

## THE THEME OF JUSTICE AND THE STRUCTURE OF *LA FARCE DE MAITRE PIERRE PATHELIN*\*

The most substantial criticism of *La Farce de Maître Pierre Pathelin* has for the past forty years tended to bog down in questions of authorship when not limited to linguistic problems. The authorship debate, dating back apparently to the seventeenth century, received its modern impetus from a study by Louis Cons, *L'Auteur de la Farce de Pathelin* (1926), which went to great lengths to attribute the play to the monk Guillaume Alecis, until then known primarily as the author of a long didactic poem, *Les Faintes du monde*. Professor Cons found in the play a wealth of details to support his case, notably many parallels between the manner in which the theme of deception, *faintes* (or *feintes*), is established in *Pathelin* and the presentation of the *faintes* in Alecis' poem :

« Dans *Pathelin* le thème unique et constant c'est la feinte et le dol. C'est aussi, comme on disait alors, le "blason", le "beau langage", la flatterie imprudente et intéressée [...] C'est une espèce de cercle ou de ronde fantastique de la feinte, un jeu où on se passe la tromperie l'un à l'autre. »<sup>1</sup>

*Pathelin*, Professor Cons argues, is a « satire voulue » : « satire de société inspirée par des motifs de "classe", et satire de l'humanité du siècle, inspirée par des motifs de religion »<sup>2</sup>. The moral is to be found in the triumph of the shepherd :

« La morale, si morale il y a, n'est pas formulée, n'est pas didactique. Elle consiste dans la "réaction" intime que l'auteur attend du spectateur, - réaction causée par la saturation même, l'excès du vice qu'on lui dépeint et qui, en l'espèce, est la "feintise". »<sup>3</sup>

« Il y a en réalité une morale dans *Pathelin* et... elle est dans le berger qui

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<sup>1</sup> L. Cons, *L'Auteur de la farce de Pathelin*, Princeton, 1926, p. 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

trionphe non parce qu'il vaut mieux que les autres mais parce que les autres le méprisent et le "foulent". »<sup>4</sup>

At the time Prof. Cons offered his interpretation, the standard estimate of the play could be found in Petit de Julleville :

« La moralité, n'en est pas très élevée ; si l'on veut absolument que *Pathelin* ait une moralité, c'est celle qu'un vieux proverbe résumait ainsi : "A trompeur, trompeur et demi." Moralité toute négative ; simple leçon d'expérience qui ressemble à celle des *Fables* de La Fontaine. Mais cette action est mise en scène avec un remarquable génie comique. »<sup>5</sup>

To attribute significance to the action was to endanger the « génie comique. » Scholars knew of course that, as a rule, fifteenth-century farce was the vehicle for morality or satire ; but uncertainty about the authorship of *Pathelin* made them reluctant to deal with the thematic substance of the play. Thus, the historian's reticence was characteristic of a general attitude : « Il faudrait savoir qui a composé la pièce et pour quelle occasion elle a été écrite. Nous ne tenons pas encore le secret de *Pathelin*. »<sup>6</sup> Only Louis Cons, since he felt he had successfully resolved the authorship, problem could call the play a religiously inspired satire and draw attention to passages which illustrated the biases one might anticipate from a monk writing in the second half of the fifteenth century in Normandy and echoing the issues characteristic of this time and place. Although Cons received the endorsement of R.T. Holbrook, the chief modern editor of *Pathelin*, his theories were not generally accepted ; the evidence seemed inconclusive, and few scholars were prepared to accept Guillaume Alecis whose *Faintes* were médiocre et best as the author of the masterly farce. In the midst of this controversy over the author, inevitably Cons' insights into the text were neglected, even though many of them did not depend on the identification. Thus, the evidence Cons assembled to demonstrate the author's erudition and care in composition remains useful in explaining why *Pathelin* is superior beyond comparison to anything done in the genre before Molière. Similarly, his argument that the author, whoever he might be, had set out to deliberately expose through farce the « feintes du monde » is not only hard to refute, but constitutes the premise from which an

