

CARNIVAL IN RELIGION
THE FEAST OF FOOLS IN FRANCE
INGVILD SALID GILHUS

In 1445 the Theological Faculty of Paris addressed a letter to the bishops and chapters of France. The letter sharply condemned a feast which took place in different cathedrals and churches during Christmas and the New Year: “Priests and clerks may be seen wearing masks and monstrous visages at the hours of office. They dance in the choir dressed as women, panders or minstrels. They sing wanton songs. They eat black puddings at the horn of the altar while the celebrant is saying mass. They play at dice there. They cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes. They run and leap through the church, without a blush at their own shame. Finally they drive about the town and its theatres in shabby traps and carts; and rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances with indecent gestures and verses scurilous and unchaste”.¹ In this letter the feast is called “the Feast of Fools” (*festum Fatuorum*).² It is a splendid example of carnival in religion.³ Much of its fame is due to the role played by an ass during its celebrations. For that reason it is also called *asinaria festa*, “the Feast of Asses”.

The problems discussed in this article are how carnivalesque meanings are produced, what sort of meanings they are and what functions they have. These questions will be discussed with special reference to the carnivalesque travesties of religious symbols in the Feast of Fools. Two premises must be stated: On the one hand, that there exist universal forms and contents in carnivalesque religion, but on the other hand, that their meanings are always produced in an interplay with the religious systems they are traversing. The universal forms of carnival consist in reversals and incongruities. Examples of reversals and incongruities can be the using of masks, talking gibberish, making animal noises instead of articulated speech, men dressing in female clothes etc. Similar elements and

similar combinations of elements are easily found in different places in the world. Accordingly, what distinguishes the Feast of Fools does not rely on any specific combination of forms and features. Its meaning must be sought in relation to the Catholic Church and to the religious universe of that Church.⁴ The meanings created by the interplay between carnivalesque forms and the Catholic religion are transient and passing, and have not left tangible relics in the shape of a new alternative ideological system. This lack of new ideology is in accordance with the playful character of the feast and with its lack of an exterior goal. Finally, why is such a feast held? To blow off steam, for the sake of didactics or just for fun? This article will argue for the priority of the last explanation.

Former investigations of the feast can be classified in three groups, historical, phenomenological/structural and anthropological. The historical approach has concentrated on the hypothetical origin, growth and decline of the feast, and has rather viewed the feast in connection with pagan Roman feasts than with Catholic religion.⁵ The structural and phenomenological approach has analysed the feast in relation to fools, clowning, carnival and the ludicrous literary genres of the Middle Ages.⁶ The anthropological approach has compared the feast with carnivals and clowning in illiterate cultures. It has especially stressed the reverse behaviour characteristic for carnivals and clowning.⁷ The present investigation is primarily structural and phenomenological. Unlike its predecessors it will not focus on the relationship between the feast and Medieval carnivalesque culture, but on its relationship with the Catholic religion.

History of the Feast

The Feast of Fools took place roughly in the period from the end of the eleventh to the sixteenth century. In its excessive form it was never approved by the Church authorities; on the contrary it was restricted and regularly forbidden. It is known mainly through its opponents, the ecclesiastical authorities.

The oldest mention of the feast is at the end of the 11th century, by the rector of theology in Paris, Joannes Belethus.⁸ In a brief comment he tells that these are four *tripudia*, religious dance feasts,

after Christmas. The feasts belong respectively to the deacons, the priests, the choir-children and the subdeacons. The last feast is called the Feast of Fools. The common dates for its performance in the different churches in France are the Circumcision, the Epiphany or the octave of the Epiphany.

In 1199 the bishop of Paris, Eudes de Sully, wrote a decree against “the Feast of Fools” (*festum fatuorum*) in Notre Dame.⁹ Like the Theological Faculty 250 years later, he wanted to reform the feast and stop its abuses.

A reformed version of the text used in the feast is preserved in the *Missels de Fou* from Sens (ca. 1220).¹⁰ This is a text that the subdeacons were allowed to use during the Mass on the Feast of Asses (*asinaria festa*). It includes “the Prose of the Ass”, a hymn sung one or more times in praise of the ass.¹¹ Neither this hymn nor the general text of the office is provoking. From Beauvais there exist two similar manuscripts. One of them has an *Officium* which is longer than that of Sens and stems approximately from the same time.¹² From Beauvais there is in addition a description of a procession, representing the Flight into Egypt. In this procession an ass carried a young girl with a child in her arms. Here too, a version of the Prose of the Ass was used.¹³ This version is “longer and more ludicrous than that of either the Sens or the Beauvais *Officium*”.¹⁴

During the following centuries there were laid down several prohibitions against the feast and its abuses in episcopal and other clerical decretals. It was condemned most sharply by Jean-Charlier de Gerson, rector of the Theological Faculty of Paris, in 1400.¹⁵ In more detail and at great length, it was condemned by the same Faculty forty-five years later, through its dean, Eustace de Mesnil.¹⁶ But despite ecclesiastical disapproval, the feast was not suppressed: Through the centuries various notices of it appear in church account books. These notices apply both to the ordinary costs of the feast and to the extraordinary costs because of damages done in the churches during its celebration. Originally the feast seems to have been restricted to the subdeacons, but it later included the lower clergy in general.

The Feast of Fools consisted of four different sequences: Procession to the church, the Mass, carnivalesques in the church and finally carnivalesques and theatrical performances outside the

church. It started as solemn and ended as burlesque. Its content was in no way fixed, but varied through the centuries and in the different churches.

Reversals

The regular movements of the ordinary service were violated. The subdeacons left their stalls. They ran and jumped in the churchhouse, and danced round the altar. In Antibes, in the church of the Franciscans, the lay-brothers held their books upside-down, wore spectacles of orange peels, and blew ashes from the censers upon each others.¹⁷ According to the Faculty of Paris it was censed with the soles of old shoes, and they played dice at the altar. It is reported from Beauvais that there was a drinking-bout in the porch, before the ass was let in: The priests were seen with bottles and glasses in their hands.¹⁸

Masks and monstrous visages (*larvae et personae*) recur in the sources. The participants grimaced and made contortions. They used unclerical costumes like female clothes and clothes of panders and minstrels. They had flowers in their hair¹⁹ and sometimes they appeared with their clothes inside out. There were even accusations of priests appearing naked.²⁰

During the feast they distorted the words and the songs of the liturgy; primarily in the form of *proses et farsurae*, additional chants or interpolations into the text, varying from being harmless to being directly improper. Wanton songs (*cantilenas in honestas*) are also mentioned.²¹ Both the answers of the celebrant and the people were sometimes changed to braying (see below). The priests are at different times and places accused of dissonant singing, of gibberish, of shouting, hissing, howling, cackling and jeering. At St. Omer the whole office was recited at the loudest pitch of the voice and with howls.²²

The feast is characterized by its *reversals*. *Reversal* designates all types of opposite or contrary behaviour. The reversals represent transformations from human to animal, from male to female, and from spirit to body. They are interrelated and refer to each other in a running transition from form to lack of form. The special meaning of this process of deformation is created on the basis of the Catholic religious system.

