Anne L. Williams

Satire, Veneration, and St. Joseph in Art, c. 1300-1550

Amsterdam
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MAÎTRE STRASBOURGEOIS
1er TIERS DU XVe SIÈCLE
LE DOUTE DE JOSEPH

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Abstract:

The introduction provides chapter summaries and a critical overview of scholarship of St. Joseph in art historical, literary, and religious studies. These have offered two very different and conflicting interpretations with respect to the presence and role of humor in religious art and practice, both of which perceive humor as the antithesis to 'high' veneration and theology – a notion that the book challenges. The introduction also provides the methodological framework behind the book's goal: to move beyond humor's relegation to the margins of medieval art, or to the profane arts alone, revealing the centrality and functions of humor and satire in altarpieces, devotional art, and veneration of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries.

Key Words: Saint Joseph, humor, veneration, theology, devotional art

A saint rife with paradox, and the seemingly antithetical combination of satire and devotion, guides this study of humor in devotional and ecclesiastical art made between *c.* 1300 and 1550. Frequently the butt of medieval jokes as the quintessential cuckold, yet simultaneously admired for his familial piety, Joseph of Nazareth became a venerated figure made powerful not merely by the endorsement of the Church, but equally, rendered potent by the humor integral to the saint in popular thought. From the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, depictions of Joseph in various media attest to the humorous and bawdy as inextricable facets of the saint's cult, even as he came to be taken more seriously as an object of devotion. Relying on extant plays, legends, tales, hymns, devotional manuals, jokes, and rhetorical theories of humor, as well as satirical paintings and prints, the following chapters explore the beneficial role of what could be called devotional humor in establishing St. Joseph as an exemplar in Germany, the Low Countries, eastern France, and northern Italy. In this regard, they reconcile two strands of interpretation that have polarized the saint into distinct early and late manifestations, one comical and derogatory, and the other sanctified and idealized.

Scholarship on St. Joseph's pre-Reformation representation has offered two very different and conflicting interpretations with respect to humor. One strand acknowledges the frequent presence of humor in the saint's depictions but interprets this presence as indicative of the saint's derision exclusively, concluding that such

representations could not be symptomatic of his veneration. The opposing camp has made the important case for the strength of Joseph's cult in western Europe as early as the fourteenth century, but in doing so, attempts to sanitize any problematically comical depictions of the saint. In all studies on St. Joseph to date, 'low,' profane humor is therefore perceived as the antithesis to 'high' veneration and theology, a concept rooted in the scholarship of Erwin Panofsky.[1] But, as this study indicates, rather than negating the theological richness or complexity of many works, humor and satire often reinforced such sacred meanings instead. Of course, depictions of Joseph were not always meant to be humorous; there exist many examples from this period that appear fully sober in message.

This study proposes several reasons behind – and functions of – late medieval and Renaissance religious humor in an attempt to encourage a more nuanced method of interpretation that moves beyond the relegation of humor to the margins: one that acknowledges the presence, and often the centrality, of humor in religious scenes, as well as the importance of play for the making and experience of images. While addressing the various ways in which humor influenced the making of religious works, it investigates how laughter, humor, and satire could be appropriate to late medieval and Renaissance veneration – how laughter could be a form of veneration itself.

One of the desired benefits of a deeper understanding of Joseph's humor is an ability to see and to accurately interpret humor and wit in other examples of sacred art. Sacred humor is a phenomenon that is often concealed from the twenty-first-century eye. Our difficulty in acknowledging that the devout could have revered a saint that they sometimes ridiculed stems quite understandably from our familiarity with today's more sober understandings of the saints, which rose out of the Counter-Reformation. It is also inextricably tied to the present, and to questions of freedom of speech that we are currently unraveling: should there be limits to freedom of expression regarding religion, as Pope Francis stated on 15 January 2015? What is the value of satire in any culture, particularly with respect to the dignity of religion – one's own and that of others?

Because of the seminal work of scholars like Michael Camille and Lilian Randall on medieval play within the margins of devotional books and churches, the concept of play in a medieval sacred context is not totally unknown in academic discourse.[2]

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1   Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 1: 164. See also Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 1: 82, 226; Cuttler, *Northern Painting from Pucelle to Bruegel*, 55; Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 73; Réau, 'Joseph,' in *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, 3: 752–755; Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 194–196; *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 3: 185–186; Foster, 'Iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish Art,' 249; Vasvari, 'Joseph on the Margin,' 168.
2   Michael Camille revealed for us this interaction of the margins with the center, not just in terms of their meaning, as Lilian Randall has successfully accomplished, but with respect to the margin's function in conveying meaning for the whole. Camille, *Image on the Edge*, 10; Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts*; Randall, 'Games and the Passion.'

Humor has also been explored as a product of High Renaissance humanism in Italian art, but not explained as a product of an artwork's devotional or liturgical purposes.[3] To acknowledge the centrality of humor, bawdiness, satire, derision, and play within the center of an altarpiece used for devotion or liturgical celebration might require that we relinquish preconceived notions of distinctions between 'medieval' and 'early modern,' or 'pre-modern' and 'Renaissance' culture. This is especially true for this book's discussions of satire, a term for which there are 'medieval' and 'early modern' definitions, which are often clearly partitioned and contrasted with one another. Such definitions are frequently negated by the nuances of humor and satire in Joseph's depictions; a definition of satire as insider's laughter at the outsider, for example, does not quite encompass or explain the nature of a satirized Joseph in a religious narrative. To avoid an interpretation of satire that is too narrow, the book discusses its nature and purposes in a variety of forms and examples from the thirteenth through early sixteenth centuries. The rhetorical strategy of *dissimulatio*, which characterizes literary examples from the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, is in many cases more useful in reconciling the derision and irony pervading images of sanctity than any existing definition of 'medieval' or 'early modern' satire; this is discussed especially in Chapter Three. Satire is a concept central to this book, however. For our purposes, although it does revolve around a criticism of vice with the goal of enacting awareness, it is also marked by inconsistency with respect to its message and its target; it is less pointed or cohesive than current definitions might suggest, in that it often refuses to take a side, seeming at times 'neutral, detached, or cynical.'[4]

Satirical depictions of Joseph appear to operate along more nuanced, engaged lines, not merely presenting his behavior as either right or wrong, but rather as reflective of a spectrum of concerns to be internalized. Such images challenge interpretations of Renaissance satire as expressing a 'firm commitment to positive values contrary to the negative values it mocks,'[5] for negativity, positivity, and culpability overlap across a thin line. For example, while many of his images uphold ideals espoused in contemporary sermons, they may simultaneously subvert these same ideals for their slippage into vice. This is discussed particularly in Chapter Four, which addresses the issue of the 'miserly Joseph' in the burgeoning profit economy.