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> L. Petit de Julleville, *Le Théâtre en France*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1908, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> J. Bédier et P. Hazard, *Histoire de la Littérature française*, t. 1, Paris, Larousse, 1948, p. 140 ; this concludes remarks about the unique polish of the presentation of the « fripon » in *Pathelin*.

analysis of the play's structure can most profitably be conducted. For whether or not the satiric intent was due to the author's religious zeal, the fact remains that it was in harmony with medieval theory of comedy. Furthermore, regardless of why the author set out to attack the « feintes », it is evident that in order to make his point he constructed a most elaborate « feinte » himself, a parody of the representations of the Truth as presented in the moralities and miracles with which *Pathelin* shared the fifteenth-century stage.

*Pathelin* is an extremely carefully structured exposé of deceit poking fun at the processes through which men assume and dispense justice. From beginning to end, the play presents characters determining their just desert and setting out to collect payment ; from a dramatic point of view, their quest reaches its climax in the trial scene, in the utter failure of justice ; the quest for payment, however, continues through the remaining two scenes, and it becomes evident that when the play closes with Pathelin pursuing the shepherd and hoping to find a sergeant of the law to assist him, both justice and payment are yet to be sought. The concluding « jeu de scene » merely parallels the concluding argument which is presented with no less virtuosity.

*Pathelin* has the unique distinction of a double resolution : the resolution of classical comedy, i.e., the young must triumph over the old, or, as Pathelin has it, « les oisons mainnent les oes paistre » (v. 1586) ; resolution of Christian drama in general, i. e., no action can be considered complete until it is seen in perspective with the Last Judgment, which perspective necessarily overwhelms farce. The whole is succinctly put into eight lines just before the play concludes with the chase off stage :

LE BERGIER

**1585.** Bee.

PATHELIN

Par Saint Jehan, tu as raison :

Les oisons mainnent les oes paistre.

Or cuidoye estre sur tous maistre

Des trompeurs, d'icy et d'ailleurs,

Des fort coureux et des bailleurs

**1590.** De paroles en payement

A rendre au jour du Jugement,

Et ung bergier des champs me passe !

The idea of payment on Doomsday presented here had actually been introduced in the opening scene of the play (v. 86) and had served as basis for the payment motif throughout the play, whether the traffic was in cloth, in services or in justice. What Louis Cons had aptly described as a «ronde fantastique» of deceit comes to a more or less satisfying end : that the deceiver will be deceived is a comic resolution or a manifestation or poetic justice suitable to the wordly stage ; however, insofar as other stages and a larger idea of justice have been suggested by the impotence of justice on this stage, the «ronde» goes on to be closed by another Shepherd who is truly innocent, at the Last Judgment.

Much of the success of *Pathelin* was and remains due to the fact that in « staging » his play the author could adapt the conventions of his time into a wonderfully sophisticated structure without sacrificing any of the gross humor and action required by the genre, in fact, without showing any strain. (The crude sequel and imitation, *Le Nouveau Pathelin* and *Le Testament de Pathelin*, which came out shortly afterwards, allow us to gauge not only the success of *Pathelin* but its superiority as well.) Instead of making farce into an uneasy vehicle for Christian morality and the stage into a makeshift pulpit, the author of *Pathelin* exploits the characteristics peculiar to the genre, the action most likely to suggest stereotypes, and the uneasy rapport between theater and life ; indeed, his treatment resembles in many respects that which we have become used to in the « self-conscious » modern theater.

