FRENCH LITERATURE IN THE
FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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The literature of the fourteenth century, like that of every other era, cannot be summed up in generalizations. Literary fashions wax and wane, political and social conditions in various places and at various times influence writers in different ways, and above all, we have, as in every century, individual authors whose temperaments and circumstances predispose them to write in a particular manner. Also, one may add, in Kittredge's words, "genius comes only by the grace of God."

It is an easy generalization to say, as has been said, that in the fourteenth century Italy had Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, England had Chaucer, while France had only Froissart. But it must be remembered that during much of this century France suffered the ravages of war and the brutalities of invasion. Petrarch, who traveled through France after the treaty of Brétigny, vividly describes the wreckage that he saw, the evidences of arson and pillage, murder and rape.

Moreover, during the Hundred Years War, with its intermittent battles, many of the French aristocracy, if they were not killed, lived abroad as captives or hostages. This was the class that by tradition had supported literature in France. Before the invention of printing, writers necessarily wrote for the ears of auditors rather than for the eyes of readers; the courts of the nobility provided valuable audiences, and professional men of letters were largely dependent for their livelihood on aristocratic patrons. All the great authors of the fourteenth century whose names we know, whether they came from France, Italy, or England, lived on influential patronage of one sort or another. Nor need this be too much deplored, since the age of the despots in Italy is one of the times when human genius flowered. Then too, the chance to frequent the courts of the mighty permitted men like Chaucer, Petrarch, and Froissart to travel widely, and to fertilize not only their own talents but those of one another. However, it is only fair to recall
that in France at this time literature could be fostered in relatively few courts. The presence of foreign troops on French soil and the absence of important patrons may therefore help to explain why France, which in the preceding centuries had fathered the epic, the troubadour lyric, and the chivalric romance, had so little to offer between 1300 and 1400.

This was also a time when in France, for whatever reasons, the ideas and ideals that had inspired earlier writers showed signs of cracking. Old beliefs and loyalties had lost their potency. The Church itself was divided, with a dissolute papal court in southern France at the beginning of the century and two popes at the end of it, one in Avignon and the other in Rome. The unquestioning faith of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had been replaced in some instances by criticism and cynicism. To be sure, even in the earlier period, certain unorthodox sects—like the Waldensians, for example—had begun to assume the right to hold private opinions on sacred subjects. But they were reformers rather than cynics. In the time we are considering, faith itself had cooled.

Chivalric notions, too, which in the beginning had worn religious trappings and aroused mystical devotion, now seemed unrealistic. The French military class, which for so long had spent its energies on defending Christianity from the infidels, could not even defend its own land from the English invaders. The *Lancelot* in prose might be the bedside companion of noble lords and ladies, but its spirit had evaporated when Froissart could equate the cruel and bloody warriors of his own day with Knights of the Round Table. The chroniclers profess to write in honor of chivalry, but the society they picture bears little relation to the illusion they cherish. King Arthur and the Emperor Charlemagne might still be golden idols, but their clay feet were beginning to show.

Another ideal of the early Middle Ages had been the unity of Christendom as a continuation of the Roman Empire. Petrarch for a time had seen in Cola di Rienzi a reincarnation of the ancient heroes of Rome, but he had always regarded the German Emperors as usurpers, and after the fall of Rienzi, he began to dream only of Italian unity and not of a universal empire. Froissart's sympathies were not engaged by any country, but by a social class: his allegiance was to the aristocracy of any land that welcomed him. He admired courage and was fascinated by the feudal society around him. He did not realize that the soul had left
the body of chivalry and that the noble soldiers he knew were hardly counterparts of Perceval, Lancelot, and Galahad. In any case, the idea of patriotism was foreign to him, and he was not scandalized by those who changed sides during contemporary battles. Indeed he himself revised his early work on the Chronicles when he left his English protectors and wrote for French patrons.