For this study, the typical periodization of history is therefore both useful and irrelevant. The time period covered in this book – *c.* 1300 to 1550 – certainly complicates our desire for neat periodization of the phenomenon of Josephine humor, but in the following chapters of this book, I will use the term 'early modern' to refer to this period bridging the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It can be said that such humor

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3   Barolsky, *Infinite Jest*; Alberti, *La peinture facétieuse*.
4   Duval, 'Rabelais and French Renaissance Satire,' 72.
5   Duval, 'Rabelais and French Renaissance Satire,' 72.

disappears altogether from Catholic art after the rise of the Reformation, when laughter and derision toward a saint become antagonistic toward Catholic devotion itself. But the rise of Joseph's humor, as we will see, in fact corresponds clearly to the twelfth-century rise of Marian devotion and Joseph's own concomitant rise in popularity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as suggested in Chapter One.

Clear divisions between lay and clerical cultures, and their Bakhtinian equations to 'folk' and 'elite,' or 'low' and 'high' cultures, persist in art historical scholarship; these are questioned in this study.[6] 'Popular' culture – meaning a culture not only associated with the 'lower' classes but also with the many who do not belong to the highest political or religious leadership of western Europe – serves as the focus instead.[7] In looking beyond papally endorsed doctrine alone, the goal is to reclaim a history of devotion occluded by the historian's necessary reliance on the theological doctrine proscribed and recorded by those in power. Scholarship on Joseph's rise through the efforts of the ecclesiastical elite alone has created an image of a saint, who, throughout most of the Middle Ages, was viewed as a solely subordinate and comical figure. But the depictions that angered the French theologian Jean Gerson (1363–1429) for their characterization of the saint as a doddering old fool are perhaps evidence not of deprecation alone, but rather a celebration of the comedy of his circumstances, and even a form of veneration as well.[8] Because Gerson attempted to suppress this cultural production by relegating it to the realm of the 'sacrilegious', the flowering of Joseph's cult is thought not have occurred until the late fifteenth century,[9] and only then as a result of the efforts of Gerson's earliest theological texts in praise of the saint, requesting the establishment of the Feast of the Engagement of Joseph at the Council of Constance (1414–1418). Outside of the official lines of discourse, however, as we will see, Joseph's cult probably had a strong lay and clerical following by the early thirteenth century, the approximate date of the appearance

6   Mikhail Bakhtin's influential *Rabelais and His World* qualified the laughter of the carnivalesque, the 'World Upside Down', and the grotesque of the medieval festival as the 'low' popular cultural sphere of the common lay folk who were allegedly rebelling against the 'high' official culture of the dominant Church and state. The lower class's employment of humor, parody, and folklore supposedly fortified them with strategies of resistance to the 'norm' imposed from above. According to Bakhtin, the propensity of the lower classes for the scatological is an example particularly of the desire to rebel against the upper class's desired decorum. Bakhtin understood carnival behavior as an expression of medieval popular culture, which he equated with a culture of laughter. The source of carnival was, to him, the desire of 'popular culture', or the lower classes, to invert sociopolitical reality in a culture supposedly dominated and strictly restricted by the Church (and its associated educated classes) who suppressed laughter. In fact, however, reversal and transgression appear to have permeated the festal behavior and humor of the clerical and lay higher and lower orders. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 96, 368–436; Gurevich, 'Bakhtin and His Theory of Carnival,' 57.

7   Jaritz, 'Bildquellen zur mittelalterlichen Volksfrömmigkeit,' 206; Schindler, 'Spuren in die Geschichte der "anderen" Zivilisation,' 23–24, 53, 74–77; Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, XI.

8   Glorieux, 'Saint Joseph dans l'oeuvre de Gerson,' 423–425; Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 46.

9   Hale, 'Joseph as Mother,' 104; Filas, *Joseph*, 495.

of the saint's most important relic at Aachen Cathedral: the *Hosen* of the saint, variously translated in text and image as stockings, pants, or boots, and believed to have been the swaddling clothes of Christ.[10]

Popular art, texts, practices, and beliefs not only reveal the strength of Joseph's cult as early as the thirteenth century, but also encourage us to reconsider the power and purposes of late medieval humor for laity and clergy alike. An approach based upon Erwin Panofsky's principles of iconographic and iconological interpretation is necessary to understand Joseph's humor in art,[11] but it is important to avoid interpretations of Renaissance art as solely visualizing the theologically complex, oriented toward the intellectual and aesthetical elite. In this study, interpretations that consider popular productions and beliefs do not, I argue, actually counter the theological richness of many works, but rather amplify it. In an art historical field turned toward materials, an iconographic approach could never be more old-fashioned; and yet I strongly believe that this method is still foundational to understanding *how* images structured their beholders' experiences – and this could not be more necessary or appropriate for shedding light on our understanding of humor in sacred art. Of course, translating the jokes and functions of humor in religious scenes necessitates iconographic analyses. But most importantly, in this book, an old-fashioned tool serves a new and all-important purpose – negating the typical iconographic analysis's privileging of theological discourse over popular beliefs and practices, and revealing a union of satire and devotion that was at times central to the late medieval experience of Joseph and of the sacred image.

