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In the Writing Workshop: Composing for the Stage in French during the Long Fifteenth Century

Estelle Doudet

The author is dead: a pilgrim, protagonist of the play *Le Jeu du pèlerin*, declares he has seen the tomb of Adam de la Halle in Italy. His claim sparks a discussion with two other characters about the 'clerc net et soutieu' (the elegant and subtle scholar)[1] whose talents were appreciated even by the princes. Is it true that Adam, a poet, a musician, and a playwright who 'savoit dis et chans controuver' (who knew how to invent speeches and songs),[2] is deceased? Which of his works will be remembered? How can we be sure that the 'canchons, / partures et motés entés' (songs, jeux-partis, and motets *entés*)[3] attributed to him are really his own? During the comic *Jeu*, Adam's authorial status seems to oscillate between truth and fiction, while the memory of his works appears both extensive and fragile among those who remember them.

Le Jeu du pèlerin is an anonymous interlude dating from the end of the thirteenth century. It was interpolated in *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* in Paris, BnF, fr. 25566, the main collection of Adam de la Halle's works.[4] As an early example of a play-with-in-the-play, the brief *Jeu* anticipates the implicit and, in part contradictory, trends in the long-standing historiographic narrative about the pre-modern performing arts. On the one hand, it indicates that the aura of the 'great author', alongside the discussions on attribution, were phenomena already evident in French-speaking

1 Langlois (ed.) (1924) 1958, p. 70, lines 23, 37.

2 Langlois (ed.) (1924) 1958, p. 70, line 37.

3 Langlois (ed.) (1924) 1958, p. 73, lines 90–91.

4 The sole extant version of *Le Jeu du pèlerin* is contained within this manuscript: the initial scene of 133 lines serves as a prologue to Adam's *Robin et Marion* (fols. 37v–39r); a subsequent addition of seventy lines is interposed between Robin's lines 698 and 699 (fol. 47r–v); a final addition of eighteen lines is inserted between Robin's lines 723 and 724 (fol. 48r). The original text of *Robin et Marion* is curated in Badel (ed.) 1995, pp. 206–85 (with an English translation in Axton and Steven (comp. and trans.) 1971). For the supposition that *Le Jeu du pèlerin* might have been authored by Adam himself, refer to Brusegan 2004. Regarding Paris, BnF, fr. 25566 and the intricate reception and stature of Adam de la Halle as a progenitor of musical compositions, see the chapter by Bradley in the present volume. For additional insights into Adam, consider the introduction and chapters by Everist and Bent.

territories during the thirteenth century. On the other hand, it reinforces the notion that between the mid-twelfth and mid-sixteenth centuries, being an author was precarious. Only a select few writers, such as Adam de la Halle and Jean Bodel in the thirteenth century, could be seen as examples of dramatic composers. Similarly, only a handful of performers, like the renowned actors Pierre Gringore and Jean de Pontalais in the early sixteenth century, could be seen as forerunners to Molière. In this regard, dramatic compositions written and enacted in Old French (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), followed by Middle French (fourteenth to early sixteenth century), would ostensibly predate the emergence of the playwright and the professional actor, both of whom are held to emerge, even originate, in the seventeenth century, according to this established narrative. How might we then understand the paradox of a history of theatre built around the 'great playwrights' subsequent to the Middle Ages, which would be, at the same time, a history that excises the 'great playwrights' from the Middle Ages?

The author is dead, Roland Barthes said provocatively in 1968.[5] His statement was intended to serve as a catalyst for re-evaluating the concept of authorship (*auctorialité* in French). Within this framework, it becomes imperative to regard as authors not solely the solitary geniuses who conceived singular works but also those who embraced a more collaborative creative approach, whether manifested over time through cultural legacy or enacted within communal networks of creation and distribution. This enables us to reassess the historical dynamics of theatrical authorship, by which I mean herein the unique methodologies and self-crafting practices employed by playwrights and the broader concept of theatrical *auctorialité*, a term encompassing cultural impact, social standing, and legal obligations accorded to an author. These ways of working are known to us today from dramatic works, archival documents (financial accounts, political and judicial decisions) and narratives (chronicles, fictions). However, such documentation is sparse for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and for part of the fourteenth. By contrast, both plays and archives are numerous and well-preserved in French-speaking regions for the long fifteenth century (1380–1530). It is therefore this period, also called Middle French, that will be my focus.[6]

5 Barthes (1968) 1984 (English translation in Barthes 1977).

6 In this chapter, I have opted to minimize the use of the terms 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' for two main reasons. Firstly, these concepts are steeped in a value system forged by nineteenth-century theatrical historiography: medieval theatre was often perceived as primitive, while Renaissance and classical theatre were seen as more refined. However, such a value system is now outdated. Secondly, the surviving sources present limitations (with fewer than ten plays and limited archives, primarily from the city of Arras before 1300, compared to over five hundred plays and thousands of documents preserved in all French-speaking regions after 1400). These limitations hinder our ability to demonstrate a direct continuity in theatrical writing, staging, and production between the periods around 1200 and 1400, although such continuity is likely. Conversely, recent research indicates that despite shifts in dramatic aesthetics, the techniques of theatrical composition explored in this chapter remained consistent in France until the 1630s. On these epistemological issues, see Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet 2024.

