

A Reassessment of the Feast of Fools: A Rough and Holy Liturgy

Max Harris

Those who write about the Feast of Fools are, more often than not, both indebted to and led astray by E. K. Chambers' collection of materials on the subject in the first volume of his *Medieval Stage*.¹ We are indebted because his is still the most complete collection available of translated, paraphrased, or summarized data culled from the archives. We are led astray for at least two reasons. First, Chambers separates the data from its liturgical context. Not only does he divide the Feast of Fools from the liturgical drama of the Christmas season, treating the former in volume one under the general rubric of Folk Drama and the latter in volume two under the general rubric of Religious Drama, but he further separates both from their place in the daily office of the Christmas season. To the liturgy as such, in which both the liturgical drama and the Feast of Fools were deeply embedded, he pays scant attention. Secondly, Chambers packs a great deal of material, culled from archival sources stretching over several centuries, into a dense sixty pages of annotated revelry. Much of this material is taken from ecclesiastical documents attempting to restrict excesses or entirely to suppress the Feast of Fools. By privileging isolated ecclesiastical opposition over habitual (and, by and large, orderly) liturgical accommodation, Chambers creates the impression that the Feast of Fools was no more than a cluster of folk—and thus, in his view, pagan—customs having little or no connection with the Christian liturgy other than to disrupt it, and that it was always and everywhere rowdy, raucous, and intrusive, “an ebullition,” as he puts it, “of the natural lout beneath the cassock.”²

Jerome Taylor has challenged this view, pointing out that the Feast of Fools took place “in far fewer cathedrals than is widely supposed” and that it was “by no means everywhere rowdy.”³ David Hughes has similarly observed that, where the Feast of Fools did take place, its surrounding liturgies were composed as “means of guiding the celebrators' energies into constructive channels.”⁴ John Southworth has even suggested that “the message” delivered by the Feast of Fools was “a spiritual one.” The Feast of Fools, he writes, “deserves respect as a genuine expression of liturgical drama,” for it is a “literal acting-out of the Magnificat.”⁵ In this paper, I hope to take one step further in the rehabilitation of the Feast of Fools. Borrowing terms from Peter Brook's discussion of the mixed “Rough” and “Holy” style of the Shakespearean theater, I will argue that the

¹ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), 1:274-335.

² *Ibid.*, 1:325.

³ Jerome Taylor, “Prophetic ‘Play’ and Symbolist ‘Plot’ in the Beauvais *Daniel*,” in Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe, eds., *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), 25-42 (p. 32).

⁴ David G. Hughes, “Music for St. Stephen at Laon,” in Laurence Berman, ed., *Words and Music: The Scholar's View* (Cambridge, MA: Department of Music, Harvard University, 1971), 137-159 (p. 139).

⁵ John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 52-53.

Feast of Fools was, at its best, a carefully crafted and seasonally appropriate Rough and Holy liturgy.⁶

Since, in a single paper, I cannot do justice to a festive tradition that stretched over several centuries and most of Europe, I will limit myself to the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and to the cathedrals of northern France. Specifically, I will focus on the offices for the Feast of the Circumcision in the cathedrals of Sens and Beauvais, the reform of the Feast of Fools in Paris under Bishop Odo of Sully, and two Feast of Fools plays, the Beauvais *Danielis ludus* and the Laon *Ordo Ioseph*. This will allow me to examine the first evidence of the Feast of Fools in northern Europe, its careful accommodation in the seasonal liturgy of the Church, and some of its more sophisticated theatrical fruit.

The “Holy Theatre,” according to Brook, is a theater of rite and ceremony, soaring poetry and arcane language, having its origins in “rituals that made the invisible incarnate.”⁷ Such, for example, is the character of classical tragedy and of most sacred liturgy. The “Rough Theatre,” on the other hand, “is close to the people. . . . Its arsenal is limitless: the aside, the placard, the topical reference, the local jokes, the exploiting of accidents, the songs, the dances, the tempo, the noise, the relying on contrasts, the shorthand of exaggeration, the false noses, the stock types, the stuffed bellies.” It is obscene and it is often aggressive, “anti-authoritarian, anti-pretence,” a theater of laughter and rebellion.⁸ Such is the character of Aristophanes’ comedies, *commedia dell’arte*, and Carnival parades. Shakespeare included a measure of Rough Theatre even in his most somber tragedies. One think of the roles of the Porter in *Macbeth* and of the Fool in *King Lear*. But in some plays Shakespeare so mixed the Holy and the Rough that we call the result a “tragicomedy” or, if we are hemmed in by the classical principle of the separation of styles, a “problem play.” Brook singled out *Measure for Measure* as a paradigm of a well-wrought mixed style.⁹

The mixed style did not, of course, originate with Shakespeare, but had its roots deep in the popular Christian drama of the Middle Ages. And, as Erich Auerbach has argued, this in turn had its roots in the narrative of the Incarnation. The story of God becoming “a human being of the lowest social station,” mingling with fishermen, and in his death being “treated as a low criminal” was, he wrote, “totally incompatible with the [classical] principle of the separation of styles.”¹⁰ The conjunction of Mercy and obscenity in *Mankind* or the easy transition from sheep-stealing to the birth of Christ in the Wakefield *Second Shepherds’ Play* are well-known examples of the popular medieval theater’s ready mix of Rough and Holy. The liturgy of the medieval Church, including much of its liturgical drama, tended to set itself apart from this mixed style, favoring instead a restrained and exclusive “holiness.” Once a year, however, at the Feast of Fools, the subdeacons in some of the cathedrals of northern France insisted on introducing a measure of Rough comedy into an otherwise Holy liturgy. I will argue that their impulse was largely Christian rather than pagan, that in Sens, Beauvais, and Laon it was wisely

⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Avon/Discus, 1968). See also my discussion of Rough and Holy Theatre in Max Harris, *Theater and Incarnation* [1990] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 95-111.

⁷ Brook, *Empty Space*, 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81. See also J. C. Trewin, *Peter Brook* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 53-55.

¹⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 72.

accommodated rather than suppressed, and that this accommodation bore fruit in Beauvais and Laon in two finely balanced Rough and Holy liturgical plays.

Perhaps the best place to start is the thirteenth-century office for the Feast of the Circumcision in the cathedral of Sens, preserved in a bound manuscript long known as the *Missel des Fous*.¹¹ The manuscript contains the text and music for the divine office of the Feast of the Circumcision (January 1), here—as elsewhere in much of medieval Europe—the day on which the subdeacons of the cathedral were annually both honored and allowed a measure of license.¹² It was this license that gained for the day its alternative title of the Feast of Fools (*festum stultorum*, *festum fatuorum*, or *festum follorum*). The Sens office, which stretches from First Vespers on the eve of the feast, through Compline, Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Mass, Sext, and Nones, to Second Vespers at the close of the feast, is an elaborate, dignified, and often beautiful score for corporate worship. Of the 162 component parts into which its modern editor, Henri Villetard, divides the office, 96 belong to the normal daily round of hours, 60 are borrowed from other liturgical contexts (mostly from elsewhere in the Christmas season), and only 6 are “extra-liturgical” elements peculiar to the Feast of Fools.¹³ Even these extra-liturgical tropes enhance rather than disrupt the liturgy.

The first two such tropes began First Vespers. Sung outside the main doors of the cathedral, “Lux hodie, lux leticie” was a brief “invitation to joy.”¹⁴ Congregants were invited to banish ill-will and gloom and to take part with delight in the “Feast of the Ass” (*asinaria festa*), another popular name for the Feast of Fools. This was followed by the “Conductus ad tabulam,” a processional chant to be sung as the clergy and choir made their way into the church for the *tabula* or reading of names and duties *pro cantu et lectora* with which Vespers began.¹⁵ Also known by its opening phrase, “Orientis partibus,” this lively chant, with its vernacular chorus of “Hez, sir asne, hez,” celebrated the beauty, strength, and virtues of an ass as it journeyed from the east, across the River Jordan, to Bethlehem.¹⁶ While the chant is certainly good-humored, it would be a mistake to read it solely as a comic burlesque. Christ, after all, rode an ass into Jerusalem and, according to traditional iconography, it was an ass that carried the Holy Family to Egypt. Moreover, as Félix Clément has shown, the chant lends itself to an allegorical exegesis, according to which the ass represents both the Jewish people bearing the true faith at least

¹¹ Henri Villetard, ed., *Office de Pierre de Corbeil (Office de la Circoncision) improprement appelé «Office des Fous»* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1907).