But there is another, happier side to the picture. Although the fourteenth century witnessed a decline in the influence of the Church and the old ideals of chivalry, and although it abandoned the notion of a universal state approximating the Roman Empire, it began to experience the stimulating spirit of the rising towns, of their trade associations, and of the new class of citizens that was emerging. Learning and culture were no longer exclusively in the hands of the clergy. The independent judgments of the laity were becoming increasingly important. It is significant that although writers of the time might take minor orders and accept the patronage of the nobility, nevertheless Chaucer, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Froissart can all be grouped together as citizen authors. Their thoughts betray a mundane rather than a cloistered orientation, and at least two of them, Chaucer and Boccaccio, exhibit an interested awareness of the common man and his problems.

In fourteenth-century France this tendency is best represented by the drama. But before we consider that, let us examine the more aristocratic writings of the time, writings by professional men of letters, whatever their origins, men whose names are known to us, who wrote primarily for the nobility and who, for the most part, would probably have had little to do with the anonymous persons who wrote for the theater of the citizenry.

It is needless to stress the fact that France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had created an amazingly fertile literature. Its continuing influence was felt from Iceland to Sicily, from Germany to Spain. French epics and lyrics, short lays and long courtly romances were widely translated and imitated. So successful and prolific was this literature that, like the English poetry of the romantic period, it laid deadening hands on the future of the land that gave it birth. Imitation stifled creation. As a consequence, despite new experiences and a new social structure, most professional French writers of the fourteenth century still clung to old conventions of matter and technique instead of venturing upon original ideas.
I should like to speak briefly at this point of only three of the more famous professional French writers of the time: Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Eustache Deschamps.

Guillaume de Machaut, who lived from about 1300 to about 1377, an author greatly honored in his own day, was a musician as well as a poet, a composer who followed the troubadour custom of writing melodies for his own verses; and his music contributed to his fame. Unfortunately, he lacked the literary talent to rejuvenate the old courtly lyric. The troubadours and trouvères had at least sought for an endless originality of form and expression, if not always of theme. Machaut, with little new to say, further hobbled his work by employing such fixed types of verse as the ballade and rondeau. His contemporaries erroneously credited him with inventing these rigid forms. Actually, he did not, but he made them popular and his followers eagerly adopted them. However, three stanzas on the same rhymes with a refrain repeating half of them do not make a poet. Like other writers of his kind, Machaut tended to lean upon tired phrases and to observe rules instead of creating them. His lyrics sometimes have facility and charm, but they lack the bite of novelty and sincerity.

Machaut wrote long narrative poems as well as short lyrics, and following the pattern made popular by the authors of the Roman de la Rose, he often used the framework of the dream and populated his landscapes with allegorical figures. Typical of many such works is the adventure of a poet who falls asleep on a day in spring and finds himself in a garden where he meets such abstract characters as Reason, Fortune, Nature, Faith, and so on. He is instructed by these symbolical persons and argues with them—usually about love.

For example, in one such poem, Le Jugement du roi de Bohême, Machaut represents himself as seeing a knight and a lady wandering in a garden. They are both exceedingly sad: the lady’s lover has died and the knight has been betrayed by his mistress. They argue as to which has suffered most. Our poet overhears the discussion and suggests that they turn to his patron, the King of Bohemia, for an opinion. They proceed to the royal residence where the king renders a decision in favor of the betrayed knight for reasons which you can guess. Although the poem introduces many allegorical figures and continues the type of judicium amoris made famous in the twelfth century in the circles of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughters, Machaut’s introduction of himself
and the king and the location of the judgment in the king's own castle give the poem a certain realistic fillip.

In another debate about a lover's problems, *Le Jugement du roi de Navarre*, Machaut makes himself the protagonist and defends himself against the charge of having been remiss toward his lady. A further touch of actuality occurs in the Prologue where the poet mentions various events of 1348 and 1349: the peasants' uprisings, the persecution of the Jews, the religious activities of the Flagellants, and the disastrous effects of the Black Death. He is like Boccaccio in setting frivolous scenes against dark events; but with Boccaccio background and foreground interact to add depth to the picture, whereas Machaut's prologue—though it gives a sense of verisimilitude to the poem—has little functional connection with what follows. The poem, in fact, is essentially another casuistic discussion about love, with an unattractive pack of quarrelsome women furnishing a slight trace of humor by their castigations of the author.

