Laughing the Master Down: Emotions and Eighteenth-Century Parisian Guilds

JANINE MARIE LANZA
Associate Professor
History

Guilds in early modern France portrayed themselves as harmonious institutions that seamlessly integrated their members into hierarchical relationships that encouraged efficient production and social concord. However, an aspect of guild culture that has been overlooked is the charged emotional content of court cases and police complaints. When masters and journeymen testified they employed emotionally charged language that couched their positions not simply in terms of interest and advantage, but also in the language of the emerging 18th century culture of sentiment, as a means to support their interests, and as a tool to express how they understood identity as members of guilds. I argue that artisans used emotional expressions to push back against the conception of guilds endorsed by masters and jurés and assert their own vision of artisanal identity and culture.

Janine Lanza is an Associate Professor in the Department of History who specializes in early modern French history. She is the author of From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy and Law (Ashgate, 2007). Her current research project examines the ways changes in civil law shaped business practices in early modern Parisian artisanal families.