¹² There were generally four such feast days honoring members of the clergy and the choir during the week following Christmas: those of the deacons (the feast of Saint Stephen on December 26), the priests (the feast of Saint John the Apostle on December 27), the choirboys (the feast of the Holy Innocents on December 28), and the subdeacons (the feast of the Circumcision on January 1—or sometimes the feast of Epiphany on January 6 or the octave of Epiphany on January 13).

¹³ Villetard, ed., *Office*, 41-44, 47.

¹⁴ Félix Clément, *Histoire générale de la musique religieuse* (Paris: Adrien Le Clere, 1860), 125.

¹⁵ Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, 1:282.

¹⁶ For a French translation, the original Latin text, and the music to which it was sung, see Villetard, ed., *Office*, 49-50, 86-87, 130. For an English translation of the almost identical Beauvais “prose of the Ass,” see Henry Copley Greene, “The Song of the Ass: *Orientis Partibus*, with special reference to Edgerton MS. 2615,” *Speculum* 6 (1931), 534-549 (p. 535). See also Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, 2:279-282.

as far as Bethlehem and Christ himself bearing the burden of human sin to the cross.¹⁷ A merry procession heralding the arrival of such an ass was liturgically appropriate to the Christmas season. Elsewhere, as we shall see, a live ass was brought to the cathedral doors or even into the cathedral itself, but there is no record of this having happened in Sens.

The third extra-liturgical trope, “Natus est,” was sung near the close of Matins.¹⁸ A joyous announcement of the birth of Christ, this, too, was a *conductus* or processional chant, probably bringing the officiating clergy to the *bacularius*, the subdeacon who inherited the cantor’s identifying cope and *baculus* (rod)—and with them some of his authority and responsibilities—for the duration of the musically rich feast of the Circumcision. The *bacularius* then chanted the Te Deum, after which the choir left the church and Matins was over. Since the rubric identifies “Natus est” as the “*Conductus ad ludos*,” it is fair to suppose that some unspecified “games” followed the time of worship.¹⁹

The last three extra-liturgical tropes occurred at the close of Second Vespers.²⁰ The first, the “*Conductus ad bacularium*,”²¹ again accompanied a procession to the *bacularius*. Beginning with the phrase “*Novus annus hodie*,” the chant celebrated the New Year as an annual feast of new beginnings, when worshippers enjoyed the loosening of the bonds of mortal sin and the restoration of spiritual health. Its repeated use of the verb “psallere” (to play on or sing to a stringed instrument) suggests lively musical accompaniment. When the same word was used in the rubrics of the Beauvais *Danielis ludus* (*Play of Daniel*), the designated *conductus* was accompanied by “harpists” (*citharistae*), “pipes” (*organa*), and “drums” (*tympana*).²² *Novus annus hodie* was followed by the “*Conductus ad poculum* [drinking-cup],” to be sung as the *bacularius* was led in procession out of the cathedral. The chant contained the only reference in the Sens office to the January Kalends, which many medieval French theologians—and E. K. Chambers—believed to have been the pagan precursor of the more objectionable aspects of the Feast of Fools.²³ But it did so to claim the feast for Christ: “*Kalendas Ianuarias/*

¹⁷ Clément, *Histoire*, 153-158. Gustave Desjardins, *Histoire de la cathédrale de Beauvais* (Beauvais: Victor Pineau, 1865), 127-134, offers an alternative allegory in which the ass represents not the Jews but the Gentiles.

¹⁸ Villetard, ed., *Office*, 101-102, 152-153.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-123, 184-188.

²¹ Clément, *Histoire*, 151, misreads “*bacularium*” as “*ludarium*,” repeating a mistake made earlier, 138, when he assigned the chanting of the Te Deum at the close of Matins to the “*ludarius*.” The meaning of “*ludarius*” is obscure. Charles Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* [1678], 10 vols. (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1937-1938), 5:148, cites just two examples of its use. Villetard, ed., 74-75, presents the case for “*bacularium*.”

²² *The Play of Daniel*, rubric following line 215 and lines 243-244. The music, Latin text, and English translation can be found in “*The Play of Daniel (Ludus Danielis)*,” transcribed by A. Marcel J. Zijlstra, translated by A. Marcel J. Zijlstra and Timothy Graham, in *The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 87-126 (pp. 104-105, 122). The line references, attached to the Latin text and an alternative English translation, are found in David Bevington, ed., *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 137-154 (pp. 146-147).

²³ When, on 2 March 1445, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris issued a letter condemning the Feast of Fools, they singled out the January Kalends as a particularly malevolent influence. For the Latin text of the letter, see *Patrologiae Cursus Completus . . . Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols (1844-64), 207:1169-1176 (p. 1171). For a partial English translation, see Chambers, *Medieval Stage*,

solemnes, Christe, facias.” (O Christ, may you sanctify the Kalends of January.) No doubt, given the title of the *conductus*, wine was served afterwards, but neither this nor the mention of the Kalends should be taken to signal drunken revelry. As John Caldwell points out, “refreshments after the service were written even into the *ordines romani* of the 8th and 9th centuries.”²⁴ Finally the manuscript provides a “Versus ad prandium [light meal],” to be sung in the refectory. The words are borrowed from a longer hymn by the early Christian poet Prudentius (348-413), *Hymnus ante cibum* (Hymn Before Food).²⁵ As Villetard rightly insists, there is nothing in the Sens office that would “shock even the most exacting taste.”²⁶

But this was the point. It is generally agreed that the Sens office was compiled by Pierre de Corbeil, bishop of Sens between 1200 and his death in 1222. Some of the extra-liturgical tropes may have been composed by de Corbeil himself, but the bulk of the office was borrowed from existing sources. The bishop’s purpose was not to make something new, but to make something acceptable, allowing the subdeacons a degree of light-hearted prominence on their traditional feast day but trimming their annual celebration of its more offensive features.²⁷ His office, in short, presupposes an earlier, less dignified feast in need of reformation.

The first surviving evidence of such a feast comes from twelfth-century Paris. “Already at mid-century,”²⁸ Richard of St.-Victor (d. 1173) had preached against popular “fortune-tellings, divinations, deceptions, and feigned madnenses” associated with the Feast of the Circumcision. “Today,” he complained, “having been seized up by the furies of their bacchant-like ravings and having been inflamed by the fires of diabolical instigation, they flock together to the church, and profane the house of God with vain and foolish [*stultiloquiis*] rhythmic poetry in which sin is not wanting but by all means present, and with evil sayings, laughing, and cacophony . . . and many applaud with the hands of priests, and the people love these things.”²⁹ Since, as Margot Fassler observes, Richard addressed these abuses “as if they were traditional,” it is likely that “clerical capers . . . within the church . . . existed in the city by at least the first half of the twelfth century.”³⁰

1:294. For a comprehensive history of the Kalends, see Michel Meslin, *La fête des kalendes de janvier dans l'empire romain: Étude d'un rituel de Nouvel An*, Collection Latomus, vol. 115 (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1970). For the possibility that the masked house visits of the January Kalends had Christian rather than pagan roots, see Max Harris, “Claiming Pagan Origins for Carnival: Bacchanalia, Saturnalia, and Kalends,” *European Medieval Drama* 10 (2007): 57-107 (pp. 95-101).

²⁴ John Caldwell, “Recordings: The Feast of Fools . . .,” *Early Music* 21 (1993), 489-491 (p. 489).

²⁵ For the full text of Prudentius’ hymn, see *Patrologiae Cursus Completus . . . Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols (1844-64), 59:796-811.

²⁶ Villetard, ed., *Office*, 51.

²⁷ Villetard, ed., *Office*, 51-61; Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, 1:280-281; Margot Fassler, “The Feast of Fools and *Danielis Ludus*: Popular Tradition in a Medieval Cathedral Play,” in Thomas Forrest Kelly, ed., *Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 65-99 (p. 79).