In the course of his longer pieces Machaut manages to insert a large number of stories or "examples." These are taken from the Bible, the bestiaries, from Greco-Roman literature, from mediaeval sources of many kinds, and even from contemporary tales, perhaps of the author's own invention. Such examples were intended to embellish, entertain, and instruct. They range from the stories of Dido and Aeneas, Jason and Medea, Piramus and Thisbe, through references to Lancelot and Tristan, to anecdotes of Machaut's own day that begin with some topical phrase like "It happened recently that a clerk of Orléans . . ." or "Not long ago a great lady came to Paris with her daughter . . . ." These incidental tales give one a good idea of the literary lore acceptable to courtly circles in the mid-fourteenth century as well as of certain manners and customs of the time.

One of Machaut's most influential works was his *Voir Dit*, which was written when the author was over sixty. The narrative proceeds by way of letters, with inserted poems, that supposedly passed between Machaut and a young woman who professed to be in love with him, sight unseen. How much of this epistolary romance was real, how much fiction, it is hard to say. Most scholars assume that there is a considerable amount of truth in it, and that the aging poet really had an affair with a young woman of some social prominence, an affair, however, in which her ambition to be the mistress and inspiration of a famous author was more deeply impli-
cated than her heart. Yet the *Voir Dit* can still be read with pleasure: the psychological ramifications of the liaison—the doubts, hopes, plans for meeting, the quarrels and reconciliations of the lovers, the warming and cooling and rewarming of their feelings—give the romance an abiding substance.

Machaut's professional status as a man of letters is apparent from the praise of his contemporaries, but above all from the eminence and generosity of his protectors. These included such men as John of Luxemburg, king of Bohemia, Charles, king of Navarre, and eventually the Dauphin of France, who became Charles V. Though the poet is referred to in documents as "master" and though he had pursued theological studies (he became a canon), he earned his living by means of his pen. Through his writings he attracted the favor of the great nobles who gave him preferments of various kinds. He acted as secretary and almoner of King John and enjoyed the prebends of several canonries bestowed upon him by his benefactors. With these highly placed men he lived on intimate terms, and traveled widely in their train. Naturally his writings conformed to the tastes of those who employed him and whom he so frequently eulogized. They are graceful trifles for the most part, full of pretty ornamental devices, but wanting in any real grandeur of theme. One might say that Machaut (unlike Chaucer) repaid his considerable debt to the *Roman de la Rose* in debased coinage.

Froissart, too, represents the professional man of letters of his age. He wrote his *Chronicles*, he says, to praise the exploits of famous men. Born about 1337 in Valenciennes, he went to London as a young man, and by 1361 had presented to Queen Philippa of England (who, like himself, was from the province of Hainaut) a poem that he had composed about the battle of Poitiers. He was graciously received and spent five years in the brilliant English court at a time when London was full of eminent French captives and hostages who were being generously treated by their captors. From both the French and English who had participated in the Hundred Years War, Froissart learned much about the persons and battles involved. A good reporter and a vivacious narrator, he tried to reproduce faithfully what he learned from his sources, and in the various editions of his *Chronicles* he only indirectly reflects his own personality, mirroring more accurately the opinions of others, especially the prejudices of his patrons.
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Froissart was primarily a historian and should be judged as such. But he also wrote lays, ballades, and long narrative poems, all of which betray the influence of Machaut. In some of his early light verses and in a longer narrative poem, L’Espinette amoureuse, he gives us fresh and charming reminiscences of his youth when, he says, he listened to the tales of minstrels and learned that all joy comes from love and arms. He was not yet fourteen when he met the lady who occupied his thoughts for ten years before finally rejecting him. Later he vows that this experience helped make a man of him. At any rate, the poem reveals that Froissart, like Machaut, can be personal within the rigid confines of the conventional poetry of his time. But his sentiments seldom ring true and hardly rise above the superficial. He reflects the well-being and contentment of a man who never suffered deeply. In fact, according to Gaston Paris, even in narrating scenes of horror, Froissart exhibits “an almost joyous serenity.” Paris also suggests that the effect of impartiality sometimes achieved by the Chronicles is merely the result of the author’s insensitiveness.

