

# SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION IN LATE MEDIEVAL TOWNS



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LE ROI ET SON DOUBLE:  
A ROYAL ENTRY TO LATE-MEDIEVAL ABBEVILLE<sup>1</sup>

Although numerous mentions of royal entries in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in northern France have been preserved, as well as many descriptions of these events, very few texts of the plays performed during these entries remain. This is a problem when we want to study symbolic communication in this context, since we can usually rely only on the descriptions of the settings, of the subject of the plays, and of the reaction of the spectators if recorded, but not on the content of the texts. In many cases, we have therefore only external elements to understand what symbolic communication was about and how it worked in a royal entry. Moreover, the descriptions are reported in most cases by a chronicler of the sovereign or a citizen of the welcoming city, and these observers are by definition never neutral. The bias of the observer prevents a full view of the event in all its aspects.

The transcription made by Alcius Ledieu at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of a short play from 1531 is therefore very precious in order to know what kind of play could be performed during a royal entry. This text is a short dialogue, called *La Declaration des misteres faiciz à l'entrée de la tres noble et excellente dame et Roynne de France madame Aÿenor*.<sup>2</sup> It was performed to welcome in Abbeville on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 1531 Eleanor of Habsburg, who was newly wed to Francis I. The whole account of the ceremony, including the text of the *Declaration*, was kept in the city's register of deliberations and the accounting books for the year 1531. The copy Ledieu made from these documents is our only witness of what was the text, since the original manuscripts were destroyed during World War II.

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Jelle Koopmans, whose valuable advices on the form as well as on the content of this article were of a great help. I also want to thank Estelle Douder for the useful informations about George Chastelein she kindly gave me, as well as Suzanne Aalberse for her linguistic advices. I translated some french excerpts in english: those coming from archives, chronicles or poems of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. I did not translate the quotation from modern scholars nor the play edited at the end of this article.

2. Alcius Ledieu, ed., 'Entrée de la reine Éléonore d'Autriche à Abbeville le 19 décembre 1531', *Mélanges d'histoire locale, lectures faites à la société d'émulation d'Abbeville de 1895 à 1900* (Paris, 1901), pp. 367-413. From now on, I will call it the *Declaration*.

This *Declaration* is therefore of a great importance in regard with the history of theatre in northern France, given the shortage of original playing texts, and it is worth looking at the reasons why this particular one was kept. Moreover, this text allows us to take another angle to study symbolic communication in royal entries in general, and particularly in this royal entry of Eleanor, for it sets up a complex strategy of communication on and from the stage toward the different categories of audience. I will therefore reproduce Ledieu's edition (this edition being difficult to find), since it does not seem to present any incoherence, from what we can judge (see appendix). I will analyze its content as well as the historical context in which it was played, to see what communication is and how it works in this particular instance. In order to judge of the peculiarity of this specific text, I will also compare it with other plays of the time dealing with the same striking point, that is to say, the way the king is staged and addressed in the play. This will allow us to understand better the aims of this play in regard to the relationship built during this entry between the queen, the king and the city of Abbeville, through symbolic communication.

Eleanor had just got married to Francis I when she came to Abbeville, since the wedding took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1530. Thanks to Ledieu's article, we have in hand some excerpts from the aldermen's register of deliberation and the accounts for the year 1531. The queen enters the city on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 1531 without the king, who is to arrive the next day, but with the sons and daughters of Francis I, several important people of the kingdom, and her suite. Since she has never entered the city before, the ceremony is supposed to be especially in her honour, whereas the king, who has already entered the city officially in 1517, will be welcomed in a simpler way. For instance, he will not receive any present, which is also the case for his daughters, but Eleanor receives a precious candy-box. The register of deliberation states, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1531, that:

'Deliberé a esté qu'il ne sera faict aulcun present au Roy, considéré qu'il n'y a que la royne quy fache entrée, ny aussy pareillement aux deux filles dudict seigneur.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus, since the traditions of the royal entry do not allow the city to prepare a special ceremony for the king, the entry of the queen becomes the major event of this royal visit and the city concentrates on this ceremony to display the most sumptuous pageantry. On this day, Eleanor enters the

3. 'It has been decided that the king will not receive any present, since it is only the queen who enters [officially] the city, nor will the daughters of the aforesaid lord'. *Registre aux délibérations de l'Échevinage*, ed. A. Ledieu, *op. cit.*, p. 382.

city under a canopy carried by several aldermen, with the sound of canons brought at the entrance of the city for the occasion. At the gate stands a stage where the *Declaration* is played for her. Then she goes through the city where five other stages are placed, and where she can attend short plays on her way to her accommodation.

