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Pamela M. King

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Jelle Koopmans

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ARRAS, WHERE BURGHERS AND JONGLEURS MEET, PLAY, AND DEVELOP FORMS – AFTERWARDS SEEN AS THEATRE . . .

Jelle Koopmans

The city of Arras holds a special place in the early development of drama in the vernacular, and thus in the development of medieval drama in general. Of the ten or eleven plays in vulgar tongue dating from before 1300 in Western Europe, at least six stem from the region Arras-Tournai – and one could ask whether all these plays are part of some kind of general evolution of drama, or whether they just show us a regional culture, *in se* unrelated to a more general Western development, if ever such a thing could be constructed (and it certainly has been, but the question remains how solid it is, as a construction). Of the plays in the vernacular before 1300, one is Spanish, one is Occitan (the *Sponsus*), one is Anglo-Norman, but copied in the south-west of France (the *Ordo representationis Adae*), and Rutebeuf's *Miracle of Theophilus* may have been Parisian (and that is sufficiently vague). From Arras-Tournai, we have the *Play of Saint Nicolas* by Jean Bodel, the adaptation of the parable of the Prodigal Son – set in a local context as *Courtois d'Arras*, where no reference to Biblical material is in any way made explicit – the proto-farce of the Boy and the Blind Man (*Le garçon et l'aveugle*) and the two plays by Adam de La Halle, the first pastoral operetta *Robin and Marion* and the highly curious play of the *Feuillée*. They clearly show the importance of the region in the coming-into-being of vernacular drama – but on the other hand, six plays for one century isn't all that much, and it is only because there is no documentation from elsewhere that this putative importance arises, and it may therefore be extremely relative. This is highly important and yet, in a way, it is not. Whatever might be said on that point, it remains clear that this region in the North of France has been prolific, either in the creation of dramatic texts, in noting them down, or in their conservation in manuscript form (which is not necessarily the same thing: many performances may have gone unnoted elsewhere). The issue of writing down or not writing down, and why write down, and for whom to write down texts we consider nowadays as play-texts, remains problematic for the study of medieval drama as a whole. What is also noteworthy in the extant texts from the region is the broad spread in genres – if one can even speak of “genre” in this very early stage of development. There does not seem to be any kind of prevalent practice or performance system behind it (if it weren't our, and I repeat “our”, idea or concept of drama). Moreover, it is certainly remarkable that most of these plays do not foreshadow the types of drama that will develop in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which also means that their place in any kind of development of drama can be questioned in many ways.

So, a first *caveat* should be formulated here: how can we be sure we are really speaking of theatre, of plays? As many forms of literature in the thirteenth century have a marked performance-aspect, how and why do we (as modern scholars) determine what is theatre and what is not, for a period in which the theatrical was not conceptualised as it is nowadays (Zumthor 1987)? Or do we just follow nineteenth-century scholarship (see Koopmans and Smith 2010)? The question automatically implies a critical review of sources – but in this chapter, the point will be illustrated by just one example, a major example, the “Play of the Bower”, the *Jeu de la Feuillée* by Adam de La Halle (1276). A second important question is, of course, to what extent the manuscripts we have are representative of any kind of dramatic reality; in other words, what are they? Do they bear witness to anything dramatic or are they just manuscripts in which we recognise something we would call dramatic? Do they represent, on the other hand, a more or less reliable witness to dramatic activities in the region in those days, or are they just recording incidental or anecdotal instances? What percentage of dramatic culture do the Arras texts represent, and thus what can be their weight as information? These are, of course, standard questions common to all types of research into medieval history and literature, but it is not totally unnecessary to reformulate them here, as historians of drama have been, so far, remarkably naïve in this regard. Before coming to that argument, however, it may be of some use to set the context.

The organisation of cultural life in Arras, the town and the city (as these were – and still are, in a way – distinct entities) is well documented: we have names, we have texts, we have administrative documents. The confraternity of Notre-Dame-des-Ardents, or the Confraternity of Burghers and Jongleurs, may count as a very early testimony to a highly interesting form of cultural organisation, and it certainly bears witness to the shift from a court culture to an urban culture. The *Nécrologe* or death roll of the confraternity is still extant and has been published by Roger Berger, which means we have the names of the members and the dates of their deaths (Berger 1970). Next to that, there also existed, in Arras, a Puy (from the Latin *podium*), a regular assembly of poets, or citizens devoted to the writing of poetry in honour of the Virgin Mary. Even though some scholars have contested the existence of this Puy, or have tried to assimilate it to the *Confrérie des Bourgeois et des Jongleurs* (Symes 2007), it clearly existed, and it was clearly distinct from the *Confrérie* – and we do have traces of rivalry between the two institutions even though, understandably enough, some poets contributed to both. Here, once more, it is important to be as precise as possible: we do have examples tending to show this rivalry, but is this a simple effect of documentation or a literary game, or is there – and to what extent – a real opposition hidden behind it all? However, the mere fact we have so much for Arras in an otherwise poorly documented period asks for some explanation.

