosphere, allowing the upper classes to be mocked in parody as well as permitting an attack on the status quo.<sup>5</sup> Also, these festival forms permitted, for a short time, power to the peasants who

occupied the top positions in the lower classes' hierarchies.<sup>6</sup> Mock courts of government were set up to control the proceedings of the festival. Tournaments and battles were staged between the newly "ennobled" peasants who sat astride barrels and jousted with paddles, or joined in hand-to-hand combat using egg beaters and cooking pans.<sup>7</sup>

These role reversals were chiefly a part of various religious festivals that took place throughout the year all over Europe. So for the upper classes, their debasement was often an act of contrition on a religious holiday, although just as often these acts were little more than frivolous play acting.<sup>8</sup> Once the basic religious function of the holiday had been served, many of these holidays took on a festive aspect that in many cases dwarfed the religious intentions.

A complementary area that will be looked at is the role submergence that took place in everyday settings in religious confraternities. While these institutions were less closely tied to the festival season, they nonetheless were ritual institutions, and in many cases they provided opportunities for lower-class individuals to assume control over their "betters." Further, looking at confraternities expands the base of the study and helps illuminate changes taking place which acted to eliminate



social flexibility by making class more dependent on appearances.

The Shrovetide Carnival, or Fastnacht, was the great riotous festival of the year,<sup>9</sup> but there were also many others. Christmas time, the New Year, May Day, Mid-Summer, and harvest festivals were all celebrated, along with various patron saints' days, and many contained some aspect or other of role reversal.<sup>10</sup> So, clearly, when one considers both the number of festivals and the time and expense that went into each of them, festivals and the role reversals that accompanied many of them were a big part of people's lives.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to illuminating a festival cycle that occupied much of the year, a survey of festival forms in various countries shows that riotous festivities and role reversals occurred through Europe, and that over the course of this study these traditional forms were under pressure to change. For while many had railed at Carnival excess in the preceding centuries, it was finally in the sixteenth century that many festivals were banned or significantly changed.

The period 1425-1625 was a time of change throughout Europe. The changes that characterized the Renaissance--humanism, a sense of individual worth, spiritual and intellectual questioning--were beginning to take hold in Western Europe, only soon to be modified by the

Reformation. This was a period that spans the transition from medieval to modern world. The role of the individual was changing at the same time as the role of government.

As governments moved toward absolutism, embracing the large nation-state and national consciousness, the role of the individual was being enhanced. Birth was becoming less of a decisive factor in determining what station a man assumed in life. While it was still rather hard for an individual to fall out of the nobility, marriage and money were increasingly a way for the non-noble to gain entry into the titled classes. But because birth became less a factor in class consciousness, the trappings of class became more important. For instance, one should not appear inferior or mingle with inferiors.<sup>12</sup> Society was becoming more rigidly stratified while some class mobility was becoming possible.

Aside from the curious spectacle of the bacchanalian revelry of many instances of role reversal, the question remains how significant were these ritual role reversals in changing class consciousness and lowering the barriers of social class structure? An examination of ritual role reversals in late medieval Europe will show that the social impact of these Carnival antics was minimal. In fact, ritual role reversals served to reinforce the status quo in most cases. In some cases this reinforcement was

overt, the festival as a whole acting as a sort of safety valve. But in most cases, these festival forms also produced more covert restraints which were probably little appreciated by their beneficiaries.

This conclusion is at variance with some historians who have seen these ritual rebellions and festival role reversals as agents of social change. Some historians, such as Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie,<sup>13</sup> have looked at these festival customs and seen the mingling of classes as breaking down social barriers. Other historians look at the not-infrequent explosion of festival ritual rebellions into large-scale violence and see a manifestation of social unrest expressing itself in a revolt against the status quo. But these views of festivals, ritual rebellions, and role reversal reflect a shallow reading of these events.

The sixteenth century view of these Carnival antics as being primarily a safety valve also has some modern adherents. And while the safety-valve effect cannot be denied, this is a surface reading of an event that also had deeper meaning both for the participants and modern observers. Mikhail Bakhtin largely accepts this safety-valve explanation.<sup>14</sup> But Bakhtin does not dig deeply enough into the event to come up with anything more. And there is more to be discovered upon inquiry.

An investigation of late medieval popular culture, such as this largely must be, needs to proceed with an eye to certain problems of proof and interpretation. The most critical problem is that of evidence. Studying popular culture in the late medieval period means looking at it through the eyes of upper-class observers, for the peasants of Europe were illiterate. As Carlo Ginzberg puts it:

The state of the documentation reflects, obviously, the state of the relationship of power between the classes. An almost exclusively oral culture such as that of the subordinate classes of preindustrial Europe tends not to leave traces, or, at least, the traces left are distorted.<sup>15</sup>

The few traces that are left are filtered through the perceptions and prejudices of an intermediary. The observations of this intermediary, no matter how well intentioned, are colored by the observer's different cultural background. The good intentions of the observer can never be taken for granted either.

The eyes of the upper-class observer were inevitably clouded by class prejudices. The paintings of Pieter Breughel, for instance, brilliantly depict various aspects of peasant life and culture in the latter sixteenth century. A perspective on Breughel's audience and intentions is provided by a look at a biography of Breughel published in 1604.

With this Franckert (a merchant for whom Breughel worked), Breughel often went out into the country to

see the peasants at their fairs and weddings. Disguised as peasants they often brought gifts like the other guests, claiming relationship or kinship with the bride or the groom. Here Breughel delighted in observing the droll behavior of the peasants. . . . He represented the peasants, men and women, of the Compine and elsewhere naturally, as they really were, betraying their boorishness in the way they walked, danced, stood still or moved.<sup>16</sup>

Droll and boorish, indeed; a hint of condescension, at least, was inevitable in the observations of the upper class. But most contemporary observations of peasant culture were much worse. Peasants were seen, after all, as being little more than savage, stupid, unkempt children, whose culture was little more than an ignorant perversion of the high culture of the upper class.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, there are the prejudices of more recent observers to be overcome.<sup>18</sup> A nineteenth century chronicler of English and European popular culture wrote of certain peasant festival observances:

They were chiefly the amusements of an ignorant populace, who, unendowed with abstract ideas of wit and pleasure, could only imagine them in the ridicule of ceremonies they were accustomed to respect.<sup>19</sup>

The same author writes later: "Such was the outline of a custom . . . which is of no further interest than as it illustrates the gross manners of the age, and the ignorance of its performers."<sup>20</sup> Observations such as these are valuable when stripped of their editorial taint, and reveal something important about both the observer and the observed. For instance, much of the early work done

on European popular culture was the product of upper-class hobbies to preserve these curious customs of the lower classes, to help preserve a bygone age. At the same time, what these people thought important enough to preserve and how they described events illuminate how these amateur antiquarians saw themselves.

Both the observer and the observed are important because there seems to be a complementary relationship between upper and lower classes in producing a culture that was in many ways common to both. Similarities did exist and as Ginzberg writes, "To explain these similarities simply on the basis of a movement from high to low involves clinging to the unacceptable notion that ideas originate exclusively among the dominant classes."<sup>21</sup> In the course of this paper, it will be shown that cultural influence was a two-way street.

A question could be raised about the validity of treating Western Europe as a single cultural entity with regard to these festival rites. While care must be taken in this matter, the facts that the countries of Western Europe were, and to an extent considered themselves to be, the heirs of Roman traditions and had by this time been linked together culturally by the Catholic Church for five hundred years, are significant. Add to this the fact that these countries were all still essentially rural agricultural societies, and it is clear that there were

many fundamental cultural features in common. The many similarities in festival forms through Europe support this idea.

A final word on methodology must be directed toward the inevitable joining of history and anthropology that takes place in an examination of this sort. Not only is an anthropological method used to examine the popular culture of role reversals, but also parallels are drawn to peoples of later times who can be more personally studied. There is perhaps a leap of faith that must take place in order to accept parallels drawn between a sixteenth century French peasant villager of the Dauphine and a nineteenth century Zuni tribesman or a twentieth century Maori. It is a leap of faith that accepts a commonality of human experience, and thus makes the unknowable past closer.

The use of anthropology provides the historian with another tool. Where many observers of the past were amateurs, with inevitable cultural biases, the anthropologist provides a view of many of the same festival forms in a professional context. The anthropologist will not be burdened to the same extent with cultural baggage and hopefully will be cognizant of what baggage he does carry. And perhaps most importantly, the anthropologist can communicate directly with the

participants in the cultural event, getting their thoughts on meanings and significance.

What this study becomes is an examination of how popular culture served to maintain the status quo of class structure. Clifford Geertz provides a useful definition of culture:

One of the more useful ways . . . of distinguishing between culture and social system is to see the former as an ordered system of meaning and symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place; and to see the latter as patterns of social interaction itself.<sup>22</sup>

Part of this ordered system of meaning and symbols was festival role reversals and ritual rebellions. Role reversals and ritual rebellions as elements of a European-wide culture served to preserve the social system as it then existed in ways both realized and unrealized. But the sixteenth century was a time of change. There was upheaval in religion, and society as a whole felt the many effects of this change. Patterns of social interaction shifted and affected various traditions of role reversal in many ways as the Reformation splintered what had been a European culture bound up by the unity of the Catholic Church. Role reversals and ritual rebellions were eliminated in many cases and toned down in many others. A traditional society was being shaken, and certain festive forms were among the casualties.



## INTRODUCTION

There was a long tradition of social role reversals associated with major festivals in Europe dating back to Roman times at least. In the Roman calendar the festival of Saturnalia was one of major excess and role reversal. James Frazer in The Golden Bough had this to say about the Roman Saturnalia and its social impact:

No feature of the festival is more remarkable, nothing in it seems to have struck the ancients themselves more than the license granted to slaves at this time. The distinction between the free and servile classes was temporarily abolished. The slave might rail at his master, intoxicate himself like his betters, sit down at table with them . . . masters actually changed places with their slaves and waited on them at table.<sup>23</sup>

The Romans were not alone in this peculiar aspect of their celebrations. Earlier, Egyptians had a similar rite in their celebration cycle.<sup>24</sup> In twentieth century Africa there remain traditional ceremonies that include role reversals.<sup>25</sup>

In all of these cases, role reversal was a festival spasm that served to highlight each group's particular role in society. In ancient Egypt and modern Africa, role reversals were part of agricultural fertility rights.<sup>26</sup> Roles were reversed to signify the coming of chaos. The

return to normal was the reimposition of order and the natural state of things, just as planting was an imposition of order on the wild.

These primitive ceremonial rites were popular religious practices taking place at crucial points of the agricultural year. In Europe ritual role reversals survived the transformation to Christianity.<sup>27</sup> But while the festivals of the pagan agricultural year were incorporated into the Christian year, the general abandon traditional at the pagan festivals survived only in a milder form, and this only to the discomfort of the Christian authorities. Writing about 1216, Thomas of Chobham commented:

It is known that until now there has been the perverse custom in many places, where on any holy feast day, wanton women and foolish youths (or adolescent fools) gather together and sing wanton and diabolical songs the whole night through in church yards and in the church.<sup>28</sup>

The Church was often a target of the festival ribaldry. For the Church certainly was a part of the power structure which peasants were forced to obey. Also, most festivals were ostensibly Church related. The involvement of the Church was inevitable. Festival institutions, like the Feast of Fools where lay brothers and lower-ranking priests took over the monasteries and cathedrals, and the Feast of the Boy Bishop where a common

church boy replaced the bishop in all the functions of the cathedral for a day, directly affected the Church.<sup>29</sup>

The Feast of Fools and the Boy Bishops both involved the substitution of an essentially ignorant person in the hierarchy of a cathedral or an abbey. These new bishops and abbots performed the regular duties in what wound up as an irreverent manner.<sup>30</sup> Thomas of Chobham thought that these practices were allowed in order to encourage church attendance.<sup>31</sup> While Thomas's explanation may not be particularly useful, it does show how some festivals survived into the medieval period, albeit in modified form, and also the general abhorrence many respectable people held toward popular festival customs.

Another, much more generally held justification for allowing widespread debauchery and role reversals at various festivals of the year was that they acted as a safety valve for social and intellectual pressures. A controlled venting of this pressure, many felt, aided in keeping society stable.<sup>32</sup> Theologians at the University of Paris in 1445, in trying to have the Feast of Fools abolished, summed up the view of the traditionalists. "But, they say, we do those things in jest and not seriously, as has been the custom from antiquity, in order that the folly innate in us may escape and evaporate once a year."<sup>33</sup>

In spite of religious and intellectual pressure, ritual role reversals survived into the fifteenth century as an element of Carnival, as part of Easter, the Feast of Fools, the Feast of the Boy Bishop, the celebration of the Christmas season, and many other festive rites.<sup>34</sup> The study that follows divides into two basic parts. The first section considers causes and effects. Were the ritual role reversals merely a social safety valve, or did they lead to more elasticity in class structure? The second section surveys various festival rituals throughout Europe, showing the institution of role reversal and ritual rebellion was a common phenomenon during the period 1425-1625, but also showing it under the pressure of change.

## PART I

### A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The elements of popular culture can be found on many different levels of society. What we are dealing with, really, is a tapestry constructed of many, sometimes contrasting, threads. One can use a sort of Ockham's razor on the problem of ritual role reversals in early modern Europe and come up with the simple explanation that they were just a form of amusement. Geertz, writing on the Balinese ritual of the cockfight, makes the point,

An image, fiction, a model, a metaphor, the cockfight is a means of expression; its function is neither to assuage social passions nor to heighten them (though in its playing-with-fire way it does a bit of both), but in a medium of feathers, blood, crowds, and money to display them.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, role reversals, as an element of play and a festival rite, displayed social tensions. Certainly the element of amusement in sixteenth century role inversions cannot be denied.<sup>36</sup> But this is a complex social phenomenon that bears examination on more than one level. There was a conscious acceptance of this Carnival behavior as being simple play. But this simple play had a

subconscious effect, and that was to reinforce the status quo, even while it was consciously being undermined.