Our *Declaration* is an allegorical dialogue of 262 lines, in which the city claims her allegiance to the king and therefore the queen, as well as a presentation and an explanation of the five short plays Eleanor is going to attend. Two characters: the 'Seigneur Souverain' and the 'Dame Souveraine', appear on stage, debating on the difference between a good and a bad marriage inspired by the story of Pyramus and Thisbe (obviously referring to the recent wedding of Eleanor). They arrive then in front of the third character, a gentle young girl named Abbeville, and ask her to explain the meaning of the tableaux that are displayed further. Abbeville greets the royal couple and explains what are these tableaux. These are, we can assume from the text and the registers, some tableaux vivants, that is to say silent illustrations with real actors. Indeed, the city feels the need to provide to the queen a play that will explain the meaning of the tableaux, which would not be necessary if the characters on the different stages were able to deliver a speech about the symbolic meaning of the scene they are placed in. Moreover, the excerpts of the accounts edited by Ledieu speak of 'cinq escharfaulx sur lesquelz ont esté *demonstrez* aucuns *hystoires* et *joyeux misteres*' and of the 'mistere prins sur ledict psalme de "Dominus regit" pour *monstrez* par personnages sur les cinq escharfaulx mentionnez cy devant'.<sup>4</sup> These terms: 'monstres' and 'demonstres', are usually those used in the manuscripts to describe a play performed without speaking, only with gestures ('par signes'); this is confirmed for instance in the description of a 'mystere mimé' for the entry of Charles VII to Paris in 1437: 'Item devant la Trinité estoit la Passion [...] Et ne parloient riens ceux qui ce faisoient, mais le monstroient par jeu de mistere'.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of the *Declaration* that is performed at the gates of the city is thus to reveal the meaning of the following scaffolds placed in several streets of the city. Each of the five tableaux illustrates a part of Psalm 22,

4. "five scaffolds on which have been demonstrated some stories and joyful mystery plays" and "a mystery play inspired from the aforesaid psalm 'Dominus regit' in order to show [the plays] with characters on the five aforesaid scaffolds": A. Ledieu, *op. cit.*, p. 394 and 405 (the italics are mine).

5. 'Before the [Hospital of the] Trinity there was the Passion [...] And nothing was spoken by those who portrayed this, but all was shown through playacting'. Cited and translated by Donald Pernel, 'The Meaning of the Mystery: From Tableau to Theatre in the French Royal Entry'. *Moving Subjects. Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2001), p. 203.

which gives its structure to the *Declaration*.<sup>6</sup> The first tableau depicts Abbeville and the region of the Somme as a *locus amoenus* under the rule of the king, since the *Dominus* who *regit me* (line 110) is in fact the king, 'le tres crestien Roy François' [*the very christian king François*] (l. 113); the second tableau evokes war and how the king guided the city (*deduxit me* l. 142) to a peaceful state; the third tableau repeats the faith of the city in the king's guidance, symbolized by the *virga tuas, et baculus* (l. 176); the fourth tableau deals with the sacraments given through coronation and marriage (*impignasit* l. 215); the fifth tableau (the only one not quoting directly the Latin text) discusses grace and mercy ('Je doitz faire misericorde' [*I have to show mercy*] l. 246). In these five tableaux where the king is put on a par with the subject of the Psalm, God himself, four major points are expressed. Firstly Abbeville reasserts her loyalty to the king (first and third scaffolds), secondly the city praises his good caretaking of the kingdom (second scaffold), thirdly Abbeville claims the legitimacy of the king, anointed in Reims by the saint phial and thereby the legitimacy of the new queen through marriage (fourth scaffold), and finally the city asks the queen – who is invested with the power of the king – to be merciful and to free the prisoners of the jail of Abbeville (fifth scaffold).

The use of Biblical references and of an exegesis of the Psalm according to the political context of the royal entry is one of the basic elements for the plays performed in such an event<sup>7</sup> and is therefore not the most striking element of this text. More interesting is the way the play presents itself as a mirror of the real entry and the system of symbolic communication it thus establishes with the different types of spectators.

The scheme of communication is quite complex. One complicating factor is the fact that one character can suggest several referents. The character of Abbeville in particular suggests three different groups of ref-

6. *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, Ps. XXXII:

22.1. Psalmus David/Dominus regit me et nihil mihi deerit

22.2. in loco pascuae ibi me contocavit/super aquam refectiois educavit me

22.3. animam meam convertit/deduxit me super semitas iustitiae propter nomen suum

22.4. nam et si ambulavero in medio umbræ mortis non timebo mala quoniam tu mecum es/virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt

22.5. parasit in conspectu meo mensam adversus eos qui tribulant me/impignasit in oleo caput meum et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est

22.6. et misericordia tua subsequitur me omnibus diebus vitae meae et ut inhabitem in domo Domini in longitudinem dierum.

7. See the typology of the themes exploited in the entries established by Christian de Méridol, 'Théâtre et politique à la fin du Moyen Âge. Les entrées royales et autres cérémonies: mises au point et nouveaux aperçus', *Théâtre et spectacle hier et aujourd'hui, Moyen Âge et Renaissance. Actes du 115e congrès national des sociétés savantes* (Paris, 1991), p. 187.

erents: the whole city as a community of inhabitants, but also more specifically the mayor and aldermen who organized the entry, and lastly the actors, artists and craftsmen who put this entry into images and words. Of course, we have to assume that this character represents these three types of referents at the same time, but in each case the message conveyed is slightly different, as will be seen later. Likewise, the public is not a whole: according to the goal of the ceremony, the first receiver is Eleanor, and her suite, including the children of Francis I, hence the heirs to the throne. But the message is also implicitly addressed to the king, although he is not present, since he will most certainly be told by his wife and his suite what the plays performed at Eleanor's entry were. On the other hand, the message is also, although not directly, addressed to the citizens and inhabitants of Abbeville, since they are also present. To summarize, the message conveyed contains explicitly two types of subjects: first to Eleanor and through her, to the king, a praise of the royal couple and the allegiance to the king and hence to his new wife (addressed by Abbeville as a community of citizens and inhabitants) (l. 26-40 and 67-87), and also an appeal to free the prisoners, addressed rather by the officials of the city (l. 229-255); then, to the whole audience (addressed by the aldermen and the actors and artists), the explanation of the meaning of the next plays, although this explanation seems to be fully addressed to the royal couple and their suite (l. 90-94). However, this message may also contain implicitly other subjects, for instance if we consider that the aldermen invite the whole audience to enjoy themselves and to take pleasure in these plays. There might perhaps also be a message addressed to the citizens of Abbeville by the aldermen to render thus account of how they use the public finances to please the king and queen and how they serve the city by giving it a good reputation.