²⁸ Fassler, “Feast,” 73.

²⁹ “In Circumcisione Domini,” *Patrologiae . . . Latina*, 177:1034-1039 (p. 1036). Migne ascribes the *Sermones centum*—the collection to which this sermon belongs—to Hugh of St.-Victor (d. 1142). Jean Chatillon, in Richard de Saint-Victor, *Liber Exceptionem*, ed. Jean Chatillon (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1958), 49-50, 77, argues for their probable authorship by Richard of St.-Victor. I have borrowed the English translation of this passage from Fassler, “Feast,” 73.

³⁰ Fassler, “Feast,” 73.

A younger contemporary of Richard of St.-Victor, Jean Beleth (fl. 1160), acknowledged the popular name of the feast: “The feast of the subdeacons, which we call ‘of fools’ [*quod vocamus stultorum*], by some is executed on the Circumcision, but by others on Epiphany or its octave.” Although the “Feast of Fools” was one of “four *tripudia* [celebrations with dancing] made in the church after the Nativity of the Lord: to wit, of deacons, of priests, of boys . . . , and of the subdeacons,” it was only the last, Beleth noted, “whose *ordo* is unspecified.”³¹ The lack of a prescribed office for the feast in Paris, as elsewhere in northern France, gave the subdeacons considerable freedom.³² Although medieval authors could use the term *tripudium* to describe approved liturgical celebrations with dancing and loud instruments, the word also retained its older, negative connotations: in pagan Rome, the *tripudium* had been a noisy ritual dance in which priests struck shields with spears or staves in honor of the war god Mars.³³ Such negative connotations are evident, for example, in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Ordo Repraesentationis Adae* [Office for the Representation of Adam, also known as *Le Jeu d’Adam*], where the dancing of the demons at the damnation of Adam and Eve is described by the rubric as a “magnum tripudium.”³⁴ It may well be that Beleth’s use of the word—at least with regard to the last of the four *tripudia*—bears this connotation of pagan license. Of the Christmas season in general, Beleth complained that, in some churches, bishops or archbishops fell so low as to play ball games in the cloisters with their clergy, invoking the tradition of “December liberty, . . . since it was in ancient times the custom among the pagans” (*libertas Decembris, . . . quia antiquitas consuetudo fuit apud gentiles*).³⁵

The first serious attempt at reform appears to have been that of Odo of Sully, bishop of Paris, in 1198. Prompted by the complaints of the French papal legate over reported abuses in the cathedral of Notre-Dame during the feast of the Circumcision—which, the legate wrote, “has come to be called, and not without good reason, the *festum fatuorum*”—Odo issued a decree prohibiting specific excesses.³⁶ The bishop insisted that the bells be rung “in the usual way” at the First Vespers. He forbade rhythmic poetry, impersonations (*personas*),³⁷ and “strange lights.”³⁸ The *dominus festi* [lord of the feast or

³¹ Johannes Beleth, *Summa de Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, ed. Herbert Douteil, 2 vols, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 41-41A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 2:133-134 (cap. 72). I have borrowed the English translation of this passage from Fassler, “Feast,” 74.

³² Fassler, “Feast,” 76-77.

³³ For the meaning of *tripudium*, in addition to entries in both the Oxford English and Oxford Latin dictionaries, see Wulf Arlt, *Ein Festoffizium des Mittelalters aus Beauvais in seiner liturgischen und musikalischen Bedeutung*, 2 vols.: Darstellungsband und Editionsband (Köln: Arno Volk Verlag, 1970), Darstellungsband, 42-43, and Fassler, “Feast,” 75.

³⁴ *The Service for Representing Adam*, in Bevington, ed., *Medieval*, 78-121 (p. 105). For an alternative English translation of the play, see *Medieval French Plays*, trans. Richard Axton and John Stevens (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 3-44 (p. 36).

³⁵ Beleth, *Summa*, 2:223 (cap. 120).

³⁶ Odo, “Contra facientes festum fatuorum in ecclesia Parisiensi,” in B. Guérard, ed., *Cartulaire de l’église Notre-Dame de Paris*, 4 vols., vols. 4-7 of *Collection des cartulaires de France* (Paris: Crapelet, 1850), 1:72-75. An English translation of the most pertinent sections of the decree can be found in Craig Wright, *Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris, 500-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 239.

³⁷ Chambers, *Medieval*, 1:277, translates “personas” as “masks.” But, according to Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 337-338, *persona* “was the standard word for the theatrical stage mask” only “in classical times. . . .

bacularius]³⁹ was not to be led to the church nor, afterward, to his house, amid procession and song. He was to “put on his cope” once he reached the choir and, “holding the staff of the cantor,” to begin the *prosa* or liturgical chant *Laetetur gaudiis* that preceded Vespers.⁴⁰ Vespers itself was to be celebrated “in the usual festal manner” by the bishop or his designated representative. Certain ornamentations of the usual chants were permitted at the various hours and the epistle at Mass should be “farsed.” Readers unfamiliar with this term should not be misled: to “farse,” from the French *farcir* (to stuff), means to amplify a scripture passage with sung (or, in this case, spoken) commentary or to extend a sung liturgical phrase by the insertion of additional words. There is nothing “farcical,” in the modern sense, about it.⁴¹ *Laetetur gaudiis* was to be sung again at Second Vespers, along with another popular Christmas-season *prosa*, *Laetabundus exultet fidelis chorus*, but the *Deposuit* was to be sung no more than five times. The pertinent line from the Magnificat, “Deposuit potentes de sede et exultavit humiles” (He has put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble), had apparently (and understandably) been seized on by the subdeacons as a justification for their annual rites of inversion. The *baculus* was to be returned to the cantor (or, perhaps, passed on to the next year’s *bacularius*) and the service concluded by the ordinary celebrant. Finally, Bishop Odo stipulated that the canons and clerks, including the subdeacons, were to occupy the same stalls throughout the feast of the Circumcision as they did during the rest of the year. Temporary reversals of role, in other words, were not to spill over into confused seating arrangements.

Nothing in Odo’s decree suggests the prior existence of some kind of subdiaconal Bacchanalia in the cathedral of Notre-Dame. It is true that the papal legate claims to have heard even of the “shedding of blood” during the feast of the Circumcision in Paris,⁴² but neither Odo’s decree nor any other record of the Feast of Fools supports this charge. Perhaps the legate was confusing the actions of the subdeacons with the language of circumcision. Odo trimmed the feast of an excess of exuberance, confining the subdeacons’ interventions by and large to First and Second Vespers and the reading of the “farsed” epistle, but he made no attempt to suppress the feast altogether. Since Pierre de Corbeil was at the time a canon of Notre-Dame and is named both among those to whom the legate’s complaint is addressed and among the signatories to Odo’s decree, he may have been active in drafting the Paris reform. Certainly his own reform in Sens a few

In medieval Latin it lost all theatrical nuances, and was generalised in very much the meaning it has in *person* today.” The medieval Latin word for mask was *larva*. Fassler, “Feast,” 78, correctly translates “persona” in this instance as “impersonations.” Wright, *Music*, 239, renders it “mummeries,” which may still be too strong.

³⁸ Fassler, “Feast,” 78. The full Latin phrase (Odo, “Contra,” 74) is “luminaria herciarum, nisi tantum in rotis ferreis et in penna, si tamen voluerit ille qui capam redditurus est,” which Wright, *Music*, 239, translates as “hearse lights, unless on iron wheels and on a candle stand if he who shall take the cope shall wish it.” Chambers, *Medieval*, 1:277, explains, “A ‘hearse’ was a framework of wood or iron bearing spikes for tapers.” “He who shall take the cape” was the *bacularius*, who wore the cantor’s cope and carried his rod of authority during the feast.

³⁹ Chambers, *Medieval*, 1:278.

⁴⁰ For more on this chant, see Villetard, ed., *Office*, 88; Arlt, *Festoffizium*, Darstellungsband, 66-67.

⁴¹ The Sens office includes a perfectly respectable farsed epistle during Mass: see Villetard, ed., *Office*, 111-113, 168-169.