The use of masks during the feast was condemned. A mask hides the individual and makes him appear different. Probably both animal masks and monstrous masks were used.²³ Their significance appears in contrast to the uniqueness of man insisted upon in Christian anthropology: Man stands in the middle position between God and animal, but he is essentially different from both. In the feast the religious process of transcending the biological nature and making it spiritual is reversed. Biological man appears monstrous and like an animal. In a similar way the structured liturgy is deconstructed and appears transformed to gibberish and animal noises. The movement from man to God is substituted by a movement from man to animal.

The use of female clothes is also significant. The Catholic hierarchy is a male hierarchy. The vestments of the priests are a main expression of their status. They transform natural man and signify his aim at transcendence. When the priests change their vestment for female clothes, a comical contrast is made between hierarchy and lack of hierarchy, between the spiritual and the physical, and between soul and body. In this connection the female appears as an unstructured opposite. She is conceived of as representing disorder, nature and the body.²⁴ The priestly vestments refer to the Catholic ideology, including its ideal of celibacy. The female clothes, on the contrary, combined with the clothes of panders and minstrels, have sexual connotations. This is further accentuated by the use of wanton songs. Especially in a male society with the ideal of celibacy, the erotic nature of the female and her role as a temptress is stressed. The contrast between male and female is therefore a contrast between asceticism and eroticism, which is an important aspect of the contrast between soul and body in Christian ideology.

The sensory level, connected with the body, is without doubt one of the most important features of the feast. An illustration of this point is the censing with old shoes. The early fathers had forbidden incense in churches. But from the ninth century it was applied for the dedication and consecration of the altar. Incense serves a double purpose, it gives a pleasant smell and simultaneously drowns the smell of human bodies. The sweet fragrance points to a higher, un bodily reality.²⁵ Censing with old shoes, on the contrary, brings, in condensed form, a stench of human bodies.

The focusing on the body also has a social reference. The underlying unity of the world consists of all things and beings being made of matter. The material body is man's vehicle for being in the world: It is the basic means for communication between human beings and for all types of interaction. The body as a structured whole is identical with other human bodies, and accordingly there exists an anonymous identity between human beings on this level. The bodily level is the least individualized. One characteristic of feast and carnival is that the body and its functions are focused upon and become prominent.²⁶ The group created by feast and carnival is based on equality and not on status; it is close and egalitarian. The participants refer especially to bodily symbols, and obviously, in the words of Victor Turner (with reference to Rabelais and James Joyce), prefer to "live on the level of 'soulless' signifiers, in reaction to a surfeit of 'bodiless' meanings".²⁷ There is accordingly a close correspondence between the type of social group and its preference for bodily symbols and sensory displays. In the Catholic hierarchy, the subdeacons were the *lowest* group. It was always the *lowest* priests who participated in the feast. They identified with the bodily level opposed to that of soul and spirit, as associated with the higher priests. Accordingly, the religious polarity of soul and body is applied to the feast to describe the opposition between the high and the low in the priestly hierarchy.²⁸

The keynote of the feast was introduced for the first time in the Magnificat sung at Vespers. It sounded in the proclamation that the mighty were cast down from their seats and the low ones were exalted. This was the moment when the ceremonial staff (*baculus*), and probably a cope, were handed over to the leader of the subdeacons.²⁹ The staff and the cope are the old symbols of power, and marked the authority of him who now presided as the *dominus festi* (in Sens called Bachularius), and also the priority of his group, the subdeacons or lower clergy. In the detailed letter from the Theological Faculty of Paris it is also stated that "bishops" or "archbishops" of Fools were chosen during the feast, in churches under pontifical jurisdiction even a pope.³⁰ It is a recurring trait of the feast that ecclesiastical titles were used.³¹ It is further said that the "bishops" and "archbishops" "wear mitres and pastoral staffs, and have crosses borne before them, as if they were on visita-

tion''.³² They aped the duties of the clergy in performing the divine service and in giving benediction to the people.³³ This letter also mentions changes in clothes between the clergy and the laity.³⁴

“The ruling idea of the feast is the inversion of status, and the performance, inevitably burlesque, by the inferior clergy of functions properly belonging to their betters”.³⁵ As the lowest in the hierarchy were exalted, their behaviour was simultaneously characterized by the typical ludicrous reversals of clowns. Therefore the priests were not playing the part of real ecclesiastical authorities, but of ecclesiastical authorities playing clowns. In Troyes there was held a burlesque over “the holy mystery of the pontificale consecration”.³⁶ According to the regulations laid down for the feast in Sens (1444), not more than three buckets of water at most must be poured over the *precentor stultorum* at Vespers.³⁷

The reversals of social roles and biological categories are experienced as ludicrous. The ludicrous effect is obtained because mutually exclusive meanings are brought together in one sign and because the reversals create a paradox between real/apparent: The lower clergy played bishops. When they played bishops they were experienced (and experienced themselves) both as subdeacons in reality and as bishops in appearance at the same time. In addition these “bishops” behaved like clowns. When the lower clergy used animal masks and made animal noises they were human beings playing animals. They were simultaneously men and animals. The experience wavered continually between opposite meanings and between reality and appearance. The reversals strengthened each other and heightened the experience of both actors and spectators. (It must be added that the roles of actors and spectators were in flux and cannot be kept strictly apart).

It is of great importance to emphasize that reversals are ambiguous. It is always possible to make different reversals of one act.³⁸ The opposite of talking can both be silence and gibberish. The opposite of eating can both be fasting and gluttony. In the Feast of Fools, the reversals aimed at deformation and incontinence, and they contrasted both the ordinary ritual practice within the Catholic Church and other types of reversals within the same Church. The highest religious ideal of the Medieval church, the *vita angelica*, and the carnivalesque life are both reversals in rela-

tion to ordinary churchly life and therefore inversions of each other.

There is an inherent tension in Christian religion, in the immanence-transcendence dichotomy, which corresponds to a symbolic opposition between incontinence and continence. The logic behind this opposition is that when the body is closed to the world and does not let the world stream through it, the soul can be opened up to God. In this light it is explicable why for instance, centuries earlier, the Church Fathers pointed out that it was not appropriate for virgins to laugh.³⁹ According to Jerome, a virgin should “be like the ark of the covenant and contain nothing but the tablets of God’s law”.⁴⁰ The virgin-state, the ark of the covenant and the prohibition against laughter signalized impenetrability and continence. Closure towards the world meant opening up to God, and the reverse: Opening up to the world means closure of the soul towards God. Accordingly, in a Christian connection, body and soul stood in an inverse relationship. Reversals in the shape of closures were found in ascetic movements, while reversals in the shape of openings up can be found in carnivals and clowning. The reversals of closure were typical for the eremitic movements and the new monastic orders which arose parallel with the flourishing of the Feast of Fools.⁴¹ In them the movement from immanence to transcendence was supported and strengthened. They pursued the *vita contemplativa* to the general benefit of the Church. The tension between immanence and transcendence is also present within the contemplative life and in the monasteries. The necessity of *apotaxis*, flight from the world, led to the establishment of the *vita angelica* as an ultimately elevated type of life. The Cartusian order, dedicated to silence, was founded in the eleventh century. The Cartusian order is an extreme case of *apotaxis*. It confirms the general tendency of continence, effectuated by means of celibacy, fasting and severe restrictions on communication, which are all reversals aiming at maximising closure towards the world.⁴²

In the Feast of Fools the opposite course was taken. The feast was celebrated as an opening up to the sensory world. This was explicitly reflected in the participants’ own apology for feasting, referred to in the letter from the Theological Faculty of Paris: Feasting is necessary because “foolishness, which is our second nature and seems to be inherent in man, might freely spend itself

at least once a year. Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air''.⁴³ Men were likened to barrels, containers in which the wisdom of God fermented like wine. But according to the feasting priests, the process of transformation was too violent to sustain without any opening up to the carnal world through carnivalesque life.