The play offers an utterly conventional juxtaposition of the man of means, the Draper, with the man of wits, the poor but resourceful lawyer, and it matches them against Agnelet, the shepherd, representing the folk's simplicity which triumphs in the end<sup>7</sup> ; the pecking order demonstrated is upset, and the audience may feel vindicated and applaud unless and until it is called upon to examine another kind of justice and another, radically different solution to the worldly problems of clothing and feeding which he play had taken up. The extreme position of farce along the comic scale facilitated the abrupt shift of point of view, and in all likelihood the call to make such a shift would not have come as a surprise to the spectators (in *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga has amply demonstrated that fondness for sudden and harsh transitions was characteristic of the period) ; the author, however, did not

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<sup>7</sup> See J.-V. Alter, *Les Origines de la satire anti-bourgeoise en France*, Genève, Droz, 1966, p. 133 : « la Farce de Maître Pathelin caractérise la satire anti-bourgeoise de l'époque mieux qu'aucune autre pièce médiévale. »

choose to rely on his audience's reflexes and prepared the shift on every level<sup>8</sup>. Even within the broad category of anti-bourgeois satire, the play could fit, although with considerable strain. Aside from what the draper, Pathelin, and the shepherd stood for in the class struggle, they represented also to a medieval audience a familiar moral progression from bogged-down materialism, through highly articulate reasoning ability to utterly inarticulate innocence. As the play develops, it becomes increasingly evident that the characters do not actually effect the progression, but they merely parody it : all three are only concerned with material gain, and all three are dissemblers of reality and perverters of truth, that is, of visual and verbal truth, the only forms of truth within their reach as men. « Le mot » in *Pathelin* signifies not only speech, as the characteristically human ground for communication ; it signifies also the price to be paid (the two meanings, are nowadays more readily connected with « parole »). On the wordly stage, where appearance and speech ultimately determine the verdict, a dress and words by the mere fact of their availability or lack may indeed determine success or failure. The dramatic development of *Pathelin* leads to a judgment on two worldly stages, both included in the « territoire / ou nous tenons nostre auditoire » where Pathelin locates the action in the first scene (v. 15-16) and where the only man wiser than he is the mayor who has read the « grimoire » and received some formal education (v. 18-19). There is first the judgment actually rendered or, rather, bypassed within the farce itself by a judge who cannot distinguish the words and the arguments and hence unravel the actions on which he must pass a verdict, a judge, furthermore, who is rushing to business elsewhere (supper, in ail probability), and whose eventual verdict is rendered « a mains de parolles » (v. 1413), in order to stop words. Second, there is the judgement in the theater by an audience which is likewise unable to control the action, but which, inasmuch as it can apprehend a fairly logical progression of cause and effect (deceiver-deceived), can at least assert the presence of *poetic* justice by laughter and applause. The play, however, since it culminates in the triumph of the shepherd after the action has systematically perverted models for human interrelation, notably justice, asks to be shifted to a cosmic stage where on the « jour du jugement » a judge no longer dependent on words or time (or

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<sup>8</sup> However intimate the contact with religion and the scriptures may have been in the fifteenth century, it is doubtful that many members of an audience would have made subtle conclusions beyond the play. Its popularity stemmed from its entertainment value. Similarly, the fifteenth-century passion plays were popular as spectacles even though the authors were turning them into vehicles for increasingly massive and subtle erudition.

supper !) will exercise ultimate control over what is done<sup>9</sup>.

The thematic development is parallel to and actually inseparable from the dramatic development. Human weakness and folly are being exposed, and it is to be anticipated that they are most obvious in matters of judgment. By medieval tradition, man has law and reason to judge what the senses present to him. Unassisted, the senses deceive, and the effect may indeed seem ludicrous as in *Pathelin*. The advice of « Judge not » is ultimately impracticable in a world like the one presented in *Pathelin* where one must, on the one hand, provide food and clothing and, on the other, cope with an ambiguous or even deceptive environment. Beyond the farce, we hear the message that so long as language and appearance are the main bases for judgment, in other words, so long as one remains within this world, one must beware of their treachery and safeguard their integrity. But the author of *Pathelin* seems to know that farce is at best a crude medium of communication, and that it is much more effective in preparing the ground, albeit violently, for a message to which it can eventually point. The justice that fails in *Pathelin* yields to a justice that is infallible. The play is content to undermine systematically language and appearance as foundations for judgment. Oddly enough, since language and appearance are the very stuff of drama and of farce in particular, the play is thus undermining itself at the same time that it undermines the poetic justice in which it culminates. The effect must have seemed even more striking in the Middle-Ages than in our post-Pirandellian times, though then, after he had upset the physical and the theatrical foundations for judgment, the author obviously could feel that he had revealed the only real foundation available, the metaphysical ; the modern playwright is more likely to feel that he has uncovered the abyss of absurdity.