Thus, we see that the scheme of communication becomes more complex according to the way we interpret the speech of the characters on stage. The fact that the way chosen to convey this message is a dialogue staging allegories that are also real members of the audience makes it even more complicated. Indeed, there is a striking distancing effect since the character addresses the other characters and at the same time the person it represents and who is present in the audience. Thus, we can infer that the character of Abbeville addresses the king and the queen on stage, but also the queen in the audience, when she claims her loyalty, gives the explanation of the mystery plays, and asks Eleanor to free the prisoners. From a theatrical point of view, it is unclear how the characters are placed on stage: must we assume that the character turns towards the queen on the stage or

towards the queen in the audience? To imagine the ways of staging such a play also reveals another level of communication, expressed through the exchanges of glances. Indeed, if the queen and her suite look mainly at the stages and decorations of the city, one can imagine that the inhabitants of Abbeville look as though at her as at the spectacle. George Chastelain describes this phenomenon in his *Chronique* when the Duke of Burgundy enters Paris in August 1471 to make sure everything is ready to welcome Louis XI. People of Paris, 'entre les mystères préparés de longue main, tendirent toutes les rues de riches draps, de tapisseries et d'autres jolivetés moult belles'.<sup>8</sup> However, when the Duke enters the city, he and his suite are so richly dressed that the attention of the people is drifted away from the decorations and the stages in his direction: when the Duke passes by,

là où de peuple avoit tant haut et bas, et des dames aux fenestres que le nombre en fut inestimable, [...] s'esblouissoient les yeux des dames et des regardans sur les richesses et beauté de ceste compaignie. Et tant furent esmerveillés et esprits de joye, que à peine les bouches ne leur souffroient à vuytier par paroles ce que les yeux leur faisoient comprendre superflues et d'admiration dignes.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the words used to describe the reaction of the audience are exactly the same as those that would be used in case of a very striking dramatic performance. The sovereign and his or her suite become a spectacle for the people of the city, as interesting and magnificent as the spectacles prepared for them. Thus, just as the characters on stage can turn both towards each other and towards the public, the public of the city probably turns towards both the stage and the queen.

The three messages conveyed by the play, namely to express the loyalty of Abbeville towards the king, to explain the meaning of the short plays, and to ask the queen to free the prisoners, are also not as plain as it seems. Indeed, although the messages seem to be addressed to the queen, we realise that, eventually, they are addressed to the king, who is the real target. The message addressed to the queen is overtaken by the message addressed to a king who is not even present at that moment. Rather than to contemplate the possibility of a failure of symbolic communication – that would miss its real aim –, we should consider that the whole audience here: the queen, her suite, the aldermen and the rest of the population, know that they are them-

8. 'between the plays prepared long beforehand, [the people of Paris] stretched in every street rich draperies, tapestries and other very nice things': Kervyn de Lettenhove, ed., *Chroniques de Georges Chastelain*, 8 vols. (Brussels, 1853-60), 4: 76.

9. 'where there were so many people above and below, and so many ladies at the windows that one could not count them, [...] the eyes of the ladies and of the other people were dazzled by the richness and the beauty of this company. And they were so amazed and delighted that their mouth was not able to express in superfluous words what their eyes revealed as deserving their admiration': Kervyn de Lettenhove, ed., *op. cit.*, 4: 77.

selves a medium to convey a part of the message to the king. Therefore, this diverted message is not confusing: the queen is certainly aware of the fact that her entry is also a good occasion for the people of Abbeville to sumptuously celebrate the entry of Francis I, although they are not supposed to do so, since the king has already entered officially the city. Then, it is quite normal that only a part of the play concerns her directly, and we can expect here that the audience perceives well the first degree of symbolic communication, that is to say the welcoming ceremony in honour of the queen, as well as its second degree, that is to say the symbolic welcoming of the king. In fact, the play builds up an ideal mirror or double of the event: it is a summary of the ideal course of the entry (if the king was taking part in it and enjoying it, and if the queen agreed to free the prisoners), and this mirror rests on the content of the dialogue as well as on the presence on stage of characters that are the doubles of the king and queen.

However, this way of conveying the request of the city to free the prisoners to the queen and implicitly to the king may seem unusual. Indeed, the aldermen decide here to represent the city itself and the royal couple on stage, and to put into the mouth of the characters the questions and answers, in short to let them dictate what the queen should reply to their request. Is there any danger in the idea of staging the royal couple in front of the eyes of the queen and the eyes of their relatives, who can inform the king precisely on the content of the play?

Staging the person of the king is common in royal entries, especially at the time of Francis I. It was customary then to put on stage a character representing the city as well as a character that represents the king surrounded by the royal symbols and attributes.<sup>10</sup> However, if it was not unusual for the allegory of the city to deliver a fairly long speech to the character of the king on stage or to the real king in the audience, it seems that the character of the king utters very seldom a long speech, except to praise the city in a very conventional way. For the entry of Charles VIII in Abbeville in 1493, a dialogue between Le Chef Souverain, Abbeville and Bon Désir had already been played. However, if we consult the text of the play, whose content we know thanks to the edition Alcius Ledieu made of the otherwise destroyed archives,<sup>11</sup> it was indeed such a predictable play where the city greets the king and the king praises the city in return. As Christian de Mérimod outlines, this play also presents the request of freeing the prisoners:

10. Anne-Marie Lecoq, *François I<sup>er</sup> imaginaire* (Paris, 1987), pp. 369-375, and Christian de Mérimod, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-185.