One of the standard explanations is that the wealth of the cities in the North, due to the first industrial revolution and its effects on the textile industry, generated new infrastructures for urban life, but also, it is important to keep in mind that simple yet essential point, it also generated new means of documentation for urban cultural life. The coming into being of a market, of an industry where imported wool was transformed into cloth to be sold at other markets, such as Paris, also meant that the most important source of wealth, up to then land, became money – and this is a prominent theme in the Arras-Tournai plays. Through possessing moveable wealth, some important families in Arras turned into bankers, and major financiers of the kings of England and France (the sums really were significant). The many things that could be said about the tension between political power and economic or financial power, will remain unaddressed here, but as contextual information, it is of some importance, and it also shows the power of a new class of a rich urban patriciate, wishing to imitate – as is often said – nobility.

What is certainly specific to the documentation is that in Arras, jongleurs and burghers joined together. That they tried, in an urban context, to recreate a court culture of new vernacular

poetics in imitating troubadour and *trouvère* poetry is already highly interesting. What is even more interesting is the emergence, within the social life of the Confrérie, of the concept of “role”. The poets of the Confrérie have left us numerous dialogue-poems or *jeux-partis*, in which two poets defend opposite views in alternate stanzas (Långfors 1926). Whether they really held these views or merely adopted them within a playful context, remains obscure, and – even worse – whether the dialogues were really performed by these poets themselves or by others taking on the role of a famous poet, does not emerge with any degree of certainty from the documentation. But role there is, play there is (and the word *jeu*).

One of the most astonishing literary texts bearing witness to this concept of role, is the *Prise de Neuville*, which is a “chanson de geste”, an epic poem, supposedly performed by a Flemish jongleur with a poor command of French. The performer, on the other hand, may have been a French actor impersonating a Flemish jongleur who was not very strong in French, while the actor, himself, was. The text is highly amusing, most certainly of linguistic importance, and certainly of social importance as it determines, in a way not found in other documents, the relations between the French-speaking town and city and the Flemish-speaking *banlieues* (Neuville, the “new-town”) of Arras (Berger 1981, 239–49). It also bears witness to a real, and elaborated, concept of role: this performance is no longer about the text (performed by a jongleur); it is about an actor impersonating a wonderfully ridiculous jongleur. It is, thus, about a character in a fully theatrical sense.

In many other texts contained within these so-called *Chansons et dits artésiens*, all of them lyrical and/or narrative in our perception, we can try to read, with some small stretch of the imagination, performances, characters, roles, scripts, accessories; the problem remaining is simply that the way of recording all that material in manuscript form has remained heavily dependent on conventions mainly determined by narrative literature and chanson culture. So what we finally have, in manuscript form, is a narrative or lyrical residue of performances we can think of only in terms of possibilities. A clear example of this problem with the “recording” of role-plays has been given by Carol Symes (Symes 2004). In her study of the manuscript of the farce of *Le garçon et l'aveugle* [The Boy and the Blind Man], a kind of proto-farce, she has shown in a convincing manner how this text, originally noted as a narrative, slowly developed in the manuscript, through the work of several hands, into what we now know as a dramatic text. It all looks as if the first hand(s) were not aware of what became the conventional codification of plays: how would one write down a dramatic text being unaware of the conventions? It is only in subsequent stages that several other hands added the names of characters, stage directions and the like, and thus the narrative has been turned into a drama. Nowadays, we all assume this really was a play, that the first written record ignored the conventions of written drama, and that the later changes in the manuscript have restored as it were the original nature of this “play”. This remains, however, a matter of belief, or possibility – maybe even probability. On the other hand, one could say that in this particular case, the “terms of possibilities” have been resolved by medieval hands, begging the question how often have they not? The problematic status of *Courtois d'Arras*, as a play or a kind of dialogue acted by a solo jongleur, or a narrative text is, after all, probably attributable to the same reason. If it is a play, why are there so many narrative passages, though in fact these are fairly limited? In a way, this text exemplifies our difficult relationship with the dramaticity of medieval texts.

The coming-into-being, or the renaissance if one wishes, of conventions for recording play-texts is roughly contemporary with the development of modern musical notation (Kelly 2015). There are many thought-provoking parallels to be found in, for example, plainsong and polyphony as compared to dramatic monologues and “real” dialogue, but one major difference remains: if we can assume that a musical score was made for singers, to be used to perform songs and not to

keep record of an actual performance, the same certainty does not apply to “drama manuscripts”, if ever such a category can be isolated. Are they written for performers, are they records of actual performances, or are they written just for readers? Why do we have them at all? These questions are particularly relevant to the remarkable group of early texts under consideration, but equally might be applied more generally.