In planning the layout this book, the idea of chapters on individual cities and religious centers was highly appealing. But a book about humor in Joseph's depictions necessitates a focus on this phenomenon's various manifestations, translating the humor therein, and articulating humor's possible functions with respect to such manifestations. Most important, although perhaps not surprising, is the fact that early modern artists from Antwerp and Hamburg to Siena were apparently familiar with similar iconographic types for Joseph and adapted these to serve their own socio-religious contexts. The wide geographical spread of similar motifs may be explained in part by the spread of legends, plays, and pilgrimage which also demonstrate that a tradition of Josephine humor dating as early as the thirteenth century was not unique to the north.[12] Indeed, the popularity of specific plays and legends regarding Joseph throughout western Europe, coupled with the movements of people on the trade and pilgrimage routes between Rome and the north, provides an

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10   Demand et al., *Kleiner Wegweiser durch die Domschatzkammer Aachen*, 42.
11   Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*; Panofsky, 'Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait.'
12   Siena particularly was connected to the north on the trade and pilgrimage routes to Rome. See Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*, 43–49.

important context for the appearance of similar depictions of the saint both north and south of the Alps.[13]

Chapter One begins with a discussion of the earliest manifestations of Joseph's cult in art. Based on a reevaluation of the Panofskian understanding of his humor, it proposes that these manifestations appeared sooner than prior scholarship has suggested. A psalter from Freiburg, a Parisian set of ivories, and Chartres Cathedral's *jubé*, all from the thirteenth century, celebrate Joseph's cult and his most import-ant relic, as well as its associated legend, which tells of Joseph's loss of his stockings for a very munificent purpose. This legend and surviving cradle-rocking plays are then linked to one of the earliest preserved altarpieces depicting the strength, and the humor, of Joseph's cult, the Hamburg *Petri-Altar* of *c.* 1383 by Meister Bertram. In this work, theology and humor are intertwined. This reconciliation of seemingly opposing concepts in a high altarpiece used for liturgical celebration sets the stage for the subsequent chapters' discussions of ridicule and reverence in other works. The humor of the 'domestic' Joseph who cooks, dries diapers, washes, and swaddles the baby in northern art is connected to the appearance of similar iconography in *trecento* Italian art.

Laughter and religious practice were interconnected throughout the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, as Chapter Two demonstrates. This chapter reveals the extensive visual puns and tropes that exist in Josephine imagery by placing them within the context of contemporary secular satire and comedy, particularly that of the fool, peasant, henpecked husband, and unequal couple. Analogies are drawn to profane prints, paintings, and tales addressing these themes. Buttressed by Chapter One, Chapter Two begins the book's examination of the nature, power, and purposes of early modern humor, as well as its relationship to the sacred. The laughter that images of Joseph as a doddering, old, and unfortunately chaste father could elicit was in fact rooted in the reinforcement of socially advantageous values emphasiz-ing the importance of fidelity and childcare for actual fathers. Such images probably also facilitated a communion with the Holy Family in its most humanized form, a trend and concern documented by contemporary devotional manuals. Humor, like illusionism in sacred images of the early Renaissance, may have served to familiar-ize the holy to the devotee desiring to experience the divine in human terms, much like the sexualization, or maternalization, of Christ in art.[14] Religious satire may be

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13   See also Ladis, 'The Legend of Giotto's Wit and the Arena Chapel.' Work remains to be done on the use of humor in devotional and liturgical art of *trecento* Italy. Studies on Joseph's cult in Italy have rightfully focused on reclaiming a history of early devotion to the saint, but in doing so they, like Panofsky, assume that humor was antithetical to the saint's devotion. Any possible hints of derision or humor are therefore ignored or sanitized, as they are perceived to be antithetical to the cause. As a result, many risible Josephs in Italian liturgical and devotional art remain unstudied and unpublished, probably in part due to their perceived deviation from more 'appropriate' venerable images. See Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 66.
14   See Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*; Bynum, 'The Body of Christ'; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*.

understood as well as an outgrowth of the 'World Upside Down' model that flourished within the aristocratic circles of the High Middle Ages. This is a phenomenon traditionally understood as an exclusively secular form of humor in which the satire of traditional sex roles, chivalric attitudes, or the clergy could occur only in circumstances in which the status quo was not actually questioned. This chapter argues that satirizing Joseph's old age, virginity, cuckoldry by God, and incomplete understanding of the significance of Christ's birth did not undermine the saint's veneration because these very qualities in question were considered doctrinally necessary; they ensured Mary's purity, for example. Laughing at St. Joseph could become equivalent to reinstating his important theological role, and in itself, therefore, a form of veneration.

Another explanation for humor's centrality in late medieval and Renaissance religious imagery of Joseph rests upon classical, early Christian, and medieval rhetorical theories of humor and laughter, the basis of Chapter Three. Such theories were available in the early 1300s in treatises on poetics and in the Latin discourse on rhetoric and emphasize the role of humor in the construction of *urbanitas* – for the patron, the audience, and as this chapter suggests, perhaps even the artist. The concept of *dissimulatio* is particularly useful for understanding inconsistencies between ridicule and reverence in art. The paradox created between the two is not irreconcilable; the definition of irony as two valid meanings existing equally and in contradiction does not apply here. It is a kind of paradox that is rooted in the many varieties of ancient Greek irony and is most reminiscent of Socratic irony. Joseph's derision may be understood as a kind of inversion of an ironic *paradoxical encomium*; rather than blaming through praise, derision is used ultimately in a kind of veneration through laughter. This, as well as the courtly ideals rooted in concepts of *estrangeté* and the gift economy, is a phenomenon that might explain the presence of humor in sacred works fabricated for the *courtois*-oriented nobility (like Philip the Bold's *Antwerp-Baltimore Polyptych, c.* 1400) and newly flourishing *bourgeoisie* in centers of humanist and proto-humanist discourse. Josephine humor is contextualized particularly through the tradition of the *sermo humilis*, which grounds the rhetorical use of the 'low' or 'plain' style, incorporating humor and jokes as rhetorical devices, in an extensive tradition of Christian humility and humor in sermons and literature, including the Gospels themselves, that, I argue, gave rise to a kind of analogous *imago humilis*. Chapter Three also discusses a rhetorical trend of humor and wit in depictions of different saints with their attributes, as in the Master of the Little Garden of Paradise's devotional panel of *c.* 1400. Finally, the presence of humor in altarpieces painted by members of the clergy reveals that play in religious art cannot be explained by citing the concerns of the laity alone.