11. See Christian de Mérimod, *op. cit.* and Alcius Ledieu, 'Première entrée de Charles VIII à Abbeville', *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques* (1888), pp. 55-65.

'Dans le programme des entrées, des demandes précises sont parfois illustrées. Ainsi, à Abbeville, en 1493, la délivrance des prisonniers, le don de la vue aux aveugles et la protection sont illustrés par une multitude de prisonniers voyants ou aveugles au pied de la Vierge'.<sup>12</sup>

The register describing the entry edited by Ledieu, evokes this scaffold:

'Pour le quart hourt, avoit une puchelle richement atournée, laquelle, tenant en une de ses mains une paire de clefz richement faites, à l'autre main un g flambeau de vierge cire ardan; au dessoubz de laquelle Vierge estoit une multitude de prisonniers, les ungz véans et les autres aveuglez. Et estoit le tableau de ce hourt escript en l'esie: *Solve vincula reis*, et, au dessoubz, en franchois:

Aux prisonniers desle leurs loyens;

Aux aveuglez restitue lumière;

Garde le Roy de tous maux terriens;

Requiers qu'il ayl par toy grace plainiere'.<sup>13</sup>

In the play explaining the meaning of the different 'tableaux vivants', Bon Désir indeed asks the king to free the prisoners:

'Comme, par humblement requerre,

La Vierge, clémente et pieuse,

Prisonniers deslie et desserre,

De charre obscure et ténébreuse,

Le Chief poeult hoster ses suppos,

Ei, par la belle paix eureuse,

Donner lumière de reppos.<sup>14</sup>

However, this request is presented in a different way than in the *Declaration*: this is a real question asked to the king through Bon Désir, whereas in our play, Abbeville says the words she would like the queen to repeat, and we can see that the Dame Souveraine already agrees on stage to free the prisoners, as a logical consequence of the fulfilment of Psalm 22's end:

'Jesus me doit perseverance

D'avoir misericorde au coeur,

Et la preferer à rigueur

De justice en lieu et temps'. (I. 252-255)

12. Christian de Méridol, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

13. 'for the fourth scaffold, there was a very richly adorned young girl who held in one hand a pair of richly made keys, and in the other hand a glowing torch made of virgin wax; under the aforesaid Virgin were a lot of prisoners, some who could see and some blind. And on the sign of this scaffold was written "Solve vincula reis" and under it, in French: *Untie on the chains of the prisoners, / Give back light to the blinds, / Keep the King away from all earthly diseases, / Ask for him the entire grace*'. Aelcius Ledieu, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

14. 'As, when asked humbly, / The Virgin, forgiving and merciful, / Unties and frees the prisoners, / From a dark and murky gaol / The Chief can take his subjects / And, with beautiful and joyful peace, / Give them the light of rest': *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

The request of 1531 appears bolder than the request of 1493, since it already expects that the queen will reply in a positive way to it, by inducting through the whole play and the use of the Psalm an internal logic that leads only to a positive answer to the question.

As for this special request of freeing the prisoners, we have another instance of a play dealing with the same topic. It is a text published in the *Recueil de Poésies françoises des XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles* by Rothschild and Montaiglon, which stages the prisoners of the Châtelet, in Paris, for the entry of Eleanor in the city in 1530.<sup>15</sup> Like our *Declaration*, it stages the request of freeing the prisoners, taking up the structure of the *Venite* of Psalm 94 and the comparison of the queen with the Virgin Mary ('*Venite*, l'estoille marine', l. 73). However, this text, although presented on a scene during the royal entry, is a poem presenting a petition and not a dialogue pregnant with real dramatic tension. Moreover, it asks the favour without postulating that it will be granted, and the royal couple does not appear on stage. There is a strict separation of roles, between those who ask humbly a favour, and the king and queen who listen to them but do not give any reply yet, this time coming later, but not during the entry.

I would like now to study briefly few other interesting instances from more or less the same period where the figure of a king is represented on stage in an unexpected situation, in order to see if we can find a compa-

15. Anatole de Montaiglon and James de Rothschild, *Recueil de Poésies françoises des XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, 13 vols. (Paris, 1876), 11: 253-276.

This poem, made of 20 stanzas, is called *Le Venite des Prisonniers du Chastelet de Paris sur la très-desirée entrée de la Roynne de France*, and combine christian references to the Bible, particularly Psalm 94, *Venite Exultemus*, on which lies the structure of the poem, with greek and latin mythology. Here is the second stanza which exposes the request of the prisoners:

*Venite*, l'Aigle Impérialle,

La très noble espouse royalle,

*Venite*, las ne tardez plus;

*Venite*, faconde nymphalle,

De paix l'auatrice très loyalle

Et des Roynes la par dessus.

*Venite*, ne faictes refus

Des povres prisonniers confuz,

De toute liberté bannys;

Nous avons mys nostre espoir sus

Que à vostre entrée, sans nul abuz,

De prison serons esclargis.

