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THE *HUY NATIVITY* FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Translation, Play-Back, and Pray-Back

Aurélie Blanc and Olivia Robinson

In the early seventeenth century in Huy (present-day Belgium), one or more anonymous Carmelite nuns embarked upon a piece of theatrical translation.[1] Using a medieval vernacular play-book which had been copied in Walloon French within their own convent around a hundred years before, in the second half of the fifteenth century, they set about adapting two of the short plays they found in it (which together cover the narrative of the Nativity, Epiphany, Rage of Herod and Purification of the Virgin) into a single, new French-language play.[2] They, or two of their sisters collaborated to copy this play into a separate manuscript. The Huy convent's medieval playbook is now owned by the Musée Condé at Chantilly (Chantilly, Condé MS 617); however, the early seventeenth-century play has remained in the convent's archive, alongside their surviving administrative and financial documentation (Liège, Archives d'Etat, Fonds Dames Blanches de Huy [hereafter 'Fonds DBH'], doc. 386bis). 386bis's play (hereafter the *Huy Nativity*) translates, reworks, and expands the material comprising the first play in Chantilly 617 and the first part of that manuscript's second play. It thus presents the Nativity, Epiphany, and part of Herod's Rage, omitting the Purification and other non-Biblical episodes found in Chantilly 617's play two. (We provide a detailed synopsis of the *Huy Nativity* as an appendix.). However, the script breaks off unfinished, suggesting that it might well have gone on to include–in another copy, or in performance–further material from Chantilly 617's second play, and/or from elsewhere.

The medieval script is reworked in the *Huy Nativity* in a variety of ways: sometimes stretches of dialogue are almost identical, semantically speaking, with alterations taking place only in terms of the spelling of particular words or the updating of particular grammatical constructions, to reflect changes in linguistic or orthographic practice (e.g. '*les anges du ciel*' for '*les angle de ciel*'). Sometimes, however, the script is much more radically revised at a structural level, including, for example, the addition of entirely new characters. One such character is the Sibyl, who does not appear at all in the medieval play, but who is sent for by Herod in the *Huy Nativity* to confirm his pre-eminence. In an episode which was certainly known as far back as the Middle Ages (it appears in the *Golden Legend*) the Sibyl experiences a vision of a virgin holding an infant in her arms. In the play, this vision enables her to confirm the birth of Jesus and deny that Herod is all-powerful.[3] The insertion of her

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[2]   Maurice Delbouille established that the later play was directly adapted from the earlier ones: 'Essai sur les nativités Wallonnes de Chantilly, et sur leur adaptation française du xvii siècle' *Mélanges de linguistique romane offerts à M Jean Haust* (Liège : H. Vaillant-Carmanne, 1939) 97-128, at 128.

[3]   We discuss the Sibyl further in: Matthew Cheung Salisbury, Elisabeth Dutton, and Olivia Robinson 'Medieval Convent Scripts: Translating Scripture and Transforming the Liturgy' forthcoming in *A Companion to Medieval Translation* edited Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications).

vision parallels the vision of the star seen by the three kings, and creates a further layer of prophetic foreshadowing and interpretative activity around the birth of Christ.

In 2017, the Medieval Convent Drama project[4] undertook a translation into present-day English of the *Huy Nativity*, as part of our ongoing work on the theatrical culture within the Carmelite women's house at Huy, a central branch of our research project. Although MCD focuses primarily on the medieval period, and thus on the plays in Chantilly 617 and their contexts, we were interested in understanding some of the ways in which a *post*-medieval generation of sisters approached their own convent's medieval history of play-making and in investigating the kinds of translatory decisions which they had made. [5] We undertook this in part through our own, contemporary translation practice, a practice which necessitated close, careful reading, and collaborative discussion about semantics, tone, register, and formal features. Our position as a pair of translators working together (both medievalists; one native English speaker and one native French speaker; but each also proficient in the other's native language) mirrored, in some respects, what we know of the play's copyists (who may possibly have been its translators and adaptors): in doc. 386bis, as Thomas-Bourgeois has shown, the *Huy Nativity* is copied collaboratively by at least two different hands, working together to shape and order the material.[6] We were also interested in exploring the ways in which the *Huy Nativity* might have worked in performance and the spaces, pace, and types of movement it might have utilised: our translation, therefore, was designed to be the subject of a staged read-through at the 2017 METh conference in Glasgow. This article comprises some of our reflections on these processes and experiences, both translation and performance, and on the ways in which they have helped us to approach the medieval-inspired *Huy Nativity* in terms of its adaption, its *mise-en-scène*, and its signification in the context of conventual memorial practices.