Instead of going through a review of all the Arras plays of this period, and a critical assessment of existing scholarship, the remainder of this chapter will illustrate this general point through a new analysis of the *Jeu de la Feuillée* [The Play of the Bower] by the poet and musician Adam de La Halle, performed, as specialists have agreed, in June 1276 (Badel 1995). Literary history has it that this is the first really secular play – and many things more. Of course, one should not too easily be carried away by the really “worldly” nature of the play (even though this was an important point for post-revolutionary French literary history, showing how theatre becomes “real theatre” once it liberates itself from the Church). Nor should we too easily be attracted by views according to which a single person, the genius Adam de La Halle, created through this play the whole of secular theatre. Not to put too fine a point on it, the theme of authorship, invention and creation has haunted studies until fairly recently. Thus Dufournet, unhappy with the failed attribution of *Courtois d’Arras* to Jean Bodel, claimed that the play must have been written in the school of Jean Bodel – but he got things wrong, as the play dates from about fifty years later than all scholars thought (Koopmans 2002). However, the general obsession with “author theatre” is clear: if Bodel’s authorship cannot be proven, we’ll think of someone like Bodel. Even the most serious study of artisanal performance culture to date (Symes 2007) becomes from time to time carried away by this author fiction, and one keeps wondering how and why “Jehan Bodel may be compared to William Shakespeare, who also flourished in times of rapid change which produced new literary genres, and who was also unusually sensitive to the larger movements and mundane problems of his day” (Symes 2007, 37). Naturally, we know the map is not the territory – and if we were to use only medieval maps to reconstruct some kind of geographical reality, it is clear we would arrive at totally ridiculous conclusions about medieval geography. However, for drama historians, the map has been the territory – and the reader can easily see the consequences of such an approach.

Why, then, is Adam’s Bower-play so interesting for our purpose? If anything is to be said about the *Jeu de la Feuillée*, it should be that it is not in the right place, and yet it is. It is not in the right place, because the text is in a way weird, highly precocious in the development of what has been called “worldly drama” and it seems to be out of place in all of the documents, moral, legal, theological and administrative documents, that could teach us about a theatre in the city. At the same time, the play is where it should be, as the historiography of the Republic has always seen the birth of secular theatre as the birth of a real theatre, so as far as that is concerned, this play responds to a need, and is welcome at its date. We were waiting for just that, in a certain sense. But it is also not in its right place, as we certainly need to force things a bit in order to call it a real “play”, but with some goodwill and a salutary dose of anachronisms, it is possible to settle that matter.

It has however proven extremely difficult until now to interpret this play as a real play. Of course, one can move into the world of easy anachronisms, and forge links between this thirteenth-century play and the fools’ plays or *sotties* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as has been proposed by Marius Sepet (Sepet 1891), who has been very influential. Jean Dufournet, from a perspective highly conditioned by a twentieth-century traditions of experimental theatre and a psychological vision with many accents from May 1968, arrived at an interesting view of this same play as a first theatre of failure (Dufournet 1974). And I should confess that for a long time, I have been receptive to the fine and intelligent analysis of Dufournet. But it cannot be defended any longer. In this chapter, I am going, therefore, to elaborate a new interpretation of this play, or, more

precisely, to show how historians of theatre, from an aprioristic view, have been unable to see its real nature.

If one were to give a plot summary, many problems would immediately arise, given the rhapsodic nature of the text, which presents as a series of unrelated sketches. There is an opening sketch: Adam wants to leave Arras in order to pursue his studies in Paris; there is a parade of citizens – Adam’s father, a harlot, a monk, a fool, a physician; towards midnight there is a messenger from the hellish army of Hellequin; at midnight, three fairies make their appearance for a ritual banquet, but one of them, as there is a piece of cutlery lacking, formulates the vow that Adam will not leave Arras – and the fairies leave because people are waiting for them elsewhere. At the end of the play, it is morning, and some of the characters, tired and drunk, see that Adam did not leave Arras, and upon hearing the bells of Saint-Nicolas church, they decide to leave.

The first thing to be noted is how radically experimental this play is, though that feature holds for most of medieval drama. The Middle Ages were reinventing a thing unknown; their experimental theatre was not, like it was in the twentieth century, an experiment directed against a mainstream culture; their experiment was really open as it had no clear referent.