[*Venite*, imperial eagle, / Very noble royal spouse, / *Venite*, alas do not wait, / *Venite*, eloquent nymph, / The very loyal creator of peace / And among queens the one who is above. / *Venite*, do not refuse / The poor and ashamed prisoners, / Banned from all freedom, / We have put our hope above / That at your entry, without abuse / From our prison we will be freed.]

For the entry of Eleanor in Paris and other parisian entries, see Lawrence M. Bryant, *The King and the City in the Parisian Royal Entry Ceremony: Politics, Ritual and Art in the Renaissance* (Genève, 1986).

table type of situation, where the author of a play steps aside from the traditional way of representing the king and his speech on stage, to venture on to a more personal discourse. Jelle Koopmans pointed out to me the case of a play in Paris, in 1500, where Louis XII is represented as being ill, pale, his head wrapped with bandages and his feet in slippers.<sup>16</sup> We do not know the context in which this play may have been played, but it may certainly have been an instance of the staging of the king in an unconventional and non-traditional situation where the author puts his own words in the king's mouth, rather than restricting himself to the official line recommended if one represents a prince on stage. However, it is very likely that the author of this play had a satirical intention in mind, and that this play was staged unofficially or even secretly, to avoid the ire of the king, whereas the *Declaration* was stage for a highly official occasion, and not at all in a satirical intention.

One can also think of the *Paix de Péronne*, by George Chastelain,<sup>17</sup> where Louis XI and Charles the Bold have a long dialogue about the peace they just concluded, a play that is likely to have been represented in front of the two monarchs. It could indeed be an example of a problematic staging of Princes, since, as Estelle Doudet underlines in her *thèse de doctorat*, the characters reflect in their dialogue, in veiled words, the point of view of Chastelain, who thinks this peace is not going to last:

'En rédigeant cette pièce de louange pour une paix récente, Chastelain, lucide observateur de son temps, sait que les deux adversaires d'hier, le roi de France et le duc de Bourgogne, ne signent qu'un accord mensonger. [...] Les personnalités de la *paix de Péronne*, se vidant elles-mêmes de leur sens, sont des indices du piège. Le dialogue devient tautologie, le hiératisme allégorique se fige dans un faux débat. L'interprétation des paroles échangées par Louis et Charles est laissée à des allégories méfiantes. [*The character*] Avis appelle à la subtilité d'interprétation et d'écriture, ce qui est peut-être un geste discret envers le lecteur'.<sup>18</sup>

This could indeed be another example where the character of the king is used to express the thoughts of the author. However, this dialogue is

16. Bernard Quillet *Louis XII, père du peuple* (Paris, 1986), p. 344: 'Dans l'une [des farces et sorties jouées], Louis XII était – comme par hasard – représenté malade, hâve, pâle, la tête enveloppé de pansements, les pieds dans des pantoufles; pour sa guérison, il demandait un brod d' "or potable", image un peu lourde (...). Dans une autre, convoquée par mère Sotte, une assemblée de Sotz Fieffiez égratignait successivement tous les souverains de la chrétienté et désignait le roi de France comme le prince le plus avare de l'univers.'

17. Keryn de Lettenhove, ed., *op. cit.*, 7: 423-452.

18. Estelle Doudet, *Poétique de Georges Chastelain*. Thèse de doctorat, Paris, La Sorbonne, pp. 69-70.

also at first sight quite innocuous even if it is always tinged with *double entendre*. The first level of reading presents a very conventional dialogue between two rulers on the verge of burying the hatchet, and it is only when we know the opinion of Chastelain on this event that we can read it as a hollow and somehow hypocritical dialogue on peace. The sovereigns and the audience are thus free not to hear Chastelain's allusions and to confine themselves to the first level that emphasizes the celebration of the peace agreement.

Therefore, from the texts I know and which were indicated to me, we are with the *Declaration* in front of a slightly different case, where the message delivered in an official and very formal situation may be surprising for the royal audience, even slightly disturbing, since the royal couple is strongly incited to reply positively to the request of Abbeville, on grounds of following the precepts exposed in Psalm 22 in order to be a good Christian:

'Je doibz faire misericorde  
A ceulz que prison advironne.  
Par cest oeuvre, j'ay esperance  
D'habier en la maison Dieu' (l. 246-249)

From what we know from the registers of the city, it seems however that this play did not raised any extraordinary reaction from the queen and her suite, or from the king at a later stage. The accounting books record that the king stayed in the city for three weeks and seemed to fully enjoy his visit. What may seem to us now an audacious message conveyed to the king has apparently been well perceived by him.

If we consider this text in the light of the rituals displayed in royal entries at the time, we realise that its problematic way of expressing a request nevertheless fits into the scheme of communication of *sacra*. Jesse Hurlbut applies the following ethnological observation developed by Victor and Edith Turner to the civic entries of the Duke of Burgundy:<sup>19</sup> the royal entry turns into a religious celebration, and thus performs the same kind of rituals as in other celebrations that belong to the same category. One of the essential aspects is the communication of *sacra*, that is to say 'sacred things' from the Latin terms, these being either objects or concepts; this communication may be performed by exhibition, by delivering instructions or by actions. The latter especially can consist of 'dra-

19. Jesse D. Hurlbut, 'The Duke's First Entry: Burgundian Inauguration and Gift', *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 155-185; Victor and Edith Turner, 'Religious Celebration', *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual* (Washington, 1982), pp. 201-219.

