

CHAPTER ONE

PERSONAL EXPRESSION OF A PLAYWRIGHT OR  
PUBLIC DISCOURSE OF A CONFRATERNITY?  
A PERFORMANCE AT THE PUY DE NOTRE-DAME IN AMIENS IN 1473

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*Introduction*

When considering the context of the literary production of the Puy of Normandy and the French-speaking Southern towns in the Low Countries, scholars often focus on the devotional motives of these confraternities as well as on the cultural significance of their literary practices within a given city. Indeed, the Puy were primarily local brotherhoods gathering notables that appeared first in Artois (Arras), and then developed in Hainaut (Valenciennes), Picardy and Normandy.<sup>1</sup> Their purpose was to encourage devotional practices and in particular to celebrate the Virgin Mary in poetic compositions; the best poems were acclaimed during contests presided over by a Prince or Master elected annually.

If scholars envisage that political considerations might have played a role in the literature produced by these societies, then these are usually seen as mere references to the general historical context in which this production took place. The reason is simple: there does not seem to be any trace of political expression in the poems nor in the rare plays produced by the Puy. Moreover, one can argue that these texts were not meant to express a public discourse on behalf of the Puy, since they were written in the specific and semi-private context of the contests and banquets of the confraternities. Indeed, the poems and plays were primarily written to be heard by the members of the Puy, and were not necessarily brought to

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<sup>1</sup> One can observe a transfer of fame from Arras in the 13th century to Valenciennes in the 14th c., then Amiens in the 15th c., and finally Rouen in the 15th and 16th c. It is worth noting that the literary activities of the Puy of Rouen went on until the 18th century, albeit in other forms than the medieval ones.

a larger audience, either because not all the sessions of the Puy were public, or because only a limited part of their literary production was published in manuscript or print form.

However, one may find exceptions to this apparently non-political production, as I wish to demonstrate through an analysis of a play written for performance at the Puy of Notre Dame in the city of Amiens, in 1473. This play makes it possible to gauge the position of drama within the wider literary activities of this brotherhood, as well as the significance of a text that seems to contain traces of political criticism directed against the Duke of Burgundy. If confirmed, this double meaning of the play as proof of the performative activities of the Puy and as a political positioning of the author and his patron would allow us to consider the possibility that the Puy of Amiens engaged in public discourse.

In order to investigate this possibility, I will first describe the Puy of Amiens and the circumstances in which this play was performed, as well as take into account the other evidence of dramatic activity on the part of the members of the Puy. I will then present the content of the play and discuss its problematic relations to its political context. Finally, I will analyse the problems concerning public discourse raised by this example and its particular use of local characters compared to the usual ways in which a city would express its local identity in the theatrical production of the time.

### *Historical and Cultural Context*

#### *The Political Context of Amiens Around 1470*

Picardy had long been the object of rivalry between the Kingdom of France and the Duchy of Burgundy. In 1463, Louis XI bought Amiens and other cities of the Somme from Philip the Good, but Philip's son, Charles the Bold, forced Louis to give the cities back in 1468. The King of France then invaded the Somme region again in 1471, and despite numerous attempts by Charles to retake Amiens, the city remained French and was definitively integrated into the Kingdom of France at the time of the death of the Duke of Burgundy in 1477. The 1473 play was thus composed and performed while Charles the Bold was trying to regain the city, and, as we will see, there is some evidence in the play that the playwright was not in favour of the reintegration of Amiens into the Duchy.

#### *The Puy of Notre-Dame of Amiens: A Brief Presentation*

The Brotherhood of the Puy of Our Lady in Amiens ('Confrérie du Puy de Notre-Dame d'Amiens') was founded in 1389. Originally, the brotherhood aimed to celebrate the most important feast days of the Virgin (such as the Annunciation and the Assumption), but 2 February (Candlemas and the Purification of the Virgin) quickly became the most important feast of this Puy. On that occasion, a poetry contest was held, with several categories that awarded prizes to various forms of poems, and the day was concluded with a banquet for the members of the brotherhood. Poetry was thus the most important form of literary expression of the Puy, and drama was not part of the contest itself, but rather of the banquet afterwards. It is also worth noting that, compared to other Puy, artistic expression was given an important place in Amiens, as a painting was made each year to illustrate the 'refrain' chosen by the Master, in anticipation of the actual celebration and poetic contest.<sup>2</sup>