There are dangers in trying to construct an accurate functional framework to apply to the festive institutions of all of Europe.<sup>37</sup> But human experience is essentially the same. And as Peter Burke writes,

There is a sense in which every festival was a miniature Carnival because it was an excuse for disorder and because it drew from the same repertoire of traditional forms, which included processions, races, mock battles, mock weddings and mock executions.<sup>38</sup>

As will be illustrated in the survey of European role reversal rituals presented later, festivals and ritual role reversals were a common theme throughout Europe. So there is a basis for drawing broad structural conclusions.

Ritual inversions usually took place within the context of a festival or holiday celebration. For the peasants much of the festival routine revolved around inverted role structures. Peasants during certain festivals formed a society with the humble exalted, and the exalted, to whatever degree they would allow it, were humbled.<sup>39</sup>

A peasant leader would assume the title and dignities of duke, prince, bishop, and so on. This peasant duke held real power to control the festivities. At the same time there was excessive drinking and debauchery. So the peasant courts effectively turned into a parody of the

regular government.<sup>40</sup> A ritual rebellion took place that both mocked the old regime and subjected the old rulers to the indignities dispensed by the new.

Instances of role reversal occurred outside of festivals, too. The religious rites of nobles at Easter and Christmas, among other celebrations, sometimes put members of the upper class in a subordinate position to the lower classes. But the great social spasm occurred at Carnival or other seasonal feasts. The main motivation for these ritual role reversals seems to break down along two lines, a line for the patriciate and a line for the commoners.

For the nobles a pretext of religion was prominent. Many of the examples of nobles humbling themselves to peasants take on decidedly Christlike overtones. Consider for example the practice of a noble washing his peasants' feet. Ercole d'Este did it in Ferrara,<sup>41</sup> the Archbishop of Canterbury did it in England in the name of the king.<sup>42</sup> The washing of the feet occurred generally at Easter and related to an early act of Christian humility. "He [Jesus] riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments: and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."<sup>43</sup> Here was Jesus Christ, son of God, washing his disciples' feet. This in itself was an

example of role reversal. The custom in Christ's time was for pupils to wash the feet of their teacher.<sup>44</sup> If the son of God could do this, could a good Christian noble do any less?

Ercole was by all accounts a very Christian ruler. Gundesheimer uses the term "fanatic" in relation to Ercole,<sup>45</sup> and Edward Gardner writes, "The year 1496 found Ercole completely under his [Savonarola's] influence, fondly attempting to transform Ferrara into an ideal city in accordance with the Friar's precepts."<sup>46</sup> And even lacking a clearly religious ruler like Ercole, it was nonetheless a good way to polish one's image, especially in a Christian era.

That the meek might inherit the earth was one of those possibilities that caused more than a few to give up their worldly wealth. This was a common theme in a literature, Christian philosophy, and commentary that was still dominant.

This popular and colorful literature throbbed with a dominant message: Those attempting to navigate the treacherous waters of the social world should remember that religious signs and group identity are always misleading . . . to be cast down in this world might be the beginnings of spiritual rebirth: Did not Dante's pilgrim have to descend to the depths of hell before commencing his sacred event?<sup>47</sup>

(It was a Protestant idea that wealth and saintliness could co-exist.)<sup>48</sup> A periodic ritual humbling was a step in the right direction for a ruling class that was able to



see itself as having a sacred duty to rule. Society and God benefited from their wealth, but even so, they could prove that they could give it all up.

On the conscious level, the idea of nobles being humbled could be seen as an attempt to earn a place in heaven on the cheap. But on a deeper level there are the ties that bind a giver and a recipient. Marcel Mauss in his book on the giving of gifts writes,

In the system of the past . . . it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange. . . . What they exchange is not exclusively goods. They exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts.<sup>49</sup>

The ruler gives of himself as representative of the ruling class, and the poor receive as representatives of the lower classes.

Having received a gift, Mauss emphasizes, entangles the recipient in an obligation to pay back the giver in one way or another. Being poor, the easiest way, perhaps the only way, was by returning passivity and loyalty. Too much should not be made of this, for it is only one component in a net of effects that serve to reinforce the status quo. Certainly, what is really only a minor gift will have only minor results. But in a situation like that in Venice, where more was given, more obedience could be extracted.

In Venice, the aristocracy liberally gave ritual dignity to lower-class leaders; they had a place in solemn ceremonies as well as in the burlesque of the festivals.<sup>50</sup> The Venetian social year contained numerous instances in which the lower classes of the city were given temporarily a high scale of status. An example was the Doge of the Nicolotti, who was received with dignity by the real doge of the city in a public ceremony.<sup>51</sup>

According to Frederick Lane, "Such gay festivals and guilds that were allowed autonomy without political power helped keep 'the little people' acquiescent in the rule of the aristocracy."<sup>52</sup> Edward Muir, writing on how the Venetian oligarchy maintained and projected an image of content over the city, seems to accept much of what Mauss says and applies it to Venice, writing,

These grants were, of course, seen as alms, and it should be remembered that in sociological terms alms and largess establish similar relationships; he who receives is personally obligated and beholden to he who gives.<sup>53</sup>

It would appear that the ritual largess of the nobles was a double-edged sword meant to entangle the lower class in a position of obligation. At the same time, this ritual largess, in many cases, improved the noble's position in the eyes of God and the Christian Church.

In the Venetian case, a third element which affected the ruling class directly was a sort of sham democracy that resulted at the installation of a new doge. Some

time before the installation, the people of the city met and vilified the new doge-to-be.<sup>54</sup> According to Muir,

Rites of status elevation such as these frequently appear in ceremonies designed to elevate a person to a higher social status or office, and they tend to brace authoritarian social roles by providing an emotional outlet for those in a subordinate station.<sup>55</sup>

Max Gluckman observed much the same thing in the Bantu tribe of South Africa. The installation of their new king was a long affair, characterized by the degradation by the whole of the tribe of their soon-to-be king just before his ascent to the throne.<sup>56</sup> There are many similar ceremonies, all of which reinforce for the new ruler the idea that he rules with the consent of his people.

Anthony Wallace, observing similar degradation rites in the Swazi, notes,

Among the Swazi of Southeast Africa, ritual rebellion includes the singing of traditional songs ridiculing the kingship; yet the Swazi themselves assert that the rituals strengthen kingship and confirm the royal family's right to the throne.<sup>57</sup>

Part of this strengthening of the kingship may be a result of an induced obligation. But more obviously, these can probably be counted toward the social-safety-valve effect. This is the great overall justification of most types of ritual disobedience. The safety-valve idea leads us down the line of the peasant's role inversions.

The idea that the festival riotousness and rebellion was a social safety valve is an old one, at least contemporary with the period considered here.<sup>58</sup> And certainly on the conscious level it works very well. But it should not be taken too far.<sup>59</sup> Quoting Wallace again,

The paradox, however, is only a seeming one, for the ultimate goal is still the same: the maintenance of order and stability in society. Rituals of rebellion are intended to contribute to the order by venting the impulses that are chronically frustrated in the day to day course of doing what is required. They are, in effect, ritualized catharsis. . . .<sup>60</sup>

Catharsis, blowing off of steam at Carnival time. Mikhail Bakhtin makes an interesting point about the pervasiveness of the festival spirit in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>61</sup> He sees peasant life divided into two parts, festival life and all the rest. Normal life was characterized by scrimping and want. It was mean, brutish, and short. Festival life was a time of ostentation and plenty beyond what could be afforded. "They [festivals] were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance."<sup>62</sup> And in terms of absolute time, time devoted to festivals was not inconsiderable. "Celebrations of a comic type represented a considerable part of the life of medieval men, even in the time given over to them. Large medieval cities devoted an average of three months a year to these festivities."<sup>63</sup>

Thomas Gray writing on a 1739 trip to Turin said, "This Carnival lasts only from Christmas to Lent; one half of the remaining part of the year is passed in remembering the last one, the other in expecting the future Carnival."<sup>64</sup> Martin Luther was concerned by the amount of time and expense, not to mention the sin, that went into the plethora of festivals. And Luther was by no means alone in his concern.<sup>65</sup>

Thus the case has been made that the festival season was a large part of everyone's life. The festival provided a safety valve in two ways. First, as was noted above, there was the expectation and memory of food, fun, and fellowship to sustain a peasant in the lean times that still made up the bulk of his year. Second, festival ritual rebellion gave the peasant an avenue to vent his dissatisfaction by satire and the imitation of his betters.

Satire is one of the most striking aspects of the festival scene, and the milieu in which the peasant reversal of roles took place.<sup>66</sup> LeRoy Ladurie states, "Satire is one of the most constant and common elements of Carnival from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries."<sup>67</sup> The presence of satire and mocking seems quite natural when one considers the relationship between

classes and the explanation offered by Erving Goffman in The Presentation of Self in Every Day Life.<sup>68</sup>

Goffman sees individuals and homogeneous groups of different social classes as presenting various identities to the outside world. When two different groups intersect, each group tends to present a face based largely on what sort of face is expected by the other group. At the same time, each group "tends to suppress its candid view of itself and of the other"<sup>69</sup> When the homogeneous group is back by itself, it mocks the mannerisms of the other group, "compensating, perhaps, for the loss of self-respect that may occur when the [other group] must be accorded accommodative face to face treatment."<sup>70</sup> This very human reaction of an ingroup mocking a higher-status outgroup finds expression in festival role reversals. In addition to this informal satire there is also the long European tradition of the fool who is actually given license to mock authority.

Enid Welsford traced the development of the ritual fool from its origins in fertility rites, to where it linked the court jester to the king. The folk festival retained its tradition of having a fool. The fool's link, spiritual at least, to the court jester entitled the fool to a certain license. "He was a 'Fool,' the elected 'King of Fools,' very well then, he would exercise the fool's right of free speech, he would in fact adopt the dress,

assume the role, and claim the privileges of the court jester."<sup>71</sup> This right of the fool can be seen as having spread to all of the people taking part in the festival.

These then are some of the components of festivals in the early modern period. The next step is to look at the festival as a whole, take the grand view. Again this grand view points toward the reinforcing role of festival. Any event that involved the whole community and built community benefited the powers in control. According to Aries,

Games and amusements . . . formed one of the principal means employed by a society to draw its collective bonds closer, to feel united. This was true of nearly all games and pastimes, but the social role was more obvious in the great seasonal and traditional festivals.<sup>72</sup>

Getting all of the people out in the street, people of all ages and all classes, was done to unite the society.

Natalie Davis also sees the festival as being a unifying force in the community. "But license was not rebellious. It was very much in the service of the community dramatizing the differences between the different stages of life."<sup>73</sup> Playing different roles educated youths and everyone about the dynamics of society; also, by highlighting aberrant behavior several times a year, proper behavior could be emphasized.

The fundamental point which binds all of this together is provided by Max Gluckman.

These ritual rebellions proceed within an established and sacred traditional system, in which there is a dispute about particular distributions of power, and not about the structure of the system itself. This allows for instituted protest, and in complex ways renews the unity of the system.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, we are dealing with revolt and not revolution. The outgroup which is mocking the group in power still supports a system which has one group on top and another on the bottom. Once the basic system is accepted, just who occupies that top spot is a matter of chance, fate, or of God.

Wallace takes this idea a step further when he asserts that,

Ritual rebellion against external political authority is, perhaps, too dangerous: it may too easily slide off into futile revolt or precipitate savage punishment, unless the rebellious have consciously accepted the rightness of their subordinate relationship.<sup>75</sup>

Demanding conscious acceptance from creatures of habit is probably asking a bit much.

But in the absence of a conscious rejection of one's position in society, Wallace's statement probably would hold up. A group must both be and feel in control to allow ritual rebellions. When we look at instances where festival satire actually broke down into real conflict, it seems to occur after a rejection of some aspect of a people's station but not really the station itself.



The violence that erupted in the French city of Romans during the wool carders' festival in 1580 was a culmination of events that had occurred earlier. There was political tension involving peasant support for a larger rebellion in the Dauphiné district of France and a feeling by the peasants that the tax burden was unfairly distributed. Noble landowners did not pay taxes. Violence in Romans was precipitated by political rather than social tensions.

Davis points out,

These elements of political and social criticism in the midst of Carnival were intended to destroy-and-renew political life in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, but not to lead directly to further political action. There are fascinating examples, however, in both city and countryside, of carnivals where the tension between the festive and everyday official realms were broken and uprising and rebellion ensued.<sup>76</sup>

Sometimes real rebellion did break out, but whatever change came about because of this violence was only peripherally connected to Carnival.

Yet LeRoy Ladurie is convinced that ritual rebellion aided in evolutionary change. "Embracing so many elements made Carnival particularly apt as an instrument of social change, which was slow but undeniable."<sup>77</sup> He goes on to say that ritual role reversals did not reinforce the status quo, but rather pointed the way to social change and progress.

LeRoy Ladurie's argument is not particularly convincing if one accepts several of the ideas previously put forth. Mauss's thesis that gifts, in this case festival ritual rebellions, obligated the receiver to the giver, would in this instance work against social change. More compelling is the idea advanced by Gluckman, Davis, and others that festival role reversals educated the people in an established social system where one class dominated another. Festival role reversals did not question a system, only the relative position of people within that system. In addition, the safety-valve theory, popular in the sixteenth century, and still viewed as essentially valid by people like Bakhtin, also would work to support the status quo.

But just as important is the fact that popular festival forms were not progressive, they were imitative and mocking. Peasant behavior was always restrained by the fact that tomorrow things would go back to normal. On their day the peasants could not be too demanding because what was sown on the wind, the next day would be reaped on the whirlwind.