From the initial scene of *Pathelin* on, we are prepared for the fact that the irony of deceiver deceived reaches beyond the primary dramatic level : it is clear to both Guillemette and to the audience that Pathelin deceives himself as readily as he deceives others. The humor of the debate between husband and wife on the question of whether he is a master of « advocacion » or « trompacion » rests for the most part on the fact that actually both professions are the same to him ; his practice of the law consists in making things seem and sound right in case they are wrong, and wrong in case they

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<sup>9</sup> The judge in *Pathelin* concludes the proceedings against the shepherd by turning against the draper with the accusation : « Vous monstrez bien qui vous estes, / sire, par le sang Nostre Dame » (v. 1475-1476) ; the confused oath seems almost to underline the shortsightedness of the judgment.

are right : « tant mieulx vault et plus tost l'empire » (v. 1129). To fully appreciate the deception by a simple shepherd of the « maistre des trompeurs d'icy et d'ailleurs », we are told in that first scene that the secret of his « success » is to deceive others by appearances while not being deceived by them. And at the close of the argument we hear Maître Pathelin asserting to his wife that the lawyer's robe does not necessarily reflect his legal talent ; if he has a reputation for deceit, so have others :

Si ont ceulx qui de camelos  
Sont vestus et de camocas,  
**60.** Qui dient qu'ilz sont advocas,  
Mais pourtant ne le sont ilz mye.

And, having thus expressed his contempt for the robe, he steps out to go to the « foire » in order to procure cloth which can be made into robes for himself and Guillemette. The close link between deception and self-deception in matters of appearance is further demonstrated in the affair between Pathelin and the shepherd. When the latter enters the scene, Pathelin first takes him for the draper returning a third time to claim his due. The shepherd introduces himself and, in the process, suggests once more the proverbial disparity between the habit and the man : « je vous payeray tres bien / portant se je suis mal vestu » (v. 1079-1980)<sup>10</sup>. While he reveals his « true » self behind the impoverished exterior, the shepherd is actually deceiving Pathelin with words. Poetic justice is already in the making, for Pathelin prefers the verbal over the visual effect in practicing deception, and it is appropriate that he be fooled by the shepherd's « mot ». Pathelin gains Joceaulme's confidence with words of flattery ; he counterfeits delirium and agony to convince the draper that the only cloth he has a use for is a shroud ; and finally, after the trial, he talks the draper into going to his home « veoir » whether he does not happen to be there (v. 1536). Such emphasis on words must seem appropriate. Farce had apparently acquired its name from the verbal sturrrng (*cf. farcir*) nowhere better illustrated than in the delirium in many tongues we find in *Pathelin* ; throughout the fifteenth century, farce did in fact depend primarily on verbal effects, as a rule extremely crude, and nowhere so self-consciously used for flattery, deception or dissimulation as here. When we cease being amused by verbal deception, however, presumably outside the theater, we become aware

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<sup>10</sup> Pathelin will eventually exploit the appearance of the shepherd in court, alluding to him as the « povre bergier douloureux, / qui est aussi nu comme ung ver ! » (v. 1465- 1466)

of the fact that it ranks quite low on a medieval scale of transgressions ; on Dante's scale, for instance, we find it near the point where fraud simple makes way for fraud complex, in other words, when we move from plain deceivers to those who deceived although linked with their victims with more than just common human ties ; they are near the bottom of the pit. (Such fraud does not occur in *Pathelin*, being a rather unlikely subject for amusement, yet is not too far off ; no host-guest relationship is established in the farce despite the repeated invitations extended by Pathelin to the draper and the shepherd, and by the judge to Pathelin to come for supper, « manger de l'oe » ; similarly, the deceit of a benefactor, the draper Jocëaulme, by a shepherd whom he had « pour Dieu et en charité / ... nourry en son enfance » (v. 1239-1240), is attenuated, legalistically at any rate, by the fact that the same shepherd had since become an « aloué », a hireling. The great risk involved in dependence on linguistic perversion is best illustrated within the play itself when Pathelin, at the end of his triumph in creating verbal chaos at the trial, himself loses control over what he says (v. 1455).