The banquet concluded a long day, during which the brothers went to church, then chose the best poems presented at the contest and gave prizes to the winners.<sup>3</sup> They also elected a new Master, since this position (and the task of organizing the activities of the Puy) was given to one of the members of the brotherhood for a term of only one year. Drama was performed during the banquet as a form of recreation, and this somewhat minor status may explain why there is very little evidence of its existence (compared to the poems, which were duly recorded for posterity).<sup>4</sup> To understand how we can still gain more information about some of the

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank Dylan Reid, who kindly agreed to proofread this paper and whose contextual approach to the Puy of Notre-Dame in Rouen was very inspiring for my own approach to the literary production of the Puy of Amiens; see Reid, 'Patrons of Poetry'. On the Puy of Normandy and especially of Rouen, one should also read the very rich study by Hüe, *La poésie palinodique à Rouen*. For detailed information about the Puy of Amiens (as well as about the other Puy of the Northern and Normandy regions), see Gros, *Le poète, la Vierge et le prince du Puy*. See also Coigneau, 'De Const van Rhetoriken, Drama and Delivery', for a comparison between the French Puy and the Dutch chambers of rhetoric. See also Lavéant, *Théâtre et culture dramatique*, pp. 297–319.

<sup>3</sup> The most prestigious category was the 'chant royal', a codified form of poem based on a 'refrain', a verse repeated at the end of each stanza. In the Puy, the *refrain* celebrated the Virgin in a metaphorical comparison. In Amiens, the Master of the Puy defined it before the contest and the poets had to base their *chant royal* on this line.

<sup>4</sup> As Denis Hüe also notes about drama at the Puy of Rouen: Hüe, 'Politique et polémique dans deux moralités du Puy de Rouen'. See also Hüe, *La Poésie palinodique*, pp. 392–419.

plays performed at the Puy of Amiens, we have to take a closer look at the story of a manuscript, and at the plays it contained.

### *The Plays of Jean Destrées: Manuscript, Context and Summary*

#### *The Manuscript and the Plays*

In 1472–1473, the Master of the Puy of Amiens was Jean de Béry. According to several accounts by nineteenth-century scholars, Béry himself made a manuscript collection of documents concerning the brotherhood (such as the regulations of the Puy and a list of the Masters who preceded him), to which he added the text of four plays performed while he was in charge of the Puy.<sup>5</sup> I have been unable to retrieve the manuscript; it is likely that it was destroyed along with the rest of the library of its last known owner, Victor de Beauvillé, when his city of Montdidier suffered heavy damage during World War I.<sup>6</sup> Luckily, thanks to the nineteenth-century descriptions of the manuscript, we know the titles of the plays and the names of their authors, as well as the precise day of their staging.

These four plays were:

- a play by Jehan (Jean) Destrées performed on Christmas Eve in 1472, *Paon et Alithie* (a pastoral play with mythological characters representing Adam and Eve);<sup>7</sup>
- an ‘extraordinary play’ (‘*jeu extraordinaire*’, as described in the manuscript and as it will be called hereafter) written by Jehan Destrées and performed on Twelfth Night/Epiphany in 1473, with the following characters: ‘Va-Partout’ (The one who goes everywhere), ‘Ne-Te-Bouge’ (The one who does not move), ‘Tout-le-Monde’ (Everyman), ‘Bon Temps’ (Good Times), two unidentified Ladies and ‘le Gendarme du Roy’ (the Soldier of the King);
- a third play written by Jehan Destrées and performed at the banquet of the Puy on Candlemas in 1473: *Paradis terrestre* (Earthly Paradise), with the following allegorical characters: the Hour of Glory, Truth, Justice,

Terrestrial Appetite, Divine Hope, the Right Hand of God, and the Virgin (*l’Heure de gloire, la Vérité, la Justice, l’Appétit sensitif, le divin Espoir, la Dextre de Dieu et la Vierge*);

