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Chapter 6

Laughing in the Face of Danger: Humorous Coping in MS Harley 913

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BL MS Harley 913, an Anglo-Irish manuscript probably completed by 1330, contains works in Latin, French, and Anglo-Irish. A number of these works have been more or less universally recognized as humorous. In addition to its most famous work, *The Land of Cokaygne*, the manuscript also contains a number of satirical and parodic pieces, several of which seem to react to the historical circumstances surrounding the poems' and manuscript's production. My main focus here will be on *The Land of Cokaygne*, with some excursions into other works in the manuscript. The early fourteenth century experienced severe weather which, between 1315–1317, caused what has become known as the Great Famine, the effects of which lasted well into the 1320s. Most scholars of these works consider them satire, with others seeing prominent elements of parody in them. Although those two genres are definitely present, I argue that *The Land of Cokaygne* and its kin are also a mode of humorous coping with the trauma that events such as the Great Famine (and Black Death afterwards) caused. In doing this, I will draw upon contemporary humor theory, providing a modified relief theory, working in conjunction with the popular incongruity theory, to argue that the humor can function as compensation for trauma. I argue that, although poems such as *The Land of Cokaygne* exist within a satiric and parodic tradition, they also could have a social function—relief from the hardships of everyday life.

Scholarly treatment of the poem has touched upon these issues, but no in-depth study of the poem in relation to its historical circumstances or using humor theory has yet appeared. Hal Rammel seems to be on the right track in seeing *The Land of Cokaygne* as part of a tradition that he calls comic utopia, which also includes "Schlaraffenland, Lubberland, Oleana, and Ditty Wah Ditty"[1] but also has links to the Roman Saturnalia, Carnival, travel narratives, and even tall-tale post cards, which present pictures of vegetables larger than the farmers who raise

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them.[2] In connecting these historically and geographically disparate artifacts, Rammel draws upon the work of A. L. Morton, who views *The Land of Cokaygne* as participating in a tradition of utopia, stemming from the material conditions of the time. In Morton's words, "In the beginning Utopia is an image of desire" and "is based on something that somebody actually wants."[3] Morton is one of very few full-length studies of how *The Land of Cokaygne* fits this tradition, yet *The Land of Cokaygne* is relatively early in the tradition. Subsequent studies—with the exception of a few minor comments and Rammel's book—seem to have forgotten Morton's work. Scholarly focus on the work has moved toward studying the poem in its manuscript context—certainly a worthy endeavor—and to placing the poem into a Franciscan context to discuss its possible satirical content.[4] While this work is worthwhile and illuminates the poem, these scholars ignore Morton's assertion about the tradition to which the poem belongs. At its foundation, this literature is wish fulfillment; only later does it become "more complex and various, and may become an elaborate means of expressing social criticism and satire" (Morton, p. 15). Another trend has developed as scholars attempted to identify models for the poem's parody. These scholars have incorporated ideas from Morton's and Rammel's vision of the poem, if only in recognizing that there may be a parodic element to it. The latest full-length study of the poem is Herman Pleij's *Dreaming of Cokaygne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life*. Probably the fullest and most important work on the subject, Pleij sees the Cokaygne poems in ways similar to Morton and Rammel. Pleij asserts that Cokaygne had a "central place . . . within the survival strategies of both peasants and townsfolk, and to a certain extent, also of aristocrats and clergy. Fantasies of Cokaygne offered a light-hearted counterbalance to the weighty obsessions of medieval existence" (Pleij, *Dreaming*, p. 5). Pleij calls the Anglo-Irish text "undoubtedly the most literary of all the [Cokaygne] texts" (Pleij, *Dreaming*, p. 166), yet he offers very little discussion of the Anglo-Irish poem—and no detailed analysis—focusing instead on the Dutch Cokaygne literature.

While all of the existing studies certainly add to our knowledge about the poem and its various traditions, all of them have shortcomings, as well. Morton, after asserting that satire develops late in the utopia tradition, claims that *The Land of Cokaygne* is satirical (Morton, p. 17). He also sees the poem as subversive, representing a rebellious nature in fourteenth-century people that would lead to later satirical works (Morton, pp. 28–31), and he ignores the material circumstances surrounding the poem's production. Studies that attempt to identify sources and objects of satire and parody similarly tend to ignore the poem's material circumstances and seem to turn the humorous nature of the poem into more of a scholarly exercise. While Rammel and Pleij both acknowledge the material circumstances (the latter in more detail), neither is focused on the Irish poem, and neither offers specific evidence about what the poet responds to, though both at least imply that this tradition is a response to very real hardship.[5] The current study foregrounds

these aspects of the Irish poem to show that the poem creates humorous coping as a reaction to its material conditions and the trauma that those circumstances inevitably caused.

Before analyzing the humor in these works, we must establish the trauma with which the literature seems to be coping. Morton identifies *The Land of Cokaygne* as wish fulfillment (Morton, p. 15), and Karma Lochrie argues that "Cokaygne is the representation of a desire that is at the same time fully cognizant of the impediments to its fulfillment."[6] If *The Land of Cokaygne* is wish fulfillment, then we need to identify what was lacking in early fourteenth-century Ireland. Such identification is key to understanding the poem as humorous coping, for in this tradition, the humor is based on wish fulfillment. The poet reacts to two main areas—the strict lifestyle of the cloistered religious and hardship brought about by frequent bad harvests.

The first of these areas is too well-documented to merit an exhaustive discussion. Although each order had its own rule, generally, the cloistered were to live modest lives. Rules varied, of course, but the Rule of St. Benedict—which was used by the Cistercians, an order scholars identify as perhaps an object of satire in the poem[7]—stipulates that only two meals were permitted each day, and only two dishes were to be available for each. What is more, meat was forbidden, save for the ill or weak.[8] This lifestyle meant participating in the three evangelical councils: poverty, chastity, and obedience.[9] Strictly enforced, poverty, chastity, and obedience could and often did present a hard life. Monks needed to provide for their own sustenance, so agriculture became an essential part of the monastery. They could, however, hold property in common, and so were able to purchase goods for the common welfare. Friars, on the other hand, could not hold property in common, and had to rely on the charity of others for their sustenance. Chastity, of course, was a difficult task, as satirical literature of the period indicates.[10] Scholars who argue that *The Land of Cokaygne* is satire invariably point to the final section of the poem, which details the activities of monks and nuns inhabiting the land, focusing on sexual license. Lochrie argues that "the Middle English Cokaygne represents a mashup of the medieval Latin satirical tradition aimed at the venality of regular clergy and utopian satire simed [*sic*] at the political and social mores of medieval culture."[11] The cloistered lifestyle was not a luxurious one, and the *Cokaygne*-poet uses a cloistered environment with not only an abundance of food but also sumptuous foods, seeming to react directly to what medieval Irish cloisters lacked—my other area of discussion.