The Middle French period is particularly interesting because it was a time for lexical revolution in the field of authorship. During that period, a new term, *composer*, surfaced to denote two distinct forms of expertise: an artistic skill allowing composers to arrange and organise textual and/or audio-visual elements, and a social proficiency involving navigating circumstances and meeting collective expectations. If the author refers etymologically to the authority (*auctoritas*), being a composer implies a certain mastery of the art of building relationships (*com-ponere*), both between the different components of a text and between the persons who work together to put on a show. In this sense, surveying those who composed for the stage in the Middle French period means investigating the functioning of a writing workshop.[7]

The notion of a 'writing workshop' was proposed in 1989 by Bernard Cerquiglini. He defined it in terms that have remained famous among medievalists: 'This continual rewriting of a work that belonged to whoever prepared it and gave it form once again. This constant and multifaceted activity turned medieval literature into a writing workshop. Meaning was to be found everywhere, and its origin was nowhere'.[8] The writing workshop invites us to renounce the ideas of origin and genealogy in favour of the vision of 'constant and multifaceted activity' undertaken by the makers of medieval texts. From Cerquiglini's perspective, however, the writing workshop was a metaphor, which aimed to draw attention to the collective dimension of medieval *auctorialité*. As far as music and theatre are concerned, the writing workshop is not a mere image. It concretely describes complex collaborative creative processes, whose sociological, economic, and legal aspects must be closely examined.[9]

I will begin by examining the emergence of the verb *composer* and the noun *compositeur* in French, which came to designate those who wrote for the stage, and by exploring the rhetorical practices these terms may have denoted. Once this semantic framework is established, I will lay out various modalities of theatrical composition in Middle French language, including reuse, seriality, and montage, which contributed to the adaptability of the theatrical text. Collaborations among artists also entailed concrete forms of social interactions and economic negotiations, at times fruitful, at times challenging, among those involved in composing dramatic performances. Ultimately, while the concept of the writing workshop indeed debunks the notion of the solitary genius, it does not undermine the author function (*fonction auteur*), as defined by Michel Foucault as a tool for social legitimization and legal control.[10] In fact, I will demonstrate that this dimension was significant for fifteenth-century French-speaking theatre, as individuals who served as public speakers, regardless of their roles as theatre makers, were already held accountable for the ideological and emotional impact of performances on audiences.

7 For an examination of this concept and that of *faire oeuvre* in French, see Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet 2014, §3–4.

8 Cerquiglini 1999, p. 33 (French version in Cerquiglini 1989, p. 57).

9 For a thorough examination of these aspects in fifteenth- to eighteenth-century French theatre, refer to Chaouche et al. 2017. For a similar approach applied to other medieval corpora in Latin and other languages, see Coste 2021.

10 Foucault 1977 (French version in Foucault (1969) 2001).

What Composing Means

In Paris, BnF, fr. 25566, the lyrical and dramatic works that Adam de la Halle 'fist' [wrote] conclude precisely where the singular known version of *Le Jeu de saint Nicolas*, 'que Jehan Bodel fist' [crafted by Jehan Bodel], begins (fol. 83r).[11] An identical verb, *faire*, characterizes the authorship of the two most renowned playwrights of the thirteenth century.[12]

From the end of the thirteenth century, the lexicon of literary endeavour underwent two distinct transformations.[13] On the one hand, the existing action verbs were complemented by new nouns: from *faire* (to make) were derived the *faiseur*, the *facteur*, and in a specifically theatrical sense, the *fatiste*, the one who wrote a play by reusing textual materials. 'Selon ce qu'il plaist au faiseur' (according to the maker's taste) is a common phrase in Eustache Deschamps's *L'Art de dictier*, the first work of poetry dedicated, in 1392, to artificial music and to 'the other music called natural' – that is, to versification in French.[14] On the other hand, between 1300 and 1500, the lexicon used to describe authors underwent significant diversification; *auctor*, *actor*, *escripvain*, *poete*, *rhetoricien*, *orateur*, *composeur*, and *compositeur* emerged. Written around 1460 and printed in 1500, *L'Instructif de seconde rhétorique*, the initial French rhetorical treatise to reference dramatic writing, frequently employs the verb *composer*.[15] Fifty years later, the performer and playwright Pierre Gringore presented himself to Queen Mary of England, whose royal entry into Paris he orchestrated in 1514, as a follower of the 'orateurs, facteurs et compositeurs modernes en françoys' (orators, makers, and modern composers in French).[16]

If the surviving documents are to be believed, *composer* and *compositeur* were therefore common terms for theatre artists as early as the fifteenth century, while they seem to have become commonplace for musicians a century later. These words are indeed found in all kinds of documents commenting on theatrical practices. They fall from Philippe de Vigneulles's pen as the Metz chronicler described his fellow citizen Charles Cauvellet, 'qui estoit homme fort ingenieulx, compousoit bien et juoit farces et moralités' (who was a witty man, who composed well, and played farces and morality plays) but who was condemned for his involvement in

11 Bodel's original play is in Henry (ed.) 1981 (English translation in Axton and Stevens (comp. and trans.) 1971).

12 For comprehensive examinations of medieval terminology concerning composition and composers as applied to music, see the introduction of this volume as well as specific chapters therein by Bent, Bradley, Desmond, Dolce, Everist, and Parkes.