⁴² Odo, “Contra,” 73.

years later followed the Parisian lead, extending and supporting it by compiling, perhaps for the first time, a prescribed office for the subdeacons' feast.

Rumors of an even more exuberant early Feast of Fools reach us from Beauvais. As the clergy left the cathedral after Lauds, according to reports of a manuscript now lost but apparently dating from around 1160, they were met in the main porch of the building by an ass and its handlers. Once the cathedral's front door had been closed and a glass and a bottle of wine passed to each of the canons, the cantor (or, perhaps, the sub-deacon who had taken his place) chanted the *Kalendas Ianuarias solemne Christe facias*. The doors, loudly beaten, were reopened and the ass entered the church to the processional chanting of the *Orientis Partibus*, known here as the "prose of the ass."⁴³ According to another missing source, the prose was repeated two weeks later, on the octave of Epiphany (January 14), when a girl, with a child in her arms, rode an ass from the cathedral to the church of St. Stephen to represent the Flight into Egypt. During the subsequent "solemn mass" inside the church, the ass and its riders stood beside the altar. The celebrant, instead of saying, "Ite, missa est," brayed three times ("ter hinnabit"). The people responded in like fashion ("hin han, hin han, hin han").⁴⁴ Censing "with black pudding and sausage" (*cum boudino et saucita*) rather than with incense may also have been part of the feast of the Circumcision in Beauvais, but the oldest report places it instead at the feast of the Innocents.⁴⁵

⁴³ The manuscript is cited in Pierre Louvet, *Histoire et antiquitez du pais de Beauvais*, 2 vols. (Beauvais, 1631-1635), 2:299-302; in a letter, dated 18 December 1697, from Foy de Saint-Hilaire, a canon in Beauvais, to M. de Francastel, assistant librarian of the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, in *Lettres Autographes de la Collection de Troussures*, ed. Paul Denis (Paris: Champion, 1912), 311-313 (p. 311); and in Pierre Nicolas Grenier, *Introduction à l'Histoire générale de la Province de Picardie* (Amiens, 1856), vol. 3 of *Memoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie. Documents inédits*, 362-363. Grenier died in 1789. For an English translation of much of Louvet's citation, see Greene, "Song," 538-539. Foy de Sainte-Hilaire claims to have "found the prose [of the ass] in a 500-year old ms. [*dans un ms. de 500 ans*]." At several points he corrects Louvet's reading of the manuscript. For further commentary on the missing manuscript, including its date, see Chambers, *Medieval*, 1:286; Arlt, *Offizium*, Darstellungsband, 30-31; David G. Hughes, "Another Source for the Beauvais Feast of Fools," in *Music and Context: Essays for John M. Ward*, ed. Anne Dhu Shapiro and Phyllis Benjamin (Cambridge, MA: Department of Music, Harvard University, 1985), 14-31 (p. 16); and Fassler, "Feast," 85.

⁴⁴ The account is again found in Foy de Saint-Hilaire's letter: see *Lettres*, ed. Denis, 312. Foy de Saint-Hilaire appears to be dependent on his father's memory of a complete manuscript of "la messe. . . de l'asne" preserved in the church of St. Stephen until the document was burned by an over-scrupulous priest during Foy de Sainte-Hilaire's own childhood. An almost identical account is found in Du Cange, *Glossarium*, 3:461, which claims to be quoting "from a Beauvais codex about 500 years old" (*ex MS. codice Bellovac. ann. circiter 500*): c.f. 3:461 and 4:483. Chambers, *Medieval*, 1:278, points out that these references to the Beauvais Feast of Fools do not appear in the first [1678] edition of the *Glossarium*, but were added to the 1733-6 edition. Perhaps the later editors of Du Cange were confusing Foy de Saint-Hilaire's then still extant 500-year old source for the prose of the ass (see note 43 above) with the undated but destroyed source for his father's memory of the "donkey mass." Greene, "Song," 536, concludes "either that the later editors of Ducange quoted from Foy de Saint-Hilaire or used the same MS. that he used." See also Grenier, *Introduction*, 363-364.

⁴⁵ Our source for this phrase is again Foy de Sainte-Hilaire's letter (*Lettres*, ed. Denis, 311) where he notes that Louvet omitted this detail from his summary of the feast of the Innocents. He adds, "A perfume so rare . . . deserves not to be forgotten." Du Cange, *Glossarium*, 4:483, cites the same phrase in the context of a discussion of the subdeacons' feast and identifies the source only as "elsewhere" (*alibi*). Grenier, *Introduction*, 363, adds it to his summary of Louvet's account of the feast of the Circumcision. For further commentary, see Greene, "Song," 548.

It is unwise to trust too much in second-hand accounts of missing manuscripts. It is also foolish to generalize, supposing such events to have taken place everywhere just because they may have taken place in Beauvais.⁴⁶ But, if such events did take place in Beauvais and, perhaps, also in Notre-Dame de Paris, we can better understand why Richard of St.-Victor and the papal legate took offense. We must not exaggerate, however, resorting as they did to the rhetoric of “bloodshed” and “bacchant-like ravings.” Braying the responses and censing with sausage may have offended the more fastidious members of the clergy, but, as Eamon Duffy observes, “A perfectly good Christian justification could be offered for these popular observances, however close to the bone their elements of parody and misrule brought them. Christ’s utterances about children and the Kingdom of Heaven, Isaiah’s prophecy that a little child shall lead them [Isaiah 11:6], and the theme of inversion and the world turned upside-down found in texts like the ‘Magnificat’ could all be invoked in their defense.”⁴⁷ Peter Burke agrees, noting that the whole Christmas season was once “treated as carnivalesque, appropriately enough from a Christian point of view, since the birth of the son of God in a manger was a spectacular example of the world turned upside down.”⁴⁸

Nor must we isolate these arguably rough elements from the otherwise Holy liturgy that surrounded them. The entry of the ass into the cathedral (if indeed there was such an entry) would have been embedded in a festive liturgy that, a few years later, was to form the basis both of Pierre de Corbeil’s regularized office in Sens and of a similar office in Beauvais. As for the *messe de l’asne* in the church of St. Stephen, we should not too quickly dismiss the simple insistence of its first reporter, Foy de Saint-Hilaire, that it was “celebrated in honor of the *bourique* [ass] that carried the son of God and his mother into Egypt.”⁴⁹ If Christ and his mother could honor an ass by riding it to safety in Egypt, why should the Church not honor an ass by inviting it to Mass?

A regularized Beauvais Circumcision office was prepared between 1227 and 1234, during the bishopric of Milon of Nanteuil (1217-1234).⁵⁰ “Slightly more restrained” than its Sens cousin,⁵¹ the Beauvais office replaced the phrase “asinaria festa” in the opening *Lux hodie* at First Vespers with the innocuous “presentia festa” (the present feast), but retained the processional *Orientis partibus*, which it repeated during the procession of the subdeacon to read the farsed epistle during Mass.⁵² It omitted the *Conductus ad ludos* at the close of Matins as well as the *Conductus ad bacularium* and the *Versus ad prandium* at the close of Second Vespers. *Kalendas Ianuarias*, which

⁴⁶ See, for an example of this generalization, Southworth, *Fools*, 52-53;

⁴⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 13-14.

⁴⁸ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* [1978] (Rev. edn, Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1994), 193.

⁴⁹ *Lettres*, ed. Denis, 312.

⁵⁰ The Beauvais office, preserved in British Museum MS. Egerton 2615, fols. 1-68, has been edited, with full musical notation and commentary, by Arlt, *Festoffizium*. Villetard, ed., *Office*, 219-226, provides a schematized summary of the office, distinguishing (as he did for the Sens office) between the basic components of the hourly office, borrowed liturgical tropes, and “extra-liturgical” elements. For further comment on the Beauvais office, see Chambers, *Medieval*, 1:284-285; Fassler, “Feast,” 85-86. Hughes, “Another Source,” discusses a seventeenth-century synopsis of a now missing variant of the Egerton MS, also dating from the time of Milon of Nanteuil.

⁵¹ Fassler, “Feast,” 85.