After the death of Queen Philippa, Froissart went back to Valenciennes and finished the first book of the Chronicles for the queen’s nephew, Robert of Namur. Soon, however, he acquired two French patrons, Guy de Blois, who gave him a fat living, and Wenceslas, Duke of Luxemburg and Brabant. It was for Wenceslas that he wrote his romance, Méliador, in which he intercalated some of the duke’s own lyrics. Méliador is probably Froissart’s most ambitious literary production, but it is pretty poor stuff. An involved story of about thirty thousand lines, it tells of the rival adventures of various knights in wooing a princess and of how the best of these knights, Méliador, won her. King Arthur’s court is involved, and the romance has been variously described as a pale reflection of the Lancelot in prose and as the kind of tale that drove Don Quixote out of his mind.

In any case, Froissart’s works, like those of Machaut, indicate that although chivalry and feudalism were dying, the feudal lords remained, and that although these lords may no longer have believed sincerely in the old ideals of the epic, the courtly lyric, and the courtly romance, their retainers paid lip service at least to certain traditions of the earlier literature. Many of the French nobility, it would seem, whatever their scepticism, must have indulged in wishful thinking and hoped to ape the exploits of
the Arthurian heroes. Unfortunately, they lived in an age when knighthood was no longer in flower, but in decay.

A poet of a different stamp is Eustache Deschamps, who lived from about 1346 to about 1406 or 1407. Unlike Machaut and Froissart, Deschamps gives the impression of having been an unhappy man throughout most of his life. To be sure, he was a devoted follower of Machaut; and, as a student of law and later among convivial companions or pleasantly housed in royal palaces, he may have enjoyed gay hours, creature comforts, good food, and the society of complacent women. But if one follows him through the ten large volumes of his works, the overwhelming impression is of complaints: complaints about the evils of the time, the war, the epidemics, the behavior of kings and prelates, the envy, greed, ambition, luxury, ingratitude, and dissoluteness of the world about him, the burdens of the poor, the unhealthy condition of a Church racked by schisms—all these mingled with complaints about his own ill health, unpaid wages, and his patrons' neglect and unfulfilled promises.

Who was this dour, embittered poet? After finishing his law studies at the University of Orléans, he entered the service of one important protector after another, serving two kings, Charles V and VI, and various princes and dukes, often simultaneously. His benefactors recognized his legal training by employing him as their bailiff and administrator in different posts, but they also used him in more intimate capacities, such as equerry and maître d'hôtel. At times they made him gifts of houses and money. But Deschamps seems everlastingly dissatisfied. The promised gifts do not arrive, the houses are in ruins or subject to lawsuits. He constantly speaks of his need for more funds. He seems also to have suffered inordinately from the cold and from some aggravated form of arthritis.

Sick, tired, old before his time, mocked at by the young, he consoles himself by castigating the vices and disorders of the time. Thus, in a way, his verses are an epitome of fourteenth-century disillusionment. In one poem he writes:

I hate my days and my sad life
And curse the hour when I was born.
I present myself humbly to Death . . .
I see myself a part of every ill.
"I see myself a part of every ill" is his refrain here; another refrain in a somewhat similar poem reads, "The world is growing old; it cannot last."

If Deschamps did not so often let his own petty concerns intrude upon his moral indictments, one could more readily admire the man and his achievements. Even so, one does welcome a new and serious note in him. His satirical verses sometimes seem almost modern. A clerk or scholar himself, he advises kings and nobles to do more studying and learning. (His only criticism of scholars is that they talk too much and perform too little.) As a magistrate, he deplores the inequalities in the administration of justice. More than once he inveighs against the crushing taxation of the poor. And he speaks out freely against the royal court as a place where the humble are oppressed by the powerful and where in order to live in peace one must be blind, deaf, and dumb.