Our analysis so far reveals that the symbols and acts of the feast refer simultaneously to three spheres: The human body as a structured system, the Catholic priestly hierarchy and the Catholic religious system. Several structural opposites can be detected. Besides the polarities continence/incontinence and form/lack of form, the most important are the polarities between high/low, man/animal, male/female and soul/body. Some of the polarities are extremes in different continua. They all relate directly or indirectly to the human body. The opposites refer to the contrast between Church and carnival and to the contrast between high and low in the priestly hierarchy.

The juxtaposition of opposite meanings and of meaning pertaining to different spheres are seen most clearly in the use of symbols. Religious carnivals both make fun of traditional symbols and invent their own ludicrous symbols. The symbols hold together the different meanings of the carnival and are therefore especially informative. We will concentrate upon the perversion of the old core-symbol of the Catholic Church, the Lord's Supper, and the invention of a new core-symbol for the Feast of Fools, the Ass.

The Lord's Supper: Reversal and Deformation

In 1400 Gerson, rector of the University of Paris, wrote about the feast: "a detestable mockery is made of the service of the Lord and of the sacraments, where things are impudently and execrably done which shold be done only in taverns and brothels, or among Saracens and Jews".⁴⁴ The Theological Faculty of Paris especially forbade eating, drinking and dancing around the altar when the Mass was celebrated. Both in the letter from the Theological Faculty and in one of the descriptions from Beauvais, the participants of the feast were accused of using black pudding during the Mass. The letter says that priests and clerks "eat black pud-

dings (*offas pingues*) at the horn of the altar while the celebrant is saying Mass".⁴⁵ According to the manuscript from Beauvais, on the day of the feast, there was "censing with pudding and sausage" (*incensabitur cum boudino et saucisa*).⁴⁶

The significance of the use of blood pudding and sausage in the feast is dependent on the significance of the Eucharist in the ordinary Roman Mass. The Eucharist had developed into a core-symbol for the Catholic Church. The different religious groups related themselves (or were related) to the symbol of the Eucharist. In the case of groups as for instance the Cathars, the mystics, those accused of Satanism, the priestly fools etc., the wine and the bread as the blood and flesh of Christ were used to describe theological and social positions vis-à-vis the Church. These different theological positions are only explicable on the assumption that the biological body is used as a symbol for the social body.⁴⁷

The main cultic act of the Catholic Church was the Mass. At the great feasts of the Church it had developed into a great dramatical performance centering around the consecration of the bread and the wine as the body and blood of Christ. The Mass had developed its form and content in the tenth century, but its ceremony was considerably extended in the twelfth and thirteenth century.⁴⁸ A celebrant made the consecration and accomplished the sacrificial act. At well-appointed churches he was accompanied by the deacon and the subdeacon and by several other officiants. The significance of the Eucharist had changed. In earlier times it had primarily been a meal expressing the unity of the Church and the community of its members. With the development of the liturgy of the Mass, the cult of the Church focused to a higher degree upon the Eucharist at the cost of other elements. The result was twofold: It both contributed to support a powerful priestly hierarchy within the Church and to kindle the personal devotion of the individual.⁴⁹

As for the priests, they were ordained for the *corpus Christi*, the Pauline designation for the Church. From the twelfth century, the *corpus Christi* referred to the eucharistic body of Christ. This clearly underlined the increased stress on the cultic role of the priest and the identifications between priest, sacrament and Christ.⁵⁰ At the same time representations of the tortured Christ had become prominent and the believers showed great preoccupations with his suffer-

ings.⁵¹ The Eucharist thus expresses a paradox in twelfth and thirteenth century religion: On the one hand almost a “divinization” of the priest as the sole person who could administer the Eucharist, on the other hand the stress on the humanity of God in the suffering of Christ.⁵² In this way strong emotive forces were let loose and connected with strong ideological interests.

Simultaneously the theology of the Eucharist developed considerably. Spiritual interpretations were not favoured when the material and sensory foundations of the Eucharist were diminished. For instance Berengar of Tours was twice brought before papal synodes because he claimed that the change in the bread and the wine appeared on the spiritual level only. Both in 1059 and 1079 he had to state before the synodes the identiy between the bread and the wine and the true body and blood of Jesus. Pious stories flourished about the bread and the wine transformed in the Mass to real flesh and blood, and about the supernatural powers inherent in the Eucharist. The adoration of the Host was important. Its highest expression was in the feast of the Corpus Christi, instituted in 1264. The Church started to use the technical term *transsubstantiation* for the change of the bread and the wine.⁵³ By *transsubstantiation* is meant that the substance of the bread and the wine in the Mass has changed to the substance of the body and blood of Christ.⁵⁴ This change implies a hierarchical development from the material to the spiritual and reflects the movement from earthly life to spiritual perfection. The Augustinian dualistic pattern had gradually been confronted with an alternative pattern where the material and the spiritual are seen in hierarchical fashion.⁵⁵

The corporeal conception of holiness is illustrated *in extremis* by the veneration of the relics of the saints. The veneration took peculiar forms, as for instance when the monks of Fossanuova “after Saint Thomas Aquinas had died in their monastery, in their fear of losing the relic, did not shrink from decapitating, boiling, and preserving the body”.⁵⁶

The belief in material vehicles as instruments for spiritual salvation is connected with the doctrine of the Church being the sole administer of salvation. The believer is both a member of the Christian society on earth and, as an individual, a potential member of the Kingdom of God to come. The first is a precondition for the

second. The theology of the Eucharist reflects both the social and the soteriological dimension of man, and shows the dependence of the individual on society. The superior Catholic view, that spirit works through matter, can be viewed in the light of Mary Douglas' thesis that "any emphasis on the necessity to mingle spirit and matter implies that the individual is by nature subordinate to society and finds his freedom within its forms. This view is prepared to sacralise flesh, while their opponents count it as blasphemy to teach the physical union of godhead and manhood".⁵⁷ According to Mary Douglas, the human body is at the same time both a body and an image of the society. Therefore the theological controversies about the relationship between body and soul also reflect conflicts about the Church and its relation to the individual represented by his subgroup.⁵⁸ Divergencies in the view of the Eucharist are in this perspective not arbitrary, but dependent on corresponding divergent social experiences. The different experiences and their corresponding symbols are part of a total social, historical and symbolic universe. They are dependent on each other and comprehensible in relation to each other. The Fools' mockery shares in this totality.

Opposed to the Catholic view the Cathars rejected both the superiority of the papal Church and the giving of the Eucharist by the priests. They were dualists, and according to them, salvation was spiritual and did not operate through material vehicles.⁵⁹ The Catholic Church persecuted them ruthlessly: Their apostasy was punished severely on their very bodies—the torturing of the individual body being the most important means through which the great body of the Church made itself symbolically and factually present for heretic groups.