In scholarship, things went wrong from the beginning. Wrong in the sense that this text, which certainly looked like a theatrical play to us in our full knowledge of what a play should look like, has been cast into the mould of what a play should be. That, however, is in fact an extrapolation or interpretation that is not totally supported by the extant documents. As Emma Dillon put it so well, if the play feels fantastically strange to a modern audience, the abundant scholarship it has provoked among literary historians can sometimes feel stranger still (Dillon 2012, 134).

Let us try to imagine an ideal world, a world without the *Bossu désenchanté* [Disenchanted Hunchback] (Cartier 1971), a world in which Adam de La Halle has not been *à la recherche de lui-même* [in search of himself] (Dufournet 1974), a world where nobody was actively looking for the first instance of real world drama in order to comply with revolutionary inhibitions, nor seeking for a first psychological drama, nor a first theatre of the absurd. Something like a world of historians, looking at documentary evidence, understanding it and seeking what it permits us to say (and above all, what it does not permit us to say). A first step, therefore, to be made is to look at the documentary evidence.

All there really is, materially, is a set of three manuscripts which – in very divergent ways – have tried to record a text. The texts the scribes wrote down look so much alike that, somewhere in the nineteenth century, scholars thought it was *one* text, or different instances showing how more or less stupid scribes had tried to record a work of art. All there was, all there ever has been, is, in fact, a collection of three manuscripts which tried, in different forms, to record the text of a performance – or the text *for* a performance. The fact of their recording is the primary factor; what this means for text and performance is secondary, but most historians of literature and of drama have simply stepped from the one to the other without being explicit about that process.

It is hence of some importance here, to look at these documents. There are three manuscripts: Paris BNF f. fr. 837, Vatican 1490 and Paris BNF f. fr. 25566. If we look at the first one, manuscript P (BNF f. fr. 837) our text is announced “& Le jeu Adan le boçu d’Arraz” [The play of Adam the hunchback from Arras]. The speeches are separated by a blank line or by an indentation, but there are no indications of the speakers. This manuscript contains the lines that appear as 1–174 in modern editions. The *explicit* suggests clearly that this is not a fragment: “Explicit uns geus” [The end of a play]. “Uns geus” [a play]: that at least is clear. The incipit, “Jeu Adan le boçu d’Arraz” [the play of Adam the hunchback from Arras] is much less clear. Does this mean a play written by Adam, performed by him, or a play about him? In the first volume of the new edition of French morality plays, this text is referred to as “an extract from the play of the Bower” (Doudet *et al.* 2012, 34), but why call it “an extract”?

The Vatican manuscript 1490 gives 170 lines. Its *incipit* states “Cest li coumencement du jeu Adam le Boçu” [This is the beginning of the play of Adam the Hunchback]. For the characters, there are stage directions rather than clear indications of speakers: before line 13, we do not read RIKECE AURIS, as in modern editions, but simply, “Or se lieve uns personnages et respond” [Here another character gets up and answers]; “Or respond Adans” [Here Adam answers]; “Et uns autres respond” [And another one answers].

One could say that these two manuscripts hold some kind of common opinion about this play. The point has been very well elaborated by Carol Symes, who asserts that for most publics [*sic*] of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe [*sic*], that was the *Jeu d’Adam*, lasting about a quarter of an hour (Symes 2007, 287). What Symes fails to point to, is that – if this were so – the status of this play as drama, as a dramatic text, would have been highly compromised, as this status relies in fact on a third document. And the contention that two manuscripts would – for two centuries – have determined European reception where a third manuscript would not, is questionable. In fact, the third manuscript is extremely interesting.

BNF f. fr. 25566, 48–59 (of which there is a copy made by Rochegeude, an IX = ms. Albi) presents a totally different text. On folio 48v, after the pastoral drama of *Robin and Marion* by Adam de La Halle, the manuscript announces “Li dis Adam” [*sic*], corrected to “jus”. The designation “dit” [spoken text] perfectly fits the text in the other manuscripts (which use the term “jeu” [play]), whereas in this manuscript, in fact, it really is a play, a “jeu” (so the correction is apt). At the end, folio 59, we read, “Explicit li jeus de la feuillie” [This is the end of the play of the Bower], and this is the first and sole instance of the term “feuillée”. Many, if not all interpretations of the play are based on this instance, but that does not automatically mean they are founded on quicksand, as it may very well be that the “feuillée” referred to in this *explicit* is so obvious a part of the overarching event that it did not need mentioning in the text nor in the stage directions. The question of a possible underlying – or overarching – script will be treated below.

There is still another small detail to be observed here: this manuscript presents the opening speech of Adam up to line 176 of the modern editions, but then, the same hand added the name of the character Riquier between lines 173 and 174. Another, later, hand indicates this should be placed one line later. And all this uncertainty intervenes right at the moment where the other manuscripts stop. This means that even in the “complete” manuscript, the fragmentary text is in a way present.

