

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### NEW LIGHT ON FRENCH ACTORS IN BELGIUM IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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INVESTIGATION of the accounts of several Belgian towns has revealed a considerable number of visits by French acting troupes, most of which have not been previously recorded. Our chief sources of information about French actors in Belgium during the seventeenth century are Liebrecht's<sup>2</sup> and Claeys's<sup>3</sup> studies of the Brussels and Ghent theatres, respectively. This article will add only a little to Liebrecht's discoveries about Brussels but will considerably supplement and sometimes correct Claeys' material about Ghent, besides supplying new information about visits to other towns. Strictly speaking, the new records of French visitors begin in the last decade of the sixteenth century but are immensely more numerous in the seventeenth century; hence the title.

Going back into the sixteenth century, we find in printed accounts that as early as 1537 and 1541 "Nicolas Bouildoul et ses compagnons" and "Jehan Sénéchal et ses compagnons," respectively, played at Tournai.<sup>4</sup> In December, 1559, "Wolfgang Tréslecat, natif de Condé-sur-l'Escaut près Valenciennes, sa femme, enfans et compagnons, joueurs d'histoires, comedies, tragedies, histoires romaines, musique, violes et aultres instrumens," having just arrived from a month of playing at Ypres, requested permission to perform at Bruges. On December 16, 1559, they were allowed to perform "prophanes," but plays concerning scriptural subjects had to

be read and sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority. This condition having been met, on December 23 Tréslecat's company was allowed to present its complete repertory.<sup>5</sup> We may speculate whether this Wolfgang Tréslecat was related to the Samuel Tréslecat whose troupe on July 31, 1567, was refused permission to perform at Amiens.<sup>6</sup>

Claeys (II,4) posits the earliest visit of a French company to Ghent to be one in the city accounts for 1602-3. In fact he overlooked an earlier visit on February 10, 1594, when unnamed French comedians presented a "history" in the City Hall before the city authorities, receiving sixteen shillings gross for their performance:

Betaelt an zekere fransche Camerspeelders de somme van xvi s.g. hemlieden ghejont ten respect van zeker historye by hemlieden vertoont met heere ende wet jnt scepenhuus vanden kuere opden x february lestleden [Ghent, Rekeningen 1593-94, f. 325].<sup>7</sup>

About a month later, March 14, 1594, another troupe, nationality not specified, received a slightly higher emolument:

Betaelt zeker ander Camerspeelders de somme van xvi s. viij g. hemlieden van ghelycken ghejont voor zeker vertooch van spele by hemlieden ghedaen met heere ende wet jnt voornomde scepenhuus opden xiiij<sup>e</sup> van maerte lestleden.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> R. A. Parmentier, "Une troupe de comédiens ambulants à Bruges en 1559," *Annales de la Société d'Emulation de Bruges*, LXIX (1926), 392-95.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Lebègue, "Le répertoire d'une troupe française à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *R.H.T.*, I (1948), 11.

<sup>7</sup> "Paid to certain French performers the sum of 16 s. gr. granted them in respect of a certain history presented by them before lord and council in the courthouse of the keure on the 10 February last." *Keure* (modern spelling) means literally a charter granted to a district or municipality by a sovereign or lord; it can also mean the area governed under such a charter.

I am indebted to Mr. Adhémar Byl for correcting my dictionary Dutch translation and thereby rescuing me from numerous errors. Those which may remain are my own fault.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* "Paid certain other performers the sum of 16 s. 8 gr., granted them likewise for certain representation of play done by them with the lord and council in the aforementioned courthouse on the 14th of March last."

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the American Philosophical Society for a grant in aid and the Belgian American Educational Foundation for a fellowship which enabled me to carry out research in Belgian archives in the summers of 1959 and 1960. The material in this article is based on that research.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Liebrecht, *Histoire du théâtre français à Bruxelles au XVII<sup>e</sup> et au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1923), hereafter referred to as "Liebrecht."

<sup>3</sup> Prosper Claeys, *Histoire du théâtre à Gand* (3 vols.; Ghent, 1910), hereafter cited as "Claeys."

<sup>4</sup> P. Sadron, "Les associations permanentes d'acteurs en France au moyen-âge," *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, IV (1952), 231.



It is tempting to suppose the French troupe to be that of Adrien Talmy, which was at Cambrai in September, 1593, receiving on the 28th "huit livres tournois" for a performance before the town council.<sup>9</sup> They might have moved on to Ghent after this. However, on February 11, 1594, one day after the Ghent performance, the city of Arras granted Talmy's company permission to play a week there.<sup>10</sup> Unless Talmy sent a messenger from Ghent to arrange for the permission, it is hardly believable that the same troupe could be in two different places at the same time.