And as will be shown, it is when festival role reversals were perceived by the upper class as breaking down social barriers that effective measures were instituted to ban or restrict them. By the same token, how seriously the whole thing could be taken is a matter

of conjecture. As Geertz says about his Balinese model, "that it was just a cockfight," so we can say about this, that it was just a Carnival.

There is the idea, too, that only strong institutions can tolerate criticism. It is the weak regimes that have something to fear. This is the point that Willeford makes.

The fact that the rebellion is allowed and even encouraged implies that the social institutions and the persons in power are strong enough to tolerate it; thus it serves the interests of authority and of social cohesion.<sup>78</sup>

This is an idea that will come into force in the course of the sixteenth century. For this was a time of change. And while changes in religion and society were the ostensible reasons for eliminating, or trying to eliminate, many festivals, the real reason more often than not was fear.

The Reformation was the big change that took place in religion. When one considers that most if not all festivals were in one way or another religious, this was a big change indeed. The early reformers set out to stop such traditional calendar customs as the Plough Monday procession (banned in 1548 in England) and the saint's days associated with special trades and occupations.<sup>79</sup> Carnival was particularly affected. Without Lenten sacrifice it was hard to justify a pre-Lent festival. The

Elizabethan settlement in England preserved most of the festivals, but deprived of their institutional backing most withered away.<sup>80</sup> Likewise in England all of the church-founding holidays were changed to the same day in October.<sup>81</sup>

The Boy Bishop was abolished in England, and the Abbot of Unreason (a relative of France's Feast of Fools) was abolished in 1555 in Scotland.<sup>82</sup> In Germany, Nuremburg's Schembartlaufe (a butchers' festival) was halted in 1539.<sup>83</sup> But Samuel Sumberg suggests that religion was not the main reason. "The times had changed, the Reformation created new attitudes, but of most influence was perhaps the fear of the growing power of the guilds. Under the mask sedition might flourish."<sup>84</sup> Indeed the fear of what could go on behind a mask was an all-pervasive one.

Catholic Europe was feeling the effects of the Reformation as well. Stung by Protestant criticism of the Mass, the Catholic hierarchy moved to clean up its spiritual institutions. The Feast of Fools and clerical participation in the more risque aspects of Carnival were phrased out.

Other Tridentine reforms served to cut back on the number of church-related festivals that had been proliferating for the past two hundred years. And while

the big Church festival, Carnival, continued, it too was put on the path of reform.

The sixteenth century was also one of sharpening class distinctions. Muir writes,

As one surveys the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, most obvious is the sharpening of class distinctions. Nobles, cittadini and plebians were separated in rituals, and the first two groups were classified according to an elaborate hierarchy of official precedences.<sup>85</sup>

Ginsburg says almost the same thing:

The subsequent period was marked, instead, by an increasingly rigid distinction between the culture of the dominant classes and artisan and peasant cultures, as well as by the indoctrination of the masses from above.<sup>86</sup>

Nobles were enjoined by Castiglione in his The Courtier from competing in games with peasants except when they were sure the nobles would win.<sup>87</sup>

In comparing the accounts of Felix and Thomas Platter, students at Montpellier forty years apart, it seems that there had occurred some social distancing in the celebration of Carnival.<sup>88</sup> The Carnival that Felix Platter celebrated in the 1550s was still one in which a mingling of classes took place. Thomas, on the other hand, took part in a Carnival that was upper class in participation and orientation. It is also interesting that while both men were good Protestants, neither had any qualms about participating in so Catholic a rite as

Carnival, while acknowledging that Basel, a rigidly Protestant town, had nothing like it.

Religious confraternities were also being changed by social pressures. What was at one time an institution of Christians, open to all classes, became in the 1500s stratified. Pullen, writing on the Venetian confraternities, says, "The Scuoli Grandi were not, by the sixteenth century, democratic or leveling institutions."<sup>89</sup>

The confraternities of Venice and Florence were open to Christian men of all classes. Within the confraternities, while both rich and poor had ostensibly equal access to the controls, the rich were responsible for taking care of the poor within their ranks. At Easter in Florentine confraternities la lavanda was held. A banquet was prepared by the rich and served by them to the poor. Also, there was the washing of the poor members' feet by the rich. But this too was changing in the sixteenth century. Weissman in his book on Florentine confraternities writes, "In elitist exclusive grand-ducal Florence poverty, humility, and low status--the traditional ritual attributes of la lavanda had become signs of social impurity and pollution."<sup>90</sup> Appearance and public deportment were becoming more important in the perception of one's social class. If the upper class could not allow itself to be debased, even in a religious

ritual, could prohibitions of lower-class aggrandizement be far behind?

The removal of the upper classes from the cultural mixture was an important loss. Their new concern with their place in society and sensitivity about criticism can be seen as the beginning of the tightening of the screws of the safety valve.

In 1541 the Abbot of Unreason was arrested on his float in Rouen for attacking the city authorities too strenuously.<sup>91</sup> In 1647 the Feast of St. John was canceled in Naples because of fear that it might get out of hand.<sup>92</sup> There had been protests before, for most of the Christian period, in fact. But now in the post-Reformation and post-Tridentine world, traditional opposition was causing action. It was this action that eventually changed or eliminated social role reversals and ritual rebellions as traditional festival forms.

## PART II

### A SURVEY OF COUNTRIES

#### Ferrara

During the fifteenth century, the Italian city of Ferrara was small, dependent on agriculture, and governed by the Estensi Dukes.<sup>93</sup> When one considers the close historical ties between ritual role reversals and agriculture fertility rites in more primitive societies, it is interesting that in Ferrara, with its close links to agriculture, occurred some of the most striking examples of a noble, and head of government, being humbled.<sup>94</sup>

The Dukes of Ferrara were absolute in their control of the city. Moreover, fifteenth century Ferrara was a fairly prosperous and peaceful place.<sup>95</sup> Yet Ercole I (1431-1505, Duke from 1471) felt it necessary to personally dispense charity to some of the poor of Ferrara every morning before hearing mass.<sup>96</sup> At Easter, Ercole again hosted some of his poor subjects at a banquet where the nobility of the city waited on the tables. After the banquet, the group of paupers moved to another room where they had their feet washed by the Duke and his family.<sup>97</sup>



During the fifteenth century, Ferrara was relatively free from want; its rolls of destitute people were not overwhelming.<sup>98</sup> So Ercole probably was not being forced into these shows of generosity as a means of quieting public discontent. Instead, this would seem to indicate that Ercole felt a deep need, for one reason or another, to serve his people in a very direct way.

Given the fact that Ercole's shows of public humility were not dictated by a pressing need to placate a restless populace, one must look to the more personal needs of Ercole. He lived during an age which was for some people an age of intense personal religious experience, for this was a time wealthy individuals gave up their wealth to join mendicant religious orders. At the same time, religious fanatics like Savonarola and Catherine of Siena had a great deal of public influence.

Ercole was apparently a devoutly religious person. Werner Gundersheimer in Ferrara describes him as being,

Unlike his predecessors . . . Ercole really lived the Christian religion. Indeed, he came closer to being a religious fanatic than any other male member of the Este family, including all the bishops and cardinals.<sup>99</sup>

For a time Ercole was an admiring correspondent of Savonarola and supported followers of St. Catherine.<sup>100</sup> Given these ties, it seems reasonable that Ercole would take a traditional show of humility at Easter and make it a little more extreme. The King of England, after all,

did something similar. On Easter in England the Archbishops of York and Canterbury washed the feet of paupers in the king's name.<sup>101</sup>

Ercole's displays were something more than just religious fanaticism, as was apparent in Ercole's institution of the ventura. An anonymous diarist recorded the first one.

1473, on the fifth day of January . . . the most illustrious Duke Ercole . . . went through the city of Ferrara seeking his fortune on foot, the first evening with the sounds of trumpets, singers and pipers; the second evening, which was the sixth day of the aforementioned month, the Feast of the Epiphany, on horseback.<sup>102</sup>

Unannounced, the Duke of Ferrara went from door to door seeking handouts which he later distributed to the poor. A member of the Duke's retinue thought the people were pleased to seek the Duke and would have given even more if only they had known that he was coming.<sup>103</sup>

In the ventura Ercole was using a form of humility to reinforce his position. Gundersheimer writes,

It is clear, even from the diarist's attitude, and apart from the tangible tribute, that Ercole's appearance was much appreciated. He was not only honoring the people by his presence, but giving them a chance to acknowledge and recognize his benevolence and their own prosperity.<sup>104</sup>

Ercole's ventura was a display of both power and humility. For while practically speaking no one could refuse him, at the same time theoretically they could, and how much Ercole received was a matter of discretion.

Thus Ferrara displays some interesting examples of role reversal. In ministering to the poor of Ferrara and in begging from door to door, the dukes were tacitly saying that the Estensi were no better than the common man and that they owed their position as rulers of Ferrara to the consent of the people.<sup>105</sup>

This idea of the Estensi Dukes moving among the common people is underscored by the frequency of their walks in the city's piazza. In fact, so used were the people of Ferrara to the idea of the dukes walking among them and chatting in the piazza, that when the dukes were required to go out with a bodyguard during a time of family instability it was subject to comment.<sup>106</sup>

At the same time the Duke Ercole satisfied a religious need in himself, he was also fostering better relations with his people and weaving them into a web of giver and receiver obligations.<sup>107</sup> According to Mauss, the receiver of a gift has an obligation to return something to the giver. By their public behavior, and by their dispensing of charity, as well as by the ritual instances cited, the Dukes of Ferrara were honoring their people and being personally identified with charity. The receivers were in effect everyone else in the city. As receivers, the people of the city incurred an obligation to the dukes and the city's aristocracy.

Obedience and support were two ways this obligation could be discharged. And in this way the status quo in Ferrara was reinforced.

Fifteenth century Ferrara was both one of the more absolute of aristocracies and one of the most politically and socially stable cities in Italy. And while too much should not be made of the use of social role reversals in maintaining this stability, peace, prosperity, and a relatively settled ducal succession certainly played a large part in Ferrara's security. Even toward the end of the fifteenth century, when war caused the indigent rolls to swell, Ercole's rule remained unchallenged.

The dukes' use of role inversion helped to maintain their position at the top of the hierarchy. In Ferrara the ritual role reversals of the dukes existed as a religious act, but also served politically to bind people in obedience to the dukes.

### Venice

While Ferrara presented a good example of a noble accepting a station under him and demonstrated the religious aspect that affected many of the upper-class role inversions, a look at Venice starts one down the path of some more popular role inversions while at the same time clearly showing the extent to which a city government participated in the lower classes raising themselves

up.<sup>108</sup> Venice was a city that used role inversions as a matter of public policy to maintain order and to present a favorable face to the rest of Europe.

During the fifteenth century, Venice had a widespread reputation for stability and gentility.<sup>109</sup> Edward Muir believes that this reputation was a result less of real conditions, than of an attempt by means of public ceremony and spectacle to present a favorable image.<sup>110</sup> One element of Venetian ceremonial policy was role reversals associated with the Sensa festival and ceremonies in the San Nicolo dei Mendicoli parish of the city.

Venice, like other places throughout Europe, had some distinctive role-reversal ceremonies of its own outside of Carnival. An early example of this is the degradation of the newly elected doge in the thirteenth century. "Crowds of popolani tore the new doge's cloak from his back. By temporarily degrading the new doge, his future subjects reversed the social roles to which they would soon be bound."<sup>111</sup> The masses of Venice were getting their day when the new doge was really subject to them. To outsiders looking in, this had the appearance of quasi-democracy, or at least popular support. But by being allowed to degrade the new doge, the popolani also incurred an obligation to return obedience to the entrenched aristocracy.<sup>112</sup>

Another manifestation of Venetian uniqueness was in the election of the Doge of the Nicolotti. The San Nicolo dei Mendicoli parish of Venice was populated mostly with fishermen. Annually the people of the parish elected a "Doge of the Nicolotti," who acted as a chief of the parish. Reinforcing the idea of a fisherman being elected doge were the actions of the real doge, who the day after the Doge of the Nicolotti was sworn in at the altar of the parish church, honored the new parish chief in a formal reception.<sup>113</sup>

The Doge of the Nicolotti was allowed to dress in scarlet satin at public ceremonies, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries he was allowed to wear the wig and cap of a gentleman. Muir finds the Doge of the Nicolotti unique because it allotted real ceremonial prestige to a lower-class leader.

The imitation of an elite political institution was common in late medieval and Renaissance Europe, where Lords of Misrule held sway on festive occasions, yet the Doge of the Nicolotti was not elected in jest or as a burlesque of elite practices, as was the custom elsewhere at carnival time.<sup>114</sup>

This offering of a small amount of prestige to the lower classes as opposed to giving up any real power seems to have been a basic element of Venetian policy. Frederic Lane also makes this point, for he sees this giving of ceremonial prestige, here and elsewhere, as a conscious attempt by the aristocracy to placate the disenfranchised

of the city with baubles while retaining real power for themselves.<sup>115</sup>

Besides the ceremonies unique to the Venetian Republic, there was the Venetian version of Carnival. As elsewhere, it contained mocking of the status quo and inverted role playing. "Most masquerades identified themselves ritually or dramatically with their social opposites: popolani dressed themselves as officials, nobles as peasants, men as women, harlots as men."<sup>116</sup> Again at Carnival there was a false visual democracy presented to outside viewers, and perhaps it even appeared so to many of the participants. But the real effect was to lock people out of power and keep them satisfied with their station.<sup>117</sup>

In Venice, public spectacle was used to present a favorable image to the rest of Europe, even to the point where the people of Venice began to believe it themselves. In this context occurred various types of role-reversal rituals. The solemn ritual of the election of the Doge of the Nicolotti is obvious in the image it projects: democracy, equality, and stability.