Clearly within "the body" of the Church, but individualistic in their religious quest, were the mystics. They cultivated the spiritual life, but with strong undercurrents of sensory images. Caroline W. Bynum argues "that images of food and drink, of brimming fountains and streams of blood, which are used with special intensity by thirteenth century women, express desire for direct, almost physical contact with Christ in the Eucharist and for power to handle this Christ as only the priest is authorized to do".⁶⁰ The image of Christ who feeds the soul on his blood is enriched by "the image of the

nursing mother whose milk is her blood, offered to the child".⁶¹ The sensory-biological level of the Eucharist seems to be especially prominent as a necessary nourishment for the individual mystic experience.

The idea of Satanic groups lived among the people. These groups were collectively feared. Witches were believed to parody the Eucharist and to eat revolting substances.⁶² They were conceived of as orgiastic and child-devouring. The old pagan idea of the Christian Eucharist as a cannibalistic feast crept to the foreground. The repugnant practices of the witches were connected with an explicit counter-ideology with the devil at its center, and with a defined social group, namely witches. The groups of witches and Jews were often deliberately fused. The Jews, who in a similar way as witches, stood completely outside the Church, were accused of consuming the blood of children in a devilish imitation of the Mass.

If the mingling of spirit and matter, corresponding to the integration between the individual and society, is seen as a middle course, with the elevation of spirit as one extreme, the elevation of the material substance of the symbol must be the other extreme. Such an elevation of matter was clearly seen both in the Eucharist of the Satanic Mass and in the Eucharist of the subdeacons, although in different ways. In both the Satanic Mass and in the Feast of Fools the disguise of the symbol had disappeared: It became in one case terrible and disgusting, in the other ludicrous and improper. It was dangerous when the symbol of the Eucharist was parodied in a counter-ideology, comic when it was stripped of both ideological and sensory meanings.

In the Feast of Fools, the symbol of the Eucharist was taken at its literal value: Its primary sensory meaning, that of being flesh and blood, was identified with its substance, the pudding and sausage made of animal flesh and blood. But the participants did not create a counter-ideology, they only distorted and nullified the existent ideology. Correspondingly they created a close and egalitarian group and clearly identified themselves with the bodily level. Simultaneously it implied a distortion and nullification of the priestly hierarchy, identified with spiritual being.

Of special interest is the distortion of the symbol of blood. As a "natural" symbol blood is one of the universal symbols of man.

Blood is both a life-giving substance and a token of death, it is at the same time both attractive and repulsive. It is often dangerous. The blood of the members of the same community in particular is universally protected by taboo.⁶³ Ritual clowns in various cultures often manipulate blood. In this way they violate the taboo on contact with blood.⁶⁴ The power and fascination of the clown is grounded precisely in his breaking of taboos. On the basis of their common preoccupation with blood, the subdeacons could be compared with ritual clowns in other cultures. However, the comparison is on this point not fortunate because it conceals a difference: The ritual clowns used fresh blood or substances which could be compared with blood, such as those connected with the human body and which were in a "natural" state. Laura Makarius refers to the use of menstrual blood as the medicine of clowns and says: "In other cases, the clown is associated not with menstrual blood, but with substances symbolising blood, such as snot, saliva or mud; or related to menstrual blood, like urine or the pubic hair of women; or symbolising matter associated with menstrual blood such as dirty water or dilute coffee".⁶⁵ The participants in the Feast of Fools, on the contrary, used blood which was prepared, cooked and made into food. The blood's character of otherness had disappeared, it had become harmless and unexciting rather than terrible and dangerous. The same holds for the sausage made of flesh, likewise ground and cooked. In both cases the symbolic potential of the ingredients was deformed. The symbol was moved from its Christian context of symbolic interpretation into two other contexts, one culinary and the other zoological.⁶⁶ The confrontation of different semantic universes created the comic effect. Concerning the culinary context, it is important to stress that pudding and sausage belong to a special type of food where the ingredients have completely lost their original form, they have in a way been deformed. In this connection one can also note the interesting secondary meanings of the term used for pudding: *Offa* means also "mass" or "lump" which corresponds (in the culinary sphere) to the original meaning of clown which is "clod", "clot" or "lump".⁶⁷ It must further be noted that even if the Eucharist is a common meal, its nutritious character has been transferred to the spiritual level; it will satisfy the spiritual hunger, but hardly the carnal. This

is reversed in the Feast of Fools; the satisfaction was now carnal.

As for the zoological context, there is a marked opposition between blood/wine/Jesus/human/God on the one hand, and blood/pudding/animal on the other.⁶⁸ The opposition between God and animal, with man as the middle course, was one of the recurring themes of the Feast. It is clearly seen in several of the reversals, and has its apotheosis in the elevation of the Ass.

In the use of the eucharistic symbols there is a double operation: At the same moment as the symbol was reversed and stress was laid on its sensory foundation (blood and flesh), this foundation, because of symbolic deformation, was rendered harmless: Flesh and blood appeared in a formless state as sausage and pudding. The ludicrous effect was obtained because of the contrast between the elaborated sensory and ideological values of the Catholic symbols and the new values created through their deformation.

The Ass: Reversal and Elevation

The role of the Ass has repeatedly been discussed by scholars over the last centuries.⁶⁹ The so-called “Prose of the Ass” exists in several manuscripts and its use is documented in Bourges, Beauvais and Sens as part of the Officium of the day of the feast. According to the liturgy of Beauvais both the celebrant and the congregation were braying. Whether an ass really was led into the Church or whether the animal was left standing outside the door of the Church is not clear.⁷⁰ However, its use as a symbol for the feast is established with certainty. In Sens the feast was in the thirteenth century called *asinaria festa*, and it is as a symbol for the feast that the Ass is interesting in this connection.

Two questions are important, the historical and the hermeneutical: What is the origin of the use of the Ass as a symbol in the Mass and what is its meaning?

There are three possible origins or combinations of origins: The first is that the Ass is a transmutation of the Cervulus, the little hind or little deer, which was part of early Christian or pagan festival games.⁷¹ The second is that it has its roots in a tradition expressed in Pagan and Gnostic sources between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D., according to which Jews and later Christians worshipped an Ass,

the head of an Ass or a man with the head of an Ass as their God.⁷² The third, and the most likely possibility, is that it originally was a pure Biblical animal. Nothing in the source-material, for instance the description and reference in the “prose of the Ass”, suggests mythological traits which are not consistent with a Biblical Ass. This conforms further with its close relation to ceremonies in the churches and not with celebrations in the streets or in the marketplaces.

The use of the Ass must be interpreted in the light of its occurrences in the Old and the New Testament, in relation to contemporary iconographical occurrences and to occurrences in churchly processions. (These different occurrences are naturally interrelated and dependent on each other). The two most applied Biblical references are those of the prophetical Ass of Bileam in the Old Testament and of the Ass on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9,9: “Rejoice, rejoice, daughter of Zion, shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem; for see, your king is coming to you, his cause won, his victory gained, humble and mounted on an ass, a foal, the young of a she-ass”.⁷³ In iconography the Ass is further represented in the Flight to Egypt,⁷⁴ and at the crib of Jesus.⁷⁵ In churchly processions the Ass was frequently used, especially acting out the part of the Ass of Bileam and that of the Ass who carried the virgin and child to Egypt.⁷⁶

Characteristic for the Biblical asses are conclusively that they are peaceful animals with the Prince of Peace as their common denominator. They are actors at important moments in the salvation history, but their parts are subordinate.