What the religious, and in fact most people in early fourteenth-century Ireland, lacked, was food security, and this area has received little attention in discussions of *The Land of Cokaygne*.[12] From 1294 through roughly 1322, Europe and Ireland experienced a series of agricultural crises. According to Mary C. Lyons, Ireland experienced a famine between 1294 and 1296, enduring another famine from 1308–1310.[13] The population had probably just recovered from this when

what has become known as the Great Famine of 1315–1317 occurred, affecting all of Europe, according to William Chester Jordan.[14] A series of extremely wet years, harsh winters, and cool summers ushered in a series of poor or failed harvests. Seung H. Baek, Jason E. Smerdon, and George-Costin Dobrin, et al. claim that it "triggered one of the worst population collapses in European history and ranks as the single worst European famine in mortality as a proportion of population."[15] Using data from the Old World Drought Atlas, they calculate that "the 1314–1316 summer mean furthermore comprises the fifth wettest 3-year summer period over Europe from 1300 to 2012."[16] Medieval agriculture was not the most productive of processes, even in good years: Jordan estimates a yield of about three bushels reaped for every bushel sown (Jordan, p. 26). Modern agriculture has a 200 or 300 to 1 ratio, and even ancient agriculture could be as high as 76:1 (Jordan, p. 25). So even in good years, we would not find an overabundance of crops.[17] During the Great Famine, we see wheat yields at 55.9% at Winchester in 1316; at Bolton Priory in Yorkshire wheat production dropped 50% during the course of the famine. During these years, food became exceedingly scarce, placing an incredible amount of strain on all aspects of society. Europe had entered true famine conditions, with the hunger and disease that naturally accompany such conditions (Jordan, p. 32).

Ireland suffered from the Great Famine, but in many ways, the impact may have been greater than it was in other areas of Europe. To add to the famine, Edward Bruce invaded Ireland in 1315. As Lyons asserts, this was devastating to the countryside, for the winter offensive in 1315–16 was basically a slash and burn campaign (Lyons, p. 42). Bruce's army consumed or destroyed most of what it contacted, and during the campaign, the army marched through nearly the entire region associated with BL MS Harley 913. Lyons concludes that this campaign "must have ensured that Ireland experienced some of the most severe effects of the famine" (Lyons, p. 42), and if *The Land of Cokaygne*-poet did not experience these effects directly, he certainly would know about them from contact with inhabitants who did. As most scholars who treat the poem assert, one of the defining characteristics of *The Land of Cokaygne*—and in fact all of the Cokaygne poems and art—is the emphasis on food, a sharp contrast to what people would have experienced in Ireland.[18]

What is important here is that medieval agriculture was a true subsistence lifestyle, even in good years. The low returns on labor indicate that the average farmer probably could not stockpile large quantities of food in preparation for poor seasons. The very wealthy and perhaps religious houses could build stockpiles, but with such low production, the stockpiling must have been slow, especially when harvests were below average. The availability of food would vary from year to year, but it seems that people typically walked a fine line between comfort and hunger, and severe agricultural crises like those that occurred in Ireland in 1294, 1308, and 1315 must have caused an immense amount of psychological distress and trauma.

Studies have shown a relationship between food insecurity and mental health

issues. For instance, a study on South Africans found a strong link between poverty (and hence food insecurity), violence, and anxiety disorders.[19] Cindy W. Leung, Barbara A. Laraia, Christina Feiner, et al. found that "the commonality of emotional responses stemming from the experience of food insecurity can increase the risk for clinical anxiety and depression."[20] Candice A. Myers reviews studies from around the world on the link between food insecurity and psychological distress and concludes that "the studies reviewed herein established a significant and positive association between food insecurity and psychological distress."[21] The link between food insecurity and psychological distress seems to be exacerbated when disease is involved, as in the COVID-19 pandemic. Julia A. Wolfson, Travertine Garcia, and Cindy W. Leung surveyed low-income adults at the beginning of the pandemic and concluded that "the stress and uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are negatively associated with the mental health of low-income adults in the United States, with disproportionate impact among adults experiencing food insecurity."[22] Early fourteenth-century Ireland experienced both food insecurity with the famines of 1294, 1296, 1308–1310, and the Great Famine of 1315–17 and violence with the Bruce invasion. People in this region experienced severe food insecurity, which probably produced psychological distress and trauma.

It was in the midst of these famines that *The Land of Cokaygne* was produced. Dates for the manuscript vary. Heuser, one of the manuscripts first scholars, dates it to around 1325,[23] and Angela M. and Peter J. Lucas date the manuscript to no later than 1335.[24] We can, therefore, say with confidence that the manuscript was compiled sometime before 1335, though the individual works were composed at various times.[25] Thomas Garbáty upholds Heuser's claim that most of the pieces in the manuscript were written between 1315 and 1318, a reasonable assumption, since several of the pieces can be dated according to historical evidence. Most editors of *The Land of Cokaygne* date it to the first quarter of the fourteenth century.[26] If many of the poems were composed between 1315 and 1318, the scribe had to be copying after 1318, and the manuscript compiled within the next seventeen years. This places the poem and the manuscript during or within recent memory of the Great Famine, the effects of which lasted well into the 1320s.

Humor theory can help to explain the use of humor in this literature. In the philosophical tradition, three theories dominate: superiority, incongruity, and relief. A full discussion of these would consume too much time for my purposes, but a definition of each is important.[27] Superiority has a long tradition of proponents, its basic premise being that we laugh when we feel superior to others. This situation would include instances of ridicule, satire, any situation where there is the butt of the joke.[28] The most-accepted single theory of humor is incongruity, championed in the work of John Morreall.[29] Proponents of incongruity argue that we laugh when we experience a violation of expectations, when "the object of amusement is some thing, event, or thought which does not fit our usual understanding of the world."[30] Incongruity was a way of understanding humor during the Middle Ages, as well.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf says, "*Trahit ars ab utroque facetum / Principium, ludit quasi quaedam praestigiartrix, / Et facit ut fiat res postera prima, future / Praesens, transversa directa, remota propinqua; Rustica sic fiunt urbana, vetusta novella, / Publica private, nigra candida, vilia cara*" [Art plays, as it were, the conjurer: causes the last to be first, the future to be present, the oblique to be straight, the remote to be near; what is rustic becomes urbane, what is old becomes new, public things are made private, black things white, and worthless things are made precious].[31] This is strikingly familiar to Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of carnival, which as a mode of speech is, "a specialized type of communication impossible in everyday life."[32] It has "special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (Bakhtin, p. 10). Important to this concept is grotesque realism, whose "essential principle . . . is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, absent; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Bakhtin, pp. 19–20). This inversion is what we see in the texts and practices that both Rammel and Morton highlight, though neither scholar identifies this technique as a defining characteristic of the tradition. Such inversion fits directly into incongruity. Another theory that I argue is at work, albeit with modifications, is relief. Proponents of the relief theory, such as Freud—the most cited proponent of this theory—indicate that we laugh to relieve psychological tension. At various times, these theories have been posited as essentialist, but many scholars have shown that none of them provide necessary and sufficient conditions for humor. And, in fact, they all in many ways deal with laughter and not necessarily humor. Lintott aptly observes that none of these theories is necessarily a stand-alone theory of humor or laughter, saying that "all of the traditional theories humor—superiority, relief, and incongruity—are somewhat accurate and very interesting in their own right; some comic amusement is enjoying a certain kind of perceived incongruity that gives one a feeling of superiority reducing psychic and/or bodily energy via expression in laughter."[33] In other words, the theories often work hand-in-hand in humor.

The theory that I will focus on here is a modified relief theory. Freud's idea of laughter/humor releasing repressed energy has been modified or refuted amply. However, D. H. Monro's statement about relief expands the theory: "Since humor often calls conventional social requirements into question, it may be regarded as affording us relief from the restraint of conforming to those requirements."[34] He concludes: "It may be, then, that the central element in humor is neither a feeling of superiority nor the awareness of incongruity, but the feeling of relief that comes from the removal of restraint" (Monro, pp. 354–355). If we view Monro's "restraining of conforming to [social] requirements" far more generally than Freud's psychic energy, we can see how humor can be a useful way to cope with undesirable situations, even psychological distress and trauma. And that is my central argument about *The Land of Cokaygne*. Intentionally or not, the poem may provide a coping

mechanism for the severe agricultural crises of early fourteenth-century Ireland. The relief offered here is a temporary relief from the hardship and trauma that agricultural shortages such as the Great Famine of 1315–1317 must have imposed upon the population. The poem, and the other humorous works dealing with food in the manuscript, invite the authors and audience to laugh in the face of danger.