Following on the conclusions of Chapter Three, Chapter Four discusses the multivalent image, particularly the altarpiece, which could convey multiple meanings for laity and clergy alike, speaking to lay fathers and spiritual fathers at once. Once again,

this understanding allows us to reconcile prior categorizations of Joseph's depictions as either entirely derogatory or purely sober in message. A multiplicity of meanings is conveyed by versions of the Adoration of the Magi that depict Joseph as the family treasurer – in line with sermons on the successful behavior of the early modern urban *paterfamilias* (like those of the Franciscan Bernardino of Siena, 1380–1444) – yet often bordering on miserly keeper or ogler of material goods. According Joseph the roles of both comical miser and responsible caretaker, these images were proponents of successful behavior in an early modern urban money economy, but they were also redolent of medieval notions of the 'avaricious Jew', appropriately tying Joseph to the Old Law. Some may have also carried an undercurrent of pre-Reformation subversion rooted in contemporary satires of the Church's greed, a medieval tradition that came to a head around 1500. While upholding Bernardine ideals (buttressed by the writings of earlier Church Fathers) of ideal nuclear paternity, the multivalent St. Joseph may simultaneously subvert these same ideals for their slippage into avarice, a problem of particular social relevance to pre-Reformation church practices based on the exchange of money. The ability of late medieval and Renaissance depictions of St. Joseph to convey seemingly conflicting messages at once, satirizing the saint's greed yet celebrating his important theological and societal role as treasurer, is contextualized within forms of satire that are less rooted in the pointed, cohesive messages of modernity. Like the marginalia of earlier medieval art, the power of Joseph's satire, central to many scenes, lies in its ability to subvert institutional ideals even while supporting that same institution's most important doctrinal messages.

Ridicule or Reverence? A History of Scholarship on St. Joseph

Joseph's veneration ascended in the twelfth century, alongside a contemporaneous increase in devotion to the Virgin Mary. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) provides one of the earliest expositions on Joseph's importance in his Advent Homily on the *Missus Est*, extolling the saint's virtues as a descendant of the house of David and protector/nourisher of Christ.[15] One of the earliest theological texts in praise of the saint was written in the fifteenth century by Jean Gerson, who also composed a Latin poem of 3,000 verses entitled *Josephina*, requesting the establishment of the Feast of the Engagement of Joseph at the Council of Constance (1414–1418). In 1489, Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) composed a treatise entitled *De Laudibus S. Josephi.*[16] The campaigns of these late medieval theologians, including Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420), finally culminated in the official ecclesiastical establishment of the saint's cult in 1479, with the introduction of Joseph's feast day on 19 March into the liturgy of

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15   Bernard of Clairvaux, *Laudibus virginis Mariae*, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 4: 63–64.
16   Réau, 'Joseph.'

the Catholic Church under the Franciscan pope Sixtus IV (1471–1484). The feast was not fully authorized for the Universal Church, however, until the sixteenth century.[17] By the end of the seventeenth century, Joseph had become one of the most venerated saints of the Catholic Church.[18] However, scholarship of Joseph's rise through the efforts of ecclesiasts alone has created an image of a saint who, throughout most of the Middle Ages, was viewed as a solely subordinate and comical figure, often ignorant of the significance of the birth of Christ. His old age and diminution to the role of the simple 'extra' in the Bible and in theological writings ensured that he could not be mistaken as anything more than Christ's foster-father.[19]

This work relies upon the groundbreaking scholarship of a number of authors who have contributed significantly to the field of Joseph studies. Carolyn C. Wilson has revealed that Joseph was taken seriously as an object of veneration even as early as the thirteenth century in some Italian towns,[20] while modern-day theologians like Joseph F. Chorpenning, O.S.F.S., and historians like Paul Payan have unveiled the theological discourse underlying the saint's rise in the eyes of the Catholic Church before the official introduction of his feast in the late fifteenth century. Before the work of these scholars, our understanding of Joseph's history rested upon a pre-sixteenth-century image of the saint that is mostly derided for his age, simplicity, and care for a child by his wife that is most certainly not his own.

An important contribution to studies of Joseph, particularly for art historical studies, is Sheila Schwartz's dissertation, completed in 1975, which documents the rise in popularity of the apocryphal account of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt and its manifestations in art. The Rest on the Flight is an event from the eighth-century Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, ignored by theological commentators for its 'heretical' origin but frequently mixed with other Apocrypha and vernacular accounts including legends and folk tales, as well as excerpts from the Golden Legend and the Bible. While mystics devoted to Christ's humanity like Pseudo-Bonaventura (the anonymous author(s) of the *Meditationes de Vita Christi*, *c.* 1300 or 1346–1364),[21] Ludolph of Saxony (*c.* 1300–1378), Thomas à Kempis (*c.* 1380–1471), and St. Bernard of Clairvaux used apocryphal material for their intimate accounts of Christ's family life, the miracles performed by the infant Christ in the account of the Rest on the Flight caused them to ignore the narrative. Despite their occasional 'magical' accounts, the New

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17   Rodrigues, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 185–186.

18   Dusserre, *Les origines de la dévotion à Saint Joseph*, 1: 23–54, 169–196, 2: 5–30; A.C., 'Le développement historique du Culte de Saint Joseph,' 104–114, 145–155, 203–209.

19   Réau, 'Joseph.'

20   Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*.

21   Typically attributed to the anonymous 'Pseudo-Bonaventure', the text has been ascribed specifically to Giovanni de Caulibus de Sancto Gemeniano. Recent work dates it between 1346 and 1364. See McNamer, 'Further Evidence for the Date of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran Meditationes vitae Christi'; McNamer, 'The Origins of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*'; McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*.