On the other hand, there were the Carnival role reversals which presented quite another image. As Muir writes, "Renaissance writers were themselves insecure about the dangers and significance of Carnival . . . they wondered whether the rabble might learn dangerous habits

of disobedience during Carnival.<sup>118</sup> In the case of Venice at least, the authorities had enough control to modify Carnival to suit their needs. That they did not would seem to indicate that Carnival suited their needs just as it was.

But time and sharpening class distinction were making themselves felt, changing some festival forms, particularly in the social inversions connected to the election of a new doge.<sup>119</sup> By the start of the sixteenth century, popular approval and ritual degradation of the new doge had been eliminated.

Rites of status reversal and the penitential conduct of the new doge eventually disappeared; by the fifteenth century the final reminder of popular ratification was erased with the elimination of the phrase, "This is your doge if he pleases you," which had previously qualified the presentation of the new doge to the populace.<sup>120</sup>

The last pillaging of the palace of a doge-elect took place in 1400.<sup>121</sup> Carnival continued on, however, for here was displayed lower-class disapproval rather than approval; that could be tolerated.

The social role reversals that took place at Carnival and throughout a full festival season reinforced the aristocracy's position by giving the people a great entertainment, by providing a means to vent whatever social frustrations they felt, and by presenting an image of democracy that they all wanted to believe in. And



while this was just one element in a "bread and circus" policy,<sup>122</sup> to the outside world, Carnival presented an image of power and stability. These minor social upheavals could take place with the city's approval.

### Nuremberg

While the rituals of Carnival are most closely identified with southern Europe, and indeed it was there that the rituals were most developed, northern Europe too had its holidays of wild abandon. The climate in Germany was perhaps less conducive to a mid-winter festival, so its Shrovetide Fastnacht was generally of shorter duration and calmer. But it did exhibit many of the same rituals and bawdiness that occurred in the south.

In Germany, as elsewhere, there were cries against the licentiousness and waste of these holidays. Luther in the thirty-seventh of his Hundred Grievances of the German Nation wrote:

Moreover the common layfolk are no little oppressed by so great an abundance of church feasts and holy days. . . . Moreover, on feast days, which at first were doubtless well celebrated, with good advice and to the honor of God almighty, innumerable transgressions are now committed, with sins and crimes, rather than the worship and veneration of God.<sup>123</sup>

The general opposition stirred up by the Reformation caused the city authorities of Nuremberg to put a stop to their Shrovetide festival in 1539.<sup>124</sup>

But religion was a pretext for eliminating the Schembartlaufe as much as anything, for it was the masking and chaos that really disturbed the town council in Nuremberg.<sup>125</sup> And as elsewhere, a festival was more easily disenfranchised than eliminated. Periodically afterwards further council resolutions were passed banning masking and revelry.<sup>126</sup>

Nuremberg's Shrovetide festival was called the Schembartlaufe, "the butcher's run." The Schembartlaufe allegedly began in 1348. The butchers of the city were given the right to parade through the streets of Nuremberg by the city's ruling class as a reward for the butchers' support of the city's leaders during a revolt by the artisans of the city.<sup>127</sup>

Over the years the parade grew in stature and opulence, but the main features remained throughout. The butchers paraded and the upper class of the city served as guards to the butchers.<sup>128</sup> At first these guards were paid by the butchers, but starting in 1468 the aristocrats paid the butchers for the privilege.<sup>129</sup>

Over the parade was elected a captain, "who," Sumberg writes, "is first cousin to the May festival kings that ruled their topsy turvey world for a day, was able to check excesses during the running."<sup>130</sup> This was a captain who was chosen seemingly without regard to class and yet,

when a peasant, had some control over the notables taking part in the parade.

Heralds led the parade, drumming up enthusiasm by throwing nuts to the boys and rosewater-filled eggs to the women. The butchers, with an exclusive right to wear masks, paraded as dancers and grotesques and surrounded a central float, the Holle, which contained a didactic scene. At the end of the parade the Laufer stormed and set fire to the Holle.<sup>131</sup>

In addition to the role reversals that took place with a commoner elected over the parade and notables acting as guards for the butchers' parade, there were also many upper-class people dressed as peasants roaming through the streets. While it might be argued that being dressed and parading as a peasant is nothing more than playing a stock Carnival figure, it was another matter to be out in public among peasants while doing it. This action by the nobility highlights that in Nuremberg at this time there was less distance between classes. The aristocracy, if wealthier than the common man, was no better by law and did not hold itself apart.<sup>132</sup> Some burghers paid homage to the butchers by guarding their parade, while others honored the peasant origins of the celebration by assuming a peasant role.<sup>133</sup>

A contrast can be drawn between the relationship of the patricians and artisans in Nuremberg and the

relationship between the nobles and peasants in Romans. In Romans, southern France, as will be more closely examined later, Carnival masking and inverted role play acting led to violence.<sup>134</sup> The town's patriciate, aided by a peasant faction, attacked and subjugated a peasant faction which had been causing trouble. While the patricians of Nuremberg paid their share and more of taxes,<sup>135</sup> the nobles of Romans were exempt by law from paying taxes.<sup>136</sup> So there was appreciably less class tension in Nuremberg. But over the course of the sixteenth century it was in Nuremberg where the Carnival was abolished, while it continued on in Romans.

The difference between Nuremberg and Romans was primarily a matter of religion. Romans, though it had a significant Huguenot population in 1581, was staunchly a Catholic city. Carnival was a Catholic institution. Nuremberg in the first half of the sixteenth century was a Protestant city. So the Catholic roots of a festival could be used as a pretext to eliminate festival customs that could be seen as threatening. As will be shown, this is what happened.

The example of role reversals in Nuremberg shows rather clearly how role reversals were used in a reward system. The butchers of the city at a critical point had, when the other artisans of the city were in revolt,

remained loyal. As a reward they were allowed a special parade of their own at which the notables of the city served as guards and retainers. Significantly, the butchers were also given an exclusive right to wear masks, a right the butchers jealously guarded.

Not only did the butchers become bound up in a giver-receiver relationship with the city authorities in the institution and structure of their parade, but in being allowed to wear masks they were being entrusted with a further test of their loyalty.

When change came and the parade was abolished, it was ostensibly for religious reasons.<sup>137</sup> But more probably it was changed because the scenes on the Holle were too pointed in a time when religion was too touchy a subject to be publicly ridiculed. The masked runners had begun to look too sinister in a time of social upheaval throughout Germany.<sup>138</sup>

For a long time, ridiculing secure figures in a stable society had been all right. But by 1539, holding an important religious figure up to scorn was no longer acceptable. What religion a city professed had become a political decision as much as a spiritual one. This political/spiritual decision had become a source of instability in society. For this reason caricaturing Dr. Osiander or the possibility of something similar happening in the future was no longer tolerated.

But while it was tolerated the Schembartlaufe contributed to the social stability in several ways. First, there was the idea of the safety valve. Just as important was the building of community that was taking place in any public festival that brought the populace out into the streets. And finally, the populace and the butchers in particular were being honored by the city aristocracy. In this way a significant group in the city was bound to reciprocate for the gift of public honor.

### England

The relationship between England the rest of Europe in festive ritual role reversals was a matter of distant influence and English adaptation. Many of the same festive institutions existed in England into the sixteenth century, but in most cases they had been made uniquely English.<sup>139</sup>

The Carnival festival existed in England, but it was not the elaborate week-long great feast of the year as it was in Southern Europe. Rather, the English spaced festivals throughout the year, with perhaps their most anticipated one falling on May Day.<sup>140</sup> Whereas in Southern Europe at Shrovetide a mock battle was fought between Carnival and Lent, in England on May Day a mock battle was fought between winter and spring.<sup>141</sup> Instead of a king and queen being chosen to reign over various

Carnival activities, on May Day a Robin Hood and Marian were elected.<sup>142</sup> But in both festivals the end result was the same: excessive eating and drinking that the peasant could really not afford, and criticism of the status quo.

What the English lacked in the quality of Shrovetide abandon they made up for by the quantity of lesser festivals. At All Hollows Eve a Lord of Misrule was elected who chose a court. The revelers dressed themselves gaudily, and a contemporary observed,

Then marche this heathen company towards the church,  
their pypers pyping, their drummers thundering, their  
stumps dancing, their bellies jiggling, their  
handkerchiefs fluttering about their heads like madde  
men . . . and in this sort they go to church.<sup>143</sup>

In addition, this group levied a tax of food or money upon those they met in the street to keep the revel going.<sup>144</sup>

But in England there was also the danger of a ritual social upheaval leading to drastic real events, as happened at Romans in France in 1580. One such occurrence in England was what came to be known as Gladman's Insurrection at Norwich in 1443.

There had been a history of tension between the city of Norwich and the Priory of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.<sup>145</sup> On January 24, 1443, the eve of the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, a scene was acted out that occurred hundreds of times a year throughout Europe

without incident. A ritual king was chosen who gathered around him a ritual court.

John Gladman, of the said city, merchant, rode on horseback as a king, with a paper crown on, and a sceptre and sword carried before him, by three persons unknown, and Robert Kemming of the same, hosteler, Rich. Dalling of the same, coteler, and twenty-four others, went on horseback before him, with coronets on their arms, and bows and arrows in their hands like valets of the crown to our sovereign lord the King.<sup>146</sup>

In addition there were one hundred others on horse and afoot, also armed with bows and arrows, all inciting the citizens.<sup>147</sup>

The next day the population of the town was gathered by the company ringing a bell. A crowd of three thousand, or so, including the mayor, gathered.<sup>148</sup> Armed and dangerous, the group proceeded to the priory, which they besieged. Shouting "Let us burn the priory, and kill the Prior and monks,"<sup>149</sup> the townsmen were able to extort concessions from the prior.

Some politics was also at issue here. A former mayor, Thomas Wetherby, wanted to keep a hand in running the city. When he was rebuffed, he allied himself with the abbot and the Earl of Suffolk in trying to limit the growing independence of Norwich. The current mayor, William Hempstede, was present at the assault on the priory. After Gladman's Insurrection, Hempstede was summoned to London, where he was jailed for six weeks.<sup>150</sup>



But the end result was that the concessions were confirmed by the king after the payment of a fine.<sup>151</sup>

Here is a case where a ritual role reversal rite had real consequences. A commoner elected to preside over a festival's proceedings led his subjects against an institution with which they had grievances. But the grievances were economic and political rather than social. The growing economic power of Norwich made the populace want independence from the land-holding prior and the Earl of Suffolk. Damming of the river for mills and the city's lease of a staith, a coal wharf, were also at issue. In addition, there was tension between the aristocratic former mayor Wetherby and the humbler current Mayor Hempstede. But the focal point of all this was that land and rights were being contested between a priory and a town.

The king's ready acceptance of the concessions granted to the town by the prior under duress further shows the nonthreatening nature of this action. For the king was, in effect, acknowledging changes in the power relationship between Norwich and the priory that had already occurred over time. The priory, with its ally Thomas Wetherby, was trying to turn back economic changes that had allowed Norwich more independence and local power. Gladman's rebels were not demanding change, but merely an acknowledgment of what was, to prevent change.

This English example illustrates how tensions brought into the open by Carnival satire and role reversal in fact were conservative and supportive of the status quo, or a power structure already in place.

The election in England of the Boy Bishop was roughly parallel to the Feast of Fools at Christmas time in France. But where the Feast of Fools was purely a profane affair, the election of the Boy Bishop was supposed to be sacred.<sup>152</sup> A common boy of the Cathedral was chosen to act in the bishop's place. The Boy Bishop said mass, officiated at church ceremonies, and if the Boy Bishop died within thirty days of his leaving office, he was interred just as a regular bishop.<sup>153</sup> The problem was that an illiterate, or barely literate, boy was unable to adequately stand in place of a bishop. So there are indications that the ritual was less solemn than some would have us believe.<sup>154</sup>

In the example of the Boy Bishop there was probably an element of the safety valve at work. Tensions in the lower orders were probably relieved to an extent as the mass was humbled in the hands of boy ecclesiastics.<sup>155</sup> But at the same time, these situations were a graphic demonstration that it took a special person to adequately perform a bishop's functions.

Still another example of English role reversals was the Christmastime ritual of selecting the Bean King. This ceremony seems to have been more popular in England and northern Europe. At Twelfth Night the family gathered, including servants, and divided a cake. The person whose piece of cake contained a bean ruled the household as the Bean King.<sup>156</sup>

The selection of the Bean King illustrates the educational and socializing elements in some role inversions. A family complete with servants was brought together in some equality, roles were changed, and new people learned first-hand of limited social dynamics.<sup>157</sup> But the emphasis should be on this event as a day of unity; society was strengthened by rites that unified a community.<sup>158</sup> The Bean King seems to have been one of these.

The Reformation started a movement away from many of the more profane observances. The Abbot of Unreason was prohibited in Scotland in 1555.<sup>159</sup> The selection of the Boy Bishop was first abolished under Henry VIII; it was restored under Mary and then eliminated for good under Elizabeth.<sup>160</sup> And while Puritanism may at first have been too weak to have all festivals abolished<sup>161</sup> (which indeed never proved possible), as religion and politics became intertwined, festival observances became more secular and less riotous.