In the Feast of Fools the situation is suddenly turned upside down: The Ass has moved to the foreground and may even for a time play the main part. The accentuating of the Ass implies a reversal of “figure” and “ground”. In Christian mythology the Ass is part of the “ground”, the context. When it appears in focus, it becomes “figure”.⁷⁷ But when the Ass becomes “figure”, its new position instantly affects the relationship between the other elements in the ideology of which it is part. In all ideological systems accentuation of one minor element changes the hierarchy and may eventually lead to its deconstruction. The elevation of the

Ass implies a temporary change in the ideology and therefore a temporary change in the comprehension of reality dependent on that ideology. A new perspective is created. This perspective—suggestive and implicit, transitory and not lasting—is a jocular perspective. Like all jocular perspectives it is built upon the play on paradoxes, generated by the play on the superior paradox real/unreal.⁷⁸ In this case this perspective may conveniently be called *the perspective of the Ass*.

In the new situation created by the Mass of the lower clergy, the Ass was simultaneously both fitting and extremely unfitting: Fitting only because it had a subordinate part. But suddenly elevated it started to play the leading role, and was thereby unfitting. It was further fitting and unfitting because it was seen at the same time as a Biblical animal and as a natural animal: It was, undoubtedly (and as indicated above), a proper and peaceful Biblical Ass. But it also activates another sphere of symbols which have their connotations outside the Biblical universe. In the different versions of the “Prose of the Ass” the wavering between the Christian mythological sphere of the Ass and the natural sphere of the Ass is obvious and significant.

The “Prose of the Ass” exists in two related versions, one shorter (seven verses) and the other longer (eleven verses).⁷⁹ In both versions, the perspective shifts between the Biblical and natural, but the long version lays more stress upon the natural capacities of the Ass and therefore seems even more ludicrous.⁸⁰ The language alternates between Latin and French, with the most spirited verses in French:

Heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh ho, heigh
Fair Sir Ass, you trot all day
Fair your mouth, and loud your bray.

Hez va hez va hez va hez
Biax (sire asnes) car allez
Bele bouche car chantez.
(from the short version)

Heigh, sir Ass, you sing hee-haw,
Your fair mouth's a sulky maw;
You shall have your fill of hay,
Oats enough to cast away.

Hez, sire asnes, car chantez
Belle bouche rechignez,
Vous aurez du foin assez
Et de l'avoine à plantez.
(from the long version).⁸¹

The Ass of the hymn is lively, it is speeding and leaping from its

Oriental origins to its presence in the churches in France. At the same time it is a hard working animal, dragging “long carriages loaded down with baggages”. It brings gold, frankincense and myrrh. On the threshing floor its feet separate the chaff from wheat. But it also eats its fill of grass and hay. And it is boisterous with its braying, calling, singing and saying amen.

Both versions of the hymn change between past and present tenses, and between description and address of the Ass. In this way the Ass was made symbolically (and perhaps was also virtually) present, animating its Biblical predecessors. Simultaneously the priest and the congregation aped its braying and thereby made it present as a beast. (In Mosburg the “bishop” was in the 16th century also titulated as *asinorum dominus*).⁸² In a comparable way as the priest in the Mass varied between representing Christ, being an intermediary between God and man, and representing the congregation, the Ass acted both as addressee, was identified with the priest and was identified with the congregation. In the last case the participants’ individualities were submerged, and a braying collective emerged. Simultaneously the Ass of the song changed its braying for its repeatedly saying *amen*. Thus the roles of man and animal were intentionally fused. The dominant perspective, *the perspective of the Ass*, involved a continually changing of figure and ground, focus and fringe. Latent in this perspective, even if not explicated, was another sphere of connotations: According to current typologies of animals, the Ass was a stupid animal. It was connected with lust and with the body, regarded as unclean and generally held in low estimation. These comprehensions are not rooted in Christian mythology, but have their origin in the sphere of assumed natural characteristics and capacities of animals.⁸³

Three levels are thus discernible in the symbol of the Ass: The explicit level of Biblical mythology; the explicit level of zoology; and the implicit level of zoopsychology. They are applied in the context of the Catholic Mass, and accordingly new connotations are created through cross-references between the three levels.

Primarily the Ass referred to the subdeacons: The Ass is a domesticated animal and ruled over as the subdeacons were ruled over. In the same way as the subdeacons were low in the churchly hierarchy, the Ass is low in the zoological hierarchy. Further, the

Ass' being a stupid animal corresponds to the feast's being a feast of fools. Nevertheless, the Ass was elevated in the Mass, as the subdeacons elevated themselves. But their elevation was the paradoxical elevation of lowness still being low, not of lowness becoming highness.

The elevation of the Ass again activates the polarity in Christianity between man and beast. Universally man defines his role in contrast to and in interplay with other beings. They are both similar and dissimilar to him, and the contemplation of animals is necessary for the understanding of himself as a species.⁸⁴ Christianity is an anthropocentric religion: Man is seen as superior to other living beings and shall legally rule over them as their steward. Man is made in the image of God, but never on the same level as Him. In this way man is fundamentally different both from God and from other animals. But in man there is a tension between a transition directed towards God and a transition from God facing downwards. This tension makes man a mediator between two poles of being, *theos* and *zoos*, and reflects the duality of Christian anthropology. It is a tension between the angelic and the beastial natures of man, often interpreted as a tension between man's soul and body.

The Ass is both beastial and sometimes explicitly identified with the body. Its elevation is therefore the elevation of the beast and the body over Christ, the god/man, and over the psychical level of being. However, when the bodily and the beastly are elevated, they become "figures" in the context of the Catholic Mass, and thereby this context is changed. In the new context, the Ass develops connotations of otherness.

Animals are often conceived of as having supernormal powers, and they therefore refer to another dimension of being. Bileam's Ass is an example of an animal with such powers. But it is not likely that it is the Bileam story which is the main source of the Otherness of the Ass. Rather the Ass has moved from its Christian instrumental position of object and has become subject. And when the Ass has become subject man becomes object because the participants of the Mass see themselves in the eyes of the Ass as objects.

We suggested that the turning of figure and ground implied a process of deconstruction. The symbol of the Ass further signified

a deformation of the deconstructed elements: The Ass referred to the bodily and the beastly in contrast to the psychic and the ideological. Therefore the elevation of the Ass meant a continual deformation of context. In spite of its peaceful Biblical origin, the Ass paradoxically exposed a chaotic dimension of being. It represented a movement from the spiritual to the carnal, from the ideological to the sensorian. The Ass was a condensation of the ludicrous happenings during the Feast of Fools, and can therefore be described as an extremely fitting core-symbol.

Victor Turner's structural model of symbols is an aid to the understanding of the process of carnival. According to his model a living symbol has both a sensory and an ideological pole with different clusters of meanings. These poles affirm and strengthen each other. In ludic and liminal situations it is rather the sensory meanings of symbols which are stressed at the cost of, and partly in opposition to, their ideological meanings. The sensory pole produces new and different meanings, especially with reference to the symbol's material basis. But these altered meanings simultaneously contribute to the creation of a new, but weak and unstable ideological pole.⁸⁵

The ludicrous effect was produced because the changed symbol was conceived against the background of the old established symbol (The Lord's Supper). This change in one symbol is accompanied by a fundamental disturbance in the structural balance between the different symbols: Peripheral symbols move from the fringe into the focus, establishing a new focus over against the old one (The Ass). Elements in the ideology are played out against each other and deconstruct each other (The low ones exalt themselves and play clowns). The different operations create deformations both on the syntactic and the semantic levels. They give rise to rich and complicated interplays between the old stable ideological and hierarchical systems and the new unstable inventions. The more rich and complicated, probably the more fun.