We also hope that it will serve to open up the Huy sisters' dramatic activities (both medieval and post-medieval) to a wider audience than hitherto. Within the medieval English tradition, very little convent drama of any kind has survived, but especially not of the sort of play which the Huy Carmelites' manuscripts seem to preserve: that is, performative activities which do *not* seem to have been designed to be an embedded part of a particular liturgical celebration, but may have taken place as stand-alone events at different times and in different

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[4]   www.medievalconventdrama.org. We here use the term 'convent' in its non-specialist sense, to signify a women's religious house of any order, rather than its academic sense, signifying a house (male or female) of one of the mendicant orders.

[5]   The *Huy Nativity* has never, to our knowledge, been fully edited. Our translation is based on Robinson's unpublished transcription of 386bis, which we also cite in this article. We retain manuscript spelling, lineation, capitalisation, and distinction between *u* and *v*. We have silently expanded abbreviations and have added accents to tonic *e* where appropriate, to facilitate comprehension (e.g. *cité* for *cite*, city).

[6]   A. C. Thomas-Bourgeois 'Le Drame religieux au Pays de Liège, avec documents inédits' in *Etudes de dialectologie romane dédiées à la mémoire de Charles de Grandgagnage* (Paris : Droz, 1932) 283-313, at 297-304. This collaborative copying, intriguingly, also mirrors the way in which the two fifteenth-century source-plays in Chantilly 617 were copied (discussed by Olivia Robinson 'Mystères as Convent Drama' in *Les Mystères: Studies in Genre, Text, and Theatricality* edited Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012) 93-118, especially 98-103, and by Ernest Hoepffner 'Date et Composition des Jeux dramatiques de Chantilly' *Romania* 48 (1922) 62-92: playmaking and copying play-scripts may, perhaps, have formed a collaborative, creative recreational activity within the convent over a long period of time.

spaces within the nunnery.[7] However, we possess hints that such drama did, indeed, take place in England, in both male and female religious houses, and that it may have operated as a recreational, as well as a liturgical or para-liturgical activity, even if no complete scripts now survive. In 1526, to give one example, visitation records show that the Benedictine nuns of Carrow Priory in Norwich were enjoined not to undertake their Christmas entertainment in which one (or more) of the younger nuns would perform as an Abbess:

> *Item habent in festo Natalis Domini juniorem monialem in abbatissam assumptam, vocandi gratia; cujus occasione ipsa consumere et dissipare cogitur quæ vel elemosina vel aliorum amicorum largitione acqusierit.*[8]

> Item: During the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, young nuns have dressed up as Abbesses, [?] voicing grace;[9] on this occasion they have also been compelled to consume [recklessly] and dissipate that which they acquired, either [from] alms or from the generosity of other friends.

This description, along with the precision that the entertainment took place at the feast of the Nativity both suggest a form of 'Girl Abbess' ceremony or game. The emphasis placed on the consumption and dissipation of resources suggests that the Carrow sisters took the opportunity to indulge in an extended festive role-play which perhaps involved food, drink, and communal entertainment alongside the traditional liturgical and ceremonial role reversal between senior and junior members of the community.[10]

While it does not, of course, 'stand in' unproblematically for lost English scripts and detailed documentation, the evidence from Huy provides us with a more precise sense of

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[7]   Two Latin *Visitatio Sepulchri* ceremonies are extant from English convents: one from Barking Abbey and one from Wilton Abbey. Unlike the Huy plays, they do not seem to be targeted purely at women but rather towards a mixed congregation: see Margaret Aziza Pappano 'Sister Acts: Conventual Performance and the *Visitatio Sepulchri* in England and France' in *Medieval Constructions in Gender and Identity* (Tempe AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005) 43-67 and Dunbar H. Ogden *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002).