London ordinances prohibited masking and mumming in 1393, 1417, and 1419.<sup>162</sup> But it was not until the influence of conservative Puritans in the sixteenth century that people actually began to stop. The Abbot of Unreason, abolished in 1555, finally disappeared in 1618.<sup>163</sup> The Master of Revels faded out at Oxford around 1557.<sup>164</sup> And while in England too there were concerns about the people being burdened by the number and expense of festivals,<sup>165</sup> it was the idea of festivals getting out of hand that caused them to be forcefully halted.<sup>166</sup>

### France

France provides some of the best and most extreme examples of social role reversals. This and the fact that a good deal of data exists on France make it a useful area upon which to concentrate some extra time.<sup>167</sup> In wild abandon, the French joie de vivre at festivals caused them to eclipse most others in Europe. Montaigne's background in France caused him to be rather blasé toward Carnival during his travels in Italy. "The Shrovetide which took place at Rome this year was more licentious, by permission of the Pope, than it has been for several years before; we found, however, that it was no great thing."<sup>168</sup> In looking at the Feast of Fools in France and the Carnival at Romans in 1580 and comparing them to similar events in England, it becomes clear that differences were

real, and yet the institutions tended to serve basically the same end. At the same time, the manipulation of popular events like the Carnival at Romans by the upper class also should be considered.

The Carnival at Romans, which LeRoy Ladurie examined, took place in association with the Feast of St. Blaise's Day in February. LeRoy Ladurie's book examines events leading up to the Carnival, much of the Carnival itself, and the massacre perpetrated by the town's patriciate against a popular faction in the midst of the Carnival celebration. LeRoy Ladurie sees real tensions being acted out and nobles using the ritual rebellion of a peasant sect as cause for pre-emptive action by the town's patriciate.<sup>169</sup> Because of this, LeRoy Ladurie sees the ritual rebellions of Carnival as agents of social change.<sup>170</sup>

St. Blaise had been martyred by wool carders, so it was the wool carders' holiday. In 1580 a popular kingdom was set up and Paumier, a peasant leader, was selected as king. He chose a court and superintended the Carnival activities of his reynage.

Another kingdom sprang up with another commoner, Laroche, as its king. He declared himself ruler of all Romans and "decreed that the town was to turn itself into a pays de Cocagne or land of Cockaigne, a favorite theme

in contemporary Provençal folk tales."<sup>171</sup> The land of Cockaigne was a glutton's delight; rivers flowed with wine, bread grew on trees, and pigs strolled about, already roasted, a knife stuck in a haunch so that anyone could carve off a piece.<sup>172</sup> To promote his land of Cockaigne, Laroche turned the price hierarchy of food stuffs upside down. Hay, rotten herring, and bad wine became the most costly, while pheasant, trout, and good wine were to sell for a few deniers.<sup>173</sup> This price list was given as part of the joke and reinforced the inverted world of Carnival, where food and drink were important.

It is interesting that Huguenots took part in these festival activities, even if they were not in on the organizational end of things. There was continuing strife between the Catholic and Huguenot communities in Romans. On St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572, there had been a massacre of Protestants in Romans as well as other areas in France. But at Carnival time Catholics and Protestants were all just craftsmen and neighbors, and Carnival was a community event. This mingling of Catholic and Protestant at Carnival illuminates one conservative community-building aspect of Carnival functions, ritual role reversals included.

The significance of the Romans Carnival in 1580 is for LeRoy Ladurie the counter-revolutionary slaughter of Paumier's followers by the patricians of the city and a

peasant faction influenced by the patricians headed by Guerin, a judge and leading citizen. LeRoy Ladurie sees the manipulating hand of the municipal judge and leading patrician Guerin behind all the actions of Larouche.<sup>174</sup> He believes this despite the fact that it was usual for more than one kingdom to spring up and compete with other kingdoms.

Liewain Van Doren partially accepts the idea of upper-class manipulation as well, writing, "The Guerin manuscript admits that 'worthy men' had scurried back and forth making plans."<sup>175</sup> But claiming that one faction in Romans was manipulated by the patriciate into doing their bidding begs the question of the real power that existed in the hands of these temporary popular leaders. It could be suggested that Gladman, King of Norwich, was manipulated into attacking the priory by the mayor, who was in the crowd.<sup>176</sup> The fact that it took manipulation to achieve an end shows where real power, at least temporarily, lay. For manipulation is a covert direction of power, not an exercise of power. If the festive kingdom of Gladman had not assembled and organized a group of people, there would have been nothing for the Mayor of Norwich to direct. If not for Laroche, there would have been nothing for the patricians of Romans to manipulate.

The mayor and patricians had not the power themselves; the power was vested in the persons of festival kings.

While it seems reasonable to accept the idea of Romans's ritual rebellions expressing real tensions, in this case the tensions are political rather than social. The dispute in Romans centered on things like who paid taxes and who had power within the city. And LeRoy Ladurie himself writes later in the book,

Turning society temporarily upside down implied a knowledge of its normal vertical position . . . the better to maintain order in the long run, in everyday society outside Carnival. Such inversion was ultimately counter-revolutionary.<sup>177</sup>

So LeRoy Ladurie does not seem convincing in making the claim that Carnival rituals led to social change, for it has been shown as well, that when social fears enter into the equation, Carnival rites wound up getting canceled, as was the case for the Schembartlaufe in Nuremburg, and most other festivals in Germany during the peasant revolts of the mid-1520s.<sup>178</sup>

Another interesting area to compare the festival institutions of England and France is the Feast of Fools in France and the Boy Bishop in England. Both occurred at roughly the same time, December. But the English festival was ostensibly a serious one, while the Feast of Fools in France was pure burlesque.<sup>179</sup>



At the Feast of Fools the control of cathedrals and monasteries was turned over to lay brothers and children.<sup>180</sup>

They put on any old torn vestments they can find and wear them inside out. They hold their books back to front and upside down, and pretend to read them with glasses whose lenses have been removed and replaced with orange peel. In this attire, they sing neither the usual hymns nor masses, but mumble certain jumbled words and shout. . . .<sup>181</sup>

The Feast of Fools inverted religious hierarchical structure just as Carnival inverted secular social order. To the extent that lay brothers and children were people drawn from the working classes and high church officials were members of the aristocracy, it is the same phenomenon.

And for the same reasons, the Feast of Fools can be seen as working for stability in religious communities. The feast itself was a welcome reprieve from the usual spartan existence of religious life and acted as a safety valve. At the same time the Feast of Fools displayed a religious order that was unchallenged. The only question was who occupied what niche.

Religious role reversals drew the same general condemnations as secular ones. The theology faculty at the University of Paris argued in 1445 for the elimination of the Feast of Fools. The way to end the Feast was by imposition of authority from above. "Nevertheless because the supporters of this thing try to protect themselves by

the law of custom and on that ground pertinaciously resist their superiors, there is need of greater and keener repression."<sup>182</sup>

In the end it would take the Tridentine reforms of one hundred years later and the force of competition in a religiously bipolar Europe to eliminate the excesses of the Feast of Fools. But the folk customs of Carnival were much harder to eliminate and lingered on for centuries, being refined rather than eliminated.

As the Carnival at Romans shows, even late in the sixteenth century Carnival customs and ritual role reversals served to reinforce the status quo as long as they were allowed. For a day, peasant leaders still had real power, and more often than not that power was used conservatively. In the vast majority of cases, this power was used to build and preserve the community. Natalie Davis writes,

. . . rather than being a mere "safety valve," deflecting attention from social reality, festive life can on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community (even guarantee its survival), and on the other hand criticize political order. Misrule can have its own rigor and can also decipher king and state.<sup>183</sup>

Role reversals could educate on social dynamics and build community, both of these in support of the status quo.

That once in a while Carnival antics got out of hand, as in Romans, is undeniable. But to say that Carnival was

the cause, or that ritual role reversals were agents of social change, is largely groundless. Rather, Carnival was a convenient occasion when underlying tensions of any sort could come to the surface. But these are occurrences outside of most festivals' primary result, the reinforcement of the then-current social system.

### Spain

A survey of various European festival customs would be incomplete without a mention of Spain, the dominant power in Europe at this time. Spain had its own variations of Christmas festivals, and Carnival was a big time for Spaniards also.<sup>184</sup>

In Spain the great feast and procession of the year occurred at the Feast of Corpus Christi.<sup>185</sup> This too was a festival celebrated throughout Europe into the sixteenth century. It also was, or should have been, the most holy of all festivals. For it had been instituted in the thirteenth century to celebrate the church doctrine of transsubstantiation.<sup>186</sup> The feast of Corpus Christi was a midsummer festival falling the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, some time in late June.<sup>187</sup>

The Feast of Corpus Christi was another opportunity for guilds and parishes within the city to strive against each other in terms of the opulence of floats and magnificence of people in the procession.<sup>188</sup> But it was

also another opportunity for the population to again loosen inhibitions, to eat and to drink to excess, and to mock the status quo with role reversals.<sup>189</sup> The lower classes would dress as the upper classes and make merry. Plays would be presented that often criticized the ruling class.<sup>190</sup>

These elements of eating, drinking, festival role playing, and oblique criticism seem to indicate that what should have been an extremely holy festival was not. M. Lyle Spencer writing on the English connection with the procession (by the middle of the fifteenth century) says the festival had lost more of its significance as a religious celebration and had become a day for feasting and eating as well as for psalm singing.<sup>191</sup> Taking into account Spain's reputation for intense religiosity and orthodoxy, one might think that the feast as celebrated in Spain would be much more resistant to the strains of the profanizing effect of popular culture. But it was not. Very, in his book on the Spanish Corpus Christi Processions, writes, "From time to time the various dioceses of the Iberian Peninsula attempted to halt the manifestations of popular rejoicing, with very little success, for the man in the street ignored such grave sermonizing."<sup>192</sup> So again in Spain there was a popular seizure of a religious festival. For the religious

authorities this popular rejoicing stained their festival, and they railed against it.<sup>193</sup>

For these reasons the Feast of Corpus Christi also fits into the category of festivals that aided in keeping people quiescent. First, the Corpus Christi Festival brought people out into the street in the unity of their religion, for there was still a very significant religious aspect to the festival. And nowhere in Europe was a government more more closely attached to its religion than in Spain. Second, a safety valve was at work, as people were encouraged to splurge and enjoy a Land of Cockaigne,<sup>194</sup> encouraged not by ecclesiastical authorities, but by a communal impetus predating Christianity. Here again is Bakhtin's element of the festival life of a people which they could both look back on and look forward to. So this Feast of Corpus Christi worked to maintain the status quo on two levels, both religious and profane, an aspect best seen here but also present at many other festivals. The processing was big, beautiful, and impressive and met the needs of the people in a religious sense and, because of the profane elements, it was play, it was fun.<sup>195</sup>

In addition to the great unifying and socializing factor of the Corpus Christi Feast, there were too the ritual rebellions and role reversals that were a staple at Carnival and elsewhere, serving the safety-valve

function and reinforcing a social hierarchy that believed in one group on top and another on the bottom.

The Corpus Christi Festival was not immune from use by rebels as the catalyst for revolt, either.

Indeed, Corpus was not always a day of rejoicing; that of 1640 became known as El Corpus de Sangre, for the day was made the signal for a bloody civil outbreak against the viceroy, whose repressive hand had weighed heavily on the people of Barcelona for some time.<sup>196</sup>

But this is, again, an isolated instance. The fact that Corpus Christi was celebrated in Spain for so long in a traditional manner indicates that the popular elements inherent, role reversals and satires, did not threaten the status quo.

The sixteenth century brought the Reformation and an end to the Corpus Christi Feast in England. In Spain the effects of the Reformation were felt too. The secular elements of many festivals were toned down and orthodoxy imposed upon the celebrations. But the Corpus Christi Procession did persist and remained to an extent a celebration of popular culture.

### Florence

A look at festive modes in Florence in the fifteenth century illuminates a trend that would spread eventually to the rest of Europe. For in Florence there was already a cultural distancing between the upper and lower

classes.<sup>197</sup> Here, also, working-class groups celebrated various festivals by forming communities and assuming the roles of patricians.<sup>198</sup>

And Florence had many city-sanctioned holidays. Not only were the usual holidays of Carnival and the city's patron saint celebrated, but the days that commemorated victories over various enemies both external and internal; even the suppression of lower-class revolts was celebrated.<sup>199</sup> The effect of holidays which celebrate the power of the city seems rather clear. The city, and its power elite, was something to impress its citizens and to be obeyed.<sup>200</sup> The celebration of the suppression of lower-class revolts is even more bald in its intended effect.<sup>201</sup> The popolo-minuto was being told not to get out of line. The minuto were being reminded what happened to them the last time they had pretensions to political power, and what awaited them if they tried again. The ritual rebellions that took place within role reversals took place against a background of civic power. So instead of serving to bring the people of Florence together, all these festivals tended to drive them apart. But the status quo was reinforced by giving the lower class a safety valve and also by reminding all citizens that acting against the city was futile.

There was, perhaps, some fear of the power wielded by lower-class leaders, for lower-class festive courts had

been manipulated before. At one festival, May Day 1343, an ambitious foreign signore named Brienne had aided in the organization of six festival brigades from among the minuto. Brienne had chosen the leaders and paid for the liveries of their festive courts. All of this to create a power base outside of the established structure in Florence.<sup>202</sup> "There can be little doubt that under the guise of the festival Brienne had created a geographically based following to counter the power of the constituted gonfalons."<sup>203</sup> In the end, his courting of the lower class did not work, and Brienne was expelled from Florence.<sup>204</sup> But the effects remained, and there would be more festival polarization to come.

In a society as politically closed and yet as competitive as Florentine society was, this currying of lower-class support was a potent political weapon that was justifiably feared. So it was inevitable that there would be peer pressure against patrician involvement in these lower-class festivities, for such participation could indicate a dangerous ambition.

Beyond this, there was a hardening of class distinctions. The aristocracy was becoming less and less able or inclined to mix with the lower class, or to allow itself to be debased. Earlier, the mingling of classes had been facilitated by rigid, inviolate class boundaries.



Class formerly had been a matter as much of birth as of appearance. The upper classes could mingle with the lower without fear of being tainted; status was a matter of birth, not achievement. These peasants, artisans, and merchants were not the great unwashed masses from whence they had come. A noble's position was well known and acknowledged; it was beyond dispute.