The process of deformation is typical for the Feast of Fools. It is seen in the individual symbols, for instance in the increased stress on sensory meanings at the cost of ideological meanings. It is seen in the fragmentation of the superior ideological system. It is seen in the reverse behaviour of the individuals and in the reversals of

the social system. And it is seen on the topological level: The Feast started within the ordinary service of the Mass, continued with carnivalesque celebrations within the church, diffused into the street, market-places and theatres in the town, and ended probably with the participants drunk and soundly asleep.

Why was the feast held and what functions did it have?

We will return to the minor priests' own apology for feasting. They emphasized (with the parable of the wine-barrels), the necessity of opening up and letting in air unless they should burst. In other words they advocated a pre-Freudian "blowing-off-steam"-theory. This theory presupposes man's beastial nature which must be repressed for the sake of perfecting the soul. Freud advocated an elaborated variant of the theory (not in principle different from that of the minor priests), and his theory has been applied on ritual clowns with the conclusion that the function of humour is to permit "the acting out of otherwise strictly prohibited regressive, infantile-sexual, and aggressive behaviour".⁸⁶⁸⁷ If we are to believe the participants (and we have no reason to doubt them), psychological tension was reduced during the feast. This reduction of tension had psychological, subjective effects. It was, however, caused by an objective, collective cause, the manipulating of the religious and the social systems. This manipulating had a direct effect on one group, the minor priests, and an indirect effect on other groups, for instance the superior priests, the bishops, the Theological Faculty and the common people.

We suggest that an important motive power of the feast was the above mentioned religious and social conflict between the egalitarian *vita apostolica* and the life within the hierarchical papal Church. This conflict was expressed both through the banning of heretical groups living a simple Christian life, but also through incorporating other groups who realized the *vita apostolica*, but who were not in pronounced opposition to the papal Church. The conflict was expressed in the Feast of Fools, but also in the similar Feast of the Boy Bishop, usually held on the Eve of the Holy Innocents Day.⁸⁸ The Feast of the Boy Bishop had several characteristics in common with the Feast of Fools: A boy was chosen as bishop and

leader for the other boys. He performed all the duties of the priest, except in the Mass, and was treated as a bishop of the others as long as the feast lasted. The superior priests had to play the roles of the minor priests. This feast seems not to have led to excesses in the same way as the Feast of Fools, and it was therefore not regarded as threatening and provoking to the same degree as the latter.⁸⁹ But its existence bears witness to the same theme of exalting the low in the social system. Both feasts made the conflict visible and, perhaps, by playing it out, for a while reduced the tension in the society, and thereby, reinforced the norms of that society.⁹⁰

However, neither the conflict in the Church, between the social system and the religious ideology, nor the need for “blowing-off steam” (psychologically or socially) are more than partial explanations. While these theories stress functional and purpose-related aspects of the feast, they fall short of explaining its playful character. The Feast of Fools was not primarily celebrated for any exterior purpose, it was celebrated for its own sake. The feast was optional from the point of view of the participants, not obligatory from the point of view of the society.⁹¹ On the contrary, the Church did its best to reform or repress it. In this connection it is necessary to stress the distinction between work and play, and especially between the different frames of motivation characteristic for these types of behaviour. Any theory which aims at explaining the feast must take these distinctions into consideration. It is useful to introduce the terms *telic* and *paratelic*. These terms are applied by Michael Apter to discriminate between two different metamotivational frames for human behaviour.⁹² In a telic state the individual is primarily oriented towards a goal, in a paratelic state the individual is not primarily oriented towards a goal. On the contrary, the paratelic state is “a state in which the individual is primarily oriented towards some aspects of his continuing behaviour and its related sensations”.⁹³ The distinction between telic and paratelic is related to the distinction between work and play, but it applies to motivation, not to behaviour.⁹⁴ A consequence of the distinction between telic and paratelic phenomenological states is that a simplified view of *homeostasis* as the superior desired state must be rejected. The “blowing-off steam”-hypotheses have homeostasis as their basic premise.

According to this premise all systems strive to reach their equilibrium and there is only one range of values. With two metamotivational frames there is a case of bistability with two ranges of values.⁹⁵ These values pertain either to a telic or to a paratelic system. The introduction of a paratelic system and the rejection of the concept of *homeostasis* implies therefore a rejection of simplified “blowing-off-steam”-hypotheses, be they psychological or sociological. The inclusion of the component of motivation further counteracts cognitive explanations with stress on didactic functions.⁹⁶

The minor priests held their feast primarily for the fun of doing it. And they derived not a little part of their amusement from ludicrous deformations of the Mass. The function of these deformations was not so much to release tension as it was to create arousal in the participants. The superior aim was to enjoy the experience and attempt to make it as intense as possible. One main source of arousal is the use of paradoxes. Contrary meanings in relation to persons, places, things or situations increase the intensity of the experience and are received with amusement in a playful state of mind.⁹⁷ It is fruitful to translate the parable of the wine-barrels from its telic context to a new paratelic context. Let us for a moment think of the barrels instead as balloons filled with gas: When a child opens up a balloon and lets it go, it will flow into the air, rush about hither and tither until no gas is left and it collapses on the ground in a shrunken and deformed state. The movement of the feast, whirling and violent, from form to lack of form can be illustrated with the flight of this balloon: It is the gas within the balloon which is the fuel making the flight possible. In like manner the feast released tension in the way that it used the tension in the religious system to create arousal in the participants. It is as if the energy which kept the elements of the religious system together was let loose, increased and spent.⁹⁸ Superior in these carnivalesque interplays between the religious and the ludicrous was the dynamic movement from form to lack of form. This movement, constituted by reversals, was the prime characteristic of the Feast of Fools.

¹ In Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Series Latina), vol. 207, (1855), pp. 1169-1176. Translation in E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. I, London, 1954 (orig. 1903), p. 294.

² The feast is also called *festum follorum*, *festum stultorum*, (the Feast of Fools), *festum subdiaconorum*, (the Feast of the Subdeacons) and *festum baculi* (the Feast of the Rod.). Cf. Chambers, p. 275.

³ Carnival in the narrowest sense is a designation for the festivities in the half-week before Lent. In the present investigation it is used to designate festivities characterized by wearing of masks, status-reversals and riotous revelry.

⁴ This is in disagreement especially with Mikhail Bakhtin. He says about the carnival forms parodying the Church's cult: "All these forms are systematically placed outside the Church and religiosity. They belong to an entirely different sphere." In *Rabelais and his World*, Camb. (Massachu.) and London, 1968, p. 7.

⁵ See E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*, Connecticut, 1977 (orig. 1952), pp. 50-64; G.M. Dreves, "Zur Geschichte der fete des fous", *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach*, Freiburg, 1894, vol. 47, pp. 571-587; Chambers, pp. 274-335. This was also the type of approach pursued by the Church.