Still, the author of *Pathelin* knows that he cannot rely much on the evidence of self déception provided within the play in order to make his point ; excessively stressed, such evidence would prevent the deception from seeming amusing to Guillemette or to the audience, for the progress of the play depends upon endorsement and rationalization of Pathelin's tricks when they succeed, not only by Guillemette, but by the spectators also. The dominant characteristic of farce being surfeit, it should be through surfeit, as Louis Cons had argued, that we acquire our insights into the action. This is in fact what happens, for as the play ascends towards the climax of the trial scene in which madness and chaos not only seem to reign but reign with impunity, order appears in the form of flash perceptions of truth and justice beyond the sham enacted. The fact that the moments of lucidity are situated at the height of madness is nothing more than a rather remarkable use of a very old convention which writers in the next two centuries were to exploit most thoroughly<sup>11</sup>. The first instance of lucidity in madness comes as Pathelin

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<sup>11</sup> Madness, « folie » or « le mal Saint Mathelin » is constantly referred to in this play. Saint Mathelin (Saint Mathurin, patron of madmen), is invoked originally by the Draper to witness the goose supper he will get from Pathelin (v. 501) ; his affliction, madness, is wished upon the Draper by Guillemette just a few lines later (v. 546). He seems to oversee this entire play where characters constantly cast each other or themselves in the role of « fol, » « desvoyé » or « nice ». The « fol naturel » or « fol de nature » (v. 1393-1412) is entitled to special consideration in court, as Pathelin knows when he instructs the shepherd ; and, of course, the delirious sinner on his death bed commands respect and faith. Thus, madness, which is amusing most of the time,

denounces the draper's cheating and miserliness (v. 838 and 916-918) in the midst of his delirium (a little earlier, setting himself up as judge rather than as lawyer, he had used the same miserliness to justify the theft of the cloth). Pathelin's « insight » in this case is probably valid even though both the delirium and the lucidity are feigned. Similarly, even though he fails to draw the consequences, Pathelin is the medium for the final insight into the triumph of the young over the old and the simple over the wily. Lucidity is however even more striking when we find it in Jocëaulme, the draper, who is a *doit* and could not counterfeit insights. It comes to him the first time when he is so overwhelmed by the « agony » of Pathelin that he renounces his claim on the cloth and formally offers it for charity, as if to compensate for his alleged miserliness ; in the process, he unwittingly casts Pathelin in an extremely appropriate fiendish role :

Que oncques. Le dyable, en lieu de ly,  
**990.** A prins mon drap pour moy tenter !  
Benedicite ! Atenter  
Ne puist il jà a ma personne !  
Et puis qu'ainsi va, je le donne.  
Pour Dieu, a quiconques l'a prins.

Jocëaulme has also a lucid interlude in the midst of the trial ; when his case against the shepherd is dismissed, he comes out of his confusion long enough to point an accusing finger at Pathelin who by his presence and « *interprétation* » had originated and maintained the chaos :

Vous l'emportastes par barat  
Mon drap, sans payer, maistre Pierre.  
**1425.** Par la char bieu, moy las ! Saint Pierre,  
Ce ne fut pas fait de preudomme

PATHELIN

Or je regnie Saint Pierre de Romme,  
S'il n'est fin fol, ou il afolle.

LE DRAPPIER

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maintains its awesome overtones, just as does language which brings it about in this play.

