

MEDIEVAL  
FRENCH PLAYS

*Translated by*  
RICHARD AXTON  
*and*  
JOHN STEVENS

OXFORD  
BASIL BLACKWELL  
1971

Our Lady Mary, holy Virgin,  
Snatched the devil's reckoning.  
To celebrate this miracle  
Arise and sing  
*Te Deum laudamus!*

660

*Thus ends the miracle of Théophile.*

*Texts*

Rutebeuf, *Le Miracle de Théophile*, éd. Grace Frank,  
Classiques Français du Moyen Age, Paris (Librairie  
Ancienne Honoré Champion), 2e. éd. 1949.

— *Oeuvres complètes de Rutebeuf*, éd. Edmond Faral &  
Julia Bastin, 2 vols., Société des Anciens Textes Français,  
Paris, 1959.

— *Le Miracle de Théophile*, transposition de G. Cohen,  
Paris (Delagrave), 6e éd., 1935.

*Staging and interpretation*

See the modernized French edition of Gustave Cohen.

## LE GARÇON ET L'AVEUGLE

### PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE BLIND MAN

THE BOY

## LE GARÇON ET L'AVEUGLE

### *Text*

This play of a Blind Man and his Boy is the oldest surviving farce in French. Its rather savagely comic theme is that of the famous sixteenth-century Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes* and many other European fabliaux. The play was composed in the vicinity of Tournai (cf. line 30) in the second half of the thirteenth century. The song that the two rogues sing (57-64, 83-90) refers to the King of Sicily and his levy of troops against the Saracen enemy. This would have been topical at any time after 1265, but perhaps the song is deliberately old fashioned.

The text is found in a single thirteenth-century manuscript. Only about half the speeches are headed by an indication of the speaker's identity, and most of these headings were added by a scribe in the fifteenth century. Apart from the rubric 'They sing together' at lines 57 and 83, there are no stage directions. We have translated Mario Roques's edition (CFMA, 1921), following his line-numbering, and have added a few stage directions to his.

### *Staging*

The play may have been performed under almost any auspices—in a market place, after a banquet or in a tavern. It needs no special stage conditions. Since the play depends chiefly on the cruel deceptions practised by the Boy on the Blind Man, its effect is heightened if there are no stage properties: thus the real-life objects the Boy describes to his master will have no visual reality for the audience. The audience serve also as bystanders in the action of the play.

The Blind Man and the Boy appeal directly to them for alms, while the Boy asks them to approve his trickery. Since the play presumably belonged originally in the repertoire of travelling entertainers, the begging from the audience, which takes up a good proportion of the action, probably was 'a game in earnest'.

## LE GARÇON ET L'AVEUGLE

BLIND MAN Give us something, gentlemen;  
 And God, the Son of Mary  
 Bring you all safe home to heaven,  
 Safe to his company.  
 I can't see you at all;  
 May Jesus see you on my behalf  
 And bring all those to Paradise  
 Who help me in my need!  
 Ah, Mother of God, Holy Mary,  
 Queen of Heaven, what's the time? 10  
 I don't hear anyone; I'm badly off  
 Not having even a boy to help me,  
 Who could take me to my home—  
 For even if he couldn't sing  
 At least he'd know how to ask for food,  
 And lead me to the bigger houses.

BOY Oh, life's a bore! (*sees the Blind Man*)  
 —Or it was till now.  
 Now I've got just what I need.

(*to the Blind Man*)

Excuse me, sir, you've missed your way.  
 There's a basement here—You may fall down. 20

BLIND MAN Ah, Mother of God, help me, please!  
 But who's this guiding me so well?

BOY Noble sir—as I hope for heaven!—  
 It's just another down-and-out.

BLIND MAN By God, I think he's a splendid fellow.  
Come here! I want to talk to you.

BOY Here I am!

BLIND MAN Do you want a job?

BOY Sir, what would I have to do?

BLIND MAN Guide me, and keep me out of danger  
Down through the city of Tournai. 30  
You will beg, and I shall sing;  
And we'll get lots of money and food.

BOY Well! By the belly of St. Gilain,  
You must think me a perfect fool!  
I tell you frankly, I must have  
At least a fiver every day,  
As long as I look after you.  
On these terms I'll do everything.

BLIND MAN Come now, my friend! Don't bicker so!  
What is your name?

BOY Little John. 40

BLIND MAN Then, Little John, a pox on you  
If you don't have your fee, and welcome!  
If you show promise in my trade,  
In time you'll be a millionaire!

BOY Let's go! (*aside*) I'm not at all worried  
At suddenly becoming rich.  
I pray to God he'll send a plague  
On those who give this poor blind man  
Even a single contribution;  
They'll just be throwing it away! 50

BLIND MAN Now, dear Johnny, what are you saying?  
You're going to make me lose my temper.