Such coping is not uncommon. Research has been conducted on the role of humor as a coping mechanism. Proponents have pointed to a relationship between laughter and endorphins, which in Carmen Moran's words "has not yet been reliably established in the research literature," but still seems to exist.[35] Moran examines humor and disability, noting that "as children [some] comedians used their humor to deal with stressful childhood environments," and that some humor "may be a coping strategy that helps people deal with the her-and-now by providing a distraction from serious circumstances and by offering an alternative set of responses," or even as a way "to help others cope." Linda D. Henman studied Vietnam POWs' use of humor to cope, concluding that "the use of humor might also be beneficial during times of less extreme stress [than being a POW]."[36] Millicent H. Abel studies the relationship between a sense of humor, stress, and coping strategies in a 258-person sample, saying that "humor appears to buffer an individual against the negative effects of stress."[37] Nicolas A. Kuiper, Rod A. Martin, and Joan L. Olinger note that "high humour individuals may engage in personal distancing as an effective coping strategy."[38] Arthur M. Nezu, Christine M. Nezu, and Sonia E. Blissett found that "that depressive, but not anxiety, reactions to stress might be mitigated against by the use of humor as a coping strategy."[39] They hypothesize that "humor may function both as a means of initially minimizing the aversiveness of the situation itself and as a way of coping with the consequences and problems emanating from the event."[40] Scholars such as these have found that humor can and often does play a role as a coping strategy,[41] although the exact mechanism remains obscure.

Both Rammel and Morton place *The Land of Cokaygne* within a grand tradition of humorous literature and practices. However, to show that the poet provides relief, a deeper analysis of parts of this tradition is necessary. Comic inversion was essential to the medieval parodic tradition,[42] which includes practices that range from feasts and dramatic performances to university exercises. The texts and practices that belong to this tradition exist in an atmosphere of festivity and celebration. Within that atmosphere, these texts and practices use humor to parody and mock the established order. For the sake of space, I will use two examples that are related to *The Land of Cokaygne*. The parodic tradition to which this poem belongs uses incongruity to create literary humor within which the poet can react to various conditions of medieval life, including extreme scarcity and provide some relief from the trauma resulting from that scarcity.

The first example is The Feast of Fools—variously called the *festum stultorum*, *fatuorum*, or *follorum* as well as the *festum subdiaconorum* and *festum*

baculi—a parodic festival that occurred throughout Europe.[43] This festival turned orthodoxy on its head, perhaps acting as relief for the conditions that existed among the religious. The Feast of Fools is extreme in its parody and license.[44] According to E. K. Chambers, this revel was most prevalent in France. Records exist from Sens, Troyes, Paris, Flanders, Lille, Chartres, Burgundy, Dijon, and Provence, but Bohemia, and England, most notably at Lincoln and Beverly (Chambers, 1, p. 321). Moreover, the surviving records—which date, albeit in different locations, from the last year of the twelfth century through the eighteenth century—indicate the festival's popularity and the official permissiveness toward it.[45] Chambers claims that this was a New Year celebration, occurring sometime between Christmas and Shrovetide (Chambers, 1, p. 276). Celebrations and holidays were common during the Middle Ages. In addition to what we recognize as holidays—such events as Christmas and Easter—feast days abounded. Although most feasts were serious in nature, a number of them included parodic representations of officials and practices that at first glance might seem to be subversive. These festivals—wild, lascivious, and risqué as they may have been—were not nearly as subversive as they at first seem. They used parody to provide entertainment for participants and audiences and to ridicule serious institutions, and as an accepted (and sanctioned) part of society, they also upheld orthodoxy.

The Feast of Fools included intense parodies of orthodoxy. A fascinating glimpse at the practices occurring during this festival survives in a letter from Eustace de Mansil on behalf of the Faculty of Theology at Paris On March 12, 1445:

> What man of feeling among Christians, I ask, would not call those priests and clerks evil, whom he sees at the time of divine office bewitched, with monstrous visages, or in the clothing of women or panders, or leading dances of actors in the choir, singing wanton songs, eating fat sausages above the horn of the altar during the mass of the celebrant, playing dice there, censing with stinking smoke from the leather of old shoes, and running through the whole church, dancing, not blushing at their own shame, and then being led in shameful spectacles through the village and theaters in carts and vehicles, making shameful gestures with their bodies and rehearsing scurrilous and unchaste verses for the laughter of their fellows and bystanders? (Chambers, 1, p. 294, my translation)[46]

Elements of parody are clear here. The clergy participate in behaviors that mock church practices. Censing with burning shoe soles is one graphic example of parody during this feast. Rather than the pleasant-smelling incense, priests and clerks fill the sanctuary with the reek of burning leather—used leather at that. The entire description, however, is parodic in that these practices turn the Church on its head, violating traditional expectations, the very definition of incongruity. The reaction

of the observers, who see a show of sorts, indicates that one of the feast's purposes was to evoke laughter (*risu*) from the audience. This feast, then, provided a humorous interlude from daily pressures for both clerical participants and onlookers. The humor stems from incongruity or comic inversion—what Bakhtin calls carnival—the low becoming high and high becoming low.

Due to its practices, the scandalous Feast of Fools became a site of contention for ecclesiastical authority. The Paris letter mentions many but not all of the practices typical of the Feast of Fools. In addition to the monstrous visages, costumes, dances, wanton songs, dicing, censing with base objects, and obscene gestures and verses, the feast usually included the election of a mock ruler (often a bishop or pope) and a parodic service during which the *baculum* was transferred to the feast bishop.[47] Another practice of the Feast of Fools was the recitation of poetry. According to Paul Gerhard Schmidt, "hymn-like songs in praise of the baculum were recited, and poetry was composed for the feast."[48] The feast itself was the responsibility of the lower clergy—sub-deacons and below. However, ecclesiastical authority sanctioned it—in both senses of the word. The local religious establishments supported the feast with money, while at the same time attempting to control the parodic, burlesque ceremonies of the feast.[49] The Feast of Fools became a legislative battleground, one that neither side won until very late.[50]

One reason for its condemnation may be linked to its celebrants, who differed from those of other festivals. Shrovetide, for instance, involved all of the people—both lay and clerical—in a series of revels that would prepare them for Lent, the long season of scarcity before Easter.[51] The Feast of Fools, which incorporated many of the same practices as Shrovetide, included mostly lower clergy in its practices, though it attracted many gleeful observers from the lay community. Participation in the practices was limited to clergy because of its subject; it was a revel that turned the clerical world on its head, elevating the low and toppling the high. The Feast of Fools parodies and mocks ecclesiastical rituals and hierarchy from within the Church. In this way, then, it is similar to *The Land of Cokaygne*, whose inhabitants are monks and nuns (Lucas, *Poems*, p. 52 and p. 148) and whose activities seem—to most scholars—to satirize the cloistered.