- a play written by Pierre du Buyon for the same occasion, also with allegorical characters: the Believer, Nature, Truth, Reason, Humanity, Piety and Love (*le Croyant, la Nature, la Vérité, la Raison, l’Humanité, la Piété et l’Amour*).<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, Beauvillé did not publish the text of the four plays. He did, however, reproduce the second play in its entirety (the *Jeu extraordinaire* of Destrées) among his transcriptions of medieval documents that he owned, while Louis-François Daire reproduced an excerpt of Destrées’ first play, *Paon et Alithie*, in a monograph about the literary history of Amiens.<sup>9</sup> We will not discuss the latter here, nor further investigate the possible meaning of the two plays whose text is completely lost. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that *Paon et Alithie*, with its metaphor of the story of Adam and Eve, was performed at Christmas, that is: at the commemoration of the redemption of human sin thanks to the birth of Christ, while two plays, the *Paradis terrestre* of Destrées and Du Buyon’s play, were performed during the banquet on the most important day of the year for the brotherhood. Given the names of the characters, and the presence of the Virgin as one of them, it is likely that these were morality plays and that they were intended as entertainment with a devotional pretext during the banquet of Candlemas.

I will, however, discuss the *Jeu extraordinaire*, which was apparently composed and performed for an occasion on which drama was not a fixed component, hence the description ‘extraordinary’ (referring to the exceptional status of the play compared to the usual customs of the Puy, rather than to an appreciation of the quality of the play).

#### *Other Dramatic Activities of the Members of the Puy of Amiens*

Before analysing the content of this play in the political context of the time, it is worth looking at other evidence that shows members of the Puy involved in theatrical activities. For a complete overview, a full list of all members of the Puy would need to be established and compared to a list

<sup>5</sup> The play under discussion ends with the following words which clearly show that Jean de Béry asked his author to write it for a dinner of the Puy: ‘C’est de par le maistre du Puy / Lequel pour le Bon Tampz trouver / A ce fait faire puis disner’ [this is thanks to the Master of the Puy / Who had this play written and a dinner organised / In order to find the Good Times] (*Jeu extraordinaire*, ll. 269–73).

<sup>6</sup> As stated by Labarre, *Le livre dans la vie amiénoise du seizième*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lavéant, *Théâtre et culture dramatique*, pp. 319–27.

<sup>8</sup> Information gleaned from the descriptions by Daire, *Histoire littéraire de la ville d’Amiens*, p. 51 and Jacob, *Bibliothèque dramatique de M. de Soleinne*, 1, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> De Beauvillé, *Recueil de documents inédits concernant la Picardie*, 1, pp. 149–54; Daire, *Histoire littéraire de la ville d’Amiens*, p. 51.

of actors and organizers of dramatic performances extracted from archival evidence (both extensive tasks which still need to be carried out). However, even the list naming only the Masters of the Puy, when compared with the names found in several studies of the archives of Amiens, already shows numerous links between the religious brotherhood and public performances in this city in the fifteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Here are a few significant examples:

- Guillaume Sauwalle/Sauvalle, Master of the Puy in 1440, takes part in some unidentified manner in plays performed in 1443 (for the Joyful Entry of the future Louis XI), 1451 (celebration of the victory of the King of France over the English in Guyenne and Bordelais) and 1456 (celebration of the defeat of the Ottoman army in Belgrade);
- Jacques Lefoulon (Master in 1465) is among the organizers of a Passion play staged in 1455;
- Jean le Senescal (Master in 1437) and Hue Houchart (Master in 1451) are in charge of organizing the performances for the entry of Charles the Bold in 1466.<sup>11</sup>

We do not know whether Jean Destrées, who composed the plays for Jean de Béry in 1472–1473, was a member of the Puy, since many poets took part in the contest without being actual members of the brotherhood. However, we know that he was involved in drama in Amiens, because he is also known to have been engaged in other performances as an actor. In addition to performances in religious dramas in 1483 (a mystery play with the title *Ten Thousands Martyrs*) and 1490 (in a mystery play with the title *Sainte Colombe*), we find him in a play performed in 1487 that celebrates a French victory over the troops of Maximilian of Habsburg near Béthune; this seems to be consistent with the political position he takes in the *Jeu extraordinaire*.<sup>12</sup> As we can see, most of the performances in which members of the Puy, and Destrées himself, were involved were linked to contemporary events. This underlines the importance of current events as a

<sup>10</sup> A list of the Masters of the Puy can be found in Gros, *Le poète, la Vierge et le Prince du Puy*, pp. 79–97; a large body of evidence for theatrical activities in the account books and in the deliberations of the aldermen of the city of Amiens is provided by Runnalls, 'La Passion d'Amiens en 1500', as well as in the older studies by Dubois, *Mystères joués à Amiens* and Lecocq, *Histoire du théâtre en Picardie*.