Testament Apocrypha were mainly popularized due to their educational function for the wider public, particularly the growing 'middle' classes, and were therefore used frequently by Dominicans and Franciscans in their sermons. The appearance of Bible translations in the thirteenth century, prompted initially by Beghard and Beguine devotion, as well as the emergence of secular romances and epics in the mid-twelfth century, probably facilitated their popularization.[22]

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt offered a unique artistic opportunity to depict St. Joseph as an integral member of the Holy Family, and sometimes very prominently as its sole head and provider. The subject first appeared in manuscript illuminations of the second quarter of the fourteenth century, but only attained its complete, autonomous popularity outside of the larger biblical and apocryphal narrative in the sixteenth century, when it became a single focus of altarpieces, particularly in Italy. Meister Bertram's Hamburg *Petri-Altar*, completed in 1383, is thought to mark a turning point in the scene's iconographic significance. Schwartz suggests that this earliest known appearance of the Rest on a major altarpiece came about from a desire to represent St. Joseph as *nutritor Domini*, the caretaker and nourisher of Jesus, and that the image's prominent placement of the saint documents a significant rise in popularity of St. Joseph's cult. Joseph appears first in the Nativity scene, handing the child to the Virgin, which Schwartz interprets as a theological demonstration of the saint's importance as the protector of Christ and Mary, 'a rare alteration of the traditional Nativity iconography, where his role is normally peripheral,' and thus an early manifestation of the saint's status in art.[23]

Similar depictions of the saint passing the Christ child to Mary at the Nativity are found in a group of about a dozen ivories dating as early as *c.* 1275 from Paris, in a psalter from Freiburg dated *c.* 1200, and on Chartres Cathedral's *jubé*, recently dated to around 1230 or earlier, all discussed in Chapter One. Whether this motif originated in devotional writings, or whether the motif itself inspired such texts, is unclear and merits reevaluation with respect to Joseph's most important relic, his *Hosen*, which became the swaddling clothes of the baby Jesus. The presence of a more positive image of Joseph in northern art as early as *c.* 1200 is suggestive of the already strong presence of his cult that actually pre-dates references to his paternal role in extant devotional literature (including the *Vita Christi* of 1374 by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony, the Franciscan *Meditationes de Vita Christi* of *c.* 1300 or 1346–1364, and Thomas à Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi* of *c.* 1418–1427). Although Joseph's feast day was not made official until the late fifteenth century, it may be found in calendars of

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22   Schwartz suggests that secular romances and epics ultimately had a significant impact on the illustration and reception of the apocryphal texts. Schwartz, 'The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,' 8–19; Hugh of St. Victor condemned the Apocrypha in his *Didascalicon*, IV, 7 and IV, 15; see Taylor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, 107–116.

23   Schwartz, 'The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,' 47.

orders and churches and in martyrologies from as early as the ninth century through the fifteenth.[24]

Schwartz's well-founded argument to establish the *Petri-Altar*'s St. Joseph as a representation of the saint's theological significance and veneration is made at the expense of a strong contemporary vernacular tradition that pokes fun at the saint's shortcomings, however. This is certainly not to say that her arguments are invalid; rather, after a detailed consideration of the scope of Joseph's iconography, the belief that the saint's derision operated separately from his veneration appears to be incorrect. The two were not mutually exclusive, particularly in the towns and cities of northern Europe, in which literature and drama frequently intertwined the sacred and the base. Medieval religious drama was inspired particularly by the literary genre of the *fabliaux*, tailored to a rising *bourgeoisie*, in which the base and the comical infused stories of mischief and trickery. The trope of the cuckolded, foolish old husband became combined with the story of Joseph's Doubt, presented in plays like the *Trial of Joseph and Mary* from the English *Ludus Coventriae* cycle, as well as German cradle-rocking plays. The cuckolded and bumbling version of the saint as a figure of comic relief appears to have continued in popular thought, even as his veneration ascended. Conrad von Soest's *Wildunger Altar* in Bad Wildungen, which Schwartz argues 'disproves a demeaning intent in the artist's presentation of Joseph, for in the [Adoration] scene, Joseph stands reverently behind the Virgin as the Magi adore the Child,' itself demonstrates the possibility for Joseph to appear a humorous, beloved, and venerated saint all at once on a high altarpiece.[25] Joseph's humble depiction in the Nativity scene (Plate 2) – crouching on all fours before a cooking pot – is probably not a humble enactment of Byzantine *proskynesis*.[26] The most detailed iconographic examination of St. Joseph in Netherlandish art, Marjory Bolger Foster's dissertation completed in 1978, includes such humorous depictions among her catalogue but attempts to sanitize them of disrespectful or sacrilegious interpretations, characterizing Joseph as 'a well-meaning old fellow whose understanding of events in which he is involved is limited.'[27]

These arguments, although supported by theological texts, discount the broader context of popular, and often satirical, literature and art – 'secular' forms of cultural production that infiltrated religious activities and productions as well. Schwartz concedes that Joseph functioned as a base figure of ridicule in German Nativity plays; but the assertion that such 'coarse entertainment for the lower classes that flourished in the absence of a strong ecclesiastical authority […] exerted no influence

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24   Bonaño, 'San José en los calendarios y martirologios hasta el siglo XV inclusive'; Barth, *Die Verehrung des heiligen Josef im Elsass*, 38–40; Schwartz, 'The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,' 13.
25   Schwartz, 'The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,' 65.
26   Schwartz, 'The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,' 66.
27   Foster, 'Iconography of St. Joseph in Netherlandish Art,' 249; Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2: pl. 103, no. 82.

upon the higher levels of literature and art'[28] is probably incorrect, as this study contends. Recent research into Joseph's function in the plays, examined in the following chapter, discounts the assumption that Joseph was solely a figure of comic relief in them, and scholarship of the plays themselves reveals that they were presented by lay actors in townhouses or in churches and were directed by laymen of the local parish, often for an audience that included elite members of society.[29] Furthermore, the humor of such plays and their associated legends appears as well in two works commissioned for the Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold (1342–1404), discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Schwartz's research into ecclesiastical thought relevant to the veneration of St. Joseph, as well as the work of Brigitte Heublein and Paul Payan, provides a seminal basis for this study. Heublein's book on the 'misunderstood' Joseph, *Der 'verkannte' Joseph: Zur mittelalterlichen Ikonographie des Heiligen im deutschen und niederländischen Kulturraum*, provides an excellent documentation of the origins of Joseph's northern medieval iconography, particularly that which evokes the importance of his biblical dreams, in the iconography of antiquity. She notes the ambiguity of Joseph's characterization in the Bible, the Apocrypha, and theological writings, but minimizes remnants of Joseph's ironic or 'bad image'[30] as a miser or bumbling care giver. Paul Payan, too, describes Joseph's doddering behavior in literature and art as at most evidence of his being 'humble' – 'un peu inquiet et peut-être un peu triste de ne pas avoir pu assurer le confort de sa famillie.'[31] Payan writes a comprehensive history of Joseph's conceptualization in church doctrine and devotion as the epitome of fatherhood, to become the intercessor for the well-being of the medieval family and the Church at large.