matic performances'.<sup>20</sup> Here would be one reason why the *Declaration* takes its structure from a psalm, in order to underline its religious dimension. According to Hurbut,

'The more elaborate expressions of the *sacra* (all generated by the city) allowed the city to establish a form of potentially profitable discourse with the duke, in the name of the ritual initiation of their relationship. Although the city was not in a hierarchical position to teach the duke his responsibilities, it could, nevertheless, hope that a carefully orchestrated presentation of the idealized political relationship (through a development of the *sacra*) would capture the duke's attention, if only on the level of suggestion.'<sup>21</sup>

In our *Declaration*, this idealised political relationship is presented on stage through the mutual respect and esteem between the royal couple and Abbeville: the Seigneur Souverain praises Abbeville, 'beau coup famee, / Et de nous grandement amee,' (l. 56-57), and Abbeville repeats her allegiance to him, saying: 'Possede moy, tu es mon Roy. / Je soustien dray tout ton atroy, / Obessant à ta personne' (l. 74-76).

Moreover, this ritual dimension explains why the city may feel allowed to present its request on stage, in a dramatic performance, and in a rather informal tone:

'The production of highly connotative stage performances gave the city an invaluable opportunity to express its concerns and to produce messages containing the models of and for the city, the duke, and their relationship. By assuming the communication of the *sacra*, the city could manipulate this discourse between the two parties in the exchange. By emphasizing the duke's power and the city's worthiness, ceremony organizers not only guided the foundation of the political relationship, but also raised the duke, the city, and the bond between the two to a cultural level of identification.'<sup>22</sup>

In this context, what would usually seem a bold message addressed to the royal authority becomes a request delivered in an unusual but admissible way.

To sum up, we are here confronted with a case where tradition in the treatment of symbolic communication is very strong, but where the event leads to a rather new way of staging the royal figures, especially the king, and to new ways to address the royal couple. Indeed, the whole ceremony follows a very set order, with greetings to the queen, plays performed and gifts offered: the very same order that was in use in the pre-

vious century, and which remains unchanged to a certain extent in northern France and in Flanders until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The different steps of the preparation in the registers insist on the importance of following the usual procedure, as is generally the case for royal entries. The main sentence that comes in such case is 'to do as usual' ('comme à l'acoustumée'), and this expression does not merely imply that nothing needs to change in the ceremony but also that nothing *must* change.

Since the city council wants to follow strictly the tradition set in the case of a royal entry, it cannot offer the king a sumptuous entry, for the reasons already evoked. But, to celebrate this exceptional event: the king coming back to the city after a long time, the city can still make use of the welcoming plays, which can express the deference of the inhabitants and citizens of Abbeville. Thus, Abbeville transforms the usual system of the symbolic communication in a royal entry by greeting more an absent king than a present queen. We can even advance the idea that this king on stage is in some way a double of the real king who cannot be here, that the king as a character replaces the absent king. In the context of celebrating the arrival of the king, this somewhat diverted communication apparently seemed very understandable and natural to the audience.

Moreover, the traditional type of play performed in such occasion is to some extent modified by the way the customary request of freeing the prisoners of the city is presented. But again, the audience, including the queen herself, are not disturbed to see the characters on stage speak freely in front of the queen about what she should do. This has to do, in my opinion, with the fact that the traditional ceremony is otherwise scrupulously observed, and that, in its religious as well as civic aspects, it complies with the respective duties of subjects toward their king and of a king toward his subjects.

Why was the play written down in the city's register of deliberation, not a place where one would expect to find the text of a play, since the plays, if ever they were kept, were usually written down on separate manuscripts? We have no definitive answer to this question. However, this decision of the city council tends to prove that, for its members, it was important and worth being saved, just as the text of the play performed for the first entry of Charles VIII, in the same place, almost forty years earlier, had been judged worth being kept in this register too. Does it come from a local tradition of conservation of this type of play or from a wish to be able to re-use the texts for another occasion? These considerations have probably played a part. But such a play might also have been kept in order to remember a singular and inventive way of following an old tradition, at a moment when one begins to take an interest in

20. Hurbut, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

21. *Ibidem*, p. 175.

22. *Id.*, p. 175.



the new topics and themes of the coming Renaissance. This is precisely such a step that can be interesting in regard of symbolic communication, when theatre brings up new ways of following old paths.

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Appendix

Play performed for the entry of Eleanor of Habsburg in Abbeville  
Municipal archives of Abbeville; registre aux délibérations de  
l'échevinage, BB, 63, fol. 135 v<sup>o</sup> sqq (destroyed).

I reproduce the edition of Ledieu, with his own notes. I brought no changes to it, except the quotation marks 1.244-251, to make clearly appear that Abbeville quotes here what the queen should say as a conclusion of the interpretation of Psalm 22.

*La declaration des misteres faiciz à l'entrée de la tres noble  
et excellente dame et Royne de France madame Alyenor.*

Le Seigneur Souverain

C'est merveilles de Piramus  
Qui, de mort, alloit degoysier  
Soubz le meurier comme la mus,  
Il devoit Thisbes espouser.

La Dame souveraine

Mariage cler que Phebus  
Ordonne de Dieu droicturier,  
Ne cherche nocturnaux abus,  
On s'y peust bien aparter.

Le Seigneur souverain

Soubz le meurier et la fontaine,  
Piramus deceupt se deffit.  
De son corps pareil murdre fit,  
Thisbes, dame noble et haultaine.