BOY Sir! Sir! Don't get upset!  
It's only to deceive those louts.  
Sing up! And I will help you, honest.  
Then everyone will give me food.

*Now they sing together.*

Whoever serves you, Mother of God,  
Will always live in joy;  
And he shall have a rich reward,  
For in your company, 60  
Sweet lady, he will be.  
I pray to you for all my patrons  
And soldiers with the king's own son  
Serving faithfully.

BOY (*to passers-by*)  
Hey, for God's sake, don't pass us by  
Without giving us something to eat!

(*to Blind Man*)

Sir, just wait a moment here:  
I'm going to beg at this big house.

(*to passers-by*)

Gentlemen, by God in heaven,  
Be generous to a poor blind man. 70

(*to Blind Man*)

I see we're doing no good here,  
Let's get along! God blast them all!

BLIND MAN They've nothing to give—but, tell me, Johnny,  
Isn't anyone answering?

BOY Not a soul! But I could see  
That they were jeering nastily.

BLIND MAN John, you should have persevered—  
Then you'd have got something at least.

BOY Sir, Christ himself couldn't—there!  
I am an expert in this trade. 80  
Sing, so we'll get something to eat,  
For I shall manage to talk them round.

*Now they sing both together.*

The King of Sicily I'll sing—  
May God be on his side!—  
Who every day is put on trial  
Against the heretics!  
And now from coast to coast  
His summons has gone out;  
All who are destitute  
Will go, to join his host. 90

BOY Well, by Saint Sophia's orifice!  
If we're able to live on air  
This evening we shall be quite drunk.  
Just look how they are rolling up!  
God's arse, I've not seen a single gate,  
Or door, opening to us tonight,  
We could starve to death right here  
Before they brought us anything.  
By the faith I owe St. Vast, I'll never  
Ask to be a blind man's dog. 100

BLIND MAN Not one single bit of luck!  
John, by the promise I owe your guts,  
'A single stroke won't fell the oak.'  
If I never begged for bread again,  
I could still enjoy myself;  
I've got a tidy pile laid up.

BOY You seem a miserable chap to me,  
Because if I had lots of money,  
I'd give us both an easy life.  
And, for as long as it lasted out, 110  
You wouldn't have to beg for bread;  
It would be yours without any question.

BLIND MAN Johnny, now for saying that,  
You'll have a share in all I've got  
From this time on, I give you my word.  
And if today we've taken nothing,  
We're pretty well provided for  
With what we need to eat and drink.

BOY Sir, God help me! that's a decent thing.  
Good God, we'll have a celebration! 120  
I tell you, I know a tale or two  
To sing, and that'll keep you happy.  
And if you feel the urge, I'll have  
Some pretty young wench brought in at once.  
Not one of those with a wrinkled paunch  
But nice and pale, with a youthful face.  
No-one could draw a girl like her  
With paint-brush or an artist's pencil.  
Don Juan himself has no apprentice  
Prettier or with a nicer figure. 130  
And she'll have such a fine little what's-it,  
We'll thrust inside it at full tilt.

BLIND MAN Ugh, you're setting my teeth on edge,  
Johnny, with your disgusting talk.  
I don't want you to talk to *me*  
Of having women. I've got a beauty!  
And when I turn her on her back,  
Then you shall come and stuff her for me;  
And the bottoms of her feet will be  
So level you could dice upon 'em. 140

BOY Sir, your talk is quite obscene;  
Don't speak so filthily again!

BLIND MAN No one can hear me apart from you,  
Johnny, old friend, so far as I know.

BOY Wait here for a moment, sir;  
I must just go and relieve myself.

*(disguising his voice)*

You dirty tramp, God curse your luck  
For speaking such obscenities.  
You'll have to pay for it, you know

*(strikes the Blind Man)*

Just take that!

150

BLIND MAN Johnny, tell me, am I wounded?

BOY Wounded? How could you be wounded?

BLIND MAN Just this moment, someone or other  
Gave me such a nasty packet.

BOY God's arse! I was just standing by.  
Tell me—why didn't you shout out?

BLIND MAN Ah, Johnny, friend, my very good friend,  
If I'd uttered a word of protest,  
He would have given me such a thump.  
I should have had the scars for life.

160

BOY Sir, you've no need to get upset:  
One or two bruises are quickly healed.

BLIND MAN True, Johnny! But every bone  
Inside my head aches horribly.

BOY O master, sir, some people die  
From blows like these. But you'll recover—  
Tonight, you put a dressing on,  
Made from the dung of a fat young foal;  
Tomorrow you'll be fit again.  
I'm telling you the gospel truth.  
Sometime ago I made a pile  
Simply from a single cure—  
On a child who was about to die:  
I made him drink a heavy dose  
First, garlic cloves—a filthier mess  
One couldn't have—I left the lot.

170

BLIND MAN Heavens, Johnny, God's been kind;  
He's given you the perfect home.  
If you behave, you've found yourself  
A patron who will keep your chin up.

180

BOY Sir, you'll find you've got in me  
A first-class servant, steady and smart.

*(aside)*

You'll see far whiter sheets than me  
Hung out to die upon a line!

BLIND MAN I'll love you for ever, Johnny my boy—  
And now I'd like to go back home.  
When you come to a flight of steps  
Two houses on, you'll find my own.

BOY Then, Hugh must live next door to you?—  
Hugh Hontevuignies, to give him his  
Full surname. Near Ramegnies  
Is the village I am speaking of.

190

BLIND MAN Johnny, I see you've been well schooled;  
You'll get us to my house all right.

BOY Here we are, sir! Just wait a moment,  
I'll open the door. Where is the key?

BLIND MAN Do you see the periwinkle, John,  
Over the lintel? That's where it is.

BOY You're home, sir. Now, if you don't mind,  
Deal straightly with me right away, 200  
And hand me over some of the cash,  
So I can go and buy the food.

BLIND MAN John, my boy, in my big purse  
You'll find a lot of ready cash.  
Take out exactly what you want!  
If you haven't enough, then take some more.  
And now I wish my little girl  
Were here—I've got a sort of yearning.

BOY My dear master, when I come in  
I'll bring her back.

BLIND MAN Do you know where she works? 210

BOY Yes, down in Comb Street. She's a wench  
Who works on young skins, fleecing them  
I've seen her working, down at the mills  
Rubbing off short hairs and fluff.  
Come on, let me go at once—  
The decent wine will soon be gone.  
And you take off your outdoor coat—  
It's absolutely torn to shreds;  
And look, sir, don't you see the buckle  
Has come unfastened from your belt? 220

BLIND MAN Take them, buckle, belt and cash,  
And coat—and get them all replaced.  
I know that you won't bungle things.  
But take care how you spend your money.

For wine, for bread, for flour, and see  
The meat you buy is really fresh.  
These are my orders; and, remember,  
Bring my mistress as you come.

BOY I'll do it with the greatest pleausre.  
I'm off now. Say a prayer for me! 230

BLIND MAN Get off! You're a real friend, my boy.

BOY Gentlemen, haven't I nicely managed  
That blind old man, who hasn't got  
A penny left, nor a coat to his name?  
I've got the lot—no 'ifs' or 'buts'.  
Good Lord! He really thought I was  
So poor I hadn't got a bean.  
But I shall drink away his pile  
And pass it round amongst my friends  
Until there isn't any left. 240  
But (as I'm an honest man!) I wouldn't  
Run off with all he has, no never,  
Without informing him about it.  
Damn me, if I won't let him know!

(to the Blind Man)

Sir, you must look for another servant.  
Now, I don't want to play you false—  
I'm going off to enjoy myself,  
With what you gave me—quite right, too—  
Haven't I been an excellent guide?  
I needn't thank you for my *earnings*, 250  
I'm sure of that. Nor for the money,  
Nor for the coat. Well, now I'm off!

BLIND MAN O God, I'm absolutely finished!  
Why can't I die now? Death's too slow  
In fetching me. But before that time,  
I swear I'll wait for the rogue, tomorrow,



And then—I'll give him such a hiding  
I swear it by my mistress, Margaret.

BOY Pfui to you! I'm not for catching.  
I just don't care a crap for you—  
You nasty, miserly old man. 260  
If it weren't for your faithful friends,  
Like me, you'd be a millionaire!  
But for their sakes—you'll go without!  
If you don't like it—come and catch me!

*Text*

*Le Garçon et l'Aveugle*, éd. Mario Roques, Classiques Français du Moyen Âge, Paris, 2e éd. 1921.

*Staging and interpretation*

Gustave Cohen, 'La scène de l'aveugle et de son valet dans le théâtre français du moyen âge', *Romania*, XLI (1912) pp. 346-72.

## LE JEU DE LA FEUILLÉE

by Adam de la Halle

### PERSONS OF THE PLAY

ADAM, the author  
HENRI, his father  
RIKIER, Rikier Auri, 'Rikeche', a rich merchant  
HANE THE MERCHANT  
GILLOS, Little Gillos  
A DOCTOR  
RAINELET  
DAME DOUCE  
A MONK, bearer of the relics of St. Acaire, patron of lunatics  
WALET  
THE IDIOT  
THE IDIOT'S FATHER  
CROKESOS, Messenger to Hellekin, King of Fairies  
MORGAN LE FAY }  
MAGLORE } fairies  
ARSILE }  
TAVERNER, Raoulet the Watchman  
Walaincourt, various madmen and a crowd of spectators  
FORTUNE