[8]   *Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich*, *A. D. 1492-1532* edited Rev. A. Jessopp (Camden Society, 1888) 209; we are grateful to Veronica O'Mara for drawing our attention to this document. James Stokes gives many further examples of nuns' involvement in dramatic activities in the diocese of Lincoln: 'Women and Performance: Evidence of Universal Cultural Suffrage in Medieval and Early Modern Lincolnshire' in *Women Players in England, 1500-1600* edited Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 25-43, at 36-37. David Klausner has recently discussed an example of monks undertaking extra-liturgical theatrical activities: 'Playing the Crucifixion in Medieval Wales' *METh 38* (2015) 57-67. Abigail Young has suggested that sisters within Canonsleigh Abbey in Devon may have been leaving the convent to attend lay 'spectacles' or performances, a practice which was discouraged by their Visitor in 1329: 'Theatre-Going Nuns in Devon?' *Early Theatre* 22 (1997) 25-29. These various examples suggest that the nature and purpose of performative activities undertaken or attended recreationally within and by members of medieval religious houses was very wide-ranging indeed.

[9]   The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* suggests a correction to Jessopp's reading here, proposing *jocandi gratia* for *vocandi gratia*, a phrasing which would underline further the ludic element of this mimicry. See *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* edited R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett and R. K. Ashdowne (Oxford: British Academy, 1975-2013) s.v. *abbatissa*, sense b.

[10]   See Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998) 72-73.

what we might provisionally term the recreational drama taking place in English women's religious houses may well have been like. The precise performance contexts, purposes, and audiences of this kind of convent theatre are difficult to recapture; the convent at Huy, for example, may have used its plays in a number of ways and played them before quite different audiences. The medieval source-play in Chantilly 617 specifies *tresdouche suers* ('sweet *sisters*') as its primary audience, suggesting, at that stage, members of the convent *only* as both participants *and* audience, and situating the plays as a community exercise in creative devotion. Surviving account books, however, show that the Huy Carmelites operated a school at the time the medieval manuscript was copied, a fact which opens up the possibility that the fifteenth-century Biblical plays (and, indeed, the other plays which accompany them in the Chantilly manuscript) may have been used in an educative context and that the performers may have been the nuns' pupils rather than the sisters themselves.[11] The seventeenth-century *Huy Nativity* features an *Anoncemant d'iciluy Jeux* ('announcement of this play') with which it opens, and which addresses the *Reverande Dame Prieure* ('reverenced Lady Prioress') and the *chere Dames* who make up the audience. We translated this as 'dear sisters', since 'dear ladies' struck us as a trifle patronising in tone, in contemporary usage, yet it is worth remembering that 'dear sisters' skews our sense of the audience members towards nuns alone, when the word *dames* (unlike the medieval plays' *suers*) might also include other, lay women.[12]

Translating the play's language

A first section of this article will reflect on language and the implications its translation has on the transmission both of the play's theological content and of its performative characteristics. The initial questions we encountered regarding language which needed to be addressed at the outset mainly related, in one way or another, to establishing the degree of modernisation or acculturation which it might be best to aim for. Our choices here would influence the performance given by the actors and the perception of the play by the audience. In translating a piece of early Burgundian theatre composed in Walloon French into contemporary English, we were faced with a double foreignness or 'distance': temporal *and* geographic. Simon Gaunt has discussed the translation of medieval texts into

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[11]   The essays in *Drama and Pedagogy in Medieval and Early Modern England* edited Elisabeth Dutton and James McBain (Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 31; Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2015) discuss the widespread overlap between theatrical and pedagogical practices in the late medieval and Tudor periods. Andrea Knox documents a sixteenth-century manuscript which makes reference to a play about the life of St Mary Magdalen written by female pupils in the Irish Dominican convent of Valladolid, Spain (founded 1545): 'Her Book-lined Cell: Irish Nuns and the Development of Text, Translation and Literacy in Late Medieval Spain' *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue* edited Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015) 67-86, at 75.