13 Doudet 2008.

14 Deschamps defines 'artificial music' as a 'science that enables, with the assistance of the aforementioned hexachord, the production of diverse correct notes from steel, iron, wood, and metals.' (Dauphant (ed. and trans.) 2014, pp. 582–635, cit. artificial music p. 588, cit. 'faiseurs', pp. 590, 602, and passim). On Deschamps's notion, see also the chapter by Plumley in this volume.

15 Buron et al. (eds.) 2015, p. 109, lines 1183–84.

16 Brown (ed.) 2005, p. 127.

a conspiracy in 1491.[17] In town accounts they frequently surface, whether in French or regional languages, to designate the artists who received payment; it was the case in Avignon, where nine ecus were paid to 'al mestre qui a composset une farce ho la moralytat a 5 personnagez' (to the master who composed a farce, along with the morality play with five characters) for a show performed at the city hall in 1519.[18] Finally and obviously, the playwrights called themselves *composeurs* or *compositeurs*, sometimes with insistence. The young Orléans lawyer Jacques Milet, who wrote the monumental *Histoire de la destruction de Troie la grant* in 1450, reiterated this term in the concluding epistle of his play ('Moy dessus nommé compositeur et translateur de l'istoire precedent' [I, the composer and translator of the aforementioned history above]) as well as in his prologue:

> Then I commenced contemplating
> the authoring of the history of Troy
> and embarked on composing it
> striving to do so to the best of my capability. . . .
> I attest that I have spared no effort
> in composing with precision,
> and I humbly entreat that the *Histoire* I have compiled,
> the commencement of which ensues,
> be received graciously.[19]

Milet's claim reflects the increasing theorisation of authorship that took place in most literatures in modern European languages during the late Middle Ages. In *De vulgari eloquentia* at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Dante distinguished between poets and inventors (*poeti*, *inventori*) and verse makers (*rimatori*), a term encompassing writers – potentially poets as well – who handle the technical aspects of writing.[20] In the following decades, this difference went hand to hand with a hierarchy in *auctorialité*, 'poets' having been granted a greater reputation than 'makers'.[21] But Milet's testimony makes it possible to specify this semantic framework in the case of theatre: by rhyming *composee* and *disposee*, the playwright draws attention to the fact that mastering the rhetorical skill of *dispositio* is the *compositeur*'s specific task. The young author did not of course invent the Trojan legend, but he was the first to stage it in French, which required him to reorganise the episodes of the legend, to redraw the characters, and to produce a new versification adapted to theatrical performance. *Dispositio* and *elocutio* appear here as complementary to that of

17 Doudet 2018, p. 555.

18 Doudet 2018, p. 509.

19 'Lors je me prins a pourpenser / De faire l'istoire de Troye / Et a mon povoir composer, / Tout au mieulx que faire porroie. . . . / Protestant que riens ne desrogue / A chose par droit composee, / En requerant d'umble pensee / Qu'on prengne en bon entendement / L'istoire par moy disposee, / Dont s'ensuit le commencement' (Paris, BnF, fr. 24333, fols. 8r–9v, lines 273–76 and 323–28).

20 Fenzi with Formisano and Montuori (eds.) 2012.

21 Armstrong and Kay 2011, p. 11.

inventio, which involves the original conception of the subject, and to that of *actio*, which concerns staging and performance.[22]

The rhetorical significance of the verb *composer* in Middle French is evidenced by various sources. One of the most noteworthy instances to have attracted scholarly interest[23] involves the collaboration between Jean Marchand and Pierre Gringore, who jointly orchestrated the official entries of French kings and queens into Paris for over fifteen years (1500–1517). Marchand was identified as a master carpenter; the records of the royal ceremonies consistently designate him as such. Gringore was both a playwright and an actor; he received payment for his role as a 'compositeur' (composer) in 1501 and 1502, as 'facteur et inventif' (maker and inventor) in 1504, as 'historien et facteur' (historian and maker) in 1514, and as 'compositeur et historien' (composer and historian) in 1517.[24] Although their exact meaning eludes us, these terms denote complementary rhetorical skills, all of which Gringore mastered, yet which several writers could have shared under different circumstances. In any case, the notion that 'composer' may have encompassed both stage writing and adherence to certain theatrical techniques now prompts us to delve into the realm of theatrical composition.

The Means of Composing

Theatrical texts are by nature characterised by their capacity to evolve. From an author's lines to an actor's words and ultimately to a reader's pages, a multitude of opportunities for textual mobility abound. This subject has been extensively explored by historians for the modern period.[25] However, medieval dramatic cultures have received far less scrutiny, despite the fifteenth century being a golden era for the performing arts and the advent of the printing press in Europe. This period is inherently intriguing for investigating how such mobility functioned as well as the writing and editing techniques it entailed. Here, I will demonstrate that the available sources permit us to embrace a genetic approach to pre-modern and early modern creative processes, a methodology that specialists in modern and contemporary theatre have largely neglected and deemed nearly impracticable to follow.[26]

A few years ago, I was fortunate enough to discover, in a late fifteenth-century manuscript (Paris, BnF, n.a.f. 6514), the longest role for an actor currently known in pre-modern European performing arts. This is the role of Homo (the Man), the principal character in the morality play *L'Homme pecheur*; the manuscript was created for its rehearsals. It enables a comparison with the printed editions of this extensive

[22] Also, refer to the chapter by Everist in this volume, which explores the language of rhetoric as it pertains to musical composition.