When a peasant was unable to aspire to being anything but a peasant, and a noble was a noble by birth regardless of achievement, the two classes could mingle more casually. For the roles of both peasant and noble were well defined and acknowledged by all. But when non-nobles could buy a title, and when the more humble could become gradually wealthy, finer distinctions based on appearance became important. This upward mobility was limited and slow, but it was possible. An example of this rising status would be the case of the Platter family of Basel.

Father Thomas Platter was a humble, itinerant student who became a printer and successful businessman in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>205</sup> Thomas's son Felix went to the university at Montpellier to study medicine. Although life for Felix was by no means easy, his university life was a good deal less precarious than his father's had been. Felix returned to Basel and became a successful physician.<sup>206</sup> Thomas's youngest son, Thomas, was largely

raised by his older brother, Felix. Felix as a noted doctor was well off financially, and his younger brother, Thomas, benefited from this. The younger Thomas also went off to Montpellier to study. But Thomas wanted for little, was able to travel quite a bit, and moved in socially prominent circles.<sup>207</sup>

This upward mobility was a minor but significant trend in Europe in the sixteenth century. While this did not happen often, it was occurring increasingly through the century throughout Europe. Somehow the new entrants to the upper class had to distinguish themselves from the class that they had come from, at the same time the older monied class had to distinguish themselves from the nouveau riche. One way to make differences apparent was by dress and public behavior. In this way, social mobility led to increased social stratification.

When boundaries are broken down, distinctions of appearance must be made. When appearance rather than simple birth is the key to one's class, the individual must be much more careful in how he disports himself in public. In Florence and across Europe, the distance between classes became much closer as class became a matter of money and influence. But when one's position in society is dependent not on birth but on appearance, it is vital to create inviolate barriers within that shortened

distance between classes. This is illustrated by Castiglione in Courtier. He notes, it was important that a noble engage in contests with his inferiors only when the noble's triumph was assured.<sup>208</sup>

Florence was a city without a nobility to speak of. For a long time, it also was without an entrenched aristocracy. In addition, there was a great deal of fear about an aristocracy becoming entrenched, and many laws and policies to prevent this happening.<sup>209</sup> For this reason Florentine festivals that include the mingling of classes and role reversals are the exception rather than the rule, occurring mostly in the fourteenth century. But politics and social pressures caused a further hardening of class distinctions.<sup>210</sup>

This hardening of class distinctions and the political nature of holidays led to a two-tiered system of festivals in Florence. Carnival became the great festival in which the patriciate participated, while the popolani embraced May Day and the Feast of St. John. Both classes continued to dress, to some extent, as the other. But they began to participate in separate festivals. This distancing was a trend that would spread to the rest of Europe as the continent became more socially sophisticated, removing important cultural interaction and dooming popular celebrations to being things strange to

the upper classes and thus to be feared. Fear would lead to eventual suppression of many of these festival forms.

### Confraternities

Religious confraternities were close ritual communities within a community, with close ties to both the festival season and festival traditions. In fact, some confraternities were outgrowths of traditional festival companies.<sup>211</sup> An examination of confraternities in Venice and Florence in this period will reinforce some of the ideas about form, function, and change brought out in festival rites, for many of the same impulses were at work, at least for the aristocracy, in confraternal rites of role reversal. An intense religious experience was offered to members of all classes, and in the end social pressure forced social divisions within the brotherhoods.<sup>212</sup>

These religious organizations evolved during the Middle Ages from penitent to ceremonial brotherhoods. Their ranks were open to all classes, and leadership was the responsibility of all members.<sup>213</sup> In some confraternities a provision existed for illiterate heads,<sup>214</sup> and in Venice the top position in its Scuoli Grandi, the city's most prestigious confraternities, was reserved by law for members of the citizen class.<sup>215</sup>

This Venetian law reserving leadership of the Scuoli Grandi was apparently another sop to keep an important group satisfied. Gasparo Contarini observed at the time,

That dignitie belonging only to the plebians, wherein also they imitate the nobility, for there heads of societies do among the people in a certain manner represent the dignitie of the procurators . . . to the end that they should not altogether think themselves deprived of public authority, and civil offices, but should also in some sort have their ambition satisfied.<sup>216</sup>

Here again is an attempt to keep real power away from a group by allowing them ceremonial control over their betters. Thus, at once, the patriciate gave up some highly visible ceremonial power to ease lower-class frustrations and incurred an obligation for the lower class to reciprocate, however they could.

These were religious institutions, and at the beginning it was for a religious experience that men of all classes joined these organizations.<sup>217</sup> Nobles could subordinate themselves to commoners within the organization because they were all equal before God.<sup>218</sup> It was Christlike behavior to be humbled. And momentary ritual humility was stock in a future salvation for upper-class individuals.

As confraternities developed, they became more and more welfare institutions. Rich members donated money to the organization to care for the poor members.<sup>219</sup> Confraternities in some cases ran hospitals. But in all

cases there is a measure of the idea to give what you could and to take what you need. The wealthy, and in Venice the noble, participation often often took the form exclusively of giving money. And in lieu of money the poor often gave their service to the confraternity or presence at functions like funerals, where confraternity representation was mandatory.<sup>220</sup>

The presence of poor members allowed the rich to perform the typical Christ imitation at Easter of preparing and serving a meal to the poor and washing their feet. A confraternity member wrote, "The third and most perfect grade of virtue, called superabundant, consists in bowing to and placing ourselves under those who are subject to us and who are inferior to us, out of love for God."<sup>221</sup> And while this ritual humbling was done primarily for religious reasons, it had its social effects too, for they were all part of the city at large. Actions within a confraternity had effects outside. For inevitably, good will generated within a confraternity by a poor man having his feet washed or being served at dinner by a rich one carried over into life outside the confraternity. And the sense of satisfaction that a lower-class man might achieve by being elected to a leadership position within a confraternity was also carried out into city life at large. Very often the people granting these privileges in the religious

community were also the people who helped run the city politically and economically. Again obligations were incurred in this giver/receiver relationship, and steam was vented off by this social safety valve.

But in confraternities, too, the changes of the sixteenth century were having an effect. Awakening social consciousness was forcing confraternity brothers apart. In one Venetian confraternity for the first time in 1533 separate roles were drawn up for the rich and the poor.<sup>222</sup> At the same time, ritual humbling was going out of vogue as a way to achieve spiritual cleansing. Another confraternity brother wrote,

The washing of feet and the supper for the recently celebrated Holy Thursday . . . was such that this performance of the washing ought to be abolished, considering that on many occasions it has happened that only with difficulty could there be found those who were willing to undertake that duty that they considered vile.<sup>223</sup>

These sorts of things just were not done by the socially conscious in the sixteenth century, certainly not in festival and now increasingly not in the name of God.<sup>224</sup>

But in the customs and rituals of their earlier incarnations, religious confraternities served many of the same stabilizing functions as festivals and offered some similar role-reversal situations. Poor lay brothers could exert control over the wealthy, and in the name of God the wealthy would serve the poor. In both ways the public was

placated, at the same time inducing an obligation for reciprocal support.



## CONCLUSION

Ritual role reversals occurred throughout Europe during most of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These role reversals occurred either as an act of Christian piety or as part of any of various carnivalesque festivals happening throughout the year.

The type of role reversal engaged in was to an extent a matter of class. The patriciate were more often engaged in assuming a humble position as an act of Christian charity, emulating some of the acts of Christ. In this regard it was not unlike developing stigmata, though a little less intense perhaps.

The commoner's act of role reversal was generally a part of the fool's satire associated with Carnival. A certain license was allowed to mock the powers that were. The choosing of a king and his setting up of a court both mocked the reigning authority and gave recognition to popular leaders who otherwise might be frustrated in their ambitions.

Ultimately, the ritual rebellions that occurred as a by-product of the social role reversals which happened throughout the European festival year served to reinforce

the status quo. Social role reversals as a play element of festival helped to bring a community together in joy. At the same time the role reversals also educated the community in the social dynamics that all were expected to observe.

Upper-class displays of humility also served in the maintenance of the status quo. Receiving an act of humility from the upper class drew the lower class into an obligatory relationship to reciprocate. Having little to reciprocate with, the lower class was forced to return loyalty.

In setting up their own hierarchies and in reversing the operant one, the people of the lower classes were implicitly accepting a social order that kept one group on top at the expense of a group on the bottom. The ritual rebellions of festival inverted the order of groups, but the rebellions did not do away with the social order altogether. Festivals advocated revolt rather than revolution.

Festivals also served to integrate the community as a whole. Festivals brought young and old, rich and poor together and served to acculturate the young to accept their place in society. This implicit acceptance of the status in the socialization of the young extended throughout Carnival. Showcasing the inequities of society through role reversals was too potentially dangerous to

allow to happen unless the participants accepted their role in that society. Role reversals were allowed by an integrated society in order to perpetuate that integration.

Finally, there is the overriding idea of the safety valve. Letting the people of an area vent their frustrations in a giant orgy of eating and drinking mitigated to some extent the common state of deprivation. By allowing the Carnival revelers the fool's right to criticize, an avenue was opened to air discontent; there was always the hope that it might do some good.

The institution of religious confraternities takes the role reversals out of the realm of holiday burlesques, while still remaining essentially ceremonial. While not temporary, religious confraternities nonetheless exhibited some of the same characteristics as Festival role reversals. The possibility that a patrician would be subordinate to an artisan in a religious confraternity was part of the religious experience; we are all equal before God, after all.

Religious confraternities, in addition to displaying instances where lower-class individuals could exert control over upper-class participants and whole institutions, also display the same social distancing that was taking place at Carnival. Increasingly in the course

of the sixteenth century it became socially unacceptable to perform acts of humility. And increasingly, confraternities were segregated by social class.

The sixteenth century brought change to this world. The reformed religion, with its hatred of popish festival trappings as relics of paganism, drove many holidays from the calendar and quieted the celebration of others. The Council of Trent, mindful of an image tarnished by many of the festival activities, cracked down on festival customs in Catholic Europe.

At the same time, there was a sharpening definition of class lines which affected festival customs as well as confraternities. It became declassé to celebrate with the lower classes. Class consciousness began to come less from birth and increasingly from appearance and association.

But these were primarily pretexts for the elimination of festival rebellions. Aristocracies were becoming more sensitive to the possibilities inherent in festival misbehavior. The face behind the mask could not be known. The fact that attempts to end these cultural forms were only sporadically successful indicates that these people had no more to fear in the sixteenth than in the fifteenth century. Over time, their push to civilize holidays was successful. What effect this had on various revolutions

of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is interesting to contemplate.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Although heading into the sixteenth century, middle classes were emerging or had, there was still a perception of society as being bipolar, divided between peasants and nobility. Henri Pirenne, Medieval Cities (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 93-120, devotes a chapter to the rise of the urban middle class. See also G. R. Elton, ed., The Reformation, Vol. II of The New Cambridge Modern History (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), pp. 15-17, for other social changes taking place, such as the rise of the English gentry. "In spite of the sharp and sometimes brutal fashion in which class distinctions asserted themselves then, as throughout the Middle Ages, there was none of the aloofness between class and class which characterizes the bourgeois society of the present day." E. B. Bax, German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages (London: Swann Sonnenschein and Co., 1894), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival in Romans, trans. Mary Feeney (New York: G. Brasiller, 1979), pp. 190-92, describes several instances of role reversal taking place in France in the latter sixteenth century. Also see Edward Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). The main theme of Muir's book is that public ritual, which in Venice included role reversals and ritual rebellion, was encouraged by the power elite of Venice to maintain their position within Venice and to present a vision of power and order without.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Sumberg, The Nuremberg Schembart Carnival (New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 59, describes the role of the upper classes in one of Nuremberg's festivals. Werner Gunderscheimer, Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 186-88, describes some traditions of a duke of Ferrara. In Nuremberg the patriciate of the city dressed as peasants and in some cases acted as guards for the butcher's parade. In Ferrara the nobles would wait on table at a dinner for the city's poor.

<sup>4</sup>E. O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961) gives an overview of many festivals taking place in Europe. Also Maria Leach, Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972), especially entries on Carnival and Fastnacht.

<sup>5</sup>"Civic and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect s clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals. . . . Minor occasions were also marked by comic protocol, as for instance the election of a king and a queen to preside at a banquet for laughs sake." Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>For an example see LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 96, on the election of a popular leader and pp. 182, 189-91 for some of his powers. See also Joseph Strutt, The Sports and the Pastimes of the People of England (London: T. T. and J. Tegg, 1833), pp. 341-42.

<sup>7</sup>F. Grossmann, Breughel: The Paintings (London: Phaidon Press, 1966), plate 6. Also D. Bax, Hieronymus Bosch: His Picture Writing Deciphered (Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1979), pp. 182-83.

<sup>8</sup>Writing in the later sixteenth century, Platter witnesses festivals in Avignon and Barcelona, among others. He notes that besides peasants, nobles also dress as pilgrims, sailors, Italians and women. Thomas Platter, Journal of a Younger Brother, trans. S. Jennett (London: Frederick Muller, 1963), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup>"There is a sense in which every festival was a miniature Carnival. . . ." Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1978), p. 199.

<sup>10</sup>See various listings in James, Leach, and G. L. Gomme, The Gentleman's Magazine Library: Popular Superstitions (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, n.d.).

<sup>11</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968) and Edith C. Rodgers, Discussion of Holidays in the Later Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940) have as their themes the prominent role of festivals in the life of most people during the late Middle Ages.

<sup>12</sup>"In elitist, exclusive, grand-ducal Florence poverty, humility, and low status . . . had become signs of social impurity and pollution." Ronald Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence (New York: Academic Press, 1982), p. 228.

<sup>13</sup>LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival.