In July, 1606, a French company, unnoticed by Claeys, performed before the city authorities of Ghent:

Betaelt jean jullot dict du lion natif de bretagne ende syne medeghesellen commedianten de somme van xvij s. viij gro' hemlieden ghejont voor een gratuiteyt voor vertooch van haere conste ende agilitet present myne heeren den onderbaillin ende scepenen ghedaen jn de maend van julio 1606 [1606-7, f. 284<sup>v</sup>].<sup>11</sup>

On March 1, 1608, a smaller sum, 13 s. 3 gr., was paid to a group of French entertainers for their performance before the aldermen:

Betaelt an seker Camerspeelders fransoisen de somme van xij s. iij g. hemlieden oock ghejont ende toegheleyt upden 1<sup>en</sup> maerte van dat sy an myne voornoemde heeren scepenen ghedaen hebben vertooch van huerlieden spel [1607-8, f. 298<sup>v</sup>].<sup>12</sup>

In the accounts for the next fiscal year, 1608-9, we find a still smaller sum, 10 s., paid to "Jean Gassel and his company":

Betaelt jean gassel ende syne compaignie commedianten de somme van x s.g. de selve by myne heeren scepenen toegheleyt voor t'vtooch an

hemlieden ghedaen van seker comédie jn retorique [1608-9, f. 289<sup>v</sup>].<sup>13</sup>

This, I presume, is the "troupe d'acteurs hollandais" which Claeys (II,5), quoting only in part from the entry, describes as "Jan van Castel met syne compaignie commedianten." Though his supposition that this is a Dutch company is possible, he is wrong in transcribing the name; Jean Gassel is clear in the original entry. This may equally well, however, be the name of a Frenchman. About this time and in the same general region we have records of a French troupe led by a man with a similar name. We find "Jean Chassot dit La Fortune" and his company playing at Lille in the second semester of 1608.<sup>14</sup> In May and June, 1609, and in May, 1614, he ("Johan Gassot dit de La Fortune") and Pierre Gillet led a group of six players to Nancy. Several years later, also at Nancy, he on September 22, 1626, married Barbe Blanvarleti, widow, this time with another variation to his name and additions to his occupation: "Jean Gassotte natif d'Orbey en Brie, Comédien du Roy, sculpteur et opérateur."<sup>15</sup> Jean Robert also speculates whether he may be the Gazotte/Cazotte/Gasco who figures in Henri Lepage's "Etudes sur le théâtre en Lorraine," *Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislas*, 1848, pp. 278 ff. In 1627 Gassot was a member of the Prince of Orange's troupe when on July 15 it leased the Hôtel de Bourgogne at Paris for a month (September 5-October 5).<sup>16</sup> Jean Gassel very likely represents what Flemish ears and Flemish orthography can do to Jean Chassot/Gassot/Gassotte, etc.

Turning aside from these visits to Ghent between 1594 and 1608, we find three entertainers visiting Tournai in the course of 1607: Nicolas Dengremont, Jean Chenenereulx, and Claude Percourt. Though evidently practicing acrobatics and rope dancing on this

<sup>9</sup> Achille Durieux, *Le théâtre à Cambrai avant et depuis 1789* (Paris, 1883), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Lebegue, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> "Paid Jean Jullot dit Du Lion native of Brittany and his fellow comedians the sum of 17 s. 8 gr. granted them for a gratuity for display of their art and agility, present my lords the underbailiffs and aldermen, done in the month of July, 1606."

<sup>12</sup> "Paid to certain French players the sum of 13 s. 3 g. also granted and accorded to them on the 1st of March because they have made to my aforementioned lords the aldermen a representation of their play." Claeys (II, 4) vaguely mentions a troupe of "artistes français, saltimbanques ou acteurs, fransche camerspeelders" as being one of four different groups who played at Ghent between May, 1607, and May, 1608. This does not seem to be the same as the "Camerspeelders fransoisen" cited above.

<sup>13</sup> "Paid Jean Gassel and his company of comedians, the sum of 10 s. the same by my lords the aldermen granted for the performance before them of a certain comedy in rhetoric."

<sup>14</sup> Léon Lefebvre, *Histoire du théâtre de Lille de ses origines à nos jours* (Lille, 1907), I, 138, cited hereafter as Lefebvre.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Robert, "Comédiens français à Nancy au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *R.H.T.*, IX (1957), 45. *Opérateurs* were medicine vendors, mountebanks, who often attracted customers by dramatic representations.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Fransen, "Documents inédits sur l'Hôtel de Bourgogne," *Revue de l'Histoire Littéraire*, XXXIV (1927), 349.



occasion, they deserve mention because comedians generally had more skills than the merely histrionic:

A nicolas dengremont Jean cheneneux et Claude percourt pour par eulx avoir joué et fait plusieurs tours d'abilitez danser sur cordes et aultrement pardevant messieurs du magistrat payé par quatre ordonnances la somme de xxij £ [Tournai, Comptes communaux 1607, in Archives Générales du Royaume, Chambre des Comptes 40023, f. 132<sup>r</sup>].

In the following year at Namur, a French-speaking town, £30 was paid "aux comediens de la ville" (Commune de Namur, 2<sup>e</sup> section, Comptes communaux 1608, f. 125<sup>r</sup>). This, I surmise, was really a chamber of rhetoric, for in later accounts similar payments are accorded to "rhetoriciens" for their part in the Notre Dame festivities.

Picking up the chronological thread of the Ghent accounts, we encounter the name of three comedians, evidently the principal members of a troupe which performed a comedy before the city authorities on September 8, 1609, namely, Hugues du Mortier, Jean Hobert, and Jacques Loreing:

Betaelt hughe du mortier jean hobert ende jacques loreing Commedianten de somme van viij s. iiij g. over den toelech hemlieden ghedaen voor tvertooch an myne heeren scepenen upden viij septembere 1609 van seker comedie [Ghent, Rekeningen 1609-10].<sup>17</sup>

Hobert (possible variant of Aubert?) and Loreing have never come to my attention; neither do the names figure in Georges Mongrédien's *Dictionnaire biographique des comédiens français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1961). We do, however, know something of Hugues du Mortier, a native of Douai, who left the family hearth to join the troupe of Pollidor dit Château-Vieux, as an actor.<sup>18</sup> This departure may have occurred as early as 1593, for Pollidor is recorded as being permitted on February 19, 1593 to play at St.