Je vous congnois à la parolle  
**1430.** Et à la robe et au visaige.  
Je ne suis pas fol, je suis saige,  
Pour congnoistre qui bien me fait.  
Je vous compteray tout le fait,  
Monseigneur, par ma conscience !

PATHELIN

**1435.** Hee ! sire, imposez leur silence.

The stage directions are of course those supplied by the modern editor, and they seem to reflect very adequately the situation involved ; there is, however, a textual variant for the last line which reads « imposez luy silence », instead of « imposez leur silence », a tempting choice inasmuch as it emphasizes the irony of a Pathelin, « maistre...des bailleurs en parolles », asking the judge to stop the draper's speech as he himself had stopped the speech of the shepherd. In either case, given the situation and the mood of the judge, Pathelin has his way, and silence is imposed even though justice is hardly done. The play moves too rapidly to pause for a more general reflection about the tenuous dividing line between chaos and order, a line which Pathelin had felt he could draw and control, as ever, by means of words. Dramatically, what matters is his narrow escape here from an accuser who is no longer to be deceived ; the stage is prepared for his eventual defeat at the hands of the shepherd. In passing, we may note that the dissimulation by surfeit of words and action has thus been exposed in the mock agony as well as in the mock trial to be a potential means for the release as well as the concealment of truth. Simultaneously, farce, a seemingly trivial form based on the comic exploitation of surfeit of words and action, has been vindicated, since at both « moments of truth », the agony and the trial (verdict), the traditional insight has merely been accentuated by the parody.

There is yet another type of insight which the author may be said to provide in *Pathelin* so that an orderly perspective can prevail despite the apparent chaos and *déception* which dominate the stage and are embodied in the fiendishly clever Maître Pathelin. This kind of insight derives from a series of veiled Biblical allusions anticipating the conclusion in the triumph of the true shepherd to follow that of the thieving Agnelet. Into this category would fall the invitations to supper, the entire clothing and feeding motif, the master-servant-shepherd relation, and, notably, the trial throughout which the

shepherd remains mute, allowing himself to be accused before a judge who eventually refuses to pass sentence. The lines suggested by such parallels are tenuous and are probably meant to be so : the farce must come to an end before the serious implications and the broader contexts can be developed. The author is content to prepare from afar for the traditional view without interrupting the comic verve, and his main device, as I have already indicated, is development of the traditional motif of eventual payment. More than the suggestions of self-deception, more even than the flash insights, it implies an inescapable system of order behind the chaos culminating in a justice and a settlement which may no longer be dismissed or deferred.

The payment motif enters in the first scene of the play, as Pathelin counts out the yards of cloth he must secure :

GUILLEMETTE

Vous comptez sans rabatre.  
Qui dyable les vous pretera ?

PATHELIN

Que vous en chault, qui ce fera ?  
**85.** On les me pretera vraiment  
A rendre au jour du Jugement ;  
Car plus tost ne sera ce point.

GUILLEMETTE

Avant, mon amy, en ce point.  
Qui que soit, en sera couvert.

Guillemette's reply must have seemed obscure from the time the play was first copied as is witnessed by the variant readings in the earliest editions : « qui que soit en », « Quel qui soit on », « Quel qui soit en », « Quelque sot en. » The « en » can refer to the sale of the cloth on credit, and this is apparently R. T. Holbrook's reading ; he offers in the glossary of his edition « fourbi » (followed by a question mark) to explain « couvert », and this meaning coincides with what is implied by « couverture » and « recouvert » a little later in the text (v. 359 and 378). However, in Guillemette's reaction to her husband's statement of intent to pay on doomsday, i. e., never, the pronominal particle « en » in « en sera couvert » can refer to the cloth as well

as to the sale, and « couvert » can have the meaning still prevalent of *covered by*. One of the very likely readings, in this case, would have « en ce point » refer to the Judgment day when, indeed, the soul must reassume its covering of flesh and sins. Such a reading would be quite consistent with the characterization of Guillemette who, at least in her first two scenes with Pathelin, has the role of undermining her husband's achievement and reminding him of the dire end which usually follows his triumphs in *advocasserie-tromperie* (cf. v. 480-483).