⁵² Arlt, *Festoffizium*, Darstellungsband, 53-64, 146, Editionsband, 3-4, 104.

served as the *Conductus ad poculum* at the close of Second Vespers in Sens, was moved to the close of Lauds in Beauvais, where it appears to have served a similar purpose.⁵³

The Beauvais cathedral chapter, however, made one very significant addition to its liturgy for the feast of the Circumcision. *Danielis ludus* (*The Play of Daniel*), now the best known and most frequently revived of medieval liturgical plays, is preserved in the same manuscript as the Beauvais Circumcision office.⁵⁴ Both were inscribed in the same hand and had the same musical notator.⁵⁵ Although the *Danielis ludus*, like most of the elements in the Circumcision office, may have been composed earlier and copied into the surviving manuscript from a now lost original, there is no solid evidence for a date of composition before the early thirteenth-century reform under Milon.⁵⁶ The text itself, with its references to “the solemn feast of the nativity” (lines 270, 276) and its closing angelic announcement of the birth of Christ (lines 389-392),⁵⁷ makes clear that the *Play of Daniel* was intended for performance during the Christmas season. Earlier scholars assigned it to various ritual moments in the Christmas octave, but Margot Fassler’s careful reading of the play in its liturgical and musical contexts has now established its link to the Feast of Fools beyond reasonable doubt.⁵⁸

⁵³ Arlt, *Festoffizium*, Editionsband, 90; Fassler, “Feast,” 86.

⁵⁴ *The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), contains a facsimile of Egerton MS. 2615, fols. 95-108; a modern transcription of the music and Latin text by A. Marcel J. Zijlstra; an English translation by A. Marcel J. Zijlstra, revised by Timothy Graham; and several critical essays. Earlier editions of the play can be found (Latin text) in Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 2:290-301; (Latin text and English translation) Bevington, ed., *Medieval*, 137-154; (Latin text, music, additional music, and English narrative by W. H. Auden, used in Noah Greenberg’s 1958 revival of the play) *The Play of Daniel*, ed. Noah Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); and (music, Latin text, and English translation) *The Play of Daniel*, transcribed and ed. W. L. Smoldon, rev. ed. David Wulstan (Sutton, Surrey: The Plainsong and Medieval Music Society, 1976)). For other editions, see Taylor, “Prophetic ‘Play,’” 191; A. Marcel J. Zijlstra, tr., “The Play of Daniel,” in *The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996, 87-126 (p. 89, note 1). For a brief history of modern revivals of the play, beginning with Greenberg’s “adaptation,” see Fletcher Collins, Jr., “*The Play of Daniel* in Modern Performance,” in *The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 63-75.

⁵⁵ Arlt, *Festoffizium*, Darstellungsband, 26; Fassler, “Feast,” 66n.

⁵⁶ For the various attempts to date the *Danielis ludus*, see Richard K. Emmerson, “Divine Judgment and Local Ideology in the Beauvais *Ludus Danielis*,” in *The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 59, note 45. See also Wulstan, ed. *Play*, ii.

⁵⁷ Quotations are from the Zijlstra and Graham translation, which lacks line numbers. Line numbers are from the Young and Bevington editions.

⁵⁸ Fassler, “Feast.” Desjardins, *Histoire*, 121, assumed that the play was performed before the closing Te Deum of Mattins during the feast of the Circumcision. So did Wulstan, ed., *Play*, i. Chambers, *Medieval*, 2:60, was a little more tentative: “It was perhaps intended for performance on the day of the *asinaria festa*.” Young, *Drama*, 2:303, was even more cautious: “Although there is no apparent obstacle to the play’s having been given on the eve of the Circumcision, we have no certainty of it.” Bevington, ed., *Medieval*, 137, remarked, “The play was probably staged in the cathedral church of Beauvais during the Christmas season, perhaps on the Feast of the Circumcision.” Taylor, “Prophetic ‘Play,’” 199, wondered if the play was “designed for presentation after matins before the midnight Mass of Christmas.” Fassler, “Feast,” 98, links the play to the feast of the Circumcision, but not to a particular place in the office: “*Daniel* . . . could just as well be put on at the close of Vespers as at the close of Matins.” Writing after the publication of Fassler’s essay, all the contributors to *Play*, ed. Ogden, accept her argument. Even Emmerson, “Divine Judgment,” who sees himself as going beyond Fassler to “address the play’s ideological level” in terms of

Fassler's argument, in summary, "is that *Danielis ludus* is a Feast of Fools play; that the staging, the text and music, the particular choice of Old Testament characters, and the narrative, all serve to illustrate the themes of misrule prominent in other aspects of Feast of Fools celebrations. But, although *Daniel* is a *ludus*, that is, a sporting or jocular entertainment, it is not ultimately irreverent. Instead this is a play written by ecclesiastical reformers, as was the Circumcision Office that accompanies it in manuscript. It permits folly and discord, but within an orthodox context, and its goals are to suppress certain aspects of well-established popular traditions by bringing them into the church and containing them within larger liturgical and exegetical traditions."⁵⁹

Seen in this light, the play comes alive in fresh ways. Like the office for the Feast of the Circumcision, *Danielis ludus* was built around a series of elaborate sung processions. The opening processional *prosa* ushered King Balthasar (Belshazzar) and his "princes" into the cathedral. Arriving at his throne (perhaps the one usually occupied by the bishop),⁶⁰ he ordered his satraps to produce for his own secular use the sacred vessels that his father had removed from the temple in Jerusalem.⁶¹ Officially responsible for the cathedral's sacred vessels and vestments, the subdeacons may have been in the habit of appropriating them for their own celebrations during the Feast of Fools. Perhaps, too, Balthasar and his "princes" were now clothed in sumptuous, "borrowed" vestments and drank from vessels usually reserved for the consecrated wine of the mass.⁶²

The second processional *prosa*, sung by the satraps as they brought the drinking vessels to the king, invited noisy rejoicing. The accompanying music was associated with the Feast of Fools. Not only was it used in nearby Laon during the Matins of Epiphany, the day on which the subdeacons there observed their *tripudium*, but its opening and closing phrases echoed the familiar melody of the prose of the ass, *Orientis Partibus*.⁶³ The words exhorted the "joyful crowd" to "sing, . . . play the harp and clap their hands and make a glad sound in a thousand ways" (42-43). Perhaps only the subdeacons sang and played musical instruments, but the lay audience, one supposes, would have applauded their entry, clapped along to the music, laughed, and otherwise made "a glad sound." In an earlier liturgical *Daniel* play, composed by the peripatetic scholar Hilarius, the opening *prosa* began, "Resonant unanimes cum plausu populari" [Let all together resound with the applause of the people].⁶⁴ The satraps in Beauvais went one cautionary step further. They sang, "Laughing Babylon applauds" (56), thereby identifying themselves and their audience (and, by implication, the Feast of Fools itself) with pagan Babylon.

Beauvais' carefully guarded independence from the monarchy in Paris, finds her argument "compelling" (p. 44).

⁵⁹ Fassler, "Feast," 66-67.

⁶⁰ Taylor, "Prophetic 'Play,'" 203; Dunbar H. Ogden, "The Staging of *The Play of Daniel* in the Twelfth Century," in *The Play of Daniel: Critical Essays*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 11-32 (p. 22).

⁶¹ There may have been a threefold referent here: first, to the temple vessels themselves (2 Kings 24:13, Daniel 5:2); second, to the pillage of lands and plate from Beauvais cathedral by Philip I of France (1060-1108) (see Emerson, "Divine Judgment," 45-46); and, third, to the chalices ordinarily used during Mass.

⁶² Fassler, "Feast," 88.

⁶³ Fassler, "Feast," 89.

⁶⁴ Hilarius, *Historia de Daniel Representanda*, line 1, in Young, "Drama," 2:276-286 (p. 276).

Once the king's blasphemous banquet was underway, writing mysteriously appeared on the wall. The terrified king's knees knocked wildly (Daniel 5:6).⁶⁵ His wise men were unable to decipher the words. The queen arrived in another sumptuous (and, one suspects, outrageously comic) procession. A male subdeacon would have played the role. The words of the *conductus reginae* (procession of the queen) drew attention to her/his "golden garments" (84-85), proclaimed her/him a "heroine" (93), and invited the "joyful applause" of the audience (95). Cross-dressing had for centuries been a commonplace of Kalends masquerades.⁶⁶ Disgruntled bishops and theologians were to complain repeatedly against its presence in the Feast of Fools.⁶⁷ It is hard, therefore, to imagine the subdeacons in Beauvais not treating the queen's musical (96-97) entry as an opportunity to indulge in traditional seasonal role reversals.