One reason for allowing these festivals could be the fact that they were contained within a set time and place, a play world. Festivals like Shrovetide and the Feast of Fools were predominantly recreational. In fact, Chambers claims, "Much in all these proceedings was doubtless the merest horseplay" (Chambers, 1, pp. 325–26). Celebrations like these conform to Johan Huizinga's idea of the playground. According to Huizinga, "All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course."[52] Douglas L. Peterson refers to this in Tudor comedy as a "world-set-apart," a place where the normal rules of society cease to exist, a place to which characters escape, such as the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*.[53] The play

world is an alternative world set off in time and space, with its own rules and for the purpose of recreation. The preset boundaries separating the play world from reality are of paramount importance, for the play world nearly always returns its participants to the world of earnest.[54] These festivals establish a world-set-apart, a place where the dominant ideology of king, bishop, or pope is turned on its head, where unlikely figures assume the roles of rulers, perform mock deeds, and finally are removed from office. The controlling factor in this cyclical pattern of rule is time, which separates these festivals from the "real" world. They have specific time constraints, typically dictated by the calendar.[55] This chronological element forms the frame for the play world. Outside of the frame, the rules of everyday life apply, but within it, the rules change.

I contend that this play world is one of the elements that make all parody possible. The play world gives parody a safety zone where the parodist can test ideas. It is a prophylactic defense against allegations of sedition or heresy, for without the play world and its boundaries, the ideas and practices represented in parody can easily be confused with serious attack and criticism. As a safety factor, setting off parody from the world of earnest is important. In order to be effective, parody must have a set beginning and end; those participating in the parody must return to a non-parodic world. What we find in these festivals is parody with a set beginning and end that delimit it from the world of earnest. Since the condemnatory evidence is sporadic, at least through the early fourteenth century, it would seem that such parodic festivals were, at least in part, an accepted element of society, perhaps considered a healthy expression of and safety valve for socially unhealthy feelings and thoughts that, taken a step further, could lead to subversive behavior.[56] Such a safety valve, Glending Olson has shown, was a major defense of recreation generally; it offered a release of the tension that accumulates with earnest life.[57] This release is carefully scripted at a set time, with an actual script, at least in some instances of the Feast of Fools.[58] And this release can also function as relief from the difficult aspects of everyday life.

This discussion of The Feast of Fools establishes the foundation of my argument about *The Land of Cokaygne* as humorous coping. This type of parody exists in a festive atmosphere instead of as serious criticism, although elements of serious criticism and satire may be present. Several elements of the Feast of Fools are important for my analysis of *The Land of Cokaygne*, thus establishing the poem's link to these practices. First, the Feast of Fools establishes that clergy can parody orthodoxy without being overly satiric. Second, the Feast of Fools exists in a play world, the end of which is a return to orthodoxy. In that sense, then, these artifacts actually uphold orthodoxy rather than subvert it.[59] Third, the humor that the Feast of Fools evoked results from incongruity, turning the world on its head. In fact, the notion of inversion plays a key role in Martha Bayless's argument about parody. The humor also seems to act as a form of relief, allowing participants license to mock the established order. *The Land of Cokaygne*, however, is a different type

of artifact from the Feast of Fools. The former is literary, the latter performative. I turn now to a representation of this tradition that also exists in BL MS Harley 913.

The second example of this tradition that is directly related to both The Feast of Fools and *The Land of Cokaygne* is a parodic mass that appears in the same manuscript as the poem.[60] We have evidence of several parodic masses—texts that alter the general mass text for humorous purposes.[61] These include drinkers' masses, gamblers' masses, and even a mass for an ass.[62] This particular mass appears in MS Harley 913, fol. 13v, seven leaves before *The Land of Cokaygne*. Bayless has established that these masses are definitely parodic. Existing as it does in the same manuscript as *The Land of Cokaygne*, it provides a manuscript context for the Anglo-Irish poem, a context of parody and humor. Moreover, both works deal with some of the same topical material—food/drink and religious practice.

This text is a clever parody of the Latin mass. From the beginning, the writer substitutes drinking terms for words in the mass. The mass begins "*Confiteor reo Bacho omnepotanti, et reo vino coloris rubei, et omnibus ciphis ejus, et vobis potatoribus*" [I confess to the all-drinking culprit Bacchus, and the accursed red wine, and to all his dishes, and to you drinkers].[63] These words replace those of the Latin Mass, which begins "*Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, beatae Mariae semper Virgini, beato Michaeli Archangelo, beato Joanni Baptistae, sanctis Apostolis Petro et Paulo, omnibus Sanctis, et tibi Pater.*" Although the opening of "The Drinkers' Mass" is shorter, the writer has kept the same general syntax and morphology, including the dative *vobis* (though he changes the vocative *pater* to a dative *potatoribus*). Likewise, the parodist retains the syntactic structure just before the *oremus* (which he renders *potemus*): "Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo," a close parody of "Dominus vobiscum. Et cum spiritu tuo." He also replaces individual words. Usually *Bacchus* replaces *Deus*. At other times, nonsense words replace those of the mass. At the end of each section, rather than the typical *amen*, this text has *Stramen—straw*. Likewise, we find a curious string of words that seem to be nonsense: "*Asiot, Ambisasiot, treisasiot, quinsiot, quinsasiot, sinsasiot, quernisiot, quenisasiot, deusasiot*."[64] These words are probably dicing terms, which would be appropriate, since dicing was a game associated with the tavern.[65] Additionally, the parodist creates compounds, which Bayless calls "exuberant puns" (Bayless, p. 102). The deity, often Bacchus, is called *ciphipotens*, cup-potent, or *omnepotanti*, all-drinking, rather than the typical *omnipotent* used in the mass.[66] All of these mock adjectives replace words describing God in the mass. This is nearly a textbook example of parody. The writer retains the structure of the Latin mass, even the syntax and grammar in many places, achieving the desired effect by changing key words that give the mass a comic subject and meaning. Moreover, he comically inverts the sacred text, making the low (gluttonous drinking) high and violating what we would expect from a mass, achieving humor from incongruity.

These masses are much like the festivals analyzed above. The overtone is mocking, perhaps disrespectful, but also fun, evoking if not laughter then at least

pleasure. And again we find a place set aside for playfulness. The parody begins with the opening words of the mass and ends with a play on the closing words (*Ite bursa vacua: Reo gratias* for *Ite missa est; Deo gratias*); it has a set beginning and end—a play world emerges where the holy words said during solemn occasions are lampooned and God is reduced to wine. This is mock ritual set off from other activities.[67]

The humor here focuses on ingestion. For this work imbibing is not a matter of polite sipping, the mode of drinking that Chaucer ascribes to his Prioress.[68] This is the fully gluttonous binge drinking that is characteristic of literary characters like Chaucer's Miller and Langland's Gluton. Bacchus and Decius are the deities in this parody, and they are gods of inappropriate behavior.[69] Eating and drinking are basic bodily needs. However, during the period in which the mass was composed and transmitted, these bodily needs were often not met. By changing the subject of the mass from God and spiritual development to alcohol and drunkenness, the parodist humorously refocuses the mass on what people lacked. The humor, then, is derived not only from incongruous wordplay but also from the excesses that are a reaction to shortages in everyday life, providing humorous relief.

One might well imagine such masses being written for one of the festivals that I have described. The texts that Chambers uses to illustrate the practices of the Feast of Fools include parodies of the *conductus*, a "chant sung while the officiant is conducted from one station to another in the church" (Chambers, 1, 1996, p. 282), the *alleluia*, and other textual material. No direct link between these parodic masses and the revels has been posited, but a link does exist nevertheless. Both the festivals and the mock masses parody church ritual in order to produce laughter. Liturgical parody is part of festivals like the Feast of Fools, which turns ritual upside down. The same is true of the parodic masses, which parody a full liturgical text. These two practices—the feasts and parodic masses—are members of a genre, liturgical parody. Both take as their subject scarcity—in the feasts often an imbalance of power but also food, in the masses food and drink. Both use verbal wit to effect laughter and, in part, to cope with the gap created by church hierarchy and food shortages, and both were not only tolerated but also popular.