<sup>11</sup> Dubois, *Mystères joués à Amiens*, pp. 11–13, Lecocq, *Histoire du théâtre en Picardie*, pp. 44–45, Runnalls, 'La Passion d'Amiens en 1550', p. 260.

<sup>12</sup> See Runnalls, 'La Passion d'Amiens en 1550', p. 261, Dubois, *Mystères joués à Amiens*, p. 17.

source of inspiration for public performances at the time, and therefore has to be taken into account when analysing the political background and likely meaning of the *Jeu extraordinaire*.

#### *Summary of the Jeu extraordinaire (onderkast)*

The play begins with Va-Partout explaining that he is looking for Bon Temps. Ne-te-Bouge has not seen him, but suggests asking Tout-le-Monde, as he is supposed to have had Bon Temps in custody in the past. But Tout-le-Monde admits that Bon Temps has escaped and thinks that he is probably dead or very ill. Two Ladies then come on stage singing and saying that Bon Temps is with them, and he also appears and explains that he refuses to leave them, as he enjoys their company. The first three characters, helped by the Gendarme, try to take him by force, but the Ladies flee with him and swear to hide him. The play ends with the Gendarme swearing to find Bon Temps with his soldiers in order to bring him back to Amiens.

#### *Problems of Interpretation and Political Issues*

##### *A Double Language*

The primary meaning of the text lies in a comical play on the figure of the Three Magi (here, the peasant characters of Va-Partout, Ne-te-Bouge and Tout-le-Monde) looking for Jesus (Bon Temps), since the performance takes place during the Epiphany festivities. However, we also find discreet allusions to the political situation that show that Destrées (and, we assume, his backer, Jean de Béry) takes the French side against Burgundy. For instance, Bon Temps is said to have left Burgundy more than four years ago, that is to say, when Louis XI had to give the cities of the Somme back to Charles the Bold in 1468. Indeed, Va-Partout exclaims:

Vorment en Bourgogne ay je esté	In vain I went to Burgundy
Mais il y a plus de quatre ans	But they lost Bon Temps
Brief qu'ilz ont perdu le Bon	More than four years ago (ll. 58–60)
Temps	

Since then, the inhabitants of Flanders have been suffering from various diseases caused by the consumption of fermented milk and beer, because they have no wine (apparently an opposition of drinks symbolizing respectively the Northern regions and France):

Le plus grant bourgeois n'est emflé	The richest bourgeois is only
Que de bière ou de chitolet,	Full of beer or of a spicy drink [?]
Et ces Flamens boivent leur let	And these Flemish drink fermented
Burré, ou le hambours toullié	Milk, or contaminated beer
Dont le ventre ont plus enbroullié	That gives them more stomach ache
Qu'on n'avoist de bon moust	Than a good fermenting grape juice
nouvel	
Plus de cent mille le tourtel	More than a hundred thousand
	suffer
En ont et le mal saint Quentin	From fevers and from dropsy
Par deffaulte de ung trait de vin	For lack of a drink of wine (ll. 64–72)

We may infer from these references to drinking that Destrées is underlining the fact that Flanders suffers just as much as Picardy because the constant war prevents the circulation of goods such as wine, certainly an important issue for members of the Puy who were often merchants and had direct interests in the conclusion of a peace.

In this play, the traditional character of Bon Temps is therefore used to highlight the difference between the good days of French Picardy and the present situation of the whole region under the rule of the Duke of Burgundy (even if Amiens is currently French at the time of Destrées writing his play).<sup>13</sup> This reading may allow us to interpret the characters of the two ladies who keep Bon Temps for themselves as representing Margaret of York, the third wife of Charles the Bold, and Mary of Burgundy, his daughter. The comical scene in which the Ladies fight with the other characters to keep Bon Temps would then contain criticism of the good life at the Duke's court and the Ladies' selfish attitude, while the people suffer from the protracted war with France and its disastrous economic consequences. It is striking, then, that at the end of the play the solution seems to come from the Gendarme, who, as a soldier of the King of France, will be able to bring Bon Temps (and peace) back, thus clearly showing which side Destrées favours.