The theological and ecclesiastical motivations behind Joseph's rise in veneration are documented extensively in an entire series of journals published by the research center of St. Joseph's Oratory of Montreal, the *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, which itself forms the unparalleled backbone of these and all Joseph studies, as its contributors vary from contemporary theologians and priests to scholars of history, religion, and art. One of the most notable contributors to the history of Joseph studies is Joseph F. Chorpenning, who charts the history of the veneration of St. Joseph with remarkable detail, albeit emphasizing the writings of theologians as the hegemonic discourse. Chorpenning, as well as a number of authors in his most recent edited volume, *Joseph of Nazareth Through the Centuries*, writes on the theological importance of St. Joseph for the changing characteristics of the late medieval family, a

28   Schwartz, 'The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt,' 84.
29   Schmidt, 'Formprobleme der deutschen Weihnachtsspiele,' 11; Simon, 'Das schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel,' 47; Simon, 'The Home Town of the *Schwäbische Weihnachtsspiel*,' 316; Brauneck et al., *Theaterstadt Hamburg*, 17.
30   Heublein, *Der 'verkannte' Joseph*, 260.
31   Payan, *Joseph*, 388; Payan, 'Ridicule?'

study that invites more work on the socio-economic currents motivating such changes. Through the lens of ecclesiasts, popular piety toward the saint appears to have only truly flourished after the official introduction of St. Joseph's feast at Rome in 1479 and the following increase in ecclesiastical literature on the saint in the sixteenth century. However, Gerson's early campaigns were probably not merely in favor of 'rescu[ing] St. Joseph from the relative neglect of earlier periods.'[32] Gerson's disapproval of Josephine humor does not suggest that Joseph's cult had only a small following at that time; rather, it hints to the presence of a cult practice that was not to Gerson's liking, as well as to his intent to correct 'mistaken' conceptions of the saint that had been fostered by the apocryphal Gospels, drama, and other more popular forms of literature and art. But these should be considered as an integral part of the saint's cult, especially since they continued far into the sixteenth century, the period during which some of the most influential early modern ecclesiastical texts on the saint appeared.

One of these texts is the *Summa of the Gifts of Saint Joseph* (*Summa de donis S. Joseph*) of 1522, published at Pavia by the Dominican friar Isidoro Isolano. This and other theological texts document a strong cult dedicated to St. Joseph in northern and central Italy, which Carolyn C. Wilson, in *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, has shown existed in more than just localized form during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Isidoro praised St. Joseph as the ideal intercessor as champion of the Church Militant and the restorer of peace in Italy, in response to the crises of plague, invasion, and attacks that damaged the north particularly. Wilson's research reveals that by 1522, churches, confraternities, and altars dedicated to St. Joseph had sprung up around northern and central Italy. In 1528, Parma adopted Joseph as its patron saint, while in 1521, Bologna was engaged in renewing the earliest known church dedicated to St. Joseph, its Benedictine church of San Giuseppe in Borgo Gallera, in existence by the twelfth century. Wilson's book is primarily engaged with correcting a long-standing misconception in the history of scholarship that Joseph was primarily or exclusively a Counter-Reformation saint, seriously venerated only in later sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century Spain, France, and the New World.[33] She demonstrates that intense cult activity existed in Italy before the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the event typically considered to mark the emergence of St. Joseph's highest veneration. Her discussion of northern images attempts to cleanse Joseph of his humor, however, stressing the necessity of rethinking 'any modern assumption of an artist's intent to ridicule Joseph in scenes that portray the saint cooking or performing other charitable and parental acts.'[34]

32   Chorpenning, *Sermon Texts on Saint Joseph by Francis de Sales*, 27.
33   An excellent documentation of the rise of St. Joseph's cult in seventeenth-century Spain is Black, *Creating the Cult of St. Joseph*.
34   Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art*, 66.

Scholars like Wilson and Schwartz have contributed an important corrective to interpretations of Joseph's depiction and cult that focused exclusively on his derision. Johan Huizinga's *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, first published in English in 1924, contends that the late fourteenth and fifteenth-century veneration of the saint was more 'subject to the influences of popular fancy rather than of theology.'[35] Huizinga includes three poems that he interprets as entirely irreverent towards the saint, characterizing him as ridiculous and foolish. Louis Réau likewise falls into the trap of total derision, claiming that the verses of the French poet Eustache Deschamps (1346–1406) indicate that Joseph, *le rassoté* ('the fool or the weary'), had little respect in the late Middle Ages.[36] Peter Burke states that a major change in the way Joseph was perceived only took place in the seventeenth century, with the saint marginally significant until then.[37] Ruth Mellinkoff's *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages* likewise interprets Joseph's iconography as solely derisive and comical.[38]

The arguments of this study align most closely with interpretations of Joseph's character in art and literature by Cynthia Hahn and Pamela Sheingorn, as well as two essays by Louise Vasvari and Francesca Alberti, addressed in Chapter Three. Although Hahn and Sheingorn acknowledge an inherent duality, ambiguity, or 'bricolage' in Joseph's late medieval artistic and literary manifestations, they tend to interpret these as distinct characteristics, the 'juxtaposition of fragments whose edges cannot be smoothed,'[39] or 'mutually exclusive roles. In some Gothic representations he was depicted as an old, tired buffoon, a butt of jokes. Alternatively, he was conceived of as the hard-working foster-father of Christ, the worthy companion and helpmate to Mary, and the strong, capable head of his household.'[40] The following chapters argue that both characterizations are true with respect to Joseph's depiction in late medieval and Renaissance art, but that these seemingly disparate roles are not at all mutually exclusive in many artistic examples.[41]

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35   Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 168.
36   Réau, 'Joseph,' 754.
37   Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*.
38   As does Cuttler, *Northern Painting from Pucelle to Bruegel*; Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*.
39   Sheingorn, 'Constructing the Patriarchal Parent,' 171.
40   Hahn, 'The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych,' 55.
41   More recent scholarship of medieval drama, like that of Stephen Wright in the field of German drama and V.A. Kolve in the field of English literature, see Joseph's two facets as evidence of his relatable function as the 'natural man,' allowing for the possibility that comedy and exemplarity could overlap. See Wright, 'Joseph as Mother, Jutta as Pope'; Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 247.