<sup>14</sup>Bakhtin, Rabelais.

<sup>15</sup>Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 126.

<sup>16</sup>Grossmann, Breughel, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup>The observations of Joseph Strutt in The Sports and the Pastimes of the People of England (London: T. T. and J. Tegg, 1933), seem to be fairly typical. On page 340 he writes, "The institution itself, even if we view it in its most favorable light, is puerile and ridiculous, adapted to the ages of ignorance, when more rational amusements were not known."

<sup>18</sup>"No less true is the fact that the material gathered by the folklorists requires great care in its employment. The paternalists of the XVIII century or the XIX century . . . examined a culture which was still strange to him: and he was not armed with any rigorous methods of study in the field." E. P. Thompson, "Rough Music: Le Charivari Anglais," trans. Eric Williams, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>G. L. Gomme, The Gentleman's Magazine Library: Manners and Customs (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, [1883]), p. 83.

<sup>20</sup>Gomme, Manners, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup>Ginzburg, Cheese, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup>Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 144.

<sup>23</sup>James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough (1890; reprint ed., New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 676.

<sup>24</sup>Frazer, Bough, p. 675.

<sup>25</sup>Max Gluckman, Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954), p. 15.



<sup>26</sup>"A dropping of normal restraints, and inverted and transsexual behavior . . . somehow were believed to achieve good for the community--an abundant harvest." Gluckman, Rituals, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>"By that date [1200] pagan rites which the church wished to preserve, or was unable to eradicate, had become imbued with new significance. Edith C. Rodgers, Discussion of Holidays in the Later Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup>Sandra Billington, "Suffer Fools Gladly: The Fool in Medieval England and the Play Mankind," in The Fool and the Trickster, ed. Paul V. A. Williams (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), p. 39.

<sup>29</sup>Natalie Z. Davis, Culture and Society in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 98, for the Feast of Fools. For the Boy Bishop see Gomme, Manners, pp. 86-87.

<sup>30</sup>Davis, Culture, p. 98.

<sup>31</sup>Billington, "Suffer Fools Gladly," p. 39.

<sup>32</sup>Anthony Wallace, Religion: An Anthropological View (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 135.

<sup>33</sup>Lynn Thorndike, University Records and Life in the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 345.

<sup>34</sup>Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), pp. 74-78, describes several festival customs during Christmas, at the May Day Celebration, and other festivals.

<sup>35</sup>Geertz, Interpretation, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup>"Thus carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life." Bakhtin, Rabelais, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup>Many similarities did exist, for example, the Feast of Fools in France and the Abbot of Unreason in Scotland. Both of these were similar in effect, if not intent, to the Feast of the Boy Bishop in England. But most obvious is the presence of Carnival or some other pre-Lenten festival in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. For Carnival examples see Platter, Journal, pp. 75-80 for France, pp. 224-25 for Spain; and Michel de Montaigne, The

Diary of Montaigne's Journey to Italy in 1580 and 1581, trans. E. J. Trenchmann (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), pp. 136-39 for Italy.

<sup>38</sup>Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1978), p. 199.

<sup>39</sup>Strutt, Sports, pp. 341-42.

<sup>40</sup>In addition to the inverted food prices described by LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 190, there were often more pointed satires as described by G. L. Gomme, English Traditions and Foreign Customs (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, [1885]), p. 244: "Scandalous Chronicle . . . Satirical anecdotes, in which the characters of the principal persons in town are humorously taken off."

<sup>41</sup>"Most notable among them was the custom he (Ercole) adopted--it may have been a traditional ducal prerogative --of washing the feet of the poor on Maundy Thursday." Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 184.

<sup>42</sup>"This Maundy [washing of feet] was kept also in England by kings and nobles, and even by private individuals who on this day entertained Christ's poor in their houses." F. A. Gasquet, Parish Life in Medieval England (London: Archibald Constable, 1906), p. 177.

<sup>43</sup>Bible, John 13:4-5.

<sup>44</sup>James Hastings, ed., Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 303.

<sup>45</sup>Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 185.

<sup>46</sup>Edmund G. Gardner, Dukes and Poets in Ferrara (London: Archibald Constable, 1904), p. 324.

<sup>47</sup>Marvin C. Becker, "An Essay on the Quest for Identity in the Early Italian Renaissance," in J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale, eds., Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 298.

<sup>48</sup>"For if that God . . . shows one of His elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose. Hence the faithful Christian must follow the call by taking advantage of the opportunity." Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 162.

<sup>49</sup>Marcel Mauss, The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Society, trans. Ian Cunnison (Glencoe: Free Press, 1954), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup>The theme of Muir's book is how the Venetian aristocracy maintained and presented an image of order to the outside world through public spectacles. The Venetian poor had the regular outlets at Carnival and more dignified ones as well. Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup>The Doge of the Nicolotti was elected from a poor fisherman's parish. He was honored at a reception by the doge of the city and had a place at all public festivals. Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 99.

<sup>52</sup>Frederic C. Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 109.

<sup>53</sup>Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 255.

<sup>54</sup>"Before the Renaissance redefinition of ducal powers, the doges were in truth multiplying their own authority when they affected a penitential posture and accepted degradation at the hands of the populace." Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 283.

<sup>55</sup>Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 282.

<sup>56</sup>"The king goes naked save for a glowing ivory prepuce--cover to the sacred enclosure through his people, as they chant the songs of hate and rejection." Gluckman, Rituals, p. 16.

<sup>57</sup>Wallace, Religion, p. 136.

<sup>58</sup>Writing in 1445, the faculty of theology at the University of Paris summed up the revelers' arguments. "Would not wineskins and casks often break asunder, if their bungholes were not occasionally opened? We indeed are old bottles and half-broken casks, wherefore the wine of wisdom, fermenting overmuch, which we retain under pressure through the whole year in the service of God, would flow forth to no purpose, if we did not occasionally recreate ourselves with games and follies." Thorndike, University Records, p. 345.

<sup>59</sup>"It is an exaggeration to view the Carnival and misrule as merely a 'safety valve,' as merely a primitive prepolitical form of recreation." Davis, Culture, p. 122.

<sup>60</sup>Wallace, Religion, p. 135.

<sup>61</sup>"All these forms of protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in all the countries of medieval Europe . . . they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less." Bakhtin, Rabelais, pp. 5-6.

<sup>62</sup>Bakhtin, Rabelais, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup>Bakhtin, Rabelais, p. 13.

<sup>64</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, p. 179.

<sup>65</sup>"[Jean] Gerson, for example, came to regard holy days as a great yoke laid upon the people without their consent. . . . This sentiment was shared by Nicolas de Clemanges, who found the common folk of early fifteenth-century France so heavily burdened that he doubted whether . . . they could hope to satisfy the demands made upon them." Rodgers, Discussion, pp. 92-93.

<sup>66</sup>"In considerations, acknowledge fact that a change in emphasis takes place from role reversals, to ritual rebellions, though for the lower classes, role reversal was really a matter of ritual rebellion." Unknown quote.

<sup>67</sup>LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 313.

<sup>68</sup>Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

<sup>69</sup>Goffman, Presentation, p. 167.

<sup>70</sup>Goffman, Presentation, p. 171.

<sup>71</sup>Enid Welsford, The Fool, His Social and Literary History (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 200.

<sup>72</sup>Aries, Centuries, p. 73.

<sup>73</sup>Davis, Culture, p. 101.

<sup>74</sup>Gluckman, Rituals, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup>Wallace, Religion, p. 138.

<sup>76</sup>Davis, Culture, p. 119.

<sup>77</sup>LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 316.

<sup>78</sup>William Willeford, The Fool and His Scepter (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 155.

<sup>79</sup>Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 65.

<sup>80</sup>Mildred Campbell, The English Yeoman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), p. 298.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas, Religion, p. 66.

<sup>82</sup>Strutt, on Boy Bishop, Sports, pp. 347-48, on Abbot of Unreason, Sports, p. 340.

<sup>83</sup>Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 184.

<sup>84</sup>Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 179.

<sup>85</sup>Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 302.

<sup>86</sup>Ginzburg, Cheese, p. 126.

<sup>87</sup>Balsassare Castiglione, The Courtier, trans. Thomas Hoby (The National Alumni, 1907), pp. 103-104.

<sup>88</sup>Felix Platter, Beloved Son, trans. S. Jennett (London: Frederick Muller, 1962), p. 52; Thomas Platter, Journal, pp. 77-79.

<sup>89</sup>Brian Pullan, Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 82-83.

<sup>90</sup>Ronald Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence (New York: Academic Press, 1982), p. 228.

<sup>91</sup>Davis, Culture, p. 118.

<sup>92</sup>Burke, Popular Culture, p. 203.

<sup>93</sup>The material in this section comes principally from Gardner, Dukes; Gundersheimer, Ferrara; and Werner Gundersheimer, "Toward a Reinterpretation of the Renaissance in Ferrara," Bibliothèque D'Humanisme et Renaissance 30 (1968): 267-81.

<sup>94</sup>"In brief that is how one has to think of Ferrara around the year 1200: a growing city, living off the produce of the land." Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup>"It would not be proper to create the impression that everything the dukes did won the universal acclaim of the people, and there are a few specific instances of popular discontent. However, they are few and far between." Gundersheimer, "Reinterpretation," pp. 278-79.

<sup>96</sup>Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 186.

<sup>97</sup>Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 187; Gardner, Dukes, p. 430.

<sup>98</sup>Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 187, says of the list of goods that Ercole received on the first ventura in 1473, "Even in that first snowy winter one sees a reflection of the abundance of Ferrarese agriculture, husbandry and wild life." On pages 178 and 181 Gundersheimer details instances where the popolo "refused to be stampeded" into revolt against the Estensi dukes.

<sup>99</sup>Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 185.

<sup>100</sup>Gardner, Dukes, p. 324 on Savonarola, pp. 363-69 on his support for followers of St. Catherine.

<sup>101</sup>"His Grace the Lord Archbishop of York, Lord High Almoner, performed the annual ceremony of washing the feet of a certain number of the poor in the Royal Chapel, Whitehall, which was formerly done by the kings themselves, in imitation of our Savior's pattern of humility etc. James II was the last king who performed this in person." Gomme, Superstitions, p. 312.

<sup>102</sup>Gundersheimer, "Reinterpretation," p. 277.

<sup>103</sup>". . . and he would have had much more, had the people known of his coming." Gundersheimer, "Reinterpretation," p. 277.

<sup>104</sup>Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 187.

<sup>105</sup>"As with the beggars on Good Friday [Ercole's] institutionalization of a form of humility helped to enhance his power and dignity." Gundersheimer, "Reinterpretation," p. 278.

<sup>106</sup>Gundersheimer, "Reinterpretation," p. 278.

<sup>107</sup>Ercole, immediately upon taking office, went through a list of generosityes; pardoning prisoners, waiving some taxes, canceling fines, etc. This in addition to rewarding his political allies. "Such acts

were undoubtedly well-advised, and backed by strong political motives. But they were in no sense alien to Ercole's character." Gundersheimer, Ferrara, p. 184.

108 This section is based largely on Edward Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Frederick C. Lane, Venice: A Maritime Republic (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); and Pompeo Molmenti, Venice: The Middle Ages, trans. Horatio F. Brown, 2 vols. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1906).

109 "An emissary from Friuli, Cornelio Frangipane . . . once lauded Venice as incomparably beautiful to see, marvelous to contemplate, secure, peaceful, and rich." Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 14.

110 "During that period of independence the Venetian patriciate created social and political institutions so outwardly stable, harmonious, and just that the tensions inherent in any community seemed to be contained in Venice and self-interest subordinated to the common good." Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 18.

111 Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 282.

112 Contrasting the election rites of the sixteenth century with those of the eleventh and thirteenth: ". . . and they were aristocratic, demonstrating the elective power of the Great Council rather than the approbation of the entire community." Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 282.

113 Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 99.

114 Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 100.

115 "Such gay festivals and guilds that were allowed autonomy without political power helped keep the 'little people' acquiescent in the rule of the aristocracy." Lane, Venice, p. 109.

116 Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 177.

117 "These public festivals had no small influence in preserving internal quiet. For example, the Doge Pietro Gradenigo, at the moment when the populace was being excluded from participation in the government by the Serrata del Maggior Consiglio, gave sumptuous banquets to the sailor-folk and took pains to mix freely in the crowds and thus succeeded in averting agitation till little by

little the populace forgot its lost liberties." Molmenti, Venice, p. 217.

118Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 157.

119"As members of the richest patrician families gradually accumulated power they eliminated the vestiges of popular election." Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 283.

120Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 283.

121Muir, Civic Ritual, p. 283n.

122"Another reason for contentment, one which the Venetians themselves emphasized and which was most important for the really poor, was an adequate supply of food. Lane, Venice, p. 109.

123G. G. Coulton, Medieval Village, Manor, and Monastery (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1960), p. 274.

124The material in this section is based primarily on Gerald Strauss, Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966) and Samuel L. Sumberg, The Nuremberg Schembart Carnival (New York: AMS Press, 1966).

125"The times had changed, the Reformation created new attitudes, but of most influence was the fear of the growing power of the guilds. Under the mask sedition might flourish." Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 179.

126Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 180.

127Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 26.

128Strauss, Nuremberg, p. 214.

129Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 58.

130Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 61.

131Strauss, Nuremberg, pp. 214-15.

132"Nor did they [the aristocracy] ever develop that air of disdain for other classes which so often disfigures the talk and demeanor of aristocracies. . . . They never separated themselves from the generality of men. Patricians were not outside the common municipal law." Strauss, Nuremberg, pp. 82-83.



133 "The predominant role given the character of the peasant in the carnival celebration seems to be due not so much to the desire of the burgher to satirize the simple countryman as to the rustic origin of the spring festivities." Sumberg, Nuremberg, p. 124.