⁶ See especially Bakhtin 1968; Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, N.Y., 1932; Paul Lehman, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart, 1963; Anton C. Zijderveld, *Reality in a Looking-Glass: Rationality through an Analysis of Traditional Folly*, London, 1982, p. 41-91.

⁷ John G. Bourke, "The Feast of Fools in Europe", *Scatologic Rites of All Nations*, N.Y., 1968 (orig. 1891), pp. 11-23; Zijderveld pursues the same line of thought. In general in anthropological articles on clowns the Feast of Fools is often used as an example.

⁸ See Charles Du Fresne Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, Graz-Austria, 1954 (orig. 1883-87), "Kalendae", p. 481.

⁹ Chambers quotes the relevant passages of the Latin text, pp. 277-278.

¹⁰ In G.M. Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, XX, N.Y., 1961, (orig. 1886-1922), pp. 217-229.

¹¹ The hymn of the Ass exists in two related versions (cf. note 79).

¹² Cf. Chambers, pp. 284-288. See Dreves, *Analecta*, pp. 229-232; Henry C. Greene, "The song of the Ass", *Speculum. A Journal of Mediaeval Studies*, VI, (1931), pp. 534-549; and Du Cange, "Festum", p. 461.

¹³ For a description, see Du Cange, "Festum", pp. 460-461.

¹⁴ Chambers, p. 287.

¹⁵ Chambers, pp. 292-293.

¹⁶ In Migne, pp. 1169-1176; Cf. Chambers, pp. 293-295.

¹⁷ Chambers, p. 317.

¹⁸ *Officium* from Beauvais. See Chambers, pp. 284-287.

¹⁹ The flowers are especially mentioned by Odo, Cardinal of Tusculum, in a letter written to the chapter of Sens in 1245. Chambers, pp. 288-289.

²⁰ Chambers, p. 317.

²¹ Chants and interpolations were allowed, but not wanton songs.

²² Chambers, p. 289.

²³ Cf. the letter from the Theological Faculty of Paris.

²⁴ "The misogyny of the later Middle Ages is well known... *Male* and *female* were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgement/mercy, and order/disorder", Caroline Walker Bynum, "... And Women His Humanity":

Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages", in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, eds. C.W. Bynum, S. Harrell and P. Richman, Boston, 1986, p. 257.

²⁵ See "Incense", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, N.Y./London, 1987, vol. 7, pp. 161-163.

²⁶ This point is repeatedly stressed by Bakhtin. See especially pp. 18ff.

²⁷ Victor Turner, "Symbolic Studies", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 4, (1975), pp. 156-157.

²⁸ In this case the bodily symbolism refers to the lowest members of the priestly hierarchy, and not to "the people" as a grandiose totality. For Bakhtin, the material bodily principle refers primarily to the people: "The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed" (*op. cit.* p. 19). The Bakhtinian grotesque carnivalesque body related to an egalitarian populism is a superior normative image probably more fruitful in a literary context than as a description of carnival as a social phenomenon (Cf. Dominick La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, Ithaca and London, 1983, pp. 291-324.). The universal phenomenon of using bodily symbols in carnivals and by clowns must in each case be interpreted in their social and historical context.

²⁹ In the decree from Eudes de Sully, see Chambers, p. 278.

³⁰ Migne, p. 1173.

³¹ Chambers, p. 326 with references.

³² Migne, p. 1173. Chambers, 295.

³³ Migne, p. 1175.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1175.

³⁵ Chambers, p. 325.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

³⁸ See Edward Norbeck, "Rites of Reversal of North American Indians as Forms of Play", in *Forms of Play of Native North Americans*, eds. Edward Norbeck and Claire R. Farrer, N.Y., 1979, pp. 51-66.

³⁹ N. Adkin, "The Fathers on Laughter", *Orpheus*, 6, 1, (1985), pp. 149-52; I.M. Resnick, "'Ritus monasticus'. Laughter and Medieval Monastic Culture", *Revue Bénédictine*, 97 (1987), pp. 90-100.

⁴⁰ Adkin, p. 149.

⁴¹ In the 11th century appear both eremitic movements modelled on the example of Egyptian hermits and monastic orders. They are motivated by dissatisfaction with the existing monastic orders (Carthusians, Premonstratensians, Cistercians etc.).

⁴² See Peter Fuchs, "Die Weltflucht der Mönche. Anmerkungen zur Funktion des monastisch-aszetischen Schweigens", *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 15, 6, (1986), pp. 393-405; Werner Bergmann, "Das Frühe Mönchtum als Soziale Bewegung", *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 37, 1, (1985), pp. 30-59; P. Suso Frank Ofm, *Angelikos Bios. Begriffsanalytische und Begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum 'Engelgleichen Leben' im Frühen Mönchtum*, (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens, 26), München, 1964.

⁴³ Quoted from Bakhtin, p. 75.

⁴⁴ Swain, p. 207, note 53.

⁴⁵ *Offa* is a lump of food or cake made of flour. It has the interesting secondary meaning of "mass" or "lump" and even of "abortion". With *pinguis*, "fat", it designates a pudding made of blood.

⁴⁶ “*Boudin*: mets fait avec un boyau qui ete rempli de sang et de graisses de porc”. Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, Gallimard/Hachette, 1967.

⁴⁷ Cf. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, N.Y., 1970.

⁴⁸ Cf. Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, Oxford, 1967 (orig. 1933), vol. I, pp. 15-43.

⁴⁹ Cf. Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, 1050-1200, London, 1972, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁰ See “Priesthood”, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 11, p. 538.

⁵¹ Morris, pp. 140ff.

⁵² See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, London, 1982, p. 19.

⁵³ The term appears in the first half of the twelfth century and becomes usual in the second half of that century.

⁵⁴ A distinction is made between “the substance”, which is the changeable nature, and “the accidents”, the accidental qualities as smell, taste and appearance, which are *not* changed. On the IVth Lateran council (1215) *transsubstantiation* became the official dogma of the Church. It got its scholastic formulation in the second part of that century by Thomas Aquinas. The Hildebrandian reform reflected in the formula forced upon Berengar of Tours implied that also the *accidentia* were transformed into *substantia*. Cf. Roy Wagner, “The Western Core Symbol”, in *Symbols that Stand for Themselves*, Chicago, 1986, pp. 96-125.

⁵⁵ Hundred years earlier Bernhard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) had said, “I think this was the main cause why the invisible God wished to be seen in flesh, and as man converse with men: so as to draw all the affections of fleshly men, who could only love in a fleshly way, to the saving love of his flesh, and thus by stages to lead them to a spiritual love”, Morris, p. 153, (Sermo 20 in Cant. V 6, Migne, PL 183, col. 870 B).

⁵⁶ J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Penguin, 1955, (orig. 1924), p. 168.

⁵⁷ Mary Douglas, p. 162.

⁵⁸ Cf. also John G. Gager, “Body-Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity”, *Religion*, 12, 4, (1982), pp. 345-363.

⁵⁹ See for instance Martin Erbstößer, *Ketzer im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart, 1984; Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages*, Prague, 1974.

⁶⁰ Bynum, 1982, p. 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶² See especially Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*, London, 1975.

⁶³ See “Blood”, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 254-256.