It is through the presence of this third manuscript, if only through its *explicit*, that a *Jeu de la Feuillée* came into existence. Equally it is through this manuscript, that the other two came to be designated fragments. Through the sole magical term “feuillée”, used only in the *explicit* (an important detail to note here), a vertiginous interpretation machine came into being, and this “feuillée” became the lodge of leaves hosting the statue of the Virgin, that has been retro-documented because it really existed in Arras. Scholars also noted that “fueillie” is the Picard form for the modern French “folie” [folly], and all speculations and interpretations followed their due course, without anyone acknowledging the mere fact that it is all based on this curious *explicit* in one manuscript, and on that alone. In all that, no mention had been made of the simple fact that the latin word “scena” means “shady” or “covered” space.

Manuscripts BNF f. fr. 837 and Vatican 1490 agree on the “play”. This also raises another problem: if the important anthology of texts – as BNF f. fr. 837 is often seen – permits itself to reduce this play to the first 174 lines, what kind of treatment has it inflicted upon other texts contained in it? Just to complicate things even more: the *Miracle de Théophile*, a miracle play by Rutebeuf, is integrally represented in this manuscript, with the names of the characters and the stage directions, so our scribe knew the conventions yet did not use them for the *Feuillée*. Then, in another manuscript of Rutebeuf’s play, BNF f. fr. 1635 folio 83r–84v, we have only the lines

384–539 in modern editions, presented as: “Cy encomence la repentance Theophilus” [here begins the repentance of Theophilus] with, at the end, folio 84r, “C’est la priere Theophilus” [this is the prayer of Theophilus], and, on folio 84v, “Explicit” [the end].

What we have seen so far is some factual information about the play-text. From here on, we will enter a world of more speculative analyses as we will be looking at aspects of performance. The main argument in all this, will be that, even if scholars have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that this play was performed during the annual feast, the “Grand Siège” or the “Grande beuvée”, of the confraternity, its exact relation to this annual feast remains unclear.

If the play was to have been performed “during” the feast, one of the key remaining problems is why it also stages parts of the feast. In other words it cannot “be” and “represent” at the same time. It cannot represent what happens during that night and at the same time be part of the actual events of the night. If this play “represents” Adam’s failure to depart, it cannot have been his failed departure, as in the early evening, he could not have known it would fail. If however – and why hasn’t anyone suggested this simple possibility – the play was a re-enactment, played well after Adam’s failure to leave, many redundant comments such as that the citizens of Arras played themselves, could be revised. If the play is the moment, it cannot be a play; if the play represents the moment, it cannot have been performed at the moment. In short, are we talking here, about a “play” in the full sense generally attached to the term?

All manner of rather simplistic interpretations have been put forward, and have gained some credibility in the scholarly world, such as the idea that the roles in this play must have been performed by the persons staged as characters, but no one has explained adequately why this must have been the case. Why would burghers of Arras play themselves, especially in such a negative way?

This question perhaps invites some consideration. The thirteenth century generated “personal poetry”, supposedly a major step towards modern poetry, as scholars would have it on the basis of their view on what constitutes “real” poetry. A corollary of this evolution is without any doubt the biographical and ideological interpretation of the *jeux-partis* in which real poets opposed each other in real debates airing rival opinions. This is a plausible case, but given the problematic situation that scholarship faces regarding documentation – and notwithstanding the wonderful work by Roger Berger who seems to have brought together all that can be known about Arras in the thirteenth century – the available material has been used to create biographies, to support opinions, and to reinforce ideological positions.

There is however a serious problem. Theatre historians have more or less accepted the importance of the Arras-Tournai region for vernacular drama before 1300. They have then moved from that position straight to focusing on the authorial and intentional side of the *jeux-partis* and the plays, and the author function (falling into the “intentionalist fallacy”). This is to ignore the problem that either the poet is still a poet, even if he presents himself on stage as a dramatic character, or he is a role that can be played by anybody else. If the second is the case, which it may be, the history of the *Jeu de la Feuillée* has to be radically revised. An Adam de La Halle who staged his own failure, is harder to imagine than an actor taking on that role. And, according to the same argument, the possibility has to be entertained that the famous *jeux-partis* may not have been real debates between real poets, but debates between two actors taking on the roles of real poets. There is no material proof either way.

The *Jeu de la Feuillée* is not a play. Its interpretation as such, as a form of staged drama as understood by modern sensibilities, is impeded by several major obstacles aside from the problem of the manuscripts. The first obstacle is the mere nature of this “play” and the way it presents itself to modern readers, knowledgeable about the conventions of the lay-out of a theatre-text,

which has led many to jump to conclusions. The duration of the performance is one night. Why would the play have been performed during the Grand Siègle of the Confraternity when what it stages is the Grand Siègle itself, hence the play would have been represented during the ritual it is supposed to represent? Something of this apparent aporia is expressed by Carol Symes in her comment upon Berger's supposition that the play was played in the hall:

Why would the confraternity go to the trouble of re-creating the sightlines, soundscapes, settings, and associations ready-to-hand in the Petit-Marché, where the ritual consecration of the Sainte-Chandelle's potion would have taken place that very day?