However, he is not always consistent, and apparently the ups and downs of his own fortunes influenced his principles. Even in lighter matters he can be capricious. Despite his happy marriage and a poem written for his daughter advising her to be a good wife like her mother, he follows the fashion of his time in attacking both women and matrimony. He accuses women of flirting and chattering too much, of being extravagant, fickle, provoking, bad-tempered, and quarrelsome. Marriage is slavery, he says: it results in grief and poverty and brings on the sufferings of jealousy and betrayal. Better free love than marriage, better a mistress than a wife. At one point he observes that it is dishonorable for a man to marry a rich, old wife, but he cynically advises that very course, since, after the death of the rich, old wife, her husband will be free to use her money and marry a younger woman more to his taste.

Apparently, Deschamps was untroubled by the inconsistency between his realistic diatribes against women and the many lyrics in the old troubadour tradition that he wrote for his noble patronesses. These are filled with courtly phrases, conventional protestations of undying devotion, references to the need for secrecy and to the slanders of would-be rivals, delicate demands for tokens of affection, and implications that heartbreak will result if the poet is denied his lady's grace.

As an author, Deschamps was prodigiously fertile: his works include some fifteen hundred pieces. He obviously composed with
great facility; in fact, one feels in him a compulsive writer. His most usual verse form was the ballade, but he also wrote many chansons royaux, rondeaux, virelais, and other types of poems, as well as three prose works and twelve works in Latin. He is often banal, but he effectively varies his rhythms, sometimes uses new and unusual words, and under stress of strong emotion, he can be eloquent.

What one misses in Deschamps is poetic grandeur. To be sure, he was courageous in attacking great issues and in giving good, though unpleasant, counsel to his patrons; he was loyal in defending those he admired against vilification, compassionate toward the sufferings of the poor, patriotic in assessing the desperate situation of France and in urging powerful men to act. He nevertheless alienates his audience by the constant intrusion into important themes of peevish grumbling about personal grievances. Small difficulties and great evils are jumbled together, so that subjects essentially momentous are made to seem trivial. Then too, the light structure of his favorite verse forms, the ballade and rondeau, give inadequate support to the weight of his indignation. Yet Deschamps, for all his faults, exhibits a sense of responsibility, lacking in men like Machaut and Froissart.

Before turning to the drama, it may be well to pause for a moment to stress a few salient facts about the more professional French literature of the fourteenth century that we have been sampling. During this time, the life of the old epics and romances was being artificially prolonged by dull imitations or prose replacements. The content of the troubadour lyrics was little changed, but their exciting rhythms and vocabulary succumbed to the stereotypes of the rondeau, ballade, virelai, and chanson royale. External characteristics of the Roman de la Rose were copied without being given any vital human significance. There was a new note of realism in some of the poetry and an increasing use of allegory—that mediaeval substitute for psychology—but the few innovations did little to revivify the literature of the age. The patina of the past remained, a kind of rust that failed to cover a rotting core. Men like Machaut, Froissart, and even Deschamps appear for the most part to lack literary depth. They treat their main theme, love, as little more than an insignificant game, and they conceal their hollowness with prolix and pedantic learning.

But it is only fair to say of these three poets that, like their early French predecessors, they exercised much influence both at home
and abroad. Chaucer, for example, in his so-called French period was indebted to all three of them. Indeed Chaucer has been called "a French love-poet writing . . . in the English language," and, "the culminating artist of the French tradition." As for François Villon, his debt to Deschamps is discernible in many poems, the debtor in this case improving so vastly on his creditor that he could be a great poet even within the confining form of the ballade.

When we turn to the French drama of the fourteenth century, we leave the courts of the aristocracy and descend into the market place. That is, all of the plays of the time which survive today, with one exception, seem to have been written for popular consumption. And, unlike the works of the professional men of letters, they are anonymous. Some of them were products of guilds. All of them, even those most religious in their subject matter, exhibit an earthiness quite foreign to the literature we have been considering.