134 LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival.

135 Strauss, Nuremberg, p. 83.

136 LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 38.

137 "In 1539, when they took it into their heads to lampoon the zealous Protestant reformer Dr. Osiander, who had been fulminating from the pulpit against the carnival as a relic of darkest Catholicism, the Council decided to forbid the whole Schembart, not just that year but forever." Strauss, Nuremberg, p. 215.

138 The Schembartlaufe had been halted in 1525. "The growing discontent among the peasantry had led to many an attempt to curtail the right of assembly in the rural districts throughout Germany. These attempts were specially aimed at the popular merrymakings and festivals." E. B. Bax, The Peasant's War in Germany (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1899), p. 36. The Schembartlaufe of 1539 was the first since 1524 and the last.

139 This section is based primarily on material from G. L. Gomme, The Gentleman's Magazine Library: Manners and Customs (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, [1883]); Edith C. Rodgers, Discussion of Holidays in the Later Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940); and Joseph Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England (London: T. T. and J. Tegg, 1833).

140 "This was once, 'says a certain author' [about May Day], 'the most delightful holiday of the year.'" Gomme, Superstitions, p. 46. Also are listed numerous festivals and a complete calendar of the English festival year, pp. 12-14. "Carnival did not have the same importance all over Europe. . . . [It was] at its weakest in the north, in Britain and Scandinavia, probably because the weather discouraged an elaborate street festival at this time of year. Where Carnival was weak . . . other festivals performed its functions and shared its characteristics." Burke, Popular Culture, p. 191.

141 "On or about May Day the Ancient Scandinavian peoples welcomed spring with mock battles between summer and winter, in which summer always won. These were still

a feature of the May Day celebrations on the Isle of Man late into the 19th century." Maria Leach, ed., Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), p. 696.

142"At the commencement of the sixteenth century, or perhaps still earlier, the ancient stories of Robin Hood and his frolicsome companions seem to have been new-modelled . . . for this reason it was customary to personify this famous outlaw, with several of his most noted associates, and add them to the pageantry of the May-games. He presided as the Lord of May . . . the Maid Marion, his faithful mistress, was the Lady of May." Strutt, Sports, pp. 353-54. Also James, Seasonal Feasts, pp. 288-89.

143Strutt, Sports, p. 342.

144"These [badges] they give to everyone that will give them money to maintain them in this their heathenish devilrie." Strutt, Sports, p. 342.

145Basil Cozens-Hardy and Ernest A. Kent, The Mayors of Norwich, 1403 to 1835 (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1938), p. 21, discuss the intrigues of a former mayor with the abbot to hamper the independence of the city with rewards to city mills, among other things, in 1439.

146Francis Blomefield, An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk, Vol. III (London: William Miller, 1805), pp. 149-50.

147Blomefield, Norfolk, p. 150.

148Blomefield, Norfolk, p. 150.

149Blomefield, Norfolk, p. 150.

150Hardy and Kent, Mayors of Norwich, pp. 21 and 24.

151Blomefield, Norfolk, p. 152.

152"Amongst the various imitations of dignity which distinguished these Festivals, the Boy Bishop claims a high distinction, as well for its solemnity, as for its observance of decency and order." Gomme, Manners, p. 88.

153Gomme, Manners, p. 89.

154"The decline of this festival throughout Europe may be attributed to two reasons . . . after surviving

numerous parodies of religion, the Boy Bishop appears to have sunk into disuse, from the causes which combined to subvert the Catholic faith, and the corruption occasioned by time." Gomme, Manners, p. 89.

155 "Why did the upper class permit this? It looks as if they were aware that the society they lived in, with all its inequalities of wealth, status and power, could not survive without a safety valve as a means for the subordinates to purge their resentments and to compensate for their frustrations." Burke, Popular Culture, p. 201.

156 Gomme, Manners, p. 156.

157 "The picture by Metsu, of a less burlesque and more truthful realism, gives us a good idea of this evening gathering around the king, of people of all ages and probably of all conditions, the servants mingling with their masters. Aries, Centuries, p. 74.

158 "On the other hand, games and amusements extended far beyond the furtive moments we allow them: they formed out of the principal means employed by a society to draw its collective bonds closer, to feel united . . . but the social role was more obvious in the great seasonal and traditional festivals." Aries, Centuries, p. 73.

159 Gomme, Manners, p. 91.

160 Strutt, Sports, pp. 347-48.

161 "The provincial Lord of Misrule was an object of hatred to the puritans, who regarded him as a relic of exploded popery." Gomme, Manners, p. 94.

162 Henry T. Riley, Memorials of London and London Life (London: Longmans Green, 1868), pp. 534, 658, 669.

163 Gomme, Manners, p. 91.

164 Gomme, Manners, p. 78.

165 In discussing a city ordinance regulating the charging of feast expenses, "It was said afterwards that many persons who had been compelled to bear the charge of feast-making were unable to recover from the expenses which were forced upon them." William Hudson and John C. Tingley, The Records of the City of Norwich, Vol. 2 (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons, 1906), p. LII.

166 "In the time of Stow, who died in 1605, they [May Days] were not conducted with so great splendor as they had been formerly, owing to a dangerous riot which took place upon May-Day, 1517, in the ninth year of Henry VIII, on which occasion several foreigners were slain, and two of the ring leaders of the disturbance were hanged." Strutt, Sports, p. 352.

167 The material in this section is largely based upon Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival in Romans, trans. Mary Feeney (New York: George Brasiller, 1979); Natalie Z. Davis, Culture and Society in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); and Edith C. Rodgers, Discussion of Holidays in the Later Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

168 Michel de Montaigne, The Diary of Montaigne's Journey to Italy in 1580 and 1581, trans. E. J. Trenchmann (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), p. 136.

169 "But Carnival also dealt with social sins or ills, on which the community unfortunately could reach no consensus. In other words, the elimination of social ills implied class struggle, with greedy notables on one side and rebellious peasants on the other. Each group entered violently into Carnival, confronting the other with theatrical and ritual gestures leading up to the final massacre." LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. xvi.

170 "In other words, Carnival was not merely a satirical and purely temporary reversal of the dual social order, finally intended to justify the status quo in an objectively conservative manner. . . . It was a way to action, perhaps modifying the society as a whole in the direction of social change and possible progress." LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 316.

171 LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 181.

172 A description of The Land of Cockaigne by Pieter Breughel, 1557, in F. Grossmann, Breughel: The Paintings (London: Phaidon Press, 1966), plate 13.

173 LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, pp. 189-90.

174 "In fact, all this preparation was psychological and intoxicating, masterfully orchestrated by Guérin." LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 193.

175Liewain Scott Van Doren, "Revolt and Reaction in the City of Romans, Dauphine, 1579-1580," Sixteenth Century Journal 5.1 (1974): 95.

176"He [the mayor] was accused of causing Gladman's insurrection and he spent six weeks in the Fleet prison." Hardy and Kent, Mayors of Norwich, p. 24.

177LeRoy Ladurie, Carnival, p. 301.

178"Gluckman goes so far as to suggest that where the social order is seriously questioned, 'rites of protest' do not occur." Burke, Popular Culture, p. 201.

179Gomme, Manners, pp. 87-89, on England's Boy Bishop.

180Davis, Culture, p. 98.

181Robert Mandrou, Introduction to Modern France, trans. R. E. Hallmark (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), p. 135.

182Thorndike, University Records, p. 343.

183Davis, Culture, p. 97.

184See Thomas Platter, Journal, pp. 224-25, for a description of Carnival in Barcelona, Spain, in 1599.

185The material in this section is based primarily on George Francis Very, The Spanish Corpus Christi Procession (Valencia: Tipografia Moderna, 1962). "The corpus Procession was perhaps the most splendid and elaborate of any in Spain." Very, Corpus Christi, p. 12.

186Very, Corpus Christi, p. 3.

187Very, Corpus Christi, p. 4.

188"As the spirit of competition amongst the parishes and guilds grew, the rivalry to provide the handsomest entertainment was the cause of civic disorders and a demonstration of petty spite." Very, Corpus Christi, p. 40.

189"Other and less seemly elements were introduced as manifestations of archetypical folklore patterns inherent in the human race, whose origin we can trace at least as far back as the Roman Saturnalia." Very, Corpus Christi, p. 7.

<sup>190</sup>Although admittedly official concerns centered on the vulgarity in the plays and dances. "It is true that the procession was increasingly marred by the bad taste of some of its elements, which seem to have combined a startling childishness with a gaudy vulgarity." Very, Corpus Christi, p. 107.

<sup>191</sup>M. Lyle Spencer, Corpus Christi Pageants in England (New York: Balsa and Taylor, 1911), p. 75.

<sup>192</sup>Very, Corpus Christi, p. 106.

<sup>193</sup>"The more profane elements of the Corpus Procession were frequently under attack by the clergy and moralists long before the influence of the French enlightenment made itself felt in Spain. . . . In February of 1608 the Council of Madrid petitioned the King that the bishop not be allowed to forbid the autos [plays] and dances on Corpus." Very, Corpus Christi, p. 106.

<sup>194</sup>"In the Calle de Catalanes there was erected an arch, on top of which were a large number of platters, piled high with roasted and stuffed chickens, turkeys, geese and capons, cheeses and pastries, olives and salads, arranged in such a way as if all were suspended in air. . . . The Parish of San Vincente furnished a decoration which consisted of a large melon, hanging from two carving knives above the street." Very, Corpus Christi, pp. 11-12.

<sup>195</sup>"In play there is something 'at play' which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action." Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (London: Hunt, Hubbard, 1949), p. 1.

<sup>196</sup>Very, Corpus Christi, p. 40.

<sup>197</sup>The material in this section is based primarily on Richard Trexler, Public Life in Renaissance Florence (New York: Academic Press, 1980), pp. 219-21. "These mock heroics of the artisans drove those with any pretensions to genuine honor away from the feast of May and back to Carnival."

<sup>198</sup>"These artisan festive groups developed a mode of celebration both aping and parodying the traditional festive modes of the old aristocracy and the pretensions of the great popolani families, the so-called patricians." Trexler, Public Life, p. 219.

199"Civic feasts from this time on were conceived as memories of victories not only over foreign powers, but over domestic enemies as well. . . . The practice of converting victories over the lower classes into civic feasts continued. Trexler, Public Life, p. 222.

200"The Florentine regimes had once and for all set the structure and tone of festivities from Carnival through June. The lower classes were to be carefully controlled. . . . Pseudo familial celebrations . . . of the popolani were to be subordinated to the representation of the government." Trexler, Public Life, p. 223.

201"The disenfranchised minuti who watched the gonfalons make their offerings on St. Johns 1394 remembered, for example, that only the previous October those same units had ridden through the city menacing the minuti. . . . Indeed, St. Johns 1394 featured a 700 man strong contingent of soldiers in an exhibition of military power." Trexler, Public Life, p. 222.

202Trexler, Public Life, p. 220.

203Trexler, Public Life, p. 221.

204Trexler, Public Life, pp. 220-21.

205Thomas Platter, Autobiography, trans. Elisabeth Ann Finn (London: B. Wertheim, 1847).

206Felix Platter, Beloved Son.

207Thomas Platter, Journal.

208Castiglione, Courtier, pp. 103-104.

209"The victory of the ignoble popolo over the noble magnati and the establishment of the guild system at the end of the century made nobility a political liability." Trexler, Public Life, p. 17. "Conceived as a fraternity of equals regulating merchants and governing the liminal groups of society, the government of Florentine actually radiated distrust in its structure. Offices were short term, attained through a complete system of scrutinies." Trexler, Public Life, p. 27.

210"The inherent exclusivism of the Florentine political class, the citizens' incessant determination to separate themselves from their menial origins and pretend

to an honor that burghers did not possess, is vividly apparent in an incident of the Brienne period glossed by Stefani." Trexler, Public Life, p. 221.

211"The foundation of a parish confraternity in Saint Ambrogio in 1445 was, therefore, almost certainly a formal incorporation of neighborhood working-class festive activity that had been present, in some rudimentary way, for quite some time." Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood, p. 66.

212Material in this section is based largely on Ronald Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence (New York: Academic Press, 1932) and Brian Pullan, Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

213"From an early date in the history of the Scuole, acceptance of office was compulsory for all ordinary members." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 72.

214"But in future the lay officials of the Scuole must either keep the accounts themselves, or--should they be illiterate--delegate the duty to another layman, and not to a priest." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 47.

215"No attempt was apparently made to alter the rules, issued both by the Scuole and by the state itself, which reserved the chief posts in the Scuole to representatives of the citizen class." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 73.

216Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 107.

217"The laudesi confraternities stressed the exaltation of God and the saints . . . the disciplinati stressed not only the exaltation of divinity but also the penitential denigration of humanity." Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood, p. 50. "Noblemen were eager to share in the fund of merit accumulated by the Scuole, to improve their prospects of salvation, and to guarantee a large following to the grave." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 74.

218"The primitive ideal, of the religious fraternity uniting all men of different ranks as 'equal sons' of the patron saint, had found defenders in the recently established Scuola di San Rocco as late as 1498." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 82.

219"Although the Scuole distributed some of their wealth to paupers and unfortunates outside their own ranks, members of the Scuole enjoyed preferential



treatment and monopolized certain benefits." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 63.

<sup>220</sup>Often only the poor would scourge themselves in public, and the rich could buy an exemption from this. Pullan, Rich and Poor, pp. 66-67. "Attending funerals became, not an act of piety performed by all members of the Scuola indifferently, but a means whereby the poorer brothers obtained alms." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 77.

<sup>221</sup>Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood, p. 101.

<sup>222</sup>Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 80.

<sup>223</sup>Weissman, Ritual Brotherhood, p. 227.

<sup>224</sup>"The emphasis now [in the sixteenth century] lay on pomp and splendour, not on suffering and humility." Pullan, Rich and Poor, p. 52.

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