[12]   Delbouille documents an alternative *anoncemant* for the *Huy Nativity*, copied roughly contemporaneously on a loose sheet of paper rather than in its manuscript booklet, 'De l'intérêt des nativités Hutoises de Chantilly et de Liège' *Mélanges d'histoire du théâtre du Moyen-Age et de la Renaissance offerts à Gustave Cohen, professeur honoraire en Sorbonne par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis* (Paris : Librairie Nizet, 1950) 75-84, at 83. This alternative prologue, intriguingly, addressed the play to '*Madame la reine*' as well as the Prioress and '*dames*': evidently, the sisters at some point intended to play, or actually played, the piece before a visiting queen (Delbouille identifies a possible candidate, Marie de Medici, who in the end did not make her proposed visit to Huy in 1638). The slip of paper preserving this reworked prologue is no longer held directly alongside doc. 386bis: we hope that further searches will unearth it elsewhere in the Fonds DBH.

contemporary English in terms of the ethical difficulties inherent in smoothing out or eliding specificities relating to time, place, linguistic identity, and form in an attempt to accommodate the linguistic and cultural norms of a contemporary audience.[13] We agreed in principle with this position and initially felt a desire to preserve the *Huy Nativity*'s foreignnesses rather than sacrifice them to make the play more palatable to our audience. Yet we also needed to produce a text that would be readable and quickly assimilated: the read-though at METh would involve non-professional actors, some entirely unfamiliar with medieval French, who had little preparation time and no rehearsals. Because of these practical constraints, we chose to punctuate our script with modern punctuation and uniformly added speech markers where they were absent, making decisions about attributing speeches to characters where the manuscript was unclear.[14] We added regular scene divisions, in order to help our actors and to underscore the movements between different timeframes and spaces presented within the play.[15] In the case of unreadable words, or words we found it impossible to gloss satisfactorily, we emended to give a contextually plausible alternative.[16]

We also swiftly realised, as the translation process got underway, that we could find no satisfactory way of retaining the *Huy Nativity*'s *francophonie* without making the translation sound parodic. Preserving the play's syntax struck us as a possible solution but we felt that this might just sound very odd, rather than specifically Walloon or French. Attempting to include French accents would risk sounding like the BBC wartime comedy *Allo Allo*. We thus decided not to emphasise the play's geographical location in our translation. We did, however, seek to preserve its 'time'. The play is now triply in the past–our translation deals with a seventeenth-century version of a medieval imagining of a Biblical past. As our translating work progressed, however, it became increasingly clear to us how much the seventeenth-century version of the play highlights the fact that its performance is taking place in a *contemporary* timeframe. Its opening moments, in which the *Anoncemant*

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[13]   Simon Gaunt 'Untranslatable' in *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory* edited Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012) 243-255. Discussing idiomatic, facing-page modern English translations of medieval texts, Gaunt writes: 'shouldn't it be *difficult* and *challenging* to access a different culture, and isn't being confronted with the alterity of a strange language part of this process?' (255).

[14]   On taking into account the particular contexts and medium of a play's anticipated delivery when translating for the theatre, see the comments on translating Pirandello for radio performance in Susan Bassnett 'Still Trapped in the Labyrinth: Further Reflections on Translation and Theatre' in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* edited Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998) 90-108, at 98.

[15]   One scene division exists in the seventeenth-century manuscript; it comes after the adoration of the Shepherds and the introduction of the three kings and moves the action of the play to Herod's court. It is preceded by a blank folio (F.4v) and starts on F.5r with *Cy Commence le Jeux/D'Herode* ('Here starts the Play/Of Herod').