Urged by the queen, the king sent for Daniel. The words and music that accompanied Daniel's processional entry were "of more serious character,"⁶⁸ as befitted the arrival of "the true servant of God" (121). While the princes exalted his "virtue, life, and character" (131), Daniel added his own refrain: "As a poor man and an exile, I go with you to the king" (127, 133, 139). Daniel's humility compared favorably with the pomp of the previous *conducti*. Arriving at the royal court, Daniel interpreted the mysterious writing as an expression of God's displeasure at the misuse of the sacred vessels and as an announcement of the imminent end of Balthasar's reign. The king ordered Daniel to be dressed in royal robes and commanded the satraps to remove the offending vessels. If the vessels were, in fact, those ordinarily reserved for sacred use in the mass, then their traditional misuse during the Feast of Fools' had been both permissively repeated and dramatically condemned by their role in the *Danielis ludus*.

The queen's recessional provided a second opportunity for cross-dressed parody of royal pretension. The words of the *conductus* lauded the queen as an example of the perfect wife of Proverbs 31:10-31. This was narratively justified by the queen's wise advice to the king, but it must also have heightened the comic effect to have a cross-dressed subdeacon extravagantly praised as the model of an ideal wife. The satraps' recessional, returning the misappropriated vessels to their rightful place, by contrast praised Daniel's youthful wisdom and virtue.

As the conquering Persian king Darius then entered, two of his followers ran ahead to "drive out Balthasar as if killing him" (246). Darius's magnificent *conductus*, twice called a "tripudium" (221, 238), was accompanied by "harpists" (*citharistae*), "drums" (*tympana*), and "pipes" (*organa*). When Darius had taken his throne, two of his followers suggested that he summon Daniel. Daniel's second *conductus* stressed his identity as both a prophet and type of Christ by inviting the congregation "joyfully [to] celebrate the solemn feast of the Nativity" (270).

Jealous of Daniel's success, the royal counselors conspired to trap him by persuading the king to pass a law forbidding the worship of any god but Darius himself.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁶ For a summary of references to cross-dressing during Kalends, see Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks*, 33-36.

⁶⁷ In their March 1445 letter condemning the Feast of Fools, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris complained, among other things, that "at the time of the divine office, priests and clerks . . . dance in the choir dressed as women [*in vestibus mulierum*]." See *Patrologiae . . . Latina*, ed. Migne, 207:1171, and, for an English translation, Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, 1:294.

⁶⁸ Fassler, "Feast," 95.

Darius brayed (“O hez!) in his folly as he issued the decree, the music echoing the sung “hin han” in the traditional prose of the ass.⁶⁹ The action continued with Daniel’s refusal to abandon his daily prayer to the true God, his arrest, his confinement in the lions’s den, his apocryphal feeding by the prophet Habbakuk, and the penitent king’s joy over Daniel’s overnight survival. Finally, Darius ordered that “the God of Daniel who reigns forever shall be worshipped by all” (383-384), Daniel announced the coming of the Messianic king, and an angel “suddenly exclaim[ed],”

I bring you a message from high heaven:
Christ is born, Ruler of the world,
In Bethlehem of Judea, as the prophet foretold (389-392).

With this proclamation of the good news of the Nativity and the singing of the *Te Deum*, the play closed.

Fassler concludes that *The Play of Daniel*’s “deliberate mixture of the sacred and the secular, the serious and the comic,”⁷⁰ skillfully accommodated and tamed the traditional license of the Feast of Fools. Which is to say, in Brook’s terms, that the *Danielis ludus* was a mix of Holy and Rough Theatre, condemning the worst of the Rough even as it permitted its reenactment for a Holy purpose. Of course, not all of the Rough Theatre’s repertoire of comic tricks, nor even the full range of subdeacons’ traditional antics, made it into *Danielis ludus*. The point of the reform was precisely to exclude those most offensive to the higher clergy. But enough survived to make *Danielis ludus* a carefully crafted annual contribution to the Rough and Holy liturgy of the Feast of the Circumcision.

Robert Lagueux has made the same case for the Laon *Ordo Ioseph [Office of Joseph]*.⁷¹ The text of the *Ordo Ioseph* follows those of two other Laon liturgical plays, an *Ordo Prophetarum [Office of the Prophets]* and an *Ordo Stellae [Office of the Star]*, in a single manuscript collection “of all the special, elaborate liturgy that the cathedral chapter might celebrate over the course of the year.”⁷² Lagueux has argued convincingly that the three plays formed part of the liturgy of the Christmas season, the *Ordo Prophetarum* being staged on Christmas Eve, the *Ordo Stellae* on the Feast of Holy Innocents (December 28), and the *Ordo Ioseph* on the Feast of Epiphany (January 6).⁷³ Although the manuscript includes the music for the liturgical offices themselves, it records only the words of the three plays.⁷⁴ The manuscript itself has been variously dated from the last quarter of the twelfth century to the early thirteenth century.⁷⁵

Both of the first two plays allow for something of a mixed style. The *Ordo Prophetarum* ends with the episode of Balaam and his ass. Balaam delivers his prophecy,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 91-92.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁷¹ Robert Charles Lagueux, “Glossing Christmas: Liturgy, Music, Exegesis, and Drama in High Medieval Laon.” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2004, includes the Latin text and an English translation of the *Ordo Ioseph* (pp. 704-711), as well as lengthy commentary on both the play and its liturgical setting (pp. 334-447). The Latin text can also be found, with brief commentary, in Young, *Drama*, 2:266-276.

⁷² Lagueux, “Glossing,” 232. The manuscript is Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 263.

⁷³ Ibid., 258, 274, 372-375.

⁷⁴ Lagueux, “Glossing,” 444, argues that “the MS does not provide music for the dramas because it allows for *different* music to be used depending on the specific needs and desires of the community at the time of the performance.”

⁷⁵ For the early date, see Hughes, “Music,” 137; Lagueux, “Glossing,” 227-228. For the later date, see, Young, *Drama*, 2:266. Arlt, *Festoffizium*, Darstellungsband, 220, remains judiciously undecided.

an angel with a sword appears, Balaam “beats the ass, and when it fails to move,” speaks to it “angrily.” “A boy beneath the ass” (*puer sub Asina*) speaks the surprising response of the ass.⁷⁶ The ass may have been played by a boy in an ass’s costume or a boy may have been concealed beneath the caparisons of a live ass.⁷⁷ In either case, it is hard to imagine, despite both Young and Lagueux’s insistence to the contrary, that the comic potential of the episode was suppressed.⁷⁸ In a Rough and Holy liturgy, there is no reason why a talking ass cannot be both a miraculous sign and a cause of merriment.

In the *Ordo Stellae*, it is Herod’s rage that suggests the possibility of a mixed style. Although Herod was the villain of the piece, responsible for the slaughter of the innocents, his traditionally exaggerated anger could also be an entertaining source of Rough Theatre. In thirteenth-century Padua, a clerical actor playing the part of Herod was allowed to interrupt Matins on the night of Epiphany. After hurling a wooden spear at the choir “with the greatest fury,” he climbed into the pulpit to read the ninth lesson “with the same fury. And meanwhile his ministers, with great fury, go around the quire beating bishop, canons and scholars with inflated bladders, and also men and women standing in the church.”⁷⁹ There is no evidence of anything like this happening during the Laon play,⁸⁰ but the text does mention the king’s wrath (*ira*). Moreover, the first six readings at Matins for the Feast of Holy Innocents in Laon came from a sermon by Peter

⁷⁶ The Latin text of the *Ordo Prophetarum* is printed in Young, *Drama*, 2:145-150, and, with an English translation, in Lagueux, “Glossing,” 692-698. For an alternative English translation of the Balaam episode, see William Tydeman, ed., *The Medieval European Stage, 500-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 100).