⁶⁴ Laura Makarius stresses the role of the clown as one who violates taboo, and especially emphasizes his connection with blood. (“Ritual Clowns and Symbolical Behaviour”, *Diogenes*, 1970, pp. 44-73).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶⁶ The hypothesis that the blood and the sausage must be interpreted in a scatological context was put forward by J.G. Bourke 1968, and repeated by A.J. Zijderweld 1982. It exemplifies an attempt to interpret the feast in a general comparative context. However, the hypothesis lacks the support of textual evidence.

⁶⁷ Makarius, p. 66, note 85.

⁶⁸ Also flesh/bread/Jesus/human/God opposed to flesh/sausage/animal.

⁶⁹ See especially Backman 1977; Chambers 1954 (Chambers refers to the literature and the discussion in the 18th and 19th century); Greene, pp. 534-549; H. Villetard, "Remarques sur la Fête des Fous au Moyen Age", Paris, 1911, pp. 1-28.

⁷⁰ Especially Villetard refutes that an animal was actually led into the church.

⁷¹ Du Cange points to the pagan festival games called Cervulus or Cervula (p. 481). Backman thinks this feast originated in early Christian circles, not in pagan, and that the roots of the Feast of Fools are to be found there (p. 59). According to the letter from the Theological Faculty of Paris, the feast must be traced to the Roman festivals of the Kalendae (p. 1170).

⁷² See for instance Lukas Vischer, "Le prétendu "Culte de l'âne", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 139, (1951), pp. 14-35; Adolf Jacoby, "Der angebliche Eselskult der Juden und Christen", *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 25, (1927), pp. 265-282.

⁷³ In the canonical gospels the ass does not appear in the native-scene. In two of the apocryphical gospels, however, in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Gospel of James it is found. The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew had a great influence on the iconography in the Middle Ages. Here it is said: "On the third day after the Birth, Mary went into a stable and put the Child in a manger, and the ox and the ass worshipped it. Here the prophecies of Isaiah and Habakkuk were fulfilled." (Poul Himmer, "Oksen og aeselet i og omkring fødselsfremstillinger", *Iconographisk Post*, 1980, pp. 24-31).

⁷⁴ In the iconography from 5th and 6th century.

⁷⁵ In the iconography at least from the 4th century.

⁷⁶ From Beauvais is described a procession with an ass carrying a young girl with a child in her arms, representing the Flight into Egypt (Du Cange, p. 461); from Rouen there is a description of a procession in the church with all the prophets and with Bileam and his ass (Du Cange, pp. 460-461).

⁷⁷ Cf. especially Gregory Bateson, "The Position of Humor in Human Communication", *Cybernetics*, N.Y., 1953, pp. 1-47; and William F. Fry, *Sweet Madness, A Study of Humor*, California, 1963, pp. 119ff.

⁷⁸ In the words of William F. Fry: "But it is the art of the punch line of the joke to snatch some of this implicit material from the world of Shades and project it into the workaday world or, in other words, into reality", (p. 152). Cf. also Michael J. Apté, *The Experience of Motivation. The Theory of Psychological Reversals*, London, 1982.

⁷⁹ Dreves 1961, pp. 217-232; Chambers, pp. 284-288; Greene, pp. 534-549.

⁸⁰ Chambers, p. 287.

⁸¹ Quoted after Greene, pp. 535-537.

⁸² Chambers, pp. 319-320.

⁸³ See "Esel", *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Stuttgart, 1966, VI, pp. 564-595.

⁸⁴ Cf. Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man. The Roots of Human Nature*, Hassocks (Sussex), 1979, especially pp. 19ff and p. 35. See also Francis Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages*, London, 1971.

⁸⁵ Cf. Turner 1975, p. 156.

⁸⁶ Jacob Levine, "Regression in Primitive Clowning", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 30, (1961), p. 82.

⁸⁷ The "blowing-off-steam"-theory is often supplied by another theory, according to which the function of the clown is to bring forbidden thoughts and/or holy

objects within the range of social experience. Cf. John J. Honigmann, "An Interpretation of the Social-psychological Functions of the Ritual Clown", *Character and Personality, Journal of Personality*, 10, (1942), pp. 220-226; Makarius, pp. 44-71. In a Jungian variant, the purpose is to integrate the hidden and neglected elements of man in an accomplished personality. Cf. Lucile Hoerr Charles, "The Clown's Function", *Journal of American Folklore*, 58, (1964), pp. 25-34.

⁸⁸ Cf. Chambers, pp. 336-371, and A. Lefebvre, *L'Évêque des Fous et la Fête des Innocents à Lille, du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle*, Lille, 1901, pp. 3-12.

⁸⁹ V.A. Kolve says about the Feast of the Boy Bishop that this feast probably never was comic. (*The Play called Corpus Christi*, London, 1966, p. 137).

⁹⁰ Cf. the theories of Max Gluckman about so-called "rituals of rebellion" (*Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Oxford, 1963); Pierre L. Van den Berghe says that carnivalesque license in the closely related fields of stress and authority is subject to definite norms and kept within safe bounds. He stresses the norm-reinforcing function of ritual licence ("Institutionalized Licence and Normative Stability", *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 3, (1963), pp. 413-423).

⁹¹ Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology", *Rice University Studies*, 60, 3, (1974), pp. 73ff.

⁹² Apter 1982.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-34; 88-106.

⁹⁶ Deformation of symbols and symbolic systems may lead to new constructs, of passing or permanent character, and thus have clearly didactic effects on those adhering to them. In other words, it could start a process of transformation in the participants. This process of transformation would apply both to the symbolic system and to the participants in the way that the result of the process was a transformed symbolic system and participants who in like manner were transformed to participate in the new system. But this is clearly not the case with the Feast of Fools. Its carnivalesque symbols never gave rise to an alternative, permanent ideological system. Another possible function of the feast, likewise pertaining to didactics, is that the symbolic system was torn apart and then reconstructed exactly as it was before. But because of the deconstructions and deformations, the participants were forced to be aware of their ideological systems in new and fresh ways. In the long run this would make them internalize the system better and thus gradually adapt themselves better to their culture. If this was the case, the ludicrous feast had a clearly didactic purpose and served exactly the ideological system it made fun of. In both cases the deformation of the symbolic system would aim at transformation of the participants, either as transformation to a new symbolic system or as an adaption to the old system. The transformative perspective stresses the didactic and cognitive functions created by the incongruities made within the symbols and within the system of symbols. But nothing in the reports from the Feast of Fools indicates that a lasting transformation ever occurred, neither of the symbolic system nor of the participants. There were deformations, but there were no transformations. These deformations clearly acted as cognitive stimuli in the carnivalesque feast, but it is important to connect the deformations of the symbolic system and the reverse behaviour of the participants to their emotional content and functions.

⁹⁷ Apter, pp. 151-153.

⁹⁸ The movement in the Feast of Fools could be compared with a special type of games and play. Roger Caillois divided play and games into four categories

(*Man, Play and Games*, N.Y., 1961 (orig. 1958)). The category labelled *illinx* or vertigo characterizes those forms of play and related activities which by a rapid whirling or falling movement aim at producing a state of dizziness or disorder in the actor. Extended, vertigo is seen in relation to moral order as a desire for destruction and disorder in the individual (pp. 81ff). Vertigo is further expressed in social institutions as carnivals, circuses and travelling fairs (pp. 129ff). In these cases it is combined with one of Caillois' other main types, *mimicry*, which designates imitation, illusion and masking. The combination of *illinx* and *mimicry* is common and similarly characteristic for the Feast of Fools.