[16]   For example, we struggled with the term *bolet*, in the phrase *prennons bolet et bourdon* ('grab your [?] and your staff', spoken by a shepherd preparing to travel to the manger). In all the examples of usage which we found for this noun, it signified 'mushroom' (and still does in contemporary French). We translated the term 'bundle' as an alternative which made sense in the context of the scene, but we have found no independent textual evidence to support this. It is of course possible that the reading *bolet* is incorrect: the first two letters of the word are partially obscured by an ink smudge in 386bis (F.3r).

marks or charts the transition from real-world into play-world, are marked by ambiguity as to who is performing and who is part of the audience. Joseph's first words address an individual or a group of people, asking for lodgings, but the only other person who speaks 'onstage' is Mary:

Joseph et Marie vons logis cherchans

[Joseph]
Hé bon ians loge nous ceans
ie vous prie nous loger
cet nuit seulement

Marie
Bonne Dame au non de Dieu
loge nous icy nous ne scavons que d'en enquerir

Joseph and Mary go looking for lodgings

Joseph:
Good people, are there lodgings here?
I beg you to shelter us
Just for tonight.

Mary:
Good lady, in the name of God
Give us lodgings here: all we can do is beg.

No one answers.

It is highly likely that the 'people' and 'good lady' addressed here are the audience of Prioress and nuns. This immediately implicates the watching community in the action onstage, drawing them into the Biblical past as active participants. They become, for that moment, the hostile residents who will not shelter the fleeing couple, rather than the safe refuge which might be more readily associated with a monastic house. The play is, therefore, deeply anchored from the very start in its own present moment, and we chose to underline this by avoiding wherever possible obviously archaic formulations. Our initial, theoretical, desire to keep the text's foreignnesses thus had to be altered as we undertook the practical business of translation. We wanted our script to have a similar contemporary relationship with its actors and audience now as it appears to have done at the time of its initial performance: a careful bringing into the present time of a past narrative (the Nativity) and a past performance heritage *within* the convent. While we did very occasionally use specific archaizations for local effects,[17] we largely aimed to construct a more contemporary idiom and style.

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[17]   Our best example of this was Mary's announcement that she is about to give birth: *Mon père l'eur et venue maintenant / Que je doit anfanter mon anfant.* This we translated as: 'Father, I am nearing my time / The birth of my child is close at hand', where the old-fashioned euphemism 'nearing my time' was used largely for reasons of its associated decorum: the Virgin Mary does not speak about Christ's birth colloquially or graphically. The verb *anfanter* still exists in present-day French (spelled *enfanter*), although its use would,

Our wish to archaize only very sparingly led to some difficulties, which caused us to question our own stylistic preconceptions and assumptions concerning contemporary dramatic language. Some of these issues were simply a case of not wishing to sound needlessly parodic to a contemporary ear. For example, we struggled to find a term to equate to *dame* when it was used as a title from one shepherdess to another: 'lady' in Modern English sounded too elevated for a shepherdess and 'mistress' evoked Mistress Quickly and cod-Shakespearean comedy. Similarly, we translated *Compagnons et berger*, an address by one shepherd to the others, as simply 'friends' because we felt that 'Friends, shepherds' sounded too close to a parody of *Julius Caesar*, while 'Friends and shepherds' seemed to imply, in present-day English, two different groups of people. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his centrality in both school and university English Literature courses, both of these difficulties were determined by the lasting influence of Shakespeare's dramatic language on our own sense of theatrical decorum and parody.

Our desire not to archaize also made us aware of the paucity of present-day English vocabulary in certain domains that were key to the play's action and modes of expression. As we tried to free our translation from old-fashioned phrases, we rapidly exhausted our options. Predictably, a particular challenge was presented by the French differentiation between *tu* and *vous*, which we expressed through changes in register, present-day English lacking a grammatical distinction between formal and colloquial 'you'. Other instances in which we struggled to find a modern English translation included: *Hé las noble dame!* We rendered this as 'Oh noble lady' instead of using the now comically archaic 'Alas!'. While the expression 'Oh' arguably does not convey the same strength of feeling as *Hé las*, we struggled to come up with an English expression that would encapsulate sorrow and despair at a turn of events and which did not sound ridiculous.[18]