(Symes 2007, 215)

Symes's speculation seems apposite. I would, however, go even further and suggest that not only does the play use the venues of the night of the "Grand Siègle", not only is it performed during the "Grand Siègle", it actually is, for this particular year, the "Grand Siègle" itself. The "play" is not a self-contained entity, but can be understood only in relation to the festivities taking place. My proposition is that there was a script, or an order of proceeding, for the ceremony of this Night of the Confraternity. Thus, the *Jeu* would be not an imitation of the event, but the libretto for the event itself. In the underlying libretto, many specific elements are already present, such as the presentation of a mechanical Wheel of Fortune, or the midnight banquet with the fairies (and the other banquet the fairies have to attend, which only receives passing mention in the play-text), and perhaps also the bower itself, the *feuillée* containing the Virgin Mary. What the text gives us, is not the script itself but a series of acted dialogues to be superimposed on that script. It is not the script, it contains only the additions to the script. What it is, in effect, is a sequence of sketches which were not designed to be played in a continuous stream, but at different moments of the larger script for the *Grande beuvée*. They punctuate several important moments in that general script, like the exposition of the Wheel of Fortune, the banquet with the fairies, but they curiously omit certain others, like the exposition of the bower with the image of the Virgin – which gave its name to the "play", at least in the *explicit* of one of the manuscripts.

Accordingly, one can perhaps risk the hypothesis according to which this play is not about Adam's failure to leave; it *is* his failure. The "play" is what is actually happening, not a dramatic imitation of it. The night was long – and something could most certainly be said about the unity of play-time and real time well before the rediscovery of Aristotle (some kind of question of the universals), but we can assume that the action took all night. In other words, this is not a play representing, at the beginning of the night, what will happen during the night, but rather it continues throughout the night of the *Grande beuvée*, as a series of sketches which has been pasted or grafted onto the general ritual as it was known to the citizens of Arras, or at least to the members of the Confrérie. There are some clear indications of such a timescale when, for instance, a character claims to have slept well, suggesting some passage of real time, which might be taken quite literally. The pauses such breaks would create within the play have never been commented upon, but we may have here, an indication of how the *Feuillée* worked with time, explained perhaps by some sort of underlying script. It is also worth noting that time and space constituted a major problem for plays in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries too. So how can we assume, on the basis of this text, and in fact only on the basis of one version of the text, that the thirteenth century already found an adequate solution? The answer I am proposing here is simple: they did not have to propose a solution, as the problem did not pose itself in these terms. The play was not, in the full modern meaning, a play, but simply a sequence of sketches superimposed on an existing ritual. Of course, we cannot be sure, but it seems highly probable and it

permits a “reading” of what has become the *Jeu de la Feuillée* that is much more in line with what can be known about thirteenth-century drama, albeit distinct from the ways modern scholarship conceives the category “drama”.

If the reader is ready to follow this interpretation of the *Jeu de la Feuillée* as a sequence, a programme for the festivities rather than the notation of an organised spectacle (at least in the Parisian manuscript) – and I repeat that this reading, in common with the alternative, is speculative – that would at least explain the short version, which is complete according to two manuscripts. It makes sense if we see this as only the first part, the first “play” as it were. Perhaps these two manuscripts were based on a role for Adam, which would explain why the other characters are indicated simply as “someone else”. The mere fact that this “play” is only recognisable if it is set against the background of the *Grande beuvée*, and that the main proceedings of the night are considered common knowledge enough not to have been noted down in the “play-text”, clearly says something about the practice of recording performances in these days. The play in the short version is a play, the play in the long version is in fact a sequence of other plays, which share the general theme and the characters, but they are not part of one unified play in the sense of a play being a unified sequential performance.