#### *A Problematic Political Discourse?*

Destrées' 'extraordinary play' and its performance at a dinner of the Puy raise several questions, one being the problem of the conditions of its

<sup>13</sup> For an introduction to this character of Bon Temps in various medieval plays, see Roch, 'Le roi, le peuple et l'âge d'or'.

staging, given its content. We have to note that this play was not performed in the public arena, for instance in the market square (a traditional setting for public performances), but in the less public space of the Puy, in front of a select audience consisting of the members of the brotherhood. I prefer not to use the term 'private space' to refer to the Puy, since, as Dylan Reid has shown, a brotherhood such as the Puy strives to 'enhance [the city's] identity and pride'.<sup>14</sup> Although Reid primarily makes this comment about the Rouen situation, we can extend this analysis to other Puys, and highlight the fact that their members too intended to play a significant role in the cultural space of their city. We should therefore use a clearer distinction – that between the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders' of the Puy, and infer that the politically laden message of the play was made possible thanks to the use of allegorical characters. Moreover, inside the Puy, it would be heard by a select audience who would be able to appreciate it and maybe also be discreet about it should the Duke of Burgundy eventually regain the city. Still, it is surprising to see that the Master of the Puy allowed a political play to be performed during a religious gathering. Apparently, some elements of the poetic or dramatic discourse of the Puy were on occasion allowed to centre on earthly debates in addition to the purely devotional discourse of the brotherhood.

Furthermore, we have to take into account the fact that the members of the Puy also belonged to the local bourgeois elite. The list of the Masters shows a number of magistrates (we find a lot of solicitors), craftsmen and bourgeois who also became aldermen (for instance, Jean Le Senescal and Hue Houchart were aldermen in 1466, after having been Master of the Puy years earlier).<sup>15</sup> Because the members of the Puy were also involved in the circles of municipal power, this performance invited these men to think about their position in the conflict between France and Burgundy and prompted them to take sides when they would have to make decisions regarding the city of Amiens as a whole. This underlines the exceptional message of the play.

To understand the specific tone of the *Jeu extraordinaire*, we can compare it with a play by Michault Taillevent, the *Moralité de Povre Commun*, performed at Arras in September 1435 during the negotiations to establish a peace treaty between France, England and Burgundy.<sup>16</sup> Both plays

<sup>14</sup> Reid, 'Patrons of Poetry', p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> As confirmed by Gros, *Le poète, la Vierge et le Prince du Puy*, pp. 50–51. See also the conclusions about the social level and role of the members of the Puy of Rouen by Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, pp. 332–42 and by Reid, 'Patrons of Poetry', pp. 43–46.

<sup>16</sup> The play has been edited by Watkins, 'A Fifteenth-century Morality Play'.

highlight the problems and suffering encountered by the people of the region when the French and Burgundian armies fought against each other, and we can establish a parallel between the lament of *Povre Commun*, representing the People, and *Tout-le-Monde* in *Destrées*' play. However, *Povre Commun* was performed in front of the ambassadors and the Court of Burgundy, and the text was written by a playwright working for the Duke of Burgundy.<sup>17</sup> The laments of *Povre Commun* are pathetic but well-mannered and they ultimately constitute an appeal to the power of the Pope and to the Delegate of the Council of Basel to find a peaceful solution between the fighting parties. On the other hand, the *Jeu extraordinaire* has a more comic but also more practical tone. Whereas in several stanzas *Povre Commun* evokes the unfortunate situation of the region with its burnt-down cities and fields and its ailing inhabitants (thus using traditional images of war), the characters of the *Jeu extraordinaire* focus instead on the consequences of war, mainly the problems of supply that compel the inhabitants of Burgundy to eat and drink bad products that make them sick (as said earlier, many members of the Puy were merchants), with rather graphic representations of these ailments.