La Dame

Hypocrisie de dol plaine,  
Quy le coeur oblenebre et nuict,

Feit apparoisire que la nuict,  
De peché rend l'ame vilaine. 15

Le Seigneur

Le meurier changea sa couleur  
En fruit rouge et sanguinolent;  
Comme triste et du cas dolent,  
A tousjours porté la douleur. 20

La Dame

L'arbre<sup>23</sup> de soy meilleur,  
Que le meurier et excellent,  
Ne change du fruit opulent,  
Car il est constant en valleur.

Le Seigneur

De malefice vient malleur. 25

La Dame

De bonté procede tout bien.  
Mon cher seigneur, nous povons bien,  
En conjugale honnesteté,  
Neantmoins qu'il ne soit osté,  
Nous transporter vers nos amys  
Et subgeetz, lesquelz Dieu a mys  
Soubz vostre souveraine forche. 30

Le Seigneur

Ad ce faire, mon voeul s'efforche,  
Non point pour gloire acumuler,  
Mais pour voir et dissimuler  
Toutes choses à mon possible.  
Dieu merchis! mon regne est paisible:  
On me ayne, on me crainct et double,  
Dont sans suspineuse doute,  
Monstrier me doitz à mes suppotz. 40

La Dame

En enssuivant vostre propos,  
Pour avoir recreation,

23. Blanc

La nostre congregacion,  
Transportons en la Picardie.

Le Seigneur

Ne doutez que je contredie  
A vostre requeste, ma douce:  
Je vous advise bien de bouche  
Que une vallée vous verrez,  
Où soullas vous percheverez,  
Plus largement que ne vous somme.

45

50

La Dame

Son nom?

Le Seigneur

La vallée de Somme,  
Ung lieu delicat, fructueux,  
Gouverné de genz vertueux,  
Et leaulx à vostre regence;  
Veu vous avez à diligence  
Abbeville beaucoup famée,  
Et de nous grandement amée,  
Toute prompte à gendarmerie,  
Donner grandz coups d'artillerie,  
Nous recevant en ses atours;  
Elle ne a ne chasteau ne tours,  
Que pour nous n'ayt toujours gardé  
Et songneusement regardé  
A tout comme france et fidelle.

55

60

La Dame

A bon droict dict grand bien d'elle;  
Regardez, elle vous salue.

65

Abbeville

Tres cher Roy de value<sup>24</sup>,  
Plus preux que Hector de Priam filz<sup>25</sup>;  
Tous mes desirs sont assaïsés  
Quant ta personne je regarde;  
Tu es ma seulle sauvegarde

70

Aprez Dieu et les benoïsez saintez;  
Mes Abbeillois te sont sains;  
Possede moy, tu es mon Roy,  
Je soustiendray tout ton arroy,  
Obeissant à ta personne.

75

La Dame

Son voulloir au vostre consomme;  
Ma foy, voylà noble picarde.

Abbeville

Madame, quant je vous regarde,  
Mon coeur se pasme; neanmoins,  
Vous saluant à joinctes mains,  
Genoux flexis et d'humble chère,  
Je vous prie faire grande chère  
En vos limites dont j'ai niece,  
Car tout mon courage pronice  
A vous rescreer sus ma foy  
Que fait la serve pour sa dame.

80

85

La Dame

Sy ne me aymiez de corps et de ame,  
Vous n'eussiez fait telz appareulx;  
Vos misteres, quy n'ont pareulx,  
Me plaisent fort et me rescrént;  
Mais dictez-moy sy vous aggrée  
La substance, et ne faillez point.

90

Abbeville

Madame, pour le premier point,  
La fontaine au prez du verger  
Seignifie, pour abregier,  
L'eau de Somme douce et profonde,  
Laquelle son cours maine et fonde  
Environ le verger plaisant,

95

Lequel nous sommes exposant  
Le royaume tres crestien,  
Où le Roy et vous je soubsstien,  
Triumphans en estat royal,

100

Dont moy mesmes, de coeur loyal,  
L'Eglise, bourgeois et gentilz,  
Avons, comme prompliz et actis,  
Ledict mistere, à vostre entrée,

105

24. Il manque deux pieds.

25. Il y a un pied en trop.

- Extraict de la lettre sacrée  
 Du pseaultier hault estimé  
 Qu'on dit: *Dominus regit me*;  
 Et est la lettre toute telle  
 Que vous yre orrez dise escoutelle  
 Le tres crestien Roy François;  
 Monseigneur me conduit et maine  
 En Abbeville, douce et humaine,  
 Où trouverray lieu à mon choix  
 Dessus l'eau de reflection,  
 Et au verger de son royaume  
 Il a seul converty mon ame,  
 A sa grande dellectation.  
 120  
 Le Seigneur  
 Voilà belle exposition  
 Et fondée en la vérité.  
 La Dame  
 Je vous donne l'auctorité  
 De parachever.  
 Le Seigneur  
 Il le faut.  
 Abbeville  
 En nostre second eschaffault,  
 Estoit le Roy soubz saint Michiel.  
 Signant que Dieu transmisist du ciel  
 A ses ancestres l'armarie  
 De France sus toute chérie.  
 En aprez, le Roy sans ensonne,  
 Presentant à vostre personne  
 L'agneau d'or, faict seignifiance  
 Qu'en vous en tout mist sa fiance,  
 Nous alliant en seure paix,  
 Dont justice par ses aspectz  
 Confute belliqueuse esclandre;  
 Ad ce propos, la salemandre,  
 Par son poveroy quoy poinct et picque,  
 Reboute la guerre et la picque  
 De la tres hideuse Atropos.  
 140