Omer, at which time he declared he had played Tournai, Arras, Aire, and other cities,<sup>19</sup> all towns in the general region of Douai. In early 1598 du Mortier was in Paris, where he and his son Michel were members of Adrien Talmy's company. On March 16 of that year he was one of the signers of a contract which briefly united the companies of Talmy and Valeran le Conte. In 1599 Talmy's company appeared at Mons, though whether with du Mortier we do not know.<sup>20</sup> A decade later, as the Ghent entry shows, he was one of the most important members, possibly chief, of another troupe. Apparently he became an actor of considerable eminence and something of a Grand Old Man of the theatre in his last years ("Ie regnoy de mon temps le plus vieux de la Scene") before his death at Mantes (or Nantes) some time before June 1633.<sup>21</sup>

At Tournai the next year (1610) a French troupe led by Robert de Vucehy performed *L'Innocence découverte* before the town council:

A Robert de vucehy et aultres commediens franchois pour avoir joué pardevant le magistrat certaine commedie et Joeu de L'Innocence decouverte et y faict plusieurs aultres recreations a este payé par billet d'ordonance et quittance la somme et icy de xx £ [Archives Générales du Royaume, Chambre des Comptes 40025 (1610), f. 133<sup>r</sup>].<sup>22</sup>

The surname Vucehy one can only puzzle over. However, the comedy very possibly

<sup>19</sup> Justin de Pas, "Comédiens français à Saint-Omer au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, III (1943), 51.

<sup>20</sup> S. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer, "La vie d'Alexandre Hardy, poète du roi," *Proceedings of the American Philological Society*, XCI (1947), 336, 342; Jules Declève, "Le théâtre à Mons," *Mémoires et Publications de la Société des Sciences, des Arts et des Lettres de Hainaut*, 5<sup>e</sup> Sér., IV (1891) 116.

<sup>21</sup> Lancaster, *op. cit.*, Part I, Vol. 1, p. 40; Part I, Vol. 2, p. 426.

<sup>22</sup> After careful scrutiny I presume *vucehy* is the correct transcription, though the word is not clear. We must bear in mind that these accounts are themselves transcripts of the original accounts, required by law to be deposited with the Chambre des Comptes. The difficult reading very likely reflects the copyist's difficulty in deciphering the original. On the same page of this account book we find payment for a private performance to an animal trainer who, however, was not allowed to perform publicly: "A Arthus dideim [or dideain] pour avoir faict ostantement de plusieurs marmottes et bestes estranges qui desiroit monstrer au peuple de ceste ville et que pour aucunes bonnes considerations ne luy a esté permis, payé par ordonnance x ts." Again the surname is not clear, as if the transcriber had difficulty in reading his original in this part of the accounts.

<sup>17</sup> "Paid Hugues du Mortier, Jean Robert and Jacques Loreing comedians the sum of 8 s. 4 g. on account of the compensation allowed them for the representation to my lord the aldermen on the 8 September 1609 of a certain comedy." I blushing confess my failure to enter the folio number in my original transcript of this item.

<sup>18</sup> Henry C. Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, Part I, Vol. 2 (Baltimore, 1929), p. 426.



represents an early performance of Jean Auvray's tragi-comedy published in 1609 as *Marfilie* and in 1628 as *L'Innocence découverte*.<sup>23</sup>

About a year later the city accounts of Malines for 1610-11 record payment to a French company that contained some "comédiens du Roi":

Betaelt voer een gratuiteyt ende tiergelt aen sekere comedianten des Coninx van vranckryck ende kamerspeelers alhier passerende tyde deser Rekening per ordonnantie t'samen de somme van x £ viij s. [Malines, Comptes communaux 1610-11, s.l., no. 285, f. 200v].<sup>24</sup>

This company, made up of certain King's comedians and other actors suggests the one led at this period by Valeran le Conte. On March 29, 1610, le Conte, François Vaultray, Estienne de Ruffin, Hugues Guéru, and Robert Guérin, "tous comedians du roy en leur nom," formed an act of association for a troupe which also included Louis Nicier, Pierre Messier, Nicolas Gasteau, Mathieu Lefebvre, Savinien Bony, and Rachel Trepau.<sup>25</sup> The troupe is known to have traveled in the provinces some time between May 8 and July 18, 1610.<sup>26</sup> The description of "certain comedians of the King of France and performers" fits this group.

The Tournai accounts for 1613 record the visit of a French troupe headed by Jean le Boeuf which included an English performer, Thomas Baril:

A Jan le boeuf Maitre Thomas baril anglois et aultres comedians franchois pour avoir joué et représenté plusieurs belles histoires pour donner recreation au peuple de ceste ville et exercé plusieurs arts forches de corps et de bras jectans picques au hault les recepvant de sa main et aultres habilitez a esté payé par trois ordonnances et quictances la somme et icy de xxxvii £ xvj ts [A.G.R., Chambre des Comptes 40028 (1613), f. 141r].

<sup>23</sup> Lancaster, *op. cit.*, Part I, Vol. 1, p. 24. This Tournai entry suggests that the title had been changed within a year of original publication.

<sup>24</sup> "Paid for a gratuity and recompense to certain comedians of the King of France and players passing by this place [at the] time of this account by ordinance all told the sum of £10 8s." Also cited, but not quoted in full, in G. Olbrechts, "Rondreizende Toneelgezelschappen te Mechelen in de XVII<sup>e</sup> en XVIII<sup>e</sup> eeuw," *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*, LV (1951), 67. Olbrechts gives the year of the visit as 1611.

<sup>25</sup> Deierkauf-Holsboer, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-96.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

Jean le Boeuf's earliest known appearance was at Frankfurt in 1602, then at Lille in 1614 and 1616.<sup>27</sup>

In Ghent at the end of the same calendar year (December 31, 1613) a French company displayed a sample of its repertory to the city authorities. As I have argued elsewhere, this may have been Valeran le Conte's troupe.<sup>28</sup>

In the fiscal year 1613-14 unidentified actors played at Brussels, as evidenced by moneys contributed to the relief of the poor:

Item nach ontfonghen vande Comedianten op verscheyden dathen, als ooyck van diversche monsters van beesten als andersints te sien blyckende byden manuele folios 149, 161 et Vsv. fol. 162 de somme van xl Rs. xv ts. 1 bec. [Brussels, Archives de l'Assistance Publique, H.159 (1613-14), f. 20v-21r].<sup>29</sup>

These "receipts from the comedians on various dates" may come from more than one troupe, not necessarily including a French group. This item is therefore offered only as a piece of evidence that may prove useful for future investigators.

A year or so later at Ghent we come upon the visit of a person with a French-sounding name, Jean de la Vigne, leader of a band of entertainers of some sort, if not true actors:

Betaelt jan de la vigne met syne compaignye de somme van x s. gr. an myne heeren schepenen vertooch hebbende eenighe plaisante ende recreative saken van vyf cleene handekens ende andersints [Ghent, Rekeningen, 1614-15, f. 294r].<sup>30</sup>

During the same year Jean de la Vigne and his troupe were at Lille, where on August 20, 1614 they performed "plusieurs jeulx

<sup>27</sup> Georges Mongrédien, *Dictionnaire biographique des comédiens français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1961), p. 110.

<sup>28</sup> "Acteurs français aux Pays-Bas espagnols: (?) Valeran le Conte (1613) et Valeran Dufour (1616)," *R.H.T.*, VI (1955), 166-68. The date given in that article, 6 December 1613, was an error from misreading *lesen*, "Last (day)" as *sesen*, "sixth."

<sup>29</sup> "Item according to receipts from the comedians on various dates, likewise various exhibitions of animals as otherwise to see appearing from the manual, folios [etc.]" Mme. Bonenfant, curator of the Archives de l'Assistance Publique, informs me that the "manuale" referred to no longer survives to supply further details. The entry is partly quoted by Liebrecht (p. 46, n. 2) who, however, erroneously gives *daeghen*, "days," for *dathen*, "dates."

<sup>30</sup> "Paid Jan de la Vigne with his company the sum of 10 s. gr. to my lords the aldermen after having represented some pleasant and amusing things of five little hands and otherwise." Supposing the troupe to be French, "vyf cleene handekens" may represent a play or skit entitled "Les cinq petites mains" or something of that import.



industrieux" before the town council (Lefebvre, I.139).

In late February (warrant dated March 1) André du Soleil and his wife performed before the Ghent aldermen:

Betaelt Andries du Soleil ende syn huusvrouw met haerlieder Compaignye camerspeelders de somme van xvj s. viij gr. hemlieder toe ghedaen voor tvertooch van haerlieder spel, an myne voornemende heeren Schepenen ghedaen over hier by ordonnantie van den j<sup>en</sup> maerte 1617 [Ghent, Rekeningen 1616-17, f. 277].<sup>31</sup>

About a year later André Soleil and Isabel Legendre were allowed on January 20 to perform at the Foire Saint-Germain in the winter of 1618.<sup>32</sup>

In the Malines accounts for 1619-20 we find record of the visit of an unidentified company of comedians:

Betaelt aen seker Comedianten ofte Camerspeelders hebbende voir myn heeren gespelt seker recreatiff spel op t'oudt Palleyes volgen d'ordonnantie vi £ [Malines, Comptes communaux 1619-20, s.l. no. 294, f. 150].<sup>33</sup>

If this is a French troupe it may be that of the Prince of Orange (Maurice of Nassau), which was at Nantes in late 1618, probably November.<sup>34</sup> In the spring of 1619 they were back in Holland, being allowed on April 19 to leave The Hague and proceed to Utrecht for three weeks of performances.<sup>35</sup> They could have passed through Malines on their way from France to Holland.

In 1620 Frepoh comedians presented "several comedies and joyous farces" as well as acrobatic feats before the city authorities of Tournai:

<sup>31</sup> "Paid Andries du Soleil and his wife with their company of players the sum of 16 s. 8 gr. rendered to them for the performance of their play, to my aforementioned lords the aldermen done here by ordinance of the 1 March 1617."

<sup>32</sup> Mongrédien, *Dictionnaire biographique*, p. 158; W. L. Wiley, *The Early Public Theatre in France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 130, citing Emile Campardon, *Les spectacles de la foire*, I, xi-xii.

<sup>33</sup> "Paid to certain comedians or players having played before my lords a certain amusing play at the Old Palace according to the ordinance £6." See also Olbrechts, *op. cit.*, p. 67, who gives the year as 1619.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Marchegay, "Documents inédits XXIV: Les comédiens du Prince d'Orange à Nantes, 1618," *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique de Nantes*, IX (1869), 228 (letter of November 10, 1618, written from Nantes by Mlle Henriette Rohan).

<sup>35</sup> W. G. G. A. van Sorgen, *De Toneelspeelkunst te Utrecht* (Utrecht, 1885), p. 79.

A plusieurs comedians franchois pour avoir représenté pardevant Messieurs plusieurs comedies et farses ioyeuses ensamble monstré plusieurs tours d'habileté comme amplement est déclaré par ordonnances et quictances payé lx £ [A. G. R. Chambre des Comptes 40035 (1620) f. 132<sup>v</sup>].<sup>36</sup>

This was possibly the Duke of Brunswick's troupe of French actors, who are known to have been in Utrecht in late January; it may have been Charles le Noir's company, perhaps patronized by the Prince of Orange, returning from England where they had performed twice before the king in September, 1619; they were at Lille in 1620. Or it may have been Antoine Cossart's troupe, also at Lille in 1620.<sup>37</sup>

From about 1620 onward, the Thirty Years' War having broken out a couple of years earlier, evidences of foreign actors in the Spanish Netherlands dwindle markedly in the printed sources, a scarcity reflected in the city records I have examined. France, however, did not declare war against Spain till 1635. Until that time we continue to encounter a fair sprinkling of visiting French troupes in the Spanish Netherlands.

In 1625 the Ypres accounts record the visit during a festival of two entertainers, Jean Jollyt and Toussaint (?) de Pierre, who may not have been actors and may not have been French:

Jan Jollyt ende tousen du piere ghespeelt hebbende de conde t'perfeeste 1625—begripen drie ponden grooten by hem verschooten an tagnes de butts en Jan meuleman hebbende mede ghespeelt by ordonnantie en quitantie iij £ [A. G. R., Chambre des Comptes 38843 (1625), f. 111<sup>v</sup>].<sup>38</sup>

It is tempting to suppose that Jollyt is the same as the "Jean Jullot dit du Lion natif de Bretagne" whom we earlier noted as playing at Ghent in 1606 and that Tousen du Piere represents a Flemish transliteration of Toussaint de [la] Pierre, but the supposition is

<sup>36</sup> The immediately preceding entry mentions payment to the *concierge des Halles* for a year's services ending June, 1620. Perhaps that places the visit of the comedians in the second half of 1620.

<sup>37</sup> Van Sorgen, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17; *Dramatic Records of the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer* (Malone Soc. Collections, VI), pp. 70-71; Lefebvre, I, 141.

<sup>38</sup> "Jan Jollyt and Tousen du Piere having played the proclamation of the Horsefair 1625—including three pounds gr. disbursed by them to Tagnes de Butts and Jan Meuleman having participated, by ordinance and receipt £3."



weakened when we find Joltyt appearing at Ypres many years later as one of four musicians (speelieden) who played for the procession of the Holy Sacrament in 1647.<sup>39</sup> He and all the others named with him in the 1625 entry are doubtless musicians.

A year or two later Nicolas de la Pierre and his company of rope-dancers performed at Ghent:

Betaelt nicolas dela piere ende consorten camerspeelders dansende upden coorde de somme van xvj s. gr. huerlieden ghejont voor het vertooch by hemlieden ghedaen van haerliedder const voor d'heeren van t'magistraet [Ghent, Rekening 1626-27, f. 200].<sup>40</sup>

In the course of 1629 an anonymous French troupe played at Tournai:

Aux comediens franchois pour recompense du debvoir et representation qu'ilz ont fait a messieurs les Consaulx a esté paié par ordonnance et quittance la somme de xiiij £ [A. G. R., Chambre des Comptes 40044 (1629), f. 163].

This was possibly the troupe of "Nicolas Mase comedian from Arene (Rennes?) in Brittany" which, after playing at Ghent before the aldermen on March 5, 1630, was allowed to perform publicly during mid-Lent, and which in turn may be the French troupe that played at Lille in the second half of 1629.<sup>41</sup>

About a year later at Tournai, in May, 1631, "Francois Gherins and company [of] foreign comedians" performed before the city authorities:

A francois gherins et compaignie Comediens estrangers pour avoir représenté en ces halles a Messeigneurs les Commissaires de sa Majeste au renouvellement de la loix [sic] en may xvi<sup>e</sup> trente ung certain comedie et recreation par charge de Messieurs a esté payé par ordonnance et quittance xxx £ [A. G. R., Chambre des Comptes 40046 (1631), f. 110].

The description of the group as foreign comedians leaves open a possibility of English, Dutch, German, Spanish, or Italian

players; and François may represent a Gallicization of Francis, Franz, Francisco, or Francesco. Nevertheless, though capable particularly of being a Dutch or German name, it could also be French—Guérin(s). In fact we may even speculate whether Francois Gherins/Guérin is kin to the more famous Robert Guérin who, under the pseudonym of Gros Guillaume, was famous as a player of farces; or kin to Charles Guérin, who in the 1650's was a member of the troupe headed by Philandre.<sup>42</sup>

We now enter a period of about twenty years during which France and Spain were at war (1635-59) and for which time there has been little published evidence of French actors in either the French or Spanish Low Countries.<sup>43</sup> By the same token, no sure traces appear in the archives that I have examined. About midway in this period, on December 23, 1641, we find "Jehan Carrys commediant" receiving 24 shillings from the Ghent city authorities for performing his entertainment with a baboon ("syn spel met eenen baviaen," Rekeningen 1641-42, f. 177), but he is probably of Low Country origin. A decade later, in January, 1651, an unnamed troupe played before the magistrates of Malines at the Old Palace:

Item gepresenteert aen de Camerspeelders hebbende alhier op het oudt Palleys eene fraeije actie gespeult ter Presentie myne Heere van de Magistrat in Januario xvj<sup>e</sup> eenenvyftich per ordonnantie vij £ xvj s. [Malines, Comptes communaux 1605-51, s.1, no. 325, f. 142].<sup>44</sup>

Though we should commonly be on insecure grounds in presuming such an unidentified company to be French, this time we can conjecture with high plausibility that this was the French troupe patronized by the Prince of Orange, Maurice of Nassau. His company is known to have been in Utrecht during the summers of 1649 and 1650; on November 24, 1650, the States General granted them a

<sup>39</sup> A.G.R., Chambre des Comptes 38866 (1648), f. 119v.

<sup>40</sup> "Paid Nicolas de la Pierre and consorts, players dancing on the cord the sum of 16 s. gr. accorded to them for the representation of their skill done by them before the lords of the magistrate."

<sup>41</sup> Claeys (II, 11), who mistakenly reads the place as Brenne; Lefebvre, I, 142.

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Lancaster, *op. cit.*, Part I, Vol. 2, pp. 732-33; Mongrédien, *Dictionnaire biographique*, pp. 86-87, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Liebrecht (pp. 52-53) cites some visits of French players to Brussels in this period.

<sup>44</sup> "Item presented to the players having played here at the Old Palace a beautiful action in the presence of my lords of the magistrate in January, 1651, by ordinance £7 16s." Also cited in Olbrechts, *op. cit.*, p. 67.



passport for a journey to Brussels.<sup>45</sup> They probably performed at Malines while on their way between Utrecht and Brussels. It was probably this troupe which on January 19 and February 14, 1651 was paid 654 florins for performing five comedies in French at the Court in Brussels (Liebrecht, pp. 17, 54-55). On February 28 it received 903 florins for seven comedies, on April 27, 129 fl. 15 placas for one comedy<sup>46</sup> and the same sum on May 2 for a final performance.<sup>47</sup> It is mentioned by name ("compagnie comedianten van den Prince van Oraingen") a couple of months later at Ghent, where they received ten pounds for a performance before the aldermen on July 27, 1651 and where they were to remain at least eleven days ("the bleven hier end minstens 11 dagen"):

Betaelt de Compaignie Comedianten van den Prince van Oraingen de somme van thien ponden grooten over t'j<sup>e</sup> vertooch ende Comedie ghedaen voor d'heeren van de Collegie opden xxvij<sup>en</sup> july 1651 by ordonnantie van de vij<sup>en</sup> augste 1651 (the bleven hier end minstens 11 dagen) [Ghent, Rekeningen 1651-52, f. 147v].<sup>48</sup>

During the course of the same year one Blaise Manfré, possibly French, was paid twelve Flemish pounds for presenting an entertainment at Tournai:

Au Sieur Blaize manfré la somme de douze livres flandres que luy a esté accordée pour avoir représenté aulcunes choses plaisantes pardevant lesdits Seigneurs prevosts et jurez payé par ordonnance et quittance [A. G. R., Chambre des Comptes 40065 (1651), f. 91v].

By contrast with the thirty pounds paid at Tournai to François Gherins in 1631, this payment of twelve pounds suggests a different kind of entertainment from a comedy. In the Ghent accounts for 1650-51 a Blaise Montfiery was paid £4 gr. for demonstrating his skill in

squirting different kinds of wine from his mouth (Claeys, I, 49). They may be the same person.

In August, 1652, a French troupe performed before the Ghent authorities, receiving ten pounds by a warrant of August 30:

Betaelt de fransche comedianten de somme van thien ponden grooten over de comédie by hemlieden ghepresenteert aen d'heeren van t'magistraet by ordonnantie van den xxx auguste 1652 [Ghent, Rekeningen 1652-53, f. 145r].<sup>49</sup>

This was doubtless the same Prince of Orange company that was earlier at Brussels and was paid on January 24 for eight comedies and on February 14 for nine comedies presented at the Court.<sup>50</sup>

With the end of the war between France and Spain (1659) we notice a renewed frequency of visits by French actors to the Low Countries. In the autumn of 1659 and winter of 1660 (October 20-February 19) a French company performed moralities ("sinne spelen") and rope dancing "in the [play] house in the Wermoesbroeck" in Brussels:

Ierst in het huys int wermoesbroeck daer de fransche comedianten vertoonen plagen te spelen, zyn verhoont geweest eenen Sinne spelen ende dansingen opden Coord alhier oycet van haerlieden Meester tzelve den xx octobris 1659 tot den 19 February 1660... xxx Rs xvij st [Brussels, Archives de l'assistance Publique H. 161 (1659-60), f. 5].<sup>51</sup>

This is most likely the company of the Duchess of Orleans which a few months later in June and July, 1660, gave a performance before the aldermen of Ghent and played in that city at least from June 26 to August 7 (Claeys, II, 22-24).

In the Ghent accounts for 1660-61 appear payments to two individual entertainers whose names I offer on the chance that they may

<sup>45</sup> E. F. Kossmann, *Nieuwe Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Toneel in de 17<sup>e</sup> en 18<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (The Hague, 1915), p. 80; Van Sorgen, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77, 79.

<sup>46</sup> A.G.R., Manuscripts Divers 1374, f. 168r-168v. Not cited by Liebrecht.

<sup>47</sup> A.G.R., Manuscripts Divers 1374, f. 175r-175v. Not cited by Liebrecht.

<sup>48</sup> "Paid the company of comedians of the Prince of Orange the sum of ten pounds gr. for the first representation and comedy done before the lords of the college on the 27th July 1651 by ordinance of the 7th August 1651 (to remain here at least 11 days)" (Claeys, I, 56-57; II, 19-21). Claeys quotes the troupe's request of July 17, 1651 to perform at Ghent, but not this record of payment.

<sup>49</sup> "Paid the French comedians the sum of ten pounds gr. for the comedy presented by them to the lords of the magistrat by ordinance of the 30 August 1652."

<sup>50</sup> Liebrecht, pp. 17, 37, 49-53. Liebrecht thinks the company made Brussels its headquarters from 1650 to 1655, even as late as 1657. Some time after the death of the Prince of Orange (1653) they called themselves the Queen of Sweden's company.

<sup>51</sup> "Firstly in the house in the Wermoesbroeck, where the French comedians used to put on plays, have been performed some morality plays and rope-dancing here also by their master himself from 20 October 1659 to 19 February 1660."



prove useful to later investigators. By warrant dated August 26, 1660, Michel de Bacque received six pounds for "a certain performance" ("over seker vertooch") (f. 168<sup>v</sup>). Apparently somewhat later (f. 174<sup>v</sup>) but without specification of the date of the warrant Leonard Dusotoir was paid 10 s. gr. also "for a certain performance." Michel de Bacque could be a French or Low Country name; Leonard Dusotoir sounds thoroughly French.

Some time in the next fiscal year (1661-62) an unnamed French troupe performed before the Ghent magistrates:

Betaelt de fransche commedianten . . . over het eerste vertooch by hemlieden ghedaen ande heeren vanden collegie x £ gr [Ghent, Rekeningen 1661-62, f. 176<sup>v</sup>].<sup>52</sup>

And in autumn, 1662, a French company, most likely the same, also performed:

Betaelt de fransche comedianten . . . over het vertooch by hemlieden ghedaen an d'heeren van t'magistraet volghende de requeste ende ordonnantie van iij october 1662 [Ghent, Rekeningen 1662-63, f. 238<sup>v</sup>].<sup>53</sup>

It is most probable that all these visits were made by the Duchess of Orleans' company which came to Brussels in mid-February, 1661, rented a playhouse, and in January, 1662, contracted to remodel the stage (Liebrecht, pp. 58, 38). Thus they made Brussels their base whence they could visit elsewhere. It was probably this troupe which began playing again at Ghent in late July, 1663:

Betaelt de fransche commedianten . . . over t'eerste vertooch ghedaen ande heeren vanden collegie volghende de requeste ende ordonnantie vanden xxx<sup>en</sup> July 1663 [Ghent, Rekeningen 1663-64, f. 175<sup>r</sup>].<sup>54</sup>

A few months later the Duchess of Orleans' players were allowed on January 8, 1664, to play at Louvain on condition that they give two performances for the benefit of the poor:

<sup>52</sup> "Paid the French comedians . . . for the first performance done by them to the lords of the college £10 gr." This entry is not cited by Claeys.

<sup>53</sup> "Paid the French comedians . . . for the performance done by them to the lords of the magistrate according to the request and ordinance of 4 October 1662." Not cited by Claeys.

<sup>54</sup> "Paid to the French comedians . . . for the first performance done to the lords of the college according to the request and ordinance of 30 July 1663." Claeys, II, 25, mentions a second visit by French comedians in July, 1663, but provides no details.

Belanghende de Commedianten vande Hertoghinne van Orleans ende hynne versochte admisse alhier is geresolveert de selve t'admitteren tot wederoepens op conditie dat sy twee vanden principaelste commedien sullen representeren tot proffyte vande armen byde heeren Borghemeesters te designeren, ende dat sy sondaeghs ende heylighe daghen nyet en sullen moghen spelen dan naer het lof [Louvain, Résolutions du Magistrat 323, f. 77<sup>r&v</sup> and alphabetical index to the principal resolutions, no. 294, f. 67<sup>r</sup>].<sup>55</sup>

Not cited by Claeys is a visit to Ghent by "Petrus le Tellier and consorts, comedians" in June, 1671:

Betaelt Petrus le Tellier ende Consorten, commedianten . . . over het eerste vertooch by hemlieden ghedaen an myne heeren Schepenen volghende de requeste ende ordonnantie van den vij<sup>en</sup> juny 1671 iij £ xvj s. gr [Ghent, Rekeningen 1670-71, f. 183<sup>r</sup>].<sup>56</sup>

The sole Le Tellier noted by Mongrédien in his *Dictionnaire biographique* (p. 17) is Bonaventure Le Tellier, dit Baugy, known only through signing an act of association in this same year (March 30) at Paris to become a member of the troupe of Monsieur (Duke Philip of Orleans). The two Le Telliers may be kin.

Claeys (II,30) mentions that "au mois d'octobre 1672 les comédiens du roi de France" played in Ghent. A fuller citation from the accounts for 1672-73 corrects and supplements Claeys. The troupe is merely referred to as "the French comedians." They gave their initial performance before the city councilors in early October:

Betaelt de fransche Comedianten . . . over het eerste vertooch bij hemlieden ghedaen an mijn heeren Schepenen volgens de requeste ende ordonnantie vanden viij october [1673] [Ghent, Rekeningen 1672-73, f. 176<sup>r</sup>].<sup>57</sup>

Then about a fortnight later they were called

<sup>55</sup> "Concerning the comedians of the Duchess of Orleans and their requested admission to this place, it is resolved to admit the same until revocation, on condition that they shall present two of their principal comedies for the benefit of the poor, to be designated by the lords burghermasters, and that on Sundays and holidays they will not be permitted to play then after the benediction."

<sup>56</sup> "Paid Petrus le Tellier and consorts, comedians . . . for the first performance done by them to my lords the aldermen according to the request and ordinance of 6 June 1671 £4 16s."

<sup>57</sup> "Paid the French comedians . . . for the first performance done by them to my lords [the] aldermen according to the request and ordinance of the 8 October."



upon to perform four comedies before the Count of Bassignies (sometime before October 20, 1672):

Betaelt de fransche commedianten . . . ter causen van vier commedien gerepresenteert t'hebben voor sijn Excellencie (den graeve van bassignies) op het stadthuys deser stede bij ordre van myn heeren schepenen volghens d'ordonnantie ende quictantie vanden xx octobre [1672] L £ [Ghent, Rekeningen 1672-73, f. 181<sup>r</sup>].<sup>58</sup>

In 1675 the Duke of Holstein's players made two separate visits to Ghent, the first in January, the second in April, on which occasions they presented initial performances before the city authorities. Claeys (II,30) refers to these visits, but without providing precise dates or payments:

Betaelt de Commedianten vanden hertogh van holstijn . . . ter causen van d'eerste mael ghespeelt t'hebben voor mijn heeren Schepenen volgens de requeste ende ordonnantie vanden 22 january 1675 iij £ [Ghent, Rekeningen 1674-75, f. 152<sup>v</sup>].

Betaelt de Comedianten vanden hertog van holstijn . . . over het eerste vertooch bij hemlieden ghedaen den 30<sup>en</sup> April 1675 voor mijne heeren Schepenen volghens de requeste ende ordonnantie vanden 14<sup>en</sup> meye 1675 iij £ [*ibid.*, f. 155<sup>v</sup>].<sup>59</sup>

The last of our hitherto unrecorded visits by French players is that of the Prince of Orange's company led by François du Pérrier, which prefaced its stay in Ghent by a performance before the city magistrates on November 12, 1685:

<sup>58</sup> "Paid the French comedians . . . because of having presented four comedies before his Excellency (the count of Bassignies) at the townhall of this town by order of my lords the aldermen according to the ordinance and receipt of 20 October 50£."

<sup>59</sup> "Paid the comedians of the Duke of Holstein . . . because of having played for the first time before my lords the aldermen according to the request and ordinance of 22 January 1675 £4."

<sup>60</sup> "Paid the comedians of the Duke of Holstein . . . concerning the first performance done by them 30 April 1675 before my lords the aldermen according to the request and ordinance of 14 May 1675 £4."

Betaelt an [François]<sup>60</sup> du Perier Meister vande partye Commedianten . . . over d'onkosten bij haer ghedoocht jnt spelen ende vertooghen d'eerste commedie an mijn Edele heeren vander kuere opden xij<sup>en</sup> 9bre 1685 iij £ gr [Ghent, Rekeningen 1685-86, f. 169<sup>v</sup>].<sup>61</sup>

This troupe, after a visit to England which lasted from about May 26 to about December 11, 1684,<sup>62</sup> returned to the Low Countries, was playing in Brussels in February, 1685, and is known to have been there as late as December 31, 1685 (Liebrecht, p. 80). Du Pérrier appears to have left the company for a while, at least in March and April, 1685 (Liebrecht, p. 82); but the above entry demonstrates that he had rejoined it before November 12.

The sharp decline in visits of French actors during the last quarter of the seventeenth century is probably a consequence of the periodic French invasions of the Spanish Netherlands, which eventually gave France the border she shares with Belgium today. While the above-mentioned French troupe played at Ghent, French forces held Ypres and Tournai during an uneasy peace following the treaty of Nijmegen. Courtrai had only recently been given up after occupation by the French from 1668 to 1678, and former towns of the Spanish Netherlands like Arras and Valenciennes were in French possession for good. Ghent's welcome to foreign players testifies to the future Belgians' absence of xenophobia and their receptiveness to the products of alien cultures.

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<sup>60</sup> Space left blank in original entry, apparently for insertion of Christian name.

<sup>61</sup> "Paid to [François] du Perier master of the group of comedians . . . concerning the expenses assumed by him in playing and performing the first comedy to my noble lords of the kuere on 12 November 1685 £4."

<sup>62</sup> Sybil Rosenfeld, *Foreign Theatrical Companies in Great Britain in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London, 1955), p. 4.



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# Modern Philology

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO  
RESEARCH IN MEDIEVAL  
AND MODERN LITERATURE

Volume LXIII . Number 1

AUGUST

1965

Bruce W. Wardropper. <i>Don Quixote: STORY OR HISTORY?</i>	1
Richard N. Ringler. THE FAUNUS EPISODE	12
Garland Cannon. SIR WILLIAM JONES AND DR. JOHNSON'S LITERARY CLUB	20
Elgin W. Mellowd. THE RECEPTION OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS' <i>Poems</i> , 1918-30	38
NOTES AND DOCUMENTS	
Harry R. Hoppe. NEW LIGHT ON FRENCH ACTORS IN BELGIUM IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY	52
REVIEW ARTICLE	
A. B. Chambers. MORE SOURCES FOR MILTON	61

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