The payment motif comes up next in the draper's shop : Pathelin is trying to get the price of the cloth he has fancied, and the draper is already trying to have him consider another as well :

Avant ! Combien me coustera  
**230.** La premiere aulne ? Dieu sera  
Payé des premiers, c'st rayson.  
Vecy ung denier, ne faisons  
Rien qui soit, ou Dieu ne se nomme.

#### LE DRAPPIER

Par Dieu, vous dittes que bon homme,  
**235.** Et m'en avez bien resjouy.

Pathelin replies « Oui ». He will eventually exploit the ambiguity of « mot », which has both the sense of a fixed price assumed here and the sense of a mere, valueless word which is indeed the only currency Pathelin uses in his communication with the world<sup>12</sup> ; in the end, however, he will be paid in the same currency by the shepherd with the only « mot » he had taught him, « Bee. » As this sequence unfolds, we will be reminded time and again of the pious manner in which the deal was begun with the offer of the « denier a Dieu », the token of good faith, accompanied by the pious formula : « ne faisons rien qui soit ou Dieu ne se nomme »<sup>13</sup>. Throughout the more and more confused proceedings, we are asked to note that aside from the

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<sup>12</sup> The argument he offers himself and the audience as he leaves the shop makes for an interesting parallel to the earlier statement of intent to pay only on Judgment Day : « En ! dea. il ne m'a pas vendu / A mon mot, ce a este au sien, / Mais il sera payé au myen. / Il luy fault or ? on le luy fourre ! / Pleust à Dieu, qu'il ne fist que courre / Sans cesser jusque à fin de paye : / Saint Jehan, il feroit plus de voye / Qu'il n'y a jusque a Pampelune. (v. 339-343).

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, even in the Middle Ages, it would be hard to find a text in which God, the Virgin Mary and the saints are called more often to witness the rather ungodly business being conducted.

traditionally sacred nature of dealings concluded on the basis of the word of one of the parties (a word of honor), this particular transaction involved God as witness and even as a party to payment. When a while later Parthelin describes the scene to Guillemette and asserts, « Dieu et luy partiront ensemble ce denier la, se bon leur semble, / car c'est tout qu'ilz en auront" (v. 399-401), he is blaspheming.

In her naiveté, Guillemette cannot quite comprehend an acquisition like the cloth shown her by her husband for which payment is not somehow forthcoming :

GUILLEMETTE

Saincte Dame,  
Or, par le peril de mon ame,  
Il vient d'aucune couverture.  
**360.** Dieux ! dont nous vient ceste aventure ?  
Helas, hélas ! qui le payera ?

Even after Pathelin insists that a « parisi » paid for the whole, she continues to doubt ; she knows that eventually someone will come to collect, and they will have to pay :

GUILLEMETTE

C'est bien alé ! Le beau nisi  
Ou ung brevet y ont ouvré :  
Ainsi l'avez vous recouvré.  
Et quant le terme passera,  
**380.** On viendra, on nous gaigera ;  
Quancque avons, nous sera osté.

Pathelin, however, sees no « terme » to the transaction (other than the « jour du jugement » which he employs as a mere form of speech), and the only danger he foresees is in the arrival of the draper. The prospect of punishing the latter succeeds in dispelling Guillemette's visions of retribution. She lets herself be convinced that her husband's deceit is in effect a just retribution ; she cannot resist the suggestion that the draper, falling a victim to flattery, is justly punished, and she draws an elaborate comparison between him and the raven of the fable (alone among all the Latin and French versions available at the time, this one has the raven sitting on a cross, « de cinq a six /

toises de hault », instead of the traditional tree or cupboard) ; she concludes :

455. De ce drap ; vous l'avez happé,  
Par blasonner, et attrappé,  
En luy usant de beau langaige,  
Comme fist Renard du froumaige.