- Le Seigneur  
 Donnez-nous de cela l'expos  
 Sus *Deduxit me<sup>26</sup>* contenu,  
 Et que sens y soit maintenu.  
 Abbeville  
 Par alliance et foy promise,  
 Qui sont de justice sentiers,  
 M'ont ycy deduit vollentiers  
 Pour son hault nom m'y suis submise;  
 La guerre et umbrage de mort  
 Sont enversés et mis au bas;  
 Je ne doubteray leurs combas,  
 Car la sallemandre les mort.  
 150  
 La Dame  
 Voilà bien dict.  
 Le Seigneur  
 Sans mal remord,  
 On n'y scauroit que repplicquer.  
 Abbeville  
 Je vous le diray à bref plet.  
 Le Roy assis, sceptre tenant,  
 Denote qu'il est gouvernant  
 Son royaume à commandement,  
 Et n'est sy osé vrayement  
 Quy ne tremble soubz son baston.  
 Par son espée congnoist on  
 Qu'il faict justice à tout endroict,  
 En punissant selon le droict  
 Ses subgetz quand ilz ont mespris  
 Ses trois nobles filz bien apris,  
 Vrais fleurons du lis putulans,  
 Au Roy et à ses biens voeulans  
 Doment tres grande esjouissance,  
 Car ilz renforchent la puissance  
 Du royaume en telle maniere  
 Qu'ilz deffenderont la banriere  
 De France, s'on l'esvahissoit,  
 170

26. Ps. XXII, v. 3.

Dont mon poeuple s'esjouissoit  
A vostre advenue nouvelle.

La Dame

J'entends le cas.

Le Seigneur

Qu'on nous revele  
En substance sans tarder plus  
*Virga tuta, et baculus*<sup>27</sup>.

Abbeville

Ta verge de direction  
Et tres illustre geniture,  
De ton scepire la florature  
Me donnent consolation.

Abbeville en Ponthieu lealle,  
A ma venue faict grand chere;  
J'en tiendray sa nation chere,  
Qui ne fust oncques desteele.

Le Seigneur

L'application n'est pas male,  
Vostre propos suit à plaisir.

La Dame

Abbeville, prenez loisir  
A nous déclarer le iij<sup>e</sup>.

Abbeville

Le Roy, assis en son lieu sublime,  
Du Sainct Espri advironné,  
Note que Dieu luy a donné  
Pour regir ce royaume insigne  
Une unction et sacré signe  
Que n'ont autres roys crestiens;  
Car je voeulx dire et sy sousiens  
Que, moyennant la saincte ampole,  
Dont il est oingt seul soubz le pole,  
Les escroelles il efface,

Par ung singulier don de grace;  
Et, à la raison que madame,  
Sa tres eureuse espouse et femme,  
A luy par mariage unit,

Il s'enssuit que Dieu la munit  
De benediction pareille;

La douce boisson non pareille,  
Dont le Roy present luy a faict,  
Et qu'elle a savouré de faict,

C'est l'honneur, la joye et triumphe  
Qu'elle a, puis que, avecq luy triumphe  
Par tout le royaume de France.

Les douze pers font demonstration  
Que, pour le Roy magnifier,  
Iiz ont vullu ratiffier  
Leur Royme en luy faisant service.

La Dame

*Impugnasti*<sup>28</sup>, vouldentiers veisse  
Mis en françois; parlez à tant,  
Comme le bref le fut portant.

Abbeville

Ton chef est oinct du sacré sacre;  
Troy et moy ne sommes que ung corps,  
En mariage ainsy concordz;

Ton chef sacré le mien consacre;  
O que tres cler est mon calice,  
Auguel mon Roy et mon seigneur  
M'abrave du royal honneur,  
Meillifieux et sans malice!

Le Seigneur

Ensuivant vostre proposé,  
Cestui vers est bien exposé,  
Que le dernier nous soi decisi.

Abbeville

Le Roy en majesté assis,  
Qui faisoit signe d'une verge,  
A la Royme luy donnant charge,  
En son hautlain royal povoir,

27. Ps. XXII, v. 4.

28. Ps. XXII, v. 5.

Hors des prisons leur donnant grace,  
Ce qu'elle a fait en ceste place, 235

A son joyeux advenement,  
Esperant par foy tellement  
Parvenir en l'eternel regne,  
Où nostre Dieu qui, tousjours regne,  
Intronise ses bons amis. 240

La Dame

Exposés comment avez mys  
En François le final dictier?

Le Seigneur

Dictes, je l'orray voullentiers.

Abbeville

"Puisque je porte la couronne,  
Et que droit royal le m'accord, 245

Je doibz faire misericorde  
A ceulz que prison advironne.  
Par cest oeuvre, j'ay esperance  
D'habiter en la maison Dieu,  
Lequel par foy m'y donra lieu  
De perpetuelle assurance." 250

La Dame

Jesus me doit perseverance  
D'avoir misericorde au coeur,  
Et la preferer à rigueur  
De justice en lieu et temps. 255

Le Seigneur

Nous sommes de vous tres contens,  
Abbeville, je vous afferme.

Abbeville

Pour fin, je crieray de voix ferme:  
Dieu gard de mal et de royne  
Le Roy François et la Royne, 260  
Le daulfin avecq ses deux freres!  
Aiez prins en gré nos misteres.

*Finis.*