Sanctity, Humor, and the Gap between Material Reality and Religious Experience

The multivalent scope of Joseph's iconography, contextualized within popular practices and beliefs, reveals much about Joseph's function as an exemplar, whether playfully derided or venerated in the most sober of circumstances. What the image contains was probably less important to the period viewer than how the image structured the viewer's experience of sanctity – how humor, for example, closed the gap between material and vision. This is an approach that also seems appropriate within the purview of the general decline of Scholasticism's influence. Craig Harbison notes (I believe correctly):

> No surviving literary sources from the fifteenth century suggest that the ordinary lay viewer or patron was unusually concerned with the religious subject matter and [theological] symbolism of a visual image […] none of these documents [of works for public locations or monasteries] indicate that the specific theological meaning or symbolism of the many details found in these works was as minutely predetermined as modern scholars have at times supposed.[42]

James Marrow also contradicts the common assumption that the presentation of symbolic meaning through recondite symbols was considered the most important artistic achievement of fourteenth and fifteenth-century art. Period discussions of devotional works of art in fact focus on how an image works in relation to the beholder, rather than what it depicts specifically. Narratives of Christ's life and devotional handbooks reveal this shift in interest from the theologically recondite to personal practice, particularly in visualizing one's own personal response to religious events.[43] As early as 1965, Sixten Ringbom related this visionary tendency in the late medieval religious experience to images, arguing that such experiences sought primarily to commune, in a very visceral and direct manner, with Christ and the saints in their most humanized form. From about 1450 to 1550 especially, *Andachtsbilder*, images like the *Virgo lactans* that have been isolated from a narrative in order to convey the emotional core of the story, were increasingly portrayed with added anecdotal and genre-like motifs. According to Ringbom, these changes were the result of a desire to make static images like that of the Virgin and Child more emotionally accessible to late medieval viewers. Another way that this was accomplished was through increased interest and skill in depicting physiognomy and a sense of the subject's psychological interior. Fifteenth-century Italian theorists like Leon Battista Alberti discussed solutions to this problem – for example, how the painter could distinguish

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42   Harbison, 'Iconography and Iconology,' 380.
43   Marrow, 'Symbol and Meaning,' 150–169.

between laughter and crying – but the Italians admired northern painters most of all for their practical solutions to rendering the intimate details of an emotional response.[44]

The humanization of Joseph, even in his most playful or bawdy forms, is thus perhaps directly symptomatic of this desire for direct contact with the Heavenly Family. Artistic forms could stimulate this sense of personal engagement in a number of ways. Depictions of emotional and gestural responses to such events as the Passion of Christ encouraged a similar response in the viewer, while illusionistic art – that which could 'eradicate or deny the distinction between the painted image and that which it represents'[45] – served the important purpose of establishing a tangible connection between the beholder and the divine subject. In similar form, the direct iconic gaze of the divine subject of a work of art would not only stimulate a spiritual dialogue with the viewer but also admonish him to present an appropriate response. Devotional treatises like the *Vita Christi*, the *Meditationes de Vita Christi*, and *De Imitatione Christi* admonish their readers to react physically during their meditations upon the body of Christ, for example, and to experience Christ and the saints as viscerally as they possibly can.[46] Depictions of the Holy Family thus facilitated this kind of devotion, inviting imitation of their actions. Theologians like St. Augustine (354–430), Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth–early sixth century), St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Bonaventura (1221–1274) each expressed an interest in the meaningfulness of the image for spiritual meditation. In his treatise entitled *On the four kinds of things on which one can meditate* (*De quatuor generibus meditabilium*), Geert Grote (1340–1384), the founder of the Modern Devotion, writes that physical images are useful in experiencing one's faith in the most human of terms, a kind of meditation that allows the worshipper to use his imagination to elaborate on the Bible. He writes that both St. Bernard and St. Bonaventura 'taught that it is permissible in meditation to attribute more or different things to Christ's earthly life than are actually found in the scriptures [...] We may picture any event as though it occurred today.'[47] Grote believed that this kind of 'appropriation' encouraged a proximity to Christ and the saints that aided in one's spiritual salvation.[48] At the very least, these images offered something akin to the longed-for experience of spiritual closeness with Christ and the saints, a foretaste of the unity with Christ and spiritual love experienced in the bliss of the afterlife.[49] Mystics aimed while still on earth to achieve an experience of this same unity through the highest form of prayer, that of a physically experienced

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44   Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 50–51; Leon Battista Alberti, *Trattato della pittura*, 120; Bartholomaeus Facius, *De viris illustribus*, 49; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, note 2.
45   Marrow, 'Symbol and Meaning,' 161.
46   Marrow, 'Symbol and Meaning,' 156–165.
47   Ridderbos, 'Objects and Questions,' 128–129.
48   Tolomio, *Il Trattato 'De quattuor generibus meditabilium,'* 56; Ridderbos, 'Objects and Questions,' 129.
49   Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion*.

yet passive unification with Christ. All of these variations in intensity of experience are what Sixten Ringbom describes as the 'empathic approach' to late medieval image theology, which is not guided by a need for edification or adoration alone, but by a 'deep emotional experience.'[50]