On his two successive visits to Pathelin, Jocëaulme fails to collect payment for his cloth ; both in the interlude between the visits and in the midst of the delirium we hear continued vague accusations that he is justly punished for his avarice and, oddly enough, for his refusal to extend credit to his fellow man. The draper's reaction is to turn on the shepherd and exact payment from him in court. Even while still in his own shop, before actually going to court, the draper already confuses the two issues ; he tells the shepherd :

1040. Par ma foy, qu'il ne t'en souviengne.  
Tu me rendras, quoy qu'il adviengne,  
Six aulnes... di je, l'assomaige  
De mes bestes, et le dommaige  
Que tu m'as fait depuis dix ans.

Whatever just payment he might be entitled to, his confusion, which suggests that he is merely picking on the shepherd while « coursé d'autre chose », is bound to undermine his claim.

The shepherd, it will be remembered, introduces his case to Pathelin by promising to pay well although he is poorly dressed (v.1079-1080). If he can so well afford to pay, it is because he too, like Pathelin and Guillemette, has been assuming the role of justice maker (executioner) beside that of servant charged with his master's flock : « je regardoye / qu'il me paioit petitement » (v. 1088), and, consequently, « J'en ai assommé et tué / tant, qu'il s'en est apperceu » (v. 1107-1108). He promises to pay, « en bel or a la couronne », and as far as Pathelin is concerned, this makes his a worthy cause :

Donc auras tu la cause bonne  
Et fust elle la moitié pire.  
Tant mieulx vault et plustost l'empire,  
1130. Quant je vueil mon sens applicquer.

From Pathelin's legal point of view, the scale of payment is the scale of value.

Inasmuch as the shepherd promises he will pay « a vostre mot », which Pathelin takes to mean at whatever price he will fix, he accepts the case. Hence, when, in the end, in response to his « paye moy ! » (v. 1551) the shepherd offers only his « Bee ! » the audience at least is satisfied with the mode of payment and the poetic justice that has been done : where the foundations of trust and communication have been removed, the payment may indeed be as empty as the service which it rewards. Pathelin had systematically emptied words of significance ; it is only fair that when he asks, « N'en auray je aultre parole ? » the answer should again come as « Bee ! » and that, with a wonderful grasp of an order beyond the farce which he had staged and acted out, Pathelin should momentarily admit the justice of this payment to one who fancied himself « maistre... des bailleurs / de parolles en payement / a rendre au jour du jugement. »

Justice is payment, and payment in some form is inevitable, as Guillemette asserted before she allowed her « dramatic success », the deception of Jocéaulme, to assuage an instinctive fear of retribution. This, then, is the inevitable truth which the play upholds from beginning to end and which it illustrates by presenting deceit as an exercise (a round, a chase) whose effects cannot be taken for granted, which can in fact be self-deluding and self-defeating, and which must seem impotent when viewed from any esthetic distance or with any degree of moral elevation. Not only the tenor of the message, but the manner in which it is communicated, largely at the expense of the legal establishment, suggests an ecclesiastical author rather than a member of the *basoche*. Yet there is nothing unusual about the fact that we do not know the author of *La Farce de Maître Pierre Pathelin*. How many medieval playwrights do we know ? Nor is it unusual that this play, being infinitely more elaborate than any other of its genre and period should particularly arouse the critics' curiosity about its origins. What is unusual is the fact that a medieval author should have chosen this farce to raise questions about the nature of his stage, his artistic medium, and his actors in a manner which is at least one hundred years ahead of its time, while giving replies to the questions in a thoroughly medieval fashion. Nothing could have been more contemporary than the triumph of the innocent and the defeat of the overly greedy or the overly clever. The unique genius of the author consisted, however, in turning his play into a farcical dramatization of human endeavors—feeding, clothing, and distinguishing right from wrong—and then yielding the stage as well as the honor of determining the course of events to an actor, Maître Pierre Pathelin, who is a caricature of the lawyer and who is rendered peculiarly grotesque by

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his obvious failure to provide for those who depend on him and by his ultimate failure to outwit those who judge and those who depend on justice.



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