⁷⁷ C. Hidé, “Notices sur les fêtes de l’Evêque dit Innocent et du Patriarche des fous à Laon,” *Bulletin de la Société Académique de Laon* 13 (1863), 111-131 (p. 114), assumes that “a choirboy, slipping under the caparisons of the animal,” spoke the lines. Suzanne Martinet, “Les Fêtes à Laon au Moyen-Age,” *Memoires (Federation des sociétés d’histoire et d’archéologie de l’Aisne)* 7 (1960-61), 89-97 (p. 92), agrees. A similar phrase (“Quidam sub asina dicat”) is used during the Balaam episode in the fourteenth-century Rouen prophet play, *Ordo Procecionorum Asinorum* (Office of the Procession of the Ass): see Young, *Drama*, 2:154-165 (p. 159). Young (p. 167) glosses this as “the person concealed under the animal cries out in protest,” but Peter Meredith, in Tydeman, ed., *Medieval*, 101, translates it as “Someone inside the ass shall say.” Dunbar H. Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), refers to “the player inside the animal costume” at Rouen (p. 74), but wonders if the speaker might have been “tied ‘underneath’ a live donkey” at Laon (p. 135). In the Chester play of *Moses and the Law: Balaack and Balaam*, the stage direction reads at this point, “Et his oportet aliquis transformiari in speciem asinae; et quando Balaham percutit, dicat asinia” (And here someone ought to be transformed into the guise of an ass; and when Balaam strikes, the ass shall say): see *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, 2 vols., Early English Text Society S.S. 3 and 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974-1986), 1:88, and, for the English translation, *The Chester Cycle*, ed. David Mills (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), 91. For an alternative English translation, see *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, ed. Peter Meredith and John E. Tailby (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), 120-121.

⁷⁸ Lagueux, “Glossing,” 263; Young, *Drama*, 2:152. Chambers, *Medieval*, 2:57, sees the episode “as an attempt to turn the established presence of the ass in the church to purposes of edification, rather than of ribaldry.”

⁷⁹ Young, *Drama*, 2:99-100. For an English translation, see Tydeman, ed., *Medieval*, 106. For a broader study of the role of Herod in medieval drama, see David Staines, “To Out-Herod Herod: The Development of a Dramatic Character,” in Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe, eds., *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), 207-231.

⁸⁰ The Latin text of the *Ordo Stellae* is printed, with brief commentary, in Young, *Drama*, 2:103-109, and, with an English translation, in Lagueux, “Glossing,” 699-703.

Chrysologos (d. ca. 450) that, as Lagueux puts it, “depicts a Herod who has become completely unhinged at the thought that he has been deceived by the Magi and that the Christ child lives.”⁸¹ The Herod of the *Ordo Stellae* must have imitated to some degree a traditional royal madness that in performance could have been both frightening and comic.

But it was the third liturgical play, the *Ordo Ioseph*, that was the designated “Feast of Fools play,” specifically “composed for performance on Epiphany, . . . the feast of the subdeacons at Laon.”⁸² The office of the feast itself, like those in Sens and Beauvais, “gives the impression that it [was] a dignified, reformed version of [an earlier] more raucous celebration,”⁸³ but it still retained several of its livelier moments. At Matins, the prose *Iubilemus cordis voce* was sung to the same melody as the *conductus* of the Satraps in the Beauvais *Danielis ludus*, which quoted musical phrases from the popular Feast of Fools prose of the Ass, *Orientis partibus*.⁸⁴ At the close of Compline, the subdeacons sang *Nos respectu gratie*, whose last verse invited the assembly to “sing and dance to the music of stringed instruments” (*psallat cum tripudio*):

Lucis tanto radio	Let this assembly
hec perfusa contio	filled with such beams of light
ex amore nimio	out of such great love
psallat cum tripudio	rejoice with joy/dance. ⁸⁵

The final rubric of Compline (and hence of the entire feast) invited the assembly to “sing all the Benedicamus [songs] we know” (*Tot benedicamus quod novit quisque canamus*).⁸⁶ Lagueux comments, “The conclusion of the Laon subdeacons’ feast was thus characterized by one final bout of revelry, with dancing, and as much singing as was possible.”⁸⁷ Moreover, candles ordinarily lit and left burning in the cathedral from First to Second Vespers at other major feasts were not put in place for Epiphany, because then, we are told, “the subdeacons celebrate their feast” (*quia subdiaconi faciunt festum*).⁸⁸ Lagueux wonders whether the subdeacons routinely stole the candles or whether “such a quantity of open flames was considered dangerous” during the “endless Compline” of singing and dancing that immediately followed Second Vespers.⁸⁹ Even so, we should remember that the extended Compline was a “revelry” of praise not of ribaldry.

It was in this Rough and Holy liturgical context that the *Ordo Ioseph* was performed. The text is incomplete, breaking off before Joseph’s brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob’s sons, but enough survives for us to see its very strong conceptual resemblance to the *Danielis ludus*. Like the Beauvais play, the *Ordo*

⁸¹ Lagueux, “Glossing,” 284. Peter Chrysologos, *De Herode et infantibus* (Sermon CLII), in *Sancti Petri Chrysologi collectio sermonum*, ed. A. Olivar, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 24B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), 949-955.

⁸² Lagueux, “Glossing,” 372.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 334, n. 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 576-579, 675-676.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 338, 627, 688. I have printed Lagueux’s translation of this verse, preceded by my own alternative rendering of the final line.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 338, 628, 689.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁸⁸ Ulysse Chevalier, ed., *Ordinaires de l’église cathédrale de Laon (XIIe et XIIIe siècles) suivis de deux Mystères liturgiques publiés d’après les manuscrits originaux* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1897), 243; English translation from Lagueux, “Glossing,” 339.

⁸⁹ Lagueux, “Glossing,” 339.

Ioseph was built around a series of lavish processions. In the absence of musical notation, these are not marked as clearly in the text as they are in the Daniel play, but Lagueux has pinpointed several moments that would have required such processions.⁹⁰ The most elaborate, involving travel to and fro between Canaan and Egypt, “were likely staged so as to cross a large distance. Canaan was probably situated in the southern transept, with Egypt in the northern transept. Processions between these two locations no doubt included extensive perambulation outside the staging area and took advantage of the aisles of the cathedral space. . . . [They] could easily have followed a course from one end of the transept down the nave towards the western portal, then back east to the other end of the transept. This distance would maximize the amount of time available for the singing of *conductus* as well as increasing the physical proximity of the action to the audience.”⁹¹ The first and perhaps the most splendid of these occurred after Joseph had been sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelite merchants. The rubric reads, “The Ishmaelites lead Joseph away clad in a splendid garment, and coming before Pharaoh they say” (67). A second journey to Egypt took place when, as the rubric tells us, Joseph brothers “go to Egypt, and coming before Joseph say” (185). A final, interrupted journey in the other direction took place when the brothers left Egypt, “carefree” (*secudi*), with full sacks of grain, only to be pursued by Joseph’s servants, who found “stolen” silver in the sacks and so brought the brothers, now “confused and bewildered,” back to Egypt (204, 214). A shorter procession, within Egypt, would have taken place when Joseph left the playing area after being sold to the pharaoh Potiphar. The counsellors sing, “Dimittant puerum” (Let us send the boy away), and “the merchants, setting the scales up, weigh the silver and, bowing to the king, move to the side” (89-90). The “act of setting up their scales and weighing the silver,” Lagueux observes, “could not have been done instantaneously”; it would have allowed ample time for Joseph’s processional departure.⁹² Another procession, akin to those of Balthasar’s queen in the *Danielis ludus*, would have accompanied the departure of the Pharaoh’s wife after her attempted seduction of Joseph (137). Yet further *conducti* would have taken place when characters were released from or returned to jail, first the baker and cupbearer (143, 157) and then Joseph (157).