I should like to examine first a collection of forty miracle plays known as the Miracles de Nostre Dame. In each of these plays the Blessed Virgin Mary saves an erring mortal from the consequences of his sin. The sins include every variety known to the modern screen. But hesitation on the part of the sinner before committing the crime, true repentance afterward, and sincere appeals to Our Lady enable him to achieve grace. The plots vary widely and can be traced to many different sources. Yet underlying them all is a certain uniformity. In every play the Blessed Virgin appears in person, accompanied by saints and angels who sing songs in her honor. And the ending is always the happy one of salvation. One of the most famous of these dramas has formed the basis of several modern versions, among them Maeterlinck's Soeur Béatrice and Max Reinhardt's successful spectacle The Miracle. This is the story of the young nun who is seduced by a lover and leaves her convent, but whose place, because of her reluctance to depart, her great piety, and her eventual repentance, is filled throughout her absence by the Blessed Virgin herself.

It has long been surmised that this collection of plays owes its origin to some guild, and recently it has been proved that the guild in question was that of the Parisian goldsmiths. From records of societies like theirs and from the two manuscripts in which the collection is preserved, we may deduce that one of the Miracles
was performed each year as part of the festivities in honor of Our Lady, the guild's patron saint.

The songs interpolated in the plays are *rondeaux* and accompanying the plays in the manuscripts are separate poems (*serventoys*) in praise of the Virgin that resemble courtly lyrics in form and diction. Obviously, the tone of the *serventoys* is very different from that of the plays; like the songs in *rondeau* form, it testifies to the extent of the influence exerted by literary traditions. It has been suggested that when members of the guild assembled to witness the plays, possibly at the banquets usual on such occasions, they also held poetical contests, awarding prizes to the best of the poems that had been submitted.

The plays, as we have said, embrace a great diversity of plots, and like the tales of Chaucer and Boccaccio, they bring into action people of every class of society. Some are about saints, but men and women from the highest to the lowest ranks of Church and State make their appearance. They range from popes and cardinals to hermits, priests, and nuns; from emperors, empresses, kings, and queens to heralds, bailiffs, sergeants, and executioners. Included also, among others, are students, minstrels, children, fools, beggars, pilgrims, midwives, innkeepers, and many types of servants. Because the plays are for the most part derivative in theme and their plots are borrowed from older stories, one must be cautious in interpreting them as portrayals of fourteenth-century life. Nevertheless, contemporaneous conditions are evident in the denial of confession and extreme unction to condemned criminals, in the assignment of important roles to hermits and, occasionally, less honorable ones to monks and nuns, and in the remark of a charlatan to his fellow thief that the English have stolen all his loot.

Although the authors of these plays may have had learning of a sort—the intercalated poems and the prose sermons preceding many of the *Miracles* betray the hands of clerks—nevertheless the atmosphere of the collection emanates from the milieu for which it was composed. Women in the *Miracles* are not goddesses on pedestals, but true daughters of Eve. The attitude toward love and marriage is that of the citizenry, not that of courtly society. No coy dalliance here with other men's wives! Fidelity is a virtue; men and women who break their marital vows expect to be punished. In general, the plays abjure allegory and substitute realism. Merchants go off on business trips and drive hard bargains. We witness a woman in childbirth, another about to be burned, still
another on the point of being raped. Nuns and monks yield to mundane passions, and persons of the most exalted station succumb to the same temptations that doubtless plagued the titillated spectators.

Indeed realism goes so far in the Miracles that God, the Blessed Virgin, the archangels, angels, and saints address the erring mortals whom they admonish with the easy familiarity of equals. As Petit de Julleville says, "Nothing is more natural in these plays than the supernatural."

The authors, however, were close observers of human nature. A canon, unwillingly lured into marriage by his relatives, leaves his bride on their wedding night, but not without experiencing fleshly yearnings as he views her naked in bed. In another play, the brother of the Emperor of Rome is entrusted with the care of the Empress during her husband's absence, but himself falls in love with her. In a long monologue he analyzes both his overwhelming desire and his feelings of guilt at betraying his brother; he sways alternately between "I will" and "I won't," and he uses every possible sophistry to persuade himself that he must have the woman he loves although he knows he must not.

Of course, the plays vary in merit, but the best of them have a continuing dramatic impact, and several have been performed successfully in our own time. Many of the plots are intricate and are developed with suspense; the characters have actuality and their problems evoke the universal emotions of pity, fear, and horror. It should also be remembered that music served to heighten the feelings that were aroused. And naturally the religious theme, namely that faith in the Blessed Virgin and prayers for her intercession can save the worst of sinners, must have assuaged the hearts of many a guilty mediaeval spectator.