[23] Bouhaïk-Gironès 2012; Doudet and Lu 2020.

[24] Hindley (ed.) 2000, pp. 20–26.

[25] Chartier 2014.

[26] Thomasseau 2010.

penitential morality play, in Paris around 1494–99.[27] The exceptional preservation of two versions of the same work, one designed for the stage and another for the book market, sheds light on the different rhetorical techniques used by those who prepared the scenario and lines for performance and those who prepared the text for reading.[28]

The role reveals a play that is shorter and more concentrated than the printed version, staging about twenty characters; their interactions seem carefully organised by brief stage instructions which as yet remain obscure. The printed volume, on the other hand, presents a play animated by about sixty characters, whose lines are adorned with oratory effects and complex versification. It would be reductive to consider these witnesses merely as the short and long versions of the same play. Rather, an examination of the stage directions reveals two different dynamics of theatrical *composition*: the role was written to guide the actor, to prepare his memory and his body for the performance, much as a musical score might do today; the print was designed to allow buyers to imagine retrospectively a show that most had not seen, by offering them a highly spectacular text in terms of rhyming and stage design.

Such flexibility in writing existed even before the plays were performed and continues to be an essential dimension of a dramatic text from its inception. Among the *composition* modes often used by *fatistes* was the technique known as *faire par personnages*, which was very popular during the fourteenth century. Most of the plays preserved in French from this period are the result of dramatisation, adapting texts for the stage that already existed in a narrative or a lyrical form.[29] *L'Estoire de Griseldis en rimes et par personnages* (1395) is the theatrical adaptation of the famous tale by Petrarch about the patience expected from married women, translated by Philippe de Mézières.[30] Likewise, the forty *Miracles de Notre Dame par personnages*, preserved in Paris, BnF, fr. 819–820, were inspired by the rich European tradition of versified narratives about the Virgin.

The *Miracles*, likely crafted and performed on a yearly basis in Paris from 1339 to 1382, showcases two additional prevalent modes of composition: montage, entailing the incorporation of disparate elements into the dramatic text (in this instance, excerpts from sermons and sung rondels, alongside numerous polyphonic motets and liturgical items); and serial reuse of textual and/or audiovisual components, such as the recurrence of rondels across various plays.[31] Such writing practices imply a cumulative *auctorialité* as the composers follow one another by recycling the same

27 At least four editions of *L'Homme pécheur* from the 1490s–1510s have been preserved, with Vérard's being the oldest. See USTC 49908, 70307, 70306, 49883. No modern edition.

28 The role has been edited in Bénichou-Samson 2014; for a more detailed study, see Doudet 2020.

29 Dramatisation, the adaptation of pre-existing lyric or narrative texts for the stage, is a process exemplified by Adam's *Robin and Marion*, which presents sung pastourelles. However, this particular writing technique should not be conflated with theatricality, defined as the capacity of a text to be performed, a trait that was widespread in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Concerning the performative aspect of numerous debates and dialogues likely composed by jugglers in Old French, see Menegaldo 2010.

30 Roques (ed.) 1957.

31 Edition of the *Miracles* is in Paris and Robert (eds.) 1876–83. For study on the *rondels*, see Gros 1988; on the musical pieces included in the plays, see Wilkins 1974.

material.[32] They also suggest a collective authorship since the *Miracles* seem to have been written and performed within the Confrérie de Saint-Éloi (the guild of Parisian goldsmiths) although the exact history of their creative process is still unknown.[33]

Sources from the fifteenth century, which are considerably more abundant, afford a clearer view of the operation of the writing workshop, albeit with many details still shrouded in obscurity. The serial reuse of certain scenes is particularly striking in the case of the addresses to the public in the prologues and epilogues of the plays. The inaugural French morality play, *La Moralité du jour saint Antoine*, staged at the Collège de Navarre in Paris in January 1427, commences with four stanzas wherein a 'doctor' directs the audience's focus towards the penitential enactment about to unfold:

> *The Doctor*
> Listen, you who must heed,
> sons of Adam. We believe ourselves so wise
> that we refuse to heed anything
> beyond preserving our old ways of life.[34]

The same verses, this time recited by Christ himself, reappear in the prologue to *Mystère de saint Sébastien*, a play produced in the Lyon region in the last third of the fifteenth century:

> *Christ*
> Listen, if you seek wisdom,
> you proud people. You believe yourselves so wise
> that you refuse to heed anything
> beyond preserving your old ways of life.[35]

Although the precise modes of circulation of these lines across varied contexts remain unclear, they attest to the presence of rewriting networks employing efficient recycling methods. The same seriality, as depicted through the montage technique, can be discerned in the epilogues of plays that culminated with songs. In the Rouen collection, the most important theatrical anthology copied in French during the sixteenth century, many of the seventy-five farces and moral plays end with the

[32] For discussions on cumulative authorship and *auctorialité* in music composition, see the introduction of this volume and chapters by Parkes and Everist.

[33] On the production context of the *Miracles*, see Clark 1994; Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.) 2008.

[34] 'Entendez qui devés entendre, / Filz Adam. Nous sommes tant sages / Que ne voulons a riens entendre / Fors maintenir noz vielz usages'. *La Moralité du jour saint Antoine* (edited in Doudet (ed.) 2019, cit. p. 65, lines 1–4) is preserved in a single manuscript (Paris, BnF, fr. 25547, prologue fol. 313r).

