Anthropological readings of Carnival, especially after Bakhtin’s study on Rabelais, have stressed the importance of the inversion, or subversion, of social patterns during Carnival. Late Medieval and Renaissance Italian courts, on the other hand, often encouraged such celebrations, turning public performances and mass gatherings into a powerful instrument of political propaganda (as was the case in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Florence). However, some social space and a broader audience were thus regained for popular or popularizing forms of literature that were previously relegated to a context of orality and folklore. This talk assesses developments in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italian literature, especially in texts associated with performance (the use of dialects in stage literature, the surfacing of folkloric texts in print, the linguistic and cultural opposition between the city and the countryside), and how such changes were affected by the contexts and rituals of Carnival celebrations.

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