The religious element in the Miracles de Nostre Dame is sometimes submerged by the excitingly mundane plots. With the earliest French Passion play, however, the so-called Palatine Passion of the fourteenth century, the religious matter and purpose become more obvious. Indeed, in two versions of the narrative poem on which the play is based, that purpose emerges clearly, for the prologue of the poem scolds those who would rather hear about Roland and Oliver than about Christ's sufferings on the cross.

The Palatine Passion is a meager thing when compared with its great successors, and, unlike the Miracles of the Parisian gold-
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smiths, it seems to have been written for a provincial audience. But in its brief compass of just under two thousand lines, some thirty-seven characters appear, besides an unknown number of anonymous angels, Jews, and souls in limbo. And the action extends from preparations for the Last Supper through all the well-known incidents before and after the Crucifixion, and ends with the three Marys at the tomb, the angelic announcement to them of the Resurrection, and their subsequent telling of the news to St. Peter.

The Passion play in its many manifestations was designed to rival other forms of diversion as well as to dramatize biblical history and enliven the teachings of the Church. A comparison of the Palatine Passion with its liturgical and biblical sources and with its more pretentious descendants shows a generous measure of originality in some scenes, and their crude realism and humor indicate a desire to entertain as well as to instruct. For example, when Judas receives his thirty pieces of silver for betraying his master, he proceeds to count them one by one and then exclaims that he has been cheated: there are only twenty-eight. And the playwright is at some pains to indicate that the nails used in the Crucifixion were inexpertly forged by the wicked wife of the smith after the smith himself had refused to use his professional skill for such an evil purpose. Indeed, our dramatist seems to delight in scenes of cruelty as he dwells at length on the torturing and beating of Jesus. He is also very fond of devils, and one of the best scenes takes place during the Harrowing of Hell. Another lively episode in the play gives us a picturesque harangue by the spice merchant from whom the three Marys, on their way to the tomb, try to buy unguents with which to anoint Jesus. The merchant claims to be a physician from the great mediaeval medical center of Salerno, and he vaunts his wares like a circus barker. He offers the Marys not only the ointment they desire, but herbs to make the old young, to enable lovers to embrace their sweethearts without being seen, and still others guaranteed to raise the dead.

Another play of the fourteenth century also reflects the taste of the populace. This is Le Jour du Jugement, which, though it lacks the realism and humor of the Palatine Passion, must have been very impressive, for it links the story of Antichrist with the Day of Judgment and introduces a vast multitude of biblical and apocryphal figures, as well as some that are fabrications of the playwright. In the play, we see devils instructing Antichrist on
how to imitate Christ so that he too, by their magic, can heal the blind and sick, succor the oppressed, and resurrect the dead. Of course, punishment of this usurper is not long delayed. He is doomed, but not alone. A long procession of the damned pass before us: an abbess and bishop who have sinned together, a king, bailiff, provost, lawyer, an adulterous queen, an erring prioress, a usurer, his wife, servant, and even his small child. Here is a cast of characters reminiscent of those in the miracle plays. And the author displays his proletarian sympathies by damning any persons who have been unkind to the poor and all, even children and servants, who have lived on the fruits of usury. At the end of the play, in a grandiose final scene, apostles and saints aid in the task of separating the saved from the damned: the blessed are gently led away to paradise while angels pour out vials of wrath on the wicked and devils brutally drive them to hell.

This dynamic treatment of the Last Judgment must have been a sensational, animated version of the scene so often depicted by mediaeval artists. Nearly a hundred characters took part in the play, and despite its relative brevity—it occupies less than three thousand lines—it gave the people a pageant of vast proportions with surprising theatrical effects in its contrasting movements and costumes. Just as the Palatine Passion was a forerunner of the magnificent and sumptuous Passion plays of later periods, so the piece about Antichrist and the Last Judgment, with its enormous range of characters, its complicated and suspenseful plot, was a precursor of the grandiose dramatic spectacles of the following centuries. Indeed the most famous and beautiful of all the French religious plays of the fifteenth century, the Passion by Arnoul Greban, owes much in technique and even in language to these unpretentious antecedents.