Like the *Danielis ludus*, too, the *Ordo Ioseph* employed as stage properties the sacred vessels and vestments for which the subdeacons were responsible and which they had likely been in the habit of appropriating for the Feast of Fools. When the baker and cupbearer were brought from jail to the Pharaoh, the former servant arrived “with bread wafers and a basket” (*cum nebulis et cophino*), the latter “with a vine and bunches of grapes” (143). Lagueux points out that *nebula* designates not just any bread but specifically “the bread of the eucharist,” and argues accordingly that “the cup held by the *pincerna* [cupbearer] was a chalice and that the *pistoris* [baker] held a paten or ciborium.”⁹³ He also suggests that the “splendid garment” (*splendida veste*) worn by Joseph for his *conductus* into Egypt (67), which represented his traditional “coat of many colors” or “richly ornamented robe” (Genesis 37:3), was “most likely the sumptuous cope of the cantor,” usually worn by the subdeaconal *bacularius* during the Feast of Fools.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., 393-396.

⁹¹ Ibid., 395-396.

⁹² Ibid., 381.

⁹³ Ibid., 385, citing in support Du Cange, *Glossarium*, 4:582-3.

⁹⁴ Lagueux, “Glossing,” 378; see also 435-436.

Perhaps Joseph received the cope from Jacob at the beginning of the play. Certainly the rubric specifies that Joseph accepted from his father at this point a shepherd's "staff" (*baculus*) (30), which would have been represented in performance by the cantor's silver-plated *baculus*.⁹⁵ The traditional transfer of power from cantor to subdeacon during the Feast of Fools, enacted by the transfer of cope and *baculus*, was thus incorporated into the action of the *Ordo Ioseph*. Perhaps the cantor himself played Jacob and the subdeacon who served as the *bacularius* during the feast played Joseph.

The *Ordo Ioseph* also included a deliberately scripted opportunity for comic cross-dressing. Indeed, the comic potential was arguably greater in Laon than in Beauvais. Whereas in the *Danielis ludus* Balthasar's queen was an ideal wife, in the *Ordo Ioseph* Potiphar's wife was a persistent seductress. The series of rubrics for the scene begins, "Again [*iterum*] Potiphar's wife, desiring Joseph, calls him in private" (127). As Lagueux points out, "*iterum*" suggests that this was not her first attempt to seduce Joseph.⁹⁶ Probably she had been silently pantomiming seduction in the northern transept (Egypt) while the previous scene between Jacob and his sons played out in the southern transept (Canaan). Then, as the attention shifted back to Egypt, she tried again. Joseph resisted, but she caught his cloak as he fled. She took the cloak to Potiphar and, in lines that "a cleric in drag,"⁹⁷ must surely have delivered in an exaggeratedly comic style, complained:

Me lascivus in conclavi voluit opprimere!	The wanton wanted to overwhelm me in the chamber. (132-134)
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Her subsequent recessional ("Having made this protest she leaves") (137) was, one suspects, the *conductus* most likely to draw the laughter and applause of the watching congregation.

Finally, Lagueux also finds comedy in the economic shrewdness of the Ishmaelite merchants, who buy Joseph for a low price in Canaan and sell him for a high price in Egypt.⁹⁸ In the first case, one of the merchants urges his colleagues, "Hurry, my partners,/ Loosen your purses!/ Let silver be presented—/ This is a good deal!" (64-67). In the second case, the merchants inflate the price and Potiphar commands, "Give them whatever they want/ as a price for the boy" (81-82). "The author of the play," Lagueux observes, "was surely making not-so-subtle reference to the lively marketplace that was active in Laon, for the cathedral chapter had a history of disputes with the merchants."⁹⁹ Comedy, in this instance, was satirical, poking fun both at the merchant's greed and at the chapter's gullibility.

But the *Ordo Ioseph* was by no means all Rough comedy. Adapting a term from Susan Boynton, Lagueux argues that the play was also "a sophisticated masterpiece of performative gloss."¹⁰⁰ In her careful reading of the late twelfth-century Fleury *Interfectio puerorum* (*Slaughter of the Innocents*), Boynton argues that the Fleury play "functions as a form of performative exegesis through the medium of dramatic impersonation,"

⁹⁵ Ibid., 432-434.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 383-384, 428-429.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 428.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 380-381. Martinet, "Fêtes," 93, also finds comedy in the actions of the merchants and in the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 430.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 374.

embodying in its action multiple historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings of the biblical narrative more commonly articulated in sermons and commentaries.¹⁰¹ Lagueux makes a similar case for the *Ordo Ioseph*. In summary, he writes, “Several of the characters are polysemic symbols, creating a web of exegetical connections. Joseph, for example, is not only the OT patriarch, but [is] also connected with Christ, Daniel, the Innocents, and the Laon subdeacons themselves. He is, furthermore, portrayed as the ideal ruler and the ideal cleric.”¹⁰² Jacob’s grief over Joseph’s bloodied robe and the journeys of the children of Jacob/Israel into Egypt are just two further examples of the way in which the story of Joseph was understood to look forward to the birth and passion narratives of Christ (among other referents). The *Ordo Ioseph* was concerned with the Holy no less than with the Rough.

Fassler’s conclusions about the *Danielis ludus* thus hold true for the *Ordo Ioseph*. Both liturgical plays were designed to mix “the sacred and the secular, the serious and the comic.”¹⁰³ In Brook’s terms, each play was a finely crafted fusion of Holy and Rough Theatre, serving not only the immediate purpose of accommodating and taming the traditional license of the Feast of Fools, but also the larger purpose of shaping a mixed liturgical style appropriate for the Christmas season. For it was then, as Auerbach and others insist, that the narrative of the Incarnation most powerfully resisted an exclusively Holy style and the message of the Magnificat demanded—at least once in the liturgical year—a comic reversal of the hierarchical status quo.

A sustained application of this concept of a Rough and Holy Liturgy to the larger history of the Feast of Fools would prove, I suspect, a much more fruitful heuristic device for understanding the data assembled by Chambers than is his own separation of Folk Drama from Religious Drama and his isolation of both theatrical styles from the liturgy of the Church. The Feast of Fools, I suggest, makes much better sense as a series of differentiated, but mutually influential, local experiments in Rough and Holy Liturgy than it does as a generalized seasonal battle between pagan and Christian forces in the medieval Church.

¹⁰¹ Susan Boynton, “Performative Exegesis in the Fleury *Interfection Puerorum*,” *Viator* 29 (1998): 39-64 (p.44.) Boynton includes the Latin text of the *Interfectio puerorum*. Bevington, ed., *Medieval*, 67-72, includes both the Latin text and an English translation. For earlier readings of the play’s multiple and simultaneous temporal mimesis, see Mary H. Marshall, “Aesthetic Values of the Liturgical Drama,” in Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson, eds., *Medieval English Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 28-43 (pp. 40-43); Max Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 53-57.

¹⁰² Lagueux, “Glossing,” 374-375.

¹⁰³ Fassler, “Feast,” 99.

Asini, "Medieval English Theatre 33 (2011) "A Rough and Holy Liturgy: A Reassessment of the Feast of Fools," in "Risus Sacer" Sacrum Risibile: Interaktionsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter im kulturellen und historischen Wandel, ed. Katja Gvozdeva and Werner Rißke (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009) "One Name, Many Dances: Differentiating the Danzas de los Matachines," in Matachines! The Feast of Fools, known also as the festum fatuorum, festum stultorum, festum hypodiaconorum, or fête des fous, are the varying names given to popular medieval festivals regularly celebrated by the clergy and laity from the fifth century until the sixteenth century in several countries of Europe, principally France, but also Spain, Germany, England, and Scotland. A similar celebration was the Feast of Asses. To the liturgy as such, in which both the liturgical drama and the Feast of Fools were deeply embedded, he pays scant attention. Secondly, Chambers packs a great deal of material, culled from archival sources stretching over several centuries, into a dense sixty pages of annotated revelry. Much of this material is taken from ecclesiastical documents attempting to restrict excesses or entirely to suppress the Feast of Fools. By privileging isolated ecclesiastical opposition over habitual (and, by and large, orderly) liturgical accommodation... The Feast of Fools (Latin: festum fatuorum, festum stultorum) was a feast day celebrated by the clergy in Europe during the Middle Ages, initially in Northern France, but later more widely. During the Feast, participants would elect either a false Bishop, false Archbishop or false Pope. Ecclesiastical ritual would also be parodied and higher and lower level clergy would change places. The passage of time has considerably obscured modern understandings of the nature and meaning of this celebration...