Both the Feast of Fools and the parodic mass establish elements of humor directly related to *The Land of Cokaygne*. First, each establishes a play world, a set place and/or time where the norms of everyday life are suspended in favor of a specialized set of norms particular to the play world. Second, both achieve their humor from incongruity, turning the world up-side-down and presenting situations that are polar opposites to what we would expect in the real world. In doing so, both alter elements specific to their counterparts in the real world—the use of shoe leather instead of incense and the alteration of key terms in the mass, for instance. Combined, these elements produce humor and laughter, and *The Land of Cokaygne* follows in this tradition.

One strong reason why these festivals and parodies were tolerated, I posit, is the idea of the play world, a world set apart from everyday life. The play world in practices like The Feast of Fools is firmly established by the set time and place of the feast. For texts, setting a world apart from the everyday becomes muddied, but it is still there. Parodic masses, for instance, are bound by the parodic model—the orthodox mass, with its set beginning, ending, and structure. We know that we have reached the end of the mass with *reo gratias*, the parody of *Deo gratias* in the mass. Similarly, *The Land of Cokaygne* presents a specific end to its play world with the lines "*Prey we God so mote hit be, / Amen, pur seint charite*" [Pray we God so that it must be, / Amen, by blessed charity][70] and, previously, by establishing how one can gain entrance to the island: "*Ful grete penance he mot do: / Seue ȝere in swine-is dritte / He mot wade, [. . .] / Al anon up to þe chynne / So he schal þe londe winne*" [Full great penance he must do: / Seven years in swine's dung / He must wade, [. . .] / All up to the chin / If he is to win the land] (178–82). The text itself, of course, is a world-set-apart. Even an orally-delivered text establishes rhetorical boundaries. The opening of *The Land of Cokaygne* establishes a double boundary. The poet opens with "*Fur in see bi west Spayngne / Is a lond ihote Cokaygne*" [Far out to sea to the west of Spain / Is a land called Cokaygne] (1–2). The poet initiates the literary play world by establishing the location of Cokaygne. The exact location is not important, however. What is important is where it is not—Europe. Moreover, entrance is gained by performing an impossible "penance," a play on words similar to what we saw in the parodic mass. These boundaries provide a safe space for the activities described there and, therefore, for the poem to be humorous rather than a serious indictment of the poet's society.[71]

The material circumstances surrounding the poem's production appear in the poem as a direct reaction to scarcity. In Cokaygne, we see the exact opposite of scarcity—overabundance. The description of the physical environment seems to react directly to the harsh living in Ireland. First, the architecture of the abbey has, "*bowris & halles; / al of pastiis beþ þe wales, / of fleis, of fisse, & rich met, / Þe likfullist þat man mai et / fluren cakes beþ þe schingles alle / of cherche, cloister, boure, & halle; / Þe pinnes beþ fat podinges—/ rich met to princeȝ & kinges*" [bedrooms and halls; / the walls are all of pies, / meat, of fish, & rich food, / The best that a person can eat / flour cakes are all the shingles/ of the church, cloister, bedroom, and hall; / The pins are of fat sausages—/ excellent food for princes and kings] (53–60). The emphasis here, as with all Cokaygne texts, is on readily available, free food.[72] The monks can simply eat their abbey, if they like. Like the architecture, the landscape in Cokaygne is edible. The Cokaygne-poet describes a tree "*swiþe likful forto se: / Þe rote is gingeuir & galingale, / Þe siouns beþ al sedwale, / trie maces beþ þe flure, / Þe rind canel of swet odur / Þe frute gilofre of gode smakke. / of cucubes þer nis no lakke*" [very delightful to see: / The root is ginger & galingale, / The shoots are sedwall, / The flowers are of choice mace,

/ The bark cinnamon of sweet smell / The fruit clove of good flavor. / there is no lack of cubebs] (71–77). It is a tree made of exotic spices, probably too expensive to be found in an Irish cloister in much abundance. Moreover, the fowl in Cokaygne are prepared and advertise themselves: "*Þe gees irostid on þe spitte / Fleeȝ to þat abbai, god it wot / And grediþ 'gees al hote, al hot!' / Hi bringeþ garlek gret plente / Þe best idiȝt þat man mai se. / Þe leurokes Þat beþ cuþ / Liȝiþ adun to man-is muþ / Idiȝt in stu ful swiþe wel / Pudrid wiþ gilofre and canel*" [The gees roasted on the spit / Fly to that abbey, God knows it / And call "gees all hot, all hot!" / They bring garlic in great plenty / The best prepared that a man might see. / The larks that are known/ Light down to man's mouth / Prepared very well in a stew / Powdered with cloves and cinnamon] (102–10). Both the architecture made of food and prepared food are typical of Cokaygne poems.[73] The Anglo-Irish text is different in that this occurs in a cloistered setting. The monks here do not need to toil to get food, as their contemporaries in early fourteenth-century Ireland did. Here, we do not find limitations on meals or dishes, and we certainly find an abundance of non-vegetarian items on the menu. In contrast to monastic prescriptions, food is to be had both in abundance and variety. In light of the historical evidence, we have here comic inversion, with an overabundance of food in Cokaygne juxtaposed to extreme scarcity in Ireland—brought about by the several famines and the Bruce invasion—with fine dishes in Cokaygne contrasted to the bland food dictated by the various monastic rules. The wish fulfillment is not subtle.

The poet goes beyond food in his wish fulfillment. He also speaks of disease, which during times of famine and war would have been widespread. The abbey has four springs: "*Þer beþ iiij willis in þe abbei, / of treacle & halwei, / of baum & ek piement, / euer ernend to riȝt rent*" [There are four springs in the abbey, / of treacle and healing water, / of healing balm and also spiced wine, / ever running for good profit] (83–86). The composition of the rivers is medicinal: treacle was a medicine believed to be particularly effective against venom, *halwei* was also a medicinal potion, *baum* was a medicinal ointment, and *piement* was not just a sweetened wine, but instead sweetened wine used in medicine or even a medical potion.[74] The four springs in Cokaygne have healing properties. Again, when we consider the historical circumstances, we can readily see the use for these. In lean times, illness was more frequent, and in times of war, both illness and wounds would have been common. Springs of healing liquid would greatly ease the hardship of daily life.

It is difficult to claim that these parts of the poem are satirical. They seem to provide rhetorical pleasure by suspending the labors of the real world in favor of an imaginative setting where prepared food advertises itself, where one can eat and drink his fill without toil, and where healing potions are readily available. Here we have a direct response to the famine conditions prevalent throughout the first quarter of the fourteenth century and made worse by the Bruce military campaigns. Couple the abundance of food with the list of negatives at the beginning of

the poem—no night, no conflict, no death, no lack of food or clothing, no anger, no predators, no domesticated animals (and hence no work relating to them), no filth, no pests, no foul weather (26–42)—and we have the precise opposite of early fourteenth-century Ireland.