The last French play to which I would call your attention is a play about the patient Griselda, known as L'Estoire de Griseldis. It was written at the very end of the century, in 1395, and, unlike the plays we have been considering, it is not a play of the market place or the guilds, but a dramatic work probably performed at court. Before this time we know of mimed entremés, or interludes, produced during royal banquet, and we hear of mimed spectacles given in connection with the processional entries of royal guests, but no other play like the Griseldis has come down to us.

The theme was first developed by Boccaccio in the Decameron. Petrarch retold Boccaccio's Italian story in Latin, and in this
form it had wide currency. From Petrarch (and a French translation) Chaucer took his English version for the Clerk's contribution to the *Canterbury Tales*. From Petrarch, too, the story was twice translated into French prose, once by Philippe de Mézières, whose translation forms the basis for *L'Estoire de Griseldis*. Indeed, it has been plausibly suggested that Philippe himself, a much traveled diplomat, a royal counselor of Charles V, and a tutor of Charles VI, wrote the play and that its first performance had something to do with preparations for the marriage of Isabelle of France and Richard of England, a project dear to Philippe, who hoped thereby to establish a durable peace between the two countries.

The theme of all the versions of the Griselda story deriving from Petrarch is the same: the almost unearthly patience of Griselda in the face of her husband's testing of her. Our dramatist adds colorful hunting scenes to his source and emphasizes the pageantry of courtly life. He also uses Griselda's humble status as an excuse to introduce shepherds who seem especially eager to express contentment with their lot and to exalt the advantages of their simple, pastoral life. At times, there is a humorous twist to their comments, a playful treatment which suggests the aristocratic attitude of the stylized *pastourelle* rather than any tendency to sympathize with the hardships of the lower classes.

Despite the fact that this is the first serious French play with a non-religious theme and that it was destined for a noble rather than a bourgeois audience, it is not too different from the plays we have been considering. The human beings it portrays are not unlike those in the miracle plays or even some of those in the Passion plays; and Griselda's virtue has a little of the superhuman quality that pervades the heroes and heroines of the saint plays. But here for the first time, outside the realm of farce and comedy, divine intervention is missing. Both the subject matter and the treatment of it are worldly. The motivation is mundane rather than religious. The play has sometimes been likened to a morality play since it dramatizes an abstraction—constancy. Yet its characters are real people, not allegorical figures, and the virtue of wifely submission bears little relation to the virtues canonized by the moralities. Here then, at the end of the century, is the drama, secularized and destined for an aristocratic audience. It has given us something new.

In conclusion, let me forget for a moment my reluctance to generalize. Glancing back at the French literature of the fourteenth
century, we have found that it falls into two categories. One was largely the work of professional men of letters and was designed for the aristocracy: it seems essentially static and offered little that was original. The other, more nearly reflecting the rising influence of townsfolk and guilds, is best mirrored in the drama; and the drama, for all its defects, had a forward movement, a potentially dynamic vitality.

Of course, one should not be too rigid about this division; a king and his court might—and did—enjoy the Passion plays, whereas his subjects, given an opportunity to hear them, undoubtedly would have delighted in certain works by Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps. There is a democracy about all literature that tends to break through barriers. But, speaking generally, for the fourteenth century, the division is recognizable.

As for what in art and literature is derivative, what evolutionary, and what original, one can only judge in retrospect. Surveying the literature of France between 1300 and 1400, we find little outside the drama that seems freshly inspired. And yet it is only necessary to mention Chaucer, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Villon to realize how the alchemy of genius turned dross into gold and how what was best in the works of this era could survive and be used in happier times and places. Regarding the drama, its universal appeal in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries to courtiers and groundlings alike needs hardly to be emphasized. Yet it is worth remembering that many a flowering in the garden that we call the Renaissance can be traced back directly to small seedlings nurtured during the late mediaeval period.