In both plays, the People are necessarily helpless and have to put their fate in the hands of more powerful figures who swear to improve their condition. *Povre Commun* puts his faith in the representatives of the Church whereas *Va-Partout*, *Ne-te-Bouge* and *Tout-le-Monde* in the end ask for help from the French Soldier. However, they are presented as more active than *Povre Commun* or other figures of the People in many plays, as they have a heated argument with the two Ladies and even try to use force to take *Bon Temps* back from them. As mentioned earlier, it is very likely that these two ladies represent the wife and the daughter of the Duke of Burgundy, or at least the Court of Burgundy in its entirety. The tone of the *Jeu extraordinaire* may therefore sound quite disrespectful. I am convinced that, in this respect, the play is interesting because it is much closer to the opinion of the people of Amiens than *Povre Commun*, a play written by a man who lived at the Court. Furthermore, the *Jeu extraordinaire* could have adopted this particular tone because the play was performed during a dinner of the Puy and not in the market square. Still, we can infer that the play also conveys common views among the members of the Puy and the elite of Amiens, as it seems doubtful that Jean de Béry, the Master of

<sup>17</sup> Michault Taillevent occupied the position of 'valet de chambre' and 'joueur de farce' of the Duke. See Watkins, 'A Fifteenth-century Morality Play' and Watkins, 'Michault Taillevent. A "Mise au Point".'

the Puy, would allow it to be performed during a banquet of the brotherhood, an occasion of harmonious gathering for its members, if he knew that it would provoke heated political discussions. The play thus completes and alters the vision we usually have of a drama performed in the towns of the region, as it gives us another perspective on the opinions of the leading people of a city when a play is performed within a smaller circle instead of being staged in an open space.

#### *Local Identity and Public Discourse*

Still, even within this context of restricted performance, the play does not necessarily suggest a discrepancy between the ideas of the elite of Amiens and the opinion of the people of the city. In my view, this play rather expresses a chasm between the local people (elite and mass alike) and the Court of Burgundy, and this is certainly another peculiarity of this text. Later, in the sixteenth century, drama in the French-speaking Southern Netherlands expresses the concerns of the cities regarding the religious problems linked with the Reformation, in plays and performances that sometimes also voice political criticism.<sup>18</sup> However, in the fifteenth century, public drama was usually devoid of such criticism, and when troubles occurred, as they did, for instance, during the Joyful Entry of Charles the Bold in Gent in 1467, drama was neither a catalyst nor an expression of such tensions.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the latter event took place in the Dutch-speaking Southern Netherlands, whereas we do not find examples of such unfortunate entries in the French-speaking cities. On very few occasions, groups of actors were the target of the Duke when he wanted to express his discontent with regard to a city and exercise pressure on the aldermen, but they were not the cause of the conflict.<sup>20</sup> During public performances, all the more during Joyful Entries, a non-problematic, consensus-oriented vision of the relations between the city and the Duke (or the King of France) was traditionally presented. The city staged itself, but in a

<sup>18</sup> I explored these questions in two articles: Lavéant, 'Le théâtre et la Réforme dans le nord de la France', and 'Le théâtre du Nord et la Réforme'.

<sup>19</sup> There are many book chapters and articles about this event. For a recent analysis of this problematic entry in a larger study of the political meaning of royal entries in the region in the fifteenth century, see Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des cérémonies*.

<sup>20</sup> I discussed such a case in my PhD thesis, Lavéant, *Théâtre et culture dramatique dans les villes des Pays-Bas méridionaux*, pp. 183–84.

subdued way, expressing admiration for the prince or petitioning for specific requests, but never staging potentially conflictual situations.

The *Jeu extraordinaire* is therefore a precious document, as it shows a little known and more polemical side of the urban population's local debates and discontents, which usually do not come to the surface, or, if they do, are presented in a very subdued form, for instance during Joyful Entries. Moreover, the 'extraordinary play' does so by employing unusual characters who differ from the usual embodiment of the city by a young girl during Entries.<sup>21</sup> Here, the characters who represent Amiens looking for peace are three popular figures, comedic and simple but likeable. One in particular, Tout-le-Monde ('Everyman'), seems to have become a legendary local figure. In the play, he is identified as 'le Vacher de Chauny' (the Cowherd of Chauny, a small town near Amiens). This character also plays a part in a pseudo-historical anecdote in which he encounters Henry IV in 1594, and still lives on as a folkloric figure in the area.<sup>22</sup> It is impossible to determine whether Destrées' play started this tradition or if Destrées was inspired by a character who already existed in oral culture, but in both cases, it is striking that the opposition to the Court and the Ladies is represented by a witty, unsophisticated peasant rather than by an urban merchant or lawyer who would be more typical of the average member of the Puy.