There is one last piece of evidence that speaks to humor in the poem. The monks in Cokaygne are not lazy. In fact, they participate in their daily spiritual activities: "*Whan þe monkes geeþ to masse / All þe fenestres þat beþ of glasse / Turneþ in to cristal briȝt / To ȝive monkes more liȝt. / When þe masses beþ iseiid / And þe bokes up ileiid / Þe cristal turniþ in to glasse / In state þat hit raþer wasse*" [When the monks go to mass / All the windows that are of glass / Turn into bright crystal / To give monks more light. / When the mass has been said / And the books laid up / The crystal turns into glass / In the state that it was previously] (113–120). This part of Cokaygne is unique to the Anglo-Irish poem. In most of the Cokaygne poems, we see no work done.[75] Here, however, the monks do their spiritual duties. However, Cokaygne is a good place in which to work, for the windows miraculously change to admit enough light by which to read, then change back. The poet even goes as far as to indicate that the monks reshelve their books.[76]

Scholars of the poem tend to ignore this passage, yet it is important. The sexuality of the monks and nuns could be satiric.[77] However, the vision of monks saying mass lessens the satire. Instead, the poet represents Cokaygne as a paradise free from the hardships of early fourteenth-century Ireland, where cloistered rules, warfare, and famine dominated life. The poet envisions a place where food is readily available and the evangelical councils of poverty, chastity, and obedience—activities that in many ways create a sense of hardship—seem to be optional or nonexistent, where the spiritual work of the monk is eased by the nature of the architecture. In many ways similar to the Feast of Fools and parodic masses, it is a way for the poet to turn the world on its head, to imagine a world outside of medieval Europe, a place where life is easy, and yet a place unreachable to medieval people. This is clearly not a land of earnest. The poet sets it apart from fourteenth-century Ireland and establishes rules particular to Cokaygne. As with most of the artifacts and practices in this tradition, it is a way to cope humorously with the harsh realities of life.

Yet this aspect of the poem has been ignored or downplayed. Satiric and parodic thought it may be in places, the poem is also comic trauma relief, operating as a mode of therapy, presenting the opposite of the situation in Ireland to provide temporary relief through humor. This is not to say that studying the potential for satire, parodic models, possible authorship, and the location of the poem does not produce valuable insights into the poem; these studies certainly do. However, sacrificing the humor element for the sake of more "serious" concerns divorces the poem from its literary tradition and strips the poem of its vitality and, in the end, perhaps its very reason for being.

Notes

1 Hal Rammel, *Nowhere in America: The Big Rock Candy Mountain and Other Comic Utopias* (Urbana, 1990), p. 2.

2 Rammel, *Nowhere*, pp. 10–25.

3 A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (London, 1978), p. 15. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.

4 Many scholars focus on the poem's satirical content, with both the Franciscans and Cistercians being strongly suggested as the target of the satire. See Charles W. Dunn and Edward T. Byrnes, eds., *Middle English Literature* (New York, 1990); P. L. Henry, "*The Land of Cokaygne*: Cultures in Contact in Medieval Ireland," *English Studies Today* 5 (1972), 120–41; Howard R. Patch, *The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1950), p. 171); Clifford Davidson, "The Sins of the Flesh in the Fourteenth-Century Middle English 'Land of Cokaygne,'" *Ball State University Forum* 11 (1971), 21–26; Veikko Väänänen, "Le 'fabliau' de Cocagne: Le Motif du pays d'abondance dans le folklore occidental," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 48 (1947), 3–37, p. 6; Colmán N. Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400–1534: From Reform to Reformation* (Portland, 2002), p. 140; Wim Tigges, "The Land of Cokaygne: Sophisticated Mirth," *Companion to Early Middle English Literature*, ed. N. H. G. E. Veldhoen and H. Aertsen (Amsterdam, 1988, pp. 97–104); Frederick B. Jonassen, "Lucian's *Saturnalia*, the Land of Cockaigne, and the Mummers' Plays," *Folklore* 101 (1990), 58–68; Angela M. Lucas, ed., *Anglo-Irish Poems of the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1996), p. 174–76; Juliette de Caluwé-Dor, "Cokagne I. L'anti-Paradis du 'Pays de Cocagne': Étude et traduction du poème moyen-anglais," *Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes offerts á Jeanne Wathelet-Willem* (Liège, 1978), pp. 103–23. For comments on parody in the poem, see J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1968), who assert that the poem is primarily a parody, not a satire (p. 137); Thomas D. Hill, "Parody and Theme in the Middle English 'Land of Cokaygne,'" *Notes and Queries* 22 (1975), 55–59; Emily K. Yoder, "The Monks' Paradise in *The Land of Cokaygne* and the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 19 (1983), 227–38; Herman Pleij, *Dreaming of Cokaygne: Medieval Fantisies of the Perfect Life*, trans. Diane Webb (New York, 2001); and Lucas, p. 176. Studies that focus on the poem as a possible Franciscan production include Henry, Thomas Jay Garbáty, "Studies in the Franciscan 'The Land of Cokaygne' in the Kildare MS," *Franziskanische Studien* 45 (1963), 139–53; Deborah Louise Hatfield Moore, *Paying the Minstrel: A Cultural Study of B. L. MS Harley 913* (Ph.D. diss., Queens University, Belfast, 2001).

5 Others have provided superficial comments on the poem's historical situation. Garbáty, for instance, mentions the Bruce invasion of 1315, but only to show

how it may have divided the monastic orders. Garrett argues that the poem "is likely an example of anti-Irish, colonialist discourse, aimed at a diverse English audience in Ireland in order to quell the gaelicisation of the colonists" (p. 2), and she highlights historical evidence of colonization, though, as with Garbáty, she only touches upon the material circumstances surrounding the poem's production. See also Brenda Garrett, "England, Colonialism, and 'The Land of Cokaygne,'" *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 15 (2004), 1–12.

6 Karma Lochrie, *Nowhere in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2016), p. 52.

7 See, for instance, Moore p. 50; Henry, p. 135, and Garbáty.

8 George Cyprian Alston, "Rule of St. Benedict," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York, 1907), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02436a.htm.

9 Alston.

10 See, for instance, the many religious orders in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, *The Canterbury Tales* seems to illustrate exactly how difficult conforming to the evangelical orders was.

11 Lochrie, p. 56. An analysis of this section of the poem is beyond the scope of my study, though, in addition to satire, one could conclude from it that it, too, is a mode of relief for harsh monastic conditions.

12 Lochrie's argument about satire focuses on the intersection of political and religious tensions in medieval Ireland (pp. 73–74). Though she details these tensions, she ignores the agricultural and environmental issues which were exacerbated by political and religious strife.

13 Mary C. Lyons, "Weather, Famine, Pestilence, and Plague in Ireland, 900–1500," in *Famine: the Irish Experience, 900–1900: Subsistence Crises and Famines in Ireland*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 31–74. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.

14 William Chester Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, 1996), p. 8. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.

15 Seung H. Baek, Jason E. Smerdon, George-Costin Dobrin, Jacob G. Naimark, Edward R. Cook, Benjamin I. Cook, Richard Seager, Mark A. Cane, and Serena R. Scholz, "A Quantitative Hydroclimatic Context for the European Great Famine of 1315–1317," *Communications Earth & Environment* 1 (2019), 1–6, p. 1.

16 Baek, et al., p. 2.

17 When we consider that part of the harvest needed to be reserved for the following year's seed, yields for food are even lower. At a 3:1 ratio, one of those three bushels would become seed, so there was probably very little surplus on average.

18 In fact, even Moore, whose thesis about the entire manuscript is that it is a Franciscan preaching book, acknowledges the link between the overabundance

of food in Cokaygne and the harsh living conditions at the time: "By a process of negation he [the poet] presents the difficulties of the day-to-day life of the poor in Ireland. Our poet understands the experience. He leaves nothing out; fighting, death, deprivations, anger, predators, the drudgery of tending farm animals and breeding horses, the filth, the vermin, adverse weather conditions and crippling handicaps are all there" (p. 49), yet she also rejects the idea that Bennett and Smithers's assertion that the poem "is banter, in a strain outrageous rather than bitter" (J. A. W. Bennet and G. V. Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (Oxford, UK, 1966), p. 138), choosing to assert that the poem is constructed to be satire (p. 45).

19 Gibbs, Andrew, "How Poverty and Violence Are Linked with Anxiety in Young South Africans (Aug. 2021)," *The Conversation: An Independent Source of Analysis from Academic Researchers*, 2018.