Creating an appropriately decorous style in which to render the play's sometimes complex treatment of theological subject matter was also especially difficult. Translation has the power to affect the perception of the play as either foreign or familiar, but it can also influence the audience's understanding and reception of its content. As we have noted, it was important to us to avoid a sense of parody in our translation (although there were certainly moments in the play intended to be humorous) because we felt that the expansions and rewordings undertaken in the *Huy Nativity*, when compared to its medieval counterpart, often tended to explore particularly complex theological or devotional questions, questions which were evidently perceived as important by the play's creator(s). Words which might carry particular theological resonance, then, necessitated careful translation. One intriguing example is the term *nourisons*; this is applied to Joseph, who is addressed as: *vous, nourisons / de l'anfant.* Cotgrave's 1611 *Dictionarie*, Richelet's 1680 *Dictionnaire françois,* and the 1762 *Dictionnaire de la langue Françoise* all accord in giving a definition for the noun *nourrisson* which suggests that the term refers unambiguously, in the seventeenth and

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today, sound very archaic: we deployed an equivalent archaism to translate it which replicates the effects of *enfanter* for a contemporary French speaker.

[18]   Readers suggested terms or expressions such as 'dear', 'gee', 'woe', 'dear me', and 'too bad', synonyms generated by a thesaurus. None of these appeared to do justice to Joseph's feelings in these lines without sounding comedic.

eighteenth centuries, to a child who is being fed, rather than an adult who feeds a child.[19] Clearly, though, this usage does not fit with how the word is used when it is applied to Joseph. *Nourisons* differs from the equivalent term used in the medieval version of this scene, which gives *norisseur*. This is a well-attested medieval word meaning 'one who feeds, one who brings up or provides for'. It is, therefore, a theologically precise definition of Joseph's relationship to Mary's child which highlights both Christ's paternal Divinity and Joseph's unique and privileged experience within the Holy Family, and which emphasises the role which *Joseph*, specifically, plays in contributing to the bodily nourishment, care and bringing-up of the Christ-child.[20] The highlighting of this foster-paternal source of nourishment and education may even have eucharistic implications: Joseph contributes to the feeding and nurturing of Christ's body, which will in turn 'nourish' the bodies of the faithful, both spiritually and literally, at the moment of communion. We chose to translate the address to Joseph fairly neutrally as: 'you, Joseph, who provide for this child', although a translation which was more explicit about Joseph as Jesus' foster-father would also have been possible: clearly, this is what the medieval play is suggesting, and the *Huy Nativity* is, presumably, aiming for something similar.

Its adaptors' decision to use the word *nourisons* to suggest this meaning is intriguing, however; particularly so since the medieval noun *nourrisseur* was apparently still in use in the seventeenth century: the adaptors could simply have retained this term.[21] It is, of course, possible that the use of *nourisons* is simply a mistake, and that the copyist meant to write *nourrisseur*. However, it is also possible that the sisters deliberately chose to employ this word and that it was selected to sound consciously old-fashioned or strange. The *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* lists an uncommon Anglo-Norman noun which is much closer to that used in the *Huy Nativity*: *nuriçun*. It gives a primary meaning of 'nourishment, sustenance,' for this noun, but also one example (dating to the late fourteenth century) of a secondary meaning: 'foster-child' *or* 'foster-father,' in line with the associations attached to the much

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[19]   Randle Cotgrave *A Dictionarie of the french and english tongues* (1611): *Nourrission*, s. m.; Pierre Richelet *Dictionnaire françois* (1680): *Nourrisson, norrisson,* s. m. Both consulted online via the Classiques Garnier Numériques database: <https://www.classiques-garnier.com/numerique-bases/index.php?module=App&action=FrameMain>, accessed 25.09.201. *Le Dictionnaire de la langue françoyse* L'Académie française (Paris : Brunet, 1762). Consulted online at <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb351535262>, accessