Summaries of articles

Clerks and jesters in mediaeval society
(12th-13th centuries)
Carla CASAGRANDE et Silvana VECCHIO

The image of the jester elaborated by the priests in the XIIth and XIIIth centuries was that of a social figure placed outside the societas christiana. A number of charges are levelled at the jester : his improper and excessive use of speech and body, his vagrancy and his being socially useless and dangerous. Moreover histriones, mimi, joculatores are confined in a space at once real and symbolic, peopled by marginal and dangerous figures : prostitutes, charlatans of every kind, animals and demons. Often, the condemnation of the jester becomes the condemnation of his public too. While on the one hand these charges desmonstrate the marginal character of the jesters, on the other, they are used as a negative pattern, which shapes the figure and conduct of churchmen in particular. This hostile attitude undergoes a partial change with the rise of the Mendicant Orders. Franciscans and Dominicans, who enjoy a closer contact with the jesters, minstrels, buffoons because of their apostolic engagement, are led to face them in a more realistic fashion. This is the beginning of a revaluation of the jester's figure, which eventually leads to his reintegration into society (St Thomas). Furthermore, it is possible to observe, in the Franciscan milieu, a more ambiguous process, both imitative and competitive : when Franciscan preachers adopt the jester's techniques (St Francis, Roger Bacon), their impact on the audience in the public squares becomes more dramatic.

The journey to paradise : the Christianization
of folklore traditions in the Middle Ages
Giuseppe GATTO

The article presents an analysis of a short 13th century tale, relating a journey to Paradise, shows how the process of Christianization hinged on three motifs : 1) the dual invitation ; 2) time expressed in terms of marvels ; 3) the taboo transgressed. This text reveals a threefold code (aristocratic, peasant and clerical) sprung from oral tradition, as the anonymous author explicitly indicates, fully aware of the Christianizing process he is performing.

Folklore methodology and mediaeval literature
Bruce A. ROSENBERG

Of all eras, the literature of the Middle Ages is the most heavily laden with folklore. This essay sets out the methods and theories of folklorists that seem to be of greatest use to the literary medievalist. Of most importance is the relation between written and oral narratives, particularly the folktale. Principles by which the researcher establishes the connection between narratives of different worlds are outlined, and guidelines for determining priority and hypothesizing the existence of oral tales are discussed.

The mediaeval quarters of Paris in the 18th century. Evolution of a multi-functional space

Robert DESCIMON et Jean NAGLE

This article, based on a critical review of the nature of the sources, demonstrates the stability and cohesion of the ancient Parisian administrative areas. Municipal wards existed before Etienne Marcel, and they served as the mould for the police divisions. Their justification lay in the vital functions they performed, first among these being defence, which was one of the founding principles of the Middle Ages. This geography persisted down the ages because it favoured the interests of the civic leaders. But functions changed along with the transformation of the city, necessitating a complete reorganization of the urban network in the last quarter of the 17th century. Police gained independence from the municipal framework, to which popular participation had ceased to give meaning and life. Thus, under Louis XIV, the classical city with its ancient harmonies gave way to an absolutist one, directly controlled by the State, thus consolidating the rupture between governing class and people.

Theatres of violence in 18th century Paris

Arlette FARGE et André ZYSBERG

Urban violence, was a banal, everyday fact of life in the 18th century, but it does provide an indicator of the degree of febrility or protest in which the pre-Revolutionary population of Paris lived. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of complaints lodged with the "Petit-Criminel" also provides us with material for a study of the social composition of the lower classes and a glimpse of those everyday incidents around which conflicts crystallize, conflicts generally neglected by conventional social analysis. The Parisian theatres of violence, in the 18th century, were those in which life itself was lived : the cabarets, homes, workshops, the street. Violence was absent neither from leisure nor from work ; and in general it occurred between members of the lower classes. It was a form of expression or survival, springing from ordinary incidents. One likely reason for the fall in the number of complaints for assault in the 18th century is that people fell into the habit of not lodging an official complaint, preferring to sort things out among themselves, in the presence of the policeman. We are more generally accustomed to hearing about a Paris engulfed in attacks on property ; it was also a city of brawls and crime.

Reading rooms in Paris : cultural practice and social space under the Restoration

Françoise PARENT

The author analyses an institution that was both commercial and cultural : cabinets de lecture, boutiques where people could come to read or borrow books and periodicals, making printed matter available to a far broader public than the private and public libraries.

The absence of direct sources has made it necessary to approach the subject in a roundabout way, via urban analysis : the social workings of the cultural institution are thus apprehended in their Parisian setting at the beginning of the 19th century. Far from confining itself to mere commercial geography, the analysis provides us, in return, with an understanding of the conditions permitting the expansion of this reading market in the period under consideration and, subsequently, to suggest hypotheses more soundly rooted in the social composition of its clientele.

Shanghai, an "other China" (1919-1949)   Marie-Claire BERGÈRE

Minority tendencies, the tendencies defeated by history, run a strong risk of appearing in the eyes of the latter as nothing but insignificant deviations. After the triumph of the Chinese Revolution, Shanghai, which was looked on as the capital of money, cosmopolitanism and vice, was cold-shouldered by the new regime. Most historians, in China as well as in the West, regard it as a passing anomaly brought on by the presence of foreigners, witness to a shameful past.

But the stigmata of imperialism which mark the history of Shanghai ought not to blind us to the role played by this city during the century-long western interlude. At a time when the weakening of the traditional political order and the decline of bureaucratic constraints were liberating the energies of the people, the existence of a haven of order and security—the "Concession territories"—preserved them.

The newly-emerging society in Shanghai at that time probably signalled less "the triumph of the West" than the revenge of a very ancient minority tendency, namely the merchants, oppositional intellectuals and other cast-offs from the mandarin system. As a window into world civilization, Shanghai also stood as an outpost for non-conformist urban China, commercial and cosmopolitan, for which modernization was merely the latest in a long line of heresies.

A social crisis in China : Henan society from summer 1956 to summer 1957   Jean-Luc DOMENACH

Due to scarce and unreliable sources, empirical research into the social situation of a Chinese province in 1956-57 can only yield very tentative conclusions. The agricultural failure of 1956 accounts for the material hardships and economic indiscipline of the peasants. Although envied and privileged, urban life suffered from supply and housing problems, as well as from the wide differences between cadres, workers, youth and occupational, ethnic, religious and political minorities. In all, however, although discontent seems to have been widespread, only a minority actually made trouble. So one can only speak of a social crisis if we are prepared to admit that these popular disturbances constituted the maximum acceptable to political authorities who controlled the social body.

Towards a characterization of Maoism   Lucien BIANCO

As analysed in this article, "Maoism" refers to the last two decades (circa 1957-1976) of Mao Tse-tung's life, that is to say to the period during which "Maoism" became as popular a term as "Leninism" or "Stalinism". While Mao's earlier activity—e.g. in the 1920's, at a time when he made no claim to be regarded as a thinker—embodied a kind of revolutionary model (a peasant and military strategy) for the Third World, his late intellectually more ambitious and original constructions missed the historical rendez-vous between Leninism and the Third World. Indeed, Mao's originality, instead of arising from a Third World environment (where one would have expected it to lie), did rather belong to the more abstract realm of revolution : it could be called an attempt at (or rather : the temptation to) permanent revolution. Such a temptation has been costly for the Chinese revolution, and did not create any practical outlet from the blind-alleys of Leninism.