20 Cindy W. Leung, Barbara A. Laraia, Christina Feiner, Karina Solis, Anita L. Stewart, Nancy E. Adler, Elissa S. Epel, "The Psychological Distress of Food Insecurity: A Qualitative Study of the Emotional Experiences of Parents and Their Coping Strategies," *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 122 (2022), 1903–1910, p. 1904.

21 Candice A. Myers, "Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature," *Current Nutrition Reports* 9 (2020), 107–118.

22 Julia A. Wolfson, Travertine Garcia, and Cindy W. Leung, Food Insecurity Is Associated with Depression, Anxiety, and Stress: Evidence from the Early Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States," *Health Equity* 5 (2021), http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/heq.2020.0059.

23 W. Heuser, *Die Kildare Gedichte* (Bonn, 1904), p. 139.

24 Lucas, Angela M., and Peter J. Lucas, "Reconstructing a Disarranged Manuscript: The Case of MS Harley 913, a Medieval Hiberno-English Miscellany," *Scriptorium* 14 (1990), 286–99.

25 Although most scholars date the manuscript to around 1330, Allen J. Fletcher posits a very late inscription between 1338–1342. Allen J. Fletcher, "The Date of London, British Library, Harley MS 913 (The 'Kildare Poems')," *Medium Aevum* 79 (2010), 306–310.

26 Richard J. Kelly dates *The Land of Cokaygne* to a very early 1230. Richard J. Kelly, "Land of Cokaygne: Contexts," *Journal of Irish Studies* 16 (2001), 58–75.

27 For an overview of these theories, see Aaron Smuts, "Humor," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://www.iep.utm.edu/humor/.

28 For a concise discussion of superiority, see Sheila Lintott, "Superiority in Humor Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74 (2016), 347–358.

29 See, for instance, "Comic Vices and Comic Virtues," *Humor* 23 (2010), 1–26; "Funny Ha-Ha, Funny Strange, and Other Reactions to Incongruity," in *The*

Philosophy of Laughter and Humor, ed. John Morreall (Albany, NY, 1986); "Humor, Philosophy and Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 46 (2014), 120–131; "Verbal Humor without Switching Scripts and without Non-*Bona Fide* Communication," *Humor* 17 (2004), 393–400.

30 Morreall, "Vices," p. 12.

31 Margaret F. Nims, trans, *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (Toronto, 1967). Original Latin in Edmond Faral, *Les Arts Poétiques du xii et du xiii siécle* (Paris, 1962), pp. 121–26.

32 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), p. 10. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.

33 Lintott, 356.

34 D. H. Monro, "Theories of Humor," in *Writing and Reading across the Curriculum*, 3rd ed, ed. Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen (Glenview, IL, 1988), pp. 349–355, p. 353. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.

35 Carmen C. Moran, "Beyond Content: Does using Humor Help Coping?" *Disability Studies Quarterly* 23 (2003), https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v23i3/4.

36 Linda D. Henman, "Humor as a Coping Mechanism: Lessons from POWs," *Humor* 14 (2001), 83–94.

37 Millicent H. Abel, "Humor, Stress, and Coping Strategies," *Humor* 15 (2002), 365–381.

38 Nicolas A. Kuiper, Rod A. Martin, and Joan L. Olinger, "Coping Humour, Stress, and Cognitive Appraisals," *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 25 (1993), 81–96.

39 Arthur M. Nezu, Christine M. Nezu, and Sonia E. Blissett, "Sense of Humor as a Moderator of the Relation between Stressful Events and Psychological Distress: A Prospective Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54 (1988), 520–525.

40 Nezu, Nezu, Blissett, p. 525.

41 Others have had similar results. See, for instance, Herbert M. Lefcourt, Karina Davidson, Robert Shepherd, Margory Phillips, Ken Prkachin, David E. Mills, "Perspective-Taking Humor: Accounting for Stress Moderation," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 14 (1995), 373–391; R. A. Martin, "Humour and the Mastery of Living: Using Humour to Cope with the Daily Stresses of Growing Up," in P.E. McGhee (ed.), *Humour and Children's Development: A Guide to Practical Applications* (New York, 1989), 135–154; R. A. Martin and J. P. Dobbin, "Sense of Humour, Hassles, and Immunoglobin A: Evidence for a Stress-Moderating Effect of Humour," *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 18 (1988), 93–10.

42 For an excellent overview of this tradition, see Martha Bayless, *Parody in the*

Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition (Ann Arbor, 1996). Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text.

43 E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Mineola, NY, 1996), p. 276. Subsequent references to this edition are given by page number in the text. Chambers provides a full discussion of such festivals and how he sees them in relation to drama. Other festivals that seem to have involved similar practices were the May festival, the Feast of St. George in England, Corpus Christi, and Halloween.

44 Related to this feast is the Feast of the Boy-Bishop, a festival where a child is elected bishop on St. Nicholas's Day (December 6). The boy-bishop then rules as bishop until Holy Innocents' Day (December 28), blessing people and presiding over all offices and ceremonies (Alston, George Cyprian. "Boy-Bishop," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York, 1907), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02725a.htm). The Feast of the Boy Bishop was relatively tame in comparison to the Feast of Fools and was never subjected to the type of criticism leveled at the latter feast. See Chambers's discussion of the boy bishop feast, which merits an entire chapter in his book (pp. 336–71).

45 In Provence, for instance, the feast lasted at least until 1645 (Chambers 1 1996, 317) and until 1721 in Amiens (Chambers 1 1996, 303). Although it was possible to halt the festival outright, which all communities eventually did, several chose to regulate it for many years, which may indicate that authorities considered the festival mostly harmless.

46 Quis, quaeso, Christianorum sensatus non diceret malos illos sacerdotes et clericos, quos divini officii tempore videret larvatos, monstruosis vultibus, aut in vestibus mulierum, aut lenonum, vel histrionum choreas ducere in choro, cantilenas inhonestas cantare, offas pingues supra cornu altaris iuxta celebrantem missam comedere, ludum taxillorum ibidem exercere, thurificare de fumo fetido ex corio veterum sotularium, et per totam ecclesiam currere, saltare, turpitudinem suam non erubescere, ac deinde per villam et theatra in curribus et vehiculis sordidis duci ad infamia spectacula, pro risu astantium et concurrentium turpes gesticulationes suis corporis faciendo, et verba impudicissima ac scurrilia proferendo? (Chambers, *Stage*, 1, p. 294, n. 2)

47 Although the letter is from 1445, both Chambers and Anthony Caputi, *Buffo: The Genius of Vulgar Comedy* (Detroit, 1978) indicate that these activities occurred more or less across chronological and geographical boundaries.

48 Paul Gerhard Schmidt, "The Quotation in Goliardic Poetry: The Feast of Fools and the Goliardic Strophe Cum Auctoritate," *Latin Poetry and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Peter Goodman and Oswyn Murray (Oxford, 1990), pp. 39–55.

49 See Chambers, 1, pp. 289–297 for an example of attempts to control the festival at Sens. He mentions that "the chapter paid a subsidy towards the amusements of the 'pope' and his 'cardinals' on the Sunday called *brioris*" (1: p. 302), and at Sens it would seem that the chapter paid for the entire feast (1, 1996, p. 291).

50 Chambers sees the clash as Christianity vs. paganism, while Bakhtin sees the conflict as the dominant, serious ideology battling the subversive, humorous ideology.

51 The pre-lenten feasts and festivals, in fact, may have been a reaction to the coming season of scarcity.

52 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston, 1967), p. 10.