The use of this peasant character from another part of Picardy to represent Everyman in a play presented to city-dwellers in Amiens remains a bit puzzling. We have to infer that there is a hidden hint, maybe a local joke that we do not understand anymore, but it is doubtful that, in this case, the peasant is laughed at. On the contrary, Chauny was known to be a city with a great tradition of jugglers and tumblers. One century later, Rabelais still portrays Gargantua enjoying the spectacle of performers from Chauny, because they are known to be smooth-talkers.<sup>23</sup> Here it is worth noting that Tout-le-Monde is broken and cannot walk straight anymore, which may be a reference to the pitiful state of the region but probably also a comic allusion to Chauny's reputation for producing agile tumblers. But it remains certain that there is no mockery of Tout-le-Monde. As the Cowherd of Chauny, he belongs to folklore where he appears as a rather

<sup>21</sup> About the traditional figures and motives used in joyful entries, see C. de Mérimodol, 'Théâtre et politique à la fin du Moyen Âge'.

<sup>22</sup> Fleury, *Origines et développements de l'art théâtral dans la province ecclésiastique de Reims*, pp. 244–50.

<sup>23</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Huchon and Moreau, p. 72 (chapter 'Comment Gargantua employait son temps quand il pleuvait').

witty character, and the other characters in the play describe him with admiration, until they see how much he too suffers from the lack of Bon Temps. I tend to think Jean Destrées chose to use him as a symbol of the local people who were smart enough to catch Bon Temps in the past, even if they have to rely on the Soldier of the King at the present time, as he is the only one able to confront the army of the Duke of Burgundy and bring back peace. This way, too, the play is clearly linked to a local context that offers an interesting mirror to the usual local themes displayed during official occasions such as Joyful Entries. Therefore, it seems that we can interpret this play as a way for the local elite of Amiens to express its political preferences through popular characters and in a simple dramatic form that could be well understood by a larger, non-elite audience.

The fact that the play was not performed in a public space may then be attributed to the circumstances for which it was composed – a gathering of the Puy – rather than to a social barrier or a political disagreement between the members of the Puy and the rest of the people of Amiens. This reading of the play as the expression of a broadly shared opinion in Amiens tends to be corroborated by historical studies. It seems that there was a general agreement in the region that the city should go back to France rather than stay in the Burgundian sphere.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

It would be gratuitous to draw general conclusions from only one example of the importance and the political role of drama in Amiens at the end of the fifteenth century. However, I hope to have shed light on the complexity of one particular play. Although performed during a 'neutral' Epiphany dinner of a religious brotherhood, it reveals to some extent a political message. Although performed within a restricted circle and for a specific public, it certainly reflects the general state of mind of the inhabitants of Amiens. Although primarily intended for an educated audience, it uses characters that unite all social categories of Amiens and bring together city and countryside against the Court.

We have to take into account that the play was most certainly performed only once and that its text was confined to one manuscript: it was not written down to be disseminated, but rather to be kept in the personal

<sup>24</sup> On this developing preference of the inhabitants of Amiens for France over Burgundy, see Desportes, 'Une bonne ville dans la tourmente'.

archives of the person who sponsored it. Its audience was therefore limited and its reach short-lived. Rather than as a powerful political weapon in the hands of the Puy, it has to be seen as entertainment composed for a specific occasion that mixed criticism of the Burgundian power with a reflection on the traditional theme 'where have the good days gone?' in the difficult context of years of instability in the region. The play is a reflection of public opinion, and as such an excellent tool for analysing it, rather than an instrument in the formation of public opinion itself.

Even as such, it is a rare example of political expression in a region in which drama is not usually used for such a purpose in public spaces during the fifteenth century. With this play, we are presented with opinions that differ from the usual, non-problematic petitions and expressions of local identity that were presented during official public performances. In a city which had just moved from one geopolitical area into another, such a play is a useful way of providing another perspective on the political debates among its inhabitants, provided that we place this play and its performance in their specific context and that we look beyond the surface of the allegorical discourse.

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