[35] 'Entendés si voulés aprandre, / Orgullieulx. Si vous estes sages, / Vous ne voulés en rien entendre / Fors maintenir vous vieulx usages.' *Le Mystère de saint Sébastien* is also known in a single version (Paris, BnF, n.a.f. 1051, prologue fol. 1v) and has been edited in Mills (ed.) 1965, cit. p. 3, lines 49–53).

line 'une chanson pour dire adieu' (a song to say farewell), which announces that the actors will leave the stage to music.[36]

Different constraints can explain why montage, seriality, and reuse techniques were chosen. The first aspect is associated with the expectations of those who commissioned and financed the performance. In this regard, it is unquestionably the mystery plays, the most lavish spectacles of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, typically arranged by the civic and religious authorities of urban centres, that provide us with the most abundant documentary evidence. We know, based on the records of the performance, that the Burgundian city of Seurre asked André de La Vigne to write a new *Mystère de saint Martin* in 1496. La Vigne composed the 11,000 lines of the play in less than five weeks.[37] But purchasing such original creations was costly. Among other things, it meant hiring renowned *orateurs* like La Vigne (who had previously worked for Charles VIII, king of France[38]) and talented *poètes* capable of producing excellent quality work with a high speed of execution. Many organisers of mystery plays thus opted to purchase an existing text and have it reworked by *fatistes*. In 1501, the city of Mons acquired the *Passion* performed in Amiens the previous year. Likewise, in 1510, Châteaudun town councillors acquired a play depicting the life of Christ, which had already been staged in Amboise in 1507. They tasked the *fatiste* Aignen Charuel with expanding and enhancing the text, with the assistance of a team of copyists.[39]

A second form of constraint involves adapting plays to meet new staging demands or criteria. The textual material must then be reorganised according to the principles of *amplificatio* and *abbreviatio* to match the number of actors available to perform them. The Rouen collection encompasses two versions of *La Farce du poulier*, one featuring four roles and the other with six roles. These versions were likely tailored for commercial theatrical troupes, which frequently assembled four to six actors during the long fifteenth century.[40]

Indeed, company directors and actors also took part in the writing workshop. Exceptionally, a few of their workbooks have been preserved in the Middle French period. They underscore the potential impact of a third type of constraint on theatrical writing, a phenomenon Christian Biet termed the *séance* (the session). This

36 The Rouen collection (Paris, BnF, fr. 24341) does not include any musical notation; on the serial reuse of this musical announcement, Doudet 2018, pp. 292–93.

37 Duplat (ed.) 1979, p. 118, minutes of the Seurre performance (Paris, BnF, fr. 24332, fol. 260r–v).

38 La Vigne's title in the minutes is 'facteur royal' (Duplat (ed.) 1979, p. 118). He was recruited by the Savoy court immediately after the performance: see Brown (ed.) 1989, pp. 1–13.

39 For the Mons Passion, see Runnalls 2002; Châteaudun *Passion* has been lost, except for a fragment in Paris, BnF, n.a.f. 1445. However, the financial records of the performance have been preserved (see Couturier and Runnalls (eds.) 1991).

40 Paris, BnF, fr. 24341, fols. 132v–144v; the play with six characters has been edited in Tissier (ed.) 1997, pp. 183–234. The adaptation of the number of characters to the available actors for performance likely persisted as a theatrical technique, although well-preserved documentary evidence for earlier periods, particularly before the fifteenth century, is lacking. For insights into this hypothesis regarding Bodel's *Jeu de saint Nicolas* and other thirteenth-century plays, see Dominguez 2008.

pertains to the interactions between the stage and the audience.[41] The manuscript Florence, BML, Ashburnham 116 was, along with Florence, BML, Ashburnham 115, owned by the artist Jazme Oliou in the 1470s. Oliou inscribed his name multiple times ('Jaquemart bon compagnon' fol. 1r, 'Jacobus Olivi' fols. 3v, 28v) in this two-volume workbook, which comprises a repertoire of six plays, several songs and poems, and even a medical recipe 'ad habendum bonam vocam' (to acquire a good voice). One of the plays, *Le Jeu d'argent*, is transcribed with numerous additional scenes, three prologues, and two epilogues, evidently tailored to suit the diverse audiences Oliou and his troupe anticipated encountering in Avignon. For instance, the concluding address to a 'roiale magesté' (royal majesty), a possible reference to René d'Anjou and his court, was crossed out on folio 28r and substituted with a farewell to 'toute la compaignie' (the entire company).[42]

It is noteworthy that until recent decades, numerous modern editors of medieval theatre have downplayed this unexpected textual fluidity. At times, they have not mentioned the myriad traces left by the writing workshop in the manuscripts, such as the alternative versions inscribed in the margins or the graphical symbols denoting deletions and additions. Occasionally, they have attributed a *lectio textualis* status to these traces, deeming them either commendable or less persuasive based on their interpretation of the *intentio auctoris*, the author's intention.[43] Today, it is imperative to shift our perspective on these pieces of material evidence. What they tangibly reveal to us is not solely textual variation; rather, more surprisingly yet also more intriguingly, they unveil a process of creation.