The main advantage of such an interpretation is naturally that it seeks a logic behind the conservation of texts, behind ways of, and motives for, recording experimental stagings later on to be labelled as “drama”, and considering the texts for what they really are. Speculative as all this may be, there is surely here a major potential gain to historical understanding. Moreover, there are some features which accord with the proposed reading. The first is the “feuillée” or the bower itself. “La feuillée” is mentioned in a document from 1292: “Factum de domo destructa ad reponendum capsam B. Mariae in platea Sancti Joannis de Rotunda villa quae vocatur follye per monachos S. Vedasti, quam canonici Atrebatenses construxerant contra voluntatem ecclesiae S. Vedast” [And the ark of the Blessed Virgin from the house that had been destroyed came to be replaced in the street of the village of Saint Jean Rondeville, which is called by the monks of St Vaast “the folly”, and which they had constructed against the will of the canons of the church of St Vaast Atrebatenses] (Cartier 1971, 159). What is interesting, here, is that “follye” is clearly a term used by the monks of Saint Vaast, and that they called it thus because they were opposed to its construction by the canons of Arras – there is no other way to read this account. It is on Saint Jean Rondeville Square. This is circumstantial evidence for the analysis of the texts as we have them, as it is still important to remind the reader that nowhere in the text, is there any “feuillée”.

A second element is the Wheel of Fortune, which receives only passing mention in the text. The episode of the Wheel of Fortune should thus be interpreted from the logic of the script of the event. Most literary scholars have extrapolated from the text some kind of minimal representation devised from a tapestry or other images, but it is certainly more credible, from the context, that there was a real performing wheel. The text did not need to specify all that much about it as it was part of the main event, not of the sketches. However, Armand Strubel claims that a Wheel of Fortune was depicted in the playing place (Strubel 2003, 60), and Estelle Doudet is of the same view: “the fairies display a strange mechanism: an articulated Wheel of Fortune on which men ascend and descend” (Doudet *et al.* 2008, 56). The point here is, naturally, whether we can conceive of a mechanical Wheel of Fortune at that date: Baudri de Bourgueil, bishop of Dol, visited the abbey of Fécamp in the early years of the twelfth century where he saw a wheel, moving, “I do not know by what art”. The *Hortus Deliciarum*, a manuscript finished in 1185, and known only through nineteenth-century copies of its miniatures, shows a real mechanical wheel, that actually rotates, with someone operating the machinery, and a person looking at it. Also in Villard de Honnecourt’s sketches, we find evidence of such mechanical wheels. In a seminal article, Alan Nelson has brought together the extant evidence for mechanical Wheels of Fortune

(Nelson 1980), and it certainly shows the possibility of a real wheel in Arras for Adam's play. Here too, the play would not be a separate staging, but it would have been superimposed on an existing one. In that case, the passing mention of the Wheel of Fortune can easily be explained: if it was there, as provided by the general script, it did not need explicit mention in the text, being provided according to the overarching organisation of the night's events.

A third element which merits attention is the banquet with the fairies. Throughout the play, the appearance of the three fairies for the midnight banquet – and the way the arrival of the messenger of the nocturnal force announces it – is presented as self-evident. Of course it was, as it was simply part of the general procedures and did not need, therefore, any specific inscription into the play itself. In our play-text, no explicit motivation for this episode is set up, as if it were to happen anyway. The fairies have to leave at a certain moment because they have to attend a meeting elsewhere in Arras – and that is certainly a clue (which has never been seriously commented upon): their appearance in the play is not conditioned by the demands of the play, but by the general lay-out of the script for the night. As anyone attending the play knew the general script, there was no need to create internal motives for this episode and its relationship to the possible presence of the fairies elsewhere. This also implies, or indeed confirms, that the play is just part of what is happening on the night, and that part of the ritual was taking place elsewhere, outside of the series of sketches that we have read as the “play”. The public, much more than the modern reader, was part of the game, a game or play we can only reconstruct from some minor textual evidence. The only problem for the modern scholar is that we do not have the overarching script, and that we therefore have to argue from documentary lacunae, or absences, for evidence about it. Carol Symes has, however, convincingly shown in what way certain extant documents, like the documentation concerning the “follye”, can help us out in this (Symes 2007, 195–8), and she also explained why it has been wrong to assume “that the dramatic display of relics in the marketplace was an invention original to the play” (Symes 2007, 198). If one were to take such a view one step further, one might ask why there is no reference at all to the Holy Candle, the *Sainte Chandelle*, which is fundamental to the foundation of the Confraternity? Once more we can guess that it was part of the general script, and did not need to appear in the dialogues superimposed on it. The mere fact that we do not have an elaborate script which has been at the basis of the structure of the *Feuille*-sketches, however, does not mean we can simply ignore its existence nor adopt an overtly positivist view. The play-text, as such, is insufficient (see Zumthor 1978); the documentary evidence also is, but that does not relieve us of the primary responsibility to point out the obvious lacunae in order to give a voice to the silence of our sources.

The last piece of the jigsaw must be the “morning session”, the strange moment at which the play-text stages Adam's failure: he has not departed, all ambitions are gone, we are simply in an Arras tavern, after a long night – and it probably really has been a long night, also in a very real sense. This cannot have been represented during the midnight session with the fairies, nor in the opening scene, as it is represented in two manuscripts as the play. This concluding scene takes on its full meaning and impact only if it really is the conclusion of the night.

Such an interpretation also settles another tricky question. How come that, if Adam de La Halle were such an important innovator in the theatrical field, no real follow-up of his “master-piece” ever came into being? How thinkable or unthinkable would be another type of staging close to what Adam has been doing around 1276 in Arras? The answer could be simple or highly complicated. The simple answer would be that, for the night in June 1276, someone, probably Adam de La Halle, created a kind of play to be superimposed upon the recurrent ritual of the annual feast of the Confraternity. Its specific link to that feast must have impeded its use in other contexts. That also means that the dramatic nature of this play, the fact that it has been considered, ever since the nineteenth century, as what we would call drama, was clearly

not central to contemporary perception. Many other instances are imaginable in which such dramatic productions could have been superimposed on existing scripts, but we simply do not have any clear witness to that activity. Maybe, and this is an easy solution, the dramaticity of the play was insufficiently distinctive – the fact that this was, according to modern standards, perhaps an instance of “real” theatre was no clear parameter in manuscript conservation – which would also explain why so many “possible plays” have not come down to us as “real plays”. From that perspective, it is important also to note the diversity of the three manuscripts of this play, or rather, the opposition between the first two manuscripts, where the play lasts for about 170 lines, and the third manuscript in which this proto-play is to some extent identifiable, but which also represents the play in the terms in which modern scholarship conceives plays. What that should mean for our reconsideration of other 170-line texts with hardly any clear indications of role, is a most important question which is central to the problem of the nature of texts as they survive in manuscript form.

It is not easy to arrive at some kind of conclusion from all the above. What is clear, is that historians of theatre, from an aprioristic point of view, have been unable to grasp the real nature of this play. What is also clear, is that, from this type of speculative interpretation of dramatic-culture in the thirteenth century, new views on what “drama” may have been in the period may emerge. Above all, this chapter has shown how and why a modern, in fact nineteenth-century, concept of drama is totally inadequate in rendering comprehensible the dramatic cultures of the thirteenth century, yet it has endured as our anchor in writing the history of what we consider to be drama. And that is a fundamental problem.

Charles Mazouer speaks, in his history of French medieval drama, of a real proliferation of interpretations imposed on this “petit drame” adding up to only 1,100 lines (Mazouer 1998, 107). What I have tried to show here, is that it is certainly not the number of lines that counts, that it is not possible to reduce this play to a “petit drame” because of the number of lines recorded in one of the manuscripts, and offering only one of the possibilities of what this play may have been about. The perspective offers serious opportunities for alternative approaches to this fragmentary material.

Carol Symes, in her study of performance culture in Arras (Symes 2007) made some significant steps forward, but she did not manage to disentangle the mystery of the *Feuillée*, simply because she kept relying too much on the extant documents as recording the totality of what supposedly happened that night, during the Grand Siège of the Confraternity of Burghers and Jongleurs. Symes also tried to situate the problematic play-text within a certain logic, for example when she states that the play boasts of seventeen speaking parts, one of which is negligible (probably a cameo role for someone planted in the audience) and eight of which were clearly designed to be doubled by four actors (Symes 2007, 186).

The adverb “clearly”, here, is particularly problematic. Why would that be clear in any way? One of the major problems with Symes’ interpretation is that it claims to have a certain historicity, constructing probabilities from a modern perspective, combined with an authorial perspective on Adam as playwright which is still presented as being an historical view on performance practice in Arras in the thirteenth century. The passage quoted above eloquently exposes the problem.

This chapter has sought to offer some informed views on the problematic status of “drama” in the medieval period. Furthermore, it explores one particular case, and particular it certainly is, namely Adam de La Halle’s *Jeu de la Feuillée*. The general contention is that this was designated a “play” in modern scholarship only, as it was never designed to be a play in the sense we attach to the word nowadays, although it certainly functioned as a play of some sort. That means an alternative approach had to be formulated, and the alternative offered here is that the leading principle for all interpretations of this “play” – if it ever was one in any sense of the word – has

to be derived not from any one of the play-texts, even the one that is apparently longest and most complete, but from the broader context. The major documentary problem in this is, above all, that we simply do not have sufficient documentary evidence at our disposal, but what we have is highly suggestive. Therefore, our interpretation has been formulated in terms of possibilities. It is plausible, but insufficiently supported by hard documentary evidence. On the other hand, it is equally apparent that other readings are not supported by adequate documentary evidence either. The main advantage of the “reading” of the play proposed here, which in fact denies it the status of an autonomous play in the sense we attach to that nowadays, is that we can in this way confront and come to terms with the problematic rebirth of the theatre. In that, the approach has been archaeological, it has been about remnants, and not about masterpiece.

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