53 Douglas L. Peterson, "Lyly, Greene, and Shakespeare and the Recreations of Princes," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1987), 67–88.

54 Peterson, p. 84.

55 Some authorities also set the place for the festival, as in the Feast of Fools at Sens. See Chambers's discussion of the regulation of the feast at Sens (1 1996, 291 ff.).

56 Samuel Kinser has developed a theory that such festivals were healthy expressions of "unexpressed or politely suppressed thought and feelings" (p. 148). Samuel Kinser, "Wildmen in Festival, 1300–1550," *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. F. H. Nicolaisen (Binghamton, NY, 1995), pp. 145–60.

57 See, for instance, Glending Olson's analysis of the bent bow story (1982, pp. 91–93). Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1982).

58 Chambers discusses an actual document from this feast—the *Officium circumcisionis in usum urbis senonensis*, which contained the words and music of the special chants used at the feast (p. 280). These documents are actually a script for what will be done during the feast.

59 Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on these texts and practices I use with caution here. Although his theory of the carnivalesque—with its focus on the body and its juxtaposition of high and low are important for my analysis, his underlying assumptions about the Middle Ages are wrong. According to Bakhtin, two competing ideologies existed during the Middle Ages: official and subversive. These continuously battled for the control of people's minds and behaviors. The official ideology was represented by both Church and State, where we find orthodoxy set down as law. The subversive ideology was represented by the various social, cultural, and textual elements that seem to fly in the face of orthodoxy. To Bakhtin, these battled continually throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the ideology of the people attempting to subvert the dominant ideology of Church and State. Orthodoxy continuously attempted to assert control, while the popular ideology continuously attempted to subvert. Bakhtin's idea of competing ideologies has been successfully refuted by too many scholars to mention here. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist say that *Rabelais and his World* is, in addition to being about Rabelais, a critique of the Soviet system, saying that Bakhtin "offers a counterideology to the values and practices that dominated public life in the 1930s" (p. 307) and that "there is [. . .] a strong element of idealization, even utopian visionariness,

in Bakhtin's analysis of carnival" (p. 310). See the full discussion in *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 295–320. Bakhtin's assertions about conflicting ideologies, one serious and one comic, are more creative wish fulfillment about his own situation than a reality of the medieval or Renaissance world. His ideas are useful in that he highlights a mode of representation—carnival—in practices seemingly divorced from Carnival. However, he fails to note that with all of these practices, the carnivalesque atmosphere ends and the dominant mode of thought and life replaces it, thus bringing carnival into what he calls the dominant ideology.

60 Bayless rejects the argument that these texts have any direct link to festivals. However, she implies that they are related in their parody and general tone, and other scholars have made the link between the festivals and these masses (Bayless, p. 125). Bakhtin states that "all medieval parodical literature is recreative; it was composed for festive leisure and was to be read on feast days" (p. 83), and this would seem to include the parodic masses.

61 Bayless sees the parodic masses as purely recreational: "religious ideas, phrases, and images were exploited by humorists with no underlying moral or ideological motivation. In other words, religion was available, like any other motif or comic device, simply to enhance the comic impact of secular literature" (p. 211).

62 Bayless prints one English drinking mass and several fragments. This type of parodic mass, it would seem, was popular.

63 The Latin text is reprinted from the edition in Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell, eds., *Reliquiae Antiquae: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts, Illustrating Chiefly Early English Literature and the English Language*, vol. II (New York, 1966), 208–10. Translations are mine.

64 Ace, two aces, three-ace, five, five-ace, six-ace, four, four-ace, two-ace. I am indebted to M. Teresa Tavormina for bringing to my attention the possibility of a link between these words and dicing.

65 Andrew Cowell, for instance, says that wine, women, and dice are "three leitmotivs of the tavern." Andrew Cowell, *At Play in the Tavern: Signs, Coins, and Bodies in the Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, 1999), p. 111.

66 Bayless points out that in other parodic drinking masses, *omnipotent* is replaced with a variety of parodic compounds: *ventripotens*, stomach-potent; *vinipotens*, wine-potent; and even *bellipotens*, battle-potent (p. 102).

67 As Huizinga says, ritual itself is a form of play requiring its own set space and time (p. 14 ff.).

68 Chaucer's description of the Prioress's manners would lead one to believe that she was proper at all times: "Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene / That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene / Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte." Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, 1987), I.133–135.

69 Bacchus is the god of drinking, while Decius, though technically meaning dice, can also be a god of gambling, since the die is personified in some poems, and in *Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis* there is a reference to a *secta Decii*, suggesting a divinity with followers.

70 The text is from E. Mätzner, *Altenglische Sprachproben*, Band I (Berlin, 1867–69), pp. 189–90. Translations are mine.

71 No scholarship on the poem has acknowledged the frame as the boundary of the play world, though some come close. Instead, scholars have interpreted the geographic position of Cokaygne to support arguments about satire or parodic models. Tigges asserts that the "penance" "may stand for the period of tedious study during the novitiate, or perhaps more generally for the material hardship that monastic life entailed" (1988, p. 103), coming very near to my point. Garrett sees in the geographic location a link to Irish tales of the other world, which are "located in the west in contrast to the eastern Eden" (p. 5). Morton has another interpretation for the location: "This westward placing clearly connects cokaygne with the earthly paradise of Celtic mythology" (p. 18), though he does acknowledge that the tradition of utopia in England mirrors England's existence as an island: "the fact that an island is self-contained, finite, and may be remote, gives it just the qualities we require to set our imagination to work" (p. 12). Still, he uses the location as evidence for satire: "Nevertheless, the fact that Cokaygne is a western island is an indication that the Cokaygne theme is of popular and pre-christian character, and the western placing may in itself be taken as one of the specifically anti-clerical features" (p. 18). Angela M. Lucas says that this location "resembles that of Ireland itself" and, along with many others, links this poem with Irish "voyage literature" (p. 175). Deborah Louise Hatfield Moore sees the penance as related to "Irish visionary literature" (p. 51), using this line as evidence for her argument that the poem satirizes the Cistercians (pp. 51–53).

72 This is to be expected of a poem that many have called a description of an "earthly paradise," since hardship was common throughout the Middle Ages. For an idea of the regularity of bad harvests, see Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200–1500* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 262.

73 The Dutch analogues include both. See Pleij's Rhyming Text L (pp. 22–26); Rhyming Text B (pp. 72–75).

74 *Middle English Dictionary*, the Middle English Compendium, ed. Frances McSparran, et al., Ann Arbor, 2000–2018, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/.

75 In fact, in much of this tradition, no work is done. "Big Rock Candy Mountain" is a place where, according to the lyrics, "They hung the jerk / That created work."

76 Garrett says of this passage that "these images may be meant to indicate that the satirist's issues are not with the foundations or books of the church, which

are depicted as sound and sanctioned by God, but with the people themselves. This reading lends support to the idea that this may have been a Spiritual Franciscan text" (p. 10). Henry conveniently omits this passage from his analysis. Tigges sees this passage as evidence of a regulated mode of life (p. 102).

77 In fact, all of the scholars who focus on satire see this passage as anti-clerical satire. See, for instance, Garbáty (p. 141), Garrett (p. 4)—who also interprets the scene as "sexual assault" (p. 2), Lucas (p. 179); Moore also mistakenly claims that "the only 'work' that the speaker mentions the monks performing is the spanking of the wench's bare bottom" (p. 51), a claim not supported by the reference to saying mass in the poem. P. L. Henry breaks with this interpretation, raising the unanswered question, "Is it written in the spirit of student prank to shock the staid, or on the other hand, does its casual urbanity conceal a sharp satiric intent?" (p. 131).