Composers at Work: The Challenges of Collaboration

In 1468, George Chastelain, the official historian and *orateur* of the Burgundian ducal court, collaborated with the municipalities of Valenciennes and Mons to stage a play dedicated to the memory of Charles le Téméraire's deceased father, titled *La Mort du duc Philippe*. In 1473, Jean Molinet, a poet, and Simon Marmion, a painter, collaborated to produce 'comedies' in Valenciennes celebrating the knights of the Golden Fleece.[44] Guillaume de Gamaches, a schoolmaster in Beauvais, collaborated with the cantors of the cathedral, actors hired by the bishop, and the company of the Momeurs du Mont-Pinard to organise a performance commemorating the peace of Arras in 1483.[45] In the 1480s, Katherine Bourlet, a nun in the convent of Huy (Liège), undertook the task of transcribing and adapting for the stage famous penitential texts from the fourteenth century, such as *Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine*, in collaboration with several anonymous Carmelites.[46]

41 Biet 2009.

42 Hindley (ed.) 2019, p. 470, line 1515.

43 The 1929 and 2019 critical editions of *Le Jeu d'argent* epitomises these different approaches, developed in Hindley (ed.) 2019, pp. 312–20.

44 Doudet 2018, p. 591.

45 Doudet 2018, pp. 590–91.

46 Doudet (ed.) 2012, pp. 306–25, 525–650.

A single decade's documentation of the performing arts in a single French-speaking region is sufficient to recognize the vast diversity of social statuses, cultural backgrounds, and economic incentives among those involved in composing theatre during the long fifteenth century. Despite this diversity, all these testimonies share a common thread: the individuals mentioned had to *composer* in the second sense of the word in French, which means to negotiate their roles as authors within collectives. This often resulted in dealing with complex and occasionally tense situations. The challenges raised by the sharing of authorship and, possibly, the contest for *auctorialité* before, during, and after the performances are questions I will try to address by taking two examples of collaborative work: *La Résurrection* performed in Angers in 1456 and *Les Trois Doms* in Romans in 1509.

In late May 1456, prompted by René d'Anjou, a three-day performance was organised, depicting the resurrection of Christ and its implications for humanity. The handwritten manuscript of the play, meticulously crafted in anticipation of the performance, 'does not specify who the author is', as noted by the modern editor.[47] However, the financial records delineate the duties for which the three principal individuals overseeing the performance were compensated. The largest payment was allocated to Jehan du Prier, the most prominent show producer in King René's court.[48] He received no less than one hundred gold ecus to 'convertir és faintes et despense du mistere' (convert this money into manufactured items and costs), for designing the staging, the scenery, the special effects, and financing their production. Pierre de Hurion received ten gold ecus for 'avoir habillé les personnages de la Resurrection' (for having reworked the characters of the play and rewritten their lines from an existing canvas). This task of composition suited Hurion's talents, as he was referred to as a 'habile imitateur' (skilled imitator) in *L'Instructif de seconde rhétorique*.[49] Finally, Jehan Daveluys was paid eight ecus for 'mettre au net le pappier de la Resurrection, et y avoir faict les adicions' (making a clean copy of the manuscript and inserting the additions to it). The example illustrates a well-organized collaborative working process, where various actions related to composition are allocated to distinct tasks and skills.[50] From what we can discern, the *Résurrection* was a success, memorable enough to be utilised thirty years later as a selling point, as I will elaborate below.

As early as the summer of 1508, the city councillors of Romans made the decision to stage a production called *Les Trois Doms* to honor the saint-martyrs Severin, Exupere, and Felicien. The initial task of writing the play was assigned to Grenoble canon Sibout Pra. After a few weeks, the town commissioners in charge of supervising Pra's work declared themselves dissatisfied. They then called on Master Chevalet, the most renowned *fatiste* in the Rhone region at the time, who agreed

47 Servet (ed.) 1993, p. 9. For a new edition and comment of these documents, see Bouhaïk-Gironès 2023, pp. 99–104.

48 Runnalls 1981.

49 Buron et al. (eds.) 2015, p. 119, lines 12–13. On Hurion, consult H. Haug 2013.

50 For insights into collaborative efforts in music, see the chapters by Plumley, Everist, and Bent in this volume; for art history, see Stones's chapter.

to help.[51] However, after Pra and Chevalet spent a few days working together, the latter decided to cease writing in collaboration 'pour ce qu'ilz ne volit pax besognier avesque ledit chanoine Pra' (because he did not want to work with this Canon Pra). While Pra and his clerk continued to work alone until May 1509, Chevalet was again called on at that time to 'radouber' (improve) some episodes, in particular the roles of the executioners for which this *fatiste* was famous. The persistent rivalry between the two authors and the ensuing textual flux are visibly evident in the manuscript copy of the mystery play (Paris, BnF, n.a.f. 1261), which incorporates the alternative lines composed by Chevalet in its margins.[52]

The 1456 performance of the *Résurrection* in Angers and the 1509 production of *Les Trois Doms* in Romans both illustrate some of the situations where the *compositeurs* were led to negotiate the sharing of their authorship, with contrasting results. Whereas the working process in Angers appears to have been efficient, with each collaborator being assigned a distinct form of authorship and thus complementary *auctorialité*, the unsuccessful collaboration in Romans reflects the uncomfortable situation in which the playwrights found themselves. The conflict between Pra and Chevalet should not merely be attributed to a clash of personalities, as a psychological perspective might imply, but can be analysed in sociological terms. They were writers with unequal reputations, whose talents were pitted against each other by those who commissioned their work. However, this example is compelling because it illustrates that collective authorship is a dynamic process in which playwrights are not the sole actors. Indeed, the failure can also be seen as a consequence of ineffective team management by the Romans officials, whose lofty expectations and excessive control exerted pressure on the artists.[53]