Although theological symbolism was indeed crucial to a work of art used for private devotion or public veneration, the viewer's experience of sanctity in art was not focused solely upon the search for 'concealed' theological complexity. Much of the symbolism that is so recondite to the modern viewer was in fact common knowledge for the late medieval laity, varying, of course, according to their social standing and associated level of education.[51] Historical analyses of late medieval religious life indicate that the laity were more interested in trying 'to "see" the consecrated host as a vision of the Christ Child, and going on both real and imaginary pilgrimages and processions, mingling superstition and personal desires with more officially recognized activities.'[52] Through its attention to anecdotal detail and naturalism, the *Vita Christi* literature indicates that the reader was meant to follow Christ on a pilgrimage through life. Reindert Falkenburg connects these themes with late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century paintings that are intended to aid in one's meditation upon this pilgrimage. Travel motifs including the walking stick, basket, and pilgrim's garb become popular especially in images of the Flight into Egypt or the Rest on the Flight, while Joachim Patinir's worldview landscape offered a path for the imagination to go on pilgrimage within the world of Christ's infancy.[53] The agency of viewing such images in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance becomes clearer with an understanding of contemporary theories of vision, which accorded a very active role to the eye in the process of seeing.[54] According to medieval theories of sight espoused by Alhazen (965–1040), John Pecham (d. 1292), and Roger Bacon (1214–1294), which continued to influence Renaissance thought, the act of seeing implied the eye's taking an imprint of the thing seen.[55] This intimates that the viewers of a work of art would engage in a very active and personal discourse with the figures and things represented. Michael Camille reminded us that, 'Whether one followed the theory of extromission, which involved the eye sending out rays in order to see, or intromission, which described the object as sending rays to the eye, vision was a far more active and dangerous sense than it is for us today.'[56]

50   Ringbom, *From Icon to Narrative*, 12.
51   Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, xv.
52   Harbison, 'Iconography and Iconology,' 401; Toussaert, *Le sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du Moyen-Âge*.
53   Falkenburg, *Joachim Patinir*.
54   Jacquemart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, 144–145; Camille, 'Obscenity under Erasure,' 143.
55   Lindberg, 'Alhazen's Theory of Vision and Its Reception in the West'; Eastwood, 'Alhazen, Leonardo, and Late Medieval Speculation on the Inversion of Images in the Eye.'
56   Camille, 'Obscenity under Erasure,' 143.

'Seeing' and experiencing the Holy Family's journey during the Flight into Egypt, for example, were, therefore, one and the same. Images of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph could be experienced as if present within one's own life. Late medieval images and artists were thus highly aware and encouraging of the beholder's reaction. More public images, like altarpieces, engaged with a multiplicity of people and concerns. These operated not for the clergy alone, but for the laity as well, whose concerns were often the main impetus behind an altarpiece's imagery, as Lynn Jacobs notes in her examination of the fabrication and marketing of south Netherlandish sculpted altarpieces. She writes that works executed for a church's high altar were primarily used for and pertinent to the religious salvation of the congregation, while for the clergy, they served as props for the liturgy and as a form of religious propaganda.[57]

The humanization of Joseph, even in his most playful and bawdy forms, is perhaps directly symptomatic of this search for direct contact with the Heavenly Family. The desire for a deep emotional or affective experience in devotion might have easily extended to experiences of play and laughter. Barbara Rosenwein's concept of 'emotional communities', which challenged Norbert Elias's influential notion of the 'civilizing process', provides a useful analogy for understanding this early modern phenomenon.[58] Rather than conceptualizing Joseph as a saint first derided and later venerated, casting humor in his art as a sign of an undeveloped cult, we should be able to perceive his cult's flourishing as something much more complex. This study attempts to reconcile a long tradition of Joseph studies that has yet to fully come to terms with humor's centrality and functions in religious imagery, primarily because we lack an understanding of the communities that bound veneration with humor. Evidence of such practices is scarce in ecclesiastical accounts, but the very fact that Gerson publicly disavowed art and plays that cast Joseph in a deprecatory light suggests that the phenomenon of the saint's humor was strong, as does the visual and literary evidence examined here.

Because of our distance from medieval and Renaissance humor, it can be exceedingly difficult to imagine a devotee laughing at and venerating a saint at once. But humor, laughter, play, and the religious experience should be conceptualized according to the cultures under study, and not today's experiences. This does not mean, however, that the early modern intertwining of satire, play, emotions, and the sacred, in ways that sometimes defy modern logic and rationalization, cannot provide some small inspiration for approaching different ways of understanding contemporary issues. Even in today's world, marked by tensions between sacred and secular lives, the concept of emotional communities is becoming a more relevant way of understanding human life, perhaps as a part of reason itself.

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57   Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces*, 17.
58   Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*; Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

As an exploration of the intersection of humor and veneration in sacred art, this study draws as well upon anthropological theories of humor and inversion, shaped by Mary Douglas and Mahadev Apte. It also employs Johan Huizinga's thought-provoking study on the fundamental significance of play, an enduringly compelling analysis explaining one way that humor and sacrality could overlap. Mary Carruthers's more recent *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* rightfully questions the notion of traditional scholarly conception of play in medieval cultures as morally deficient or inferior, irrelevant for 'serious people like clerics.'[59] She argues rather that medieval arts were 'composed and experienced on the model of classical rhetoric'[60] and that 'it is to rhetoric and not theology that one should go first to understand its character.'[61] Paul Binski's chapter in *Gothic Wonder* on the pleasure of play in medieval marginalia similarly cautions against such problematically binary thinking, arguing that in fact, 'the culture of marginalia originated in, and shared many quite well-documented features of, high clerical and Latinate culture.'[62] These are compelling notions that inform Chapter Three of this book. Work on medieval play in the margins provides an inspirational and important foundation for the aim of this book: to explore the reasons behind humor's move to the center of many late medieval and Renaissance religious scenes, as well as how humor and satire could transcend such anachronistic categories as 'sacred' and 'secular' or lay and clerical. But as an inquiry into the relationship between humor, religious sensibilities, and art, it is primarily a historical contextual analysis grounded in the visual culture of northern Europe, particularly the areas that border the Rhine and its wider environs, connected via trade and pilgrimage to the spiritual center of Aachen. Underlying this study is my earnest attempt to contextualize playful motifs within historically and culturally specific frameworks of early modern humor, satire, and wit, and to avoid assigning anachronistic meanings to works that never made (or were intended to make) their contemporaries smile or chuckle. A certain amount of humor transcends past and present, early modern and modern humanity; but humor is also specific to each person's own experience, and even satire itself, as well as its functions today and 500 years ago, resists concrete definitions. Indeed, I am sure that there exist many jokes from this period that I did not 'get' – I hope that this book will provide some inspiration for further explorations of humor and play in late medieval and Renaissance art, a field that is finally growing but continues to invite much more exploration, particularly with respect to its role in veneration and devotion.

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59 Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 17.
60 Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 18.
61 Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 18.
62 Binski, *Gothic Wonder,* 286.

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