The work processes in Angers and Romans shared a common feature, which should not be overlooked. In both instances, the actors responsible for performing the plays intervened in the text they were to recite and adjusted their lines to suit their preferences. The changes 'que aucuns des joueurs d'iceluy mistere y cuiderent adjouster a leurs plaisances' (that some actors had added at their pleasure) have been censured by the reviewers of the *Résurrection* manuscript.[54] On the contrary, the roles that Chevalet rewrote at the request of wealthy Romanais such as Etienne Combez des Coppes were incorporated into the copy of *Les Trois Doms*, indicating the influence that the town's prominent figures exerted over the theatrical endeavour, which they likely regarded themselves as co-authors of.

Indeed, during the fifteenth century, some plays had no other *compositeurs* than the communities that decided to stage them. In December 1496, Chalon-sur-Saône

51 On Chevalet's theatrical *compositure* and career before and after 1509, see Servet (ed.) 2006, pp. 14–15.

52 For a comprehensive analysis of the unsuccessful collaboration between Pra and Chevalet, see Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet 2014, §7–25.

53 The commissioners in Romans were also discontented with the painter François Thevenot and proposed that he expedite his work by collaborating with an artist from another town, an offer that he declined (Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet 2014, §26; Bouhaïk-Gironès 2023, p. 61).

54 Servet (ed.) 1993, p. 12.

city council decided to express its gratitude to Saint Sebastian by performing a show dedicated to him a few months later.[55] Twelve members of the council, who were prominent figures in the city, were elected to undertake three missions. Firstly, they were tasked with 'veoir et corriger la ryme' (reading and improving the writing) of an already acquired text, signifying that these officials assumed the role of composers in the rhetorical sense of the term. Secondly, they were responsible for creating 'les chaffaulx, secretz' (the stage and special effects) and ensuring that all the necessary equipment for the performance was manufactured. Last but not least, they were tasked with directing the actors, assigning roles, and overseeing rehearsals in such a way that 'ceulx qu'ils cognoistront non estre souffisans pour jouer le personnaige a eulx baillé, qu'ilz pourront changer et bailler aultres personnaiges' (if they find out that some actors are not talented enough to play their characters, they could give them other roles).[56] What makes this example unique is that the writing, scenography, and staging of the mystery play were undertaken by the city council itself. In contrast, on other, more common occasions, the composition process relied on the collaboration of various actors within the cities. This collaborative approach is exemplified by the Lille procession, one of the most renowned performative events in French from that era.[57]

Hall of Fame, Walk of Shame: Standing and Accountability

In the 1490s, the printer Antoine Vérard published the *Mystère de la Résurrection* as a text allegedly from 1456 and 'composé par maistre Jehan Michel et joué à Angiers triumphamment devant le roy de Cecile' (composed by Master Jehan Michel and performed triumphantly in Angers before the king of Sicily). Michel had indeed composed a renowned adaptation of Arnoul Gréban's *Passion*, a reworking that was staged in Angers in 1486. However, he was not involved in any capacity with the team commissioned by René d'Anjou thirty years prior. As Vérard was known for his unscrupulous publishing strategies, we can presume that his erroneous attribution was intentional. Theatre is a commercial art, and theatrical authorship carries economic implications: fame translates into financial gain.

It can also entail complications. Since theatre is a public art, the creators of a production bear responsibility for its impact on the public sphere. This investigation will therefore conclude with the following question: how did the justice system of the long fifteenth century address the criminal liability of playwrights, considering the intricate dynamics of the creative process that I have just delineated? A few trials involving fifteenth-century French-speaking composers and actors have been

55 The play has not been preserved, unlike that of the Lyon region on the same subject, mentioned above. But Chalon's municipal registers make it possible to reconstruct its creation process.

56 Chalon-sur-Saône city archives, cited in Bouhaïk-Gironès and Doudet 2014, §28.

57 Attested from 1270 and continuing until the middle of the eighteenth century, the Lille procession was overseen by the city council. However, in this instance, the shows were organized by entertainment experts, including leaders of joyful urban societies, and the plays were likely written by local clerks and/or performers. Seventy-two plays have been preserved in a single manuscript dating from the end of the fifteenth century (Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Cod. Guelf. 9 Blankenburg) and edited in Knight (ed.) 2001–11.

documented. I will briefly summarize two legal cases where the charge was *lèse-majesté*, an attack on the honour of the crown. Although this was a very serious accusation, both cases concluded significantly with the release of the detainees.

Jehan Savenot and his company were arrested in 1447 for having criticised the military policy of the king of France during a comic farce, part of the *Mystère de saint Éloi* performed in Dijon.[58] They informed the prosecutor that they were not accountable for the lines considered scandalous. They asserted that they had purchased a script from another company, unaware of any wrongdoing, as the play had previously been successful. Above all, Savenot pretended to ignore 'qui a esté le fateur et celui qui a ditte laditte farce' (who has authored and published the said farce). The director likely understood that asserting authorial responsibility and then making it impossible to attribute the play to a specific author was a crucial argument in his defence. This indeed presented a significant challenge for the prosecution, which struggled to identify a culprit. Consequently, the case was dropped.

When Henri Baude was arrested in 1486, along with the four lawyers who performed in his play which attacked the corrupt advisers of King Charles VIII, he did not deny that he was the author. On the contrary, the playwright wrote to his patron Jean II de Bourbon that 'il a fait qu'on a fait / jouer une brievfe moralité' (he arranged for a short morality play to be put on), with emphasis on the action verb *faire*.[59] While claiming its authorship, Baude cunningly shifted his *auctorialité*, or legal liability in this case, onto an institution beyond suspicion. He emphasised that the performance had been duly authorised by the Parisian Parliament and subsequently expressed discontent regarding the criminal procedure initiated against him by the royal court, considering it unjust. Baude, who was himself trained as a lawyer, based his argument on the fact that the prerogatives of the different institutions that were 'gardes et protecteurs' (guardians and protectors) of the public sphere overlapped and conflicted. Furthermore, he questioned who exactly possessed the legal competence to adjudicate composers and performers. Indeed, at that time, individuals who composed for the theatre had a rather fluid social identity and typically belonged to multiple social spheres: to the church as literati, to urban communities as citizens, and sometimes to the courts when engaged as administrative employees or remunerated artists. This intractable issue, coupled with the likely intervention of Baude's patron, ultimately resulted in the release of his group between July and December 1486.

As these two examples illustrate, fifteenth-century justice was evidently ill-equipped to contend with the argumentative strategies employed by show producers, playwrights, and actors, drawing from their multifaceted authorship and intricate *auctorialité*, not to mention their multifarious social status. When facing the risk of a conviction, the artists accused knew how to turn these dimensions into an advantage. But as those who wrote for the stage asserted their status throughout the sixteenth century, legal frameworks for regulating theatrical activities became more consolidated. Around and after 1562, with the onset of the Wars of Religion in French-speaking regions, the control apparatus was strengthened for both theatrical

58 Documents edited and studied in Bouhaïk-Gironès 2003 and Bouhaïk-Gironès 2012.

59 Baude's correspondence with Jean II de Bourbon and the trial records are edited in Quicherat (ed.) 1856, pp. 113–20. The case is re-examined in Bouhaïk-Gironès 2007, pp. 143–49.

and musical performances. Paradoxically, the gradual replacement in French of the *faiseur de jeux* (theatre makers) by the *poète dramatique* (dramatic poet), which traditional historiography dates from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, was contemporaneous with a judicial and social control of hitherto unseen force for the artists. Yet, the working processes specific to the writing workshop that I have tried to describe for the long fifteenth century never ceased to exist.[60]

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, those who compose for the stage have increasingly been given or have claimed the names of *faiseurs de théâtre*, of *écrivains de plateau* (theatre makers, stage writers), rather than authors or dramatists.[61] Post-modern and post-dramatic approaches have criticized two supposedly typical aspects of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century European theatre: the sacred character of the theatrical text, which would not suffer any change, and the dominant role of the stage director, who would impose his vision on the actors. Instead, a continuous theatrical writing before, during, and after the performance is promoted and an *auctorialité* distributed equally between the theatre makers. It is noteworthy that in contemporary French theatrical culture, this demand for change is expressed in terms identical to those developed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the *faiseurs* and *compositeurs* of plays thrived.

However, this recent movement should not be construed as an unconscious return to the Middle Ages. In reality, the writing workshop, along with the issues of cultural legitimisation, economic competition, and legal liability that collaborative authorship and complex *auctorialité* entail, have been constant themes throughout the history of European theatre. This raises the question as to whether the now obsolete text-centrism and the outdated tyrannical figure of the 'great author' are not challenges for theorists and historians rather than hindrances for theatre practitioners.

Undoubtedly, the 'great author' is a fascinating figure that sparks the imagination. Although the thirteenth century has scant surviving documentation of theatrical practices, the most notable manuscripts invited their readers to recall a few celebrated musicians, poets, and playwrights by portraying them as fictional characters. The scribe of Paris, BnF, fr. 1635 chose to present both *La Repentance Rutebeuf* and *La Repentance de Théophile* with identical titles and layouts. In the former, the poet confesses to the Virgin (fols. 2va–3ra), while in the latter, the main character of Rutebeuf's play *Le Miracle de Théophile* performs a similar prayer (fol. 83rb).[62] In Paris, BnF, fr. 25566, the sequence in which Adam de la Halle's works are transcribed – from the poet's youthful devotion to love and music, to the ironic self-reflection portrayed in the theatrical plays and finally to the aging writer's contemplation on death – delineates the idealised life of the devout Christian, while layering subjective experiences to captivate the readers' attention.[63] The mythologising of authors has been, and continues to be, a fundamental technique throughout the history of music, theatre, and literature.[64]

60 Chaouche et al. (2017), pp. 31–37.

61 Lehmann 2006; Tackels 2015.

62 Zink (ed. and trans.) 2001, pp. 331–40, 568–74.

63 Huot 1987, pp. 64–74; Badel (ed.) 1995, p. 10.

64 I am grateful to Sarah J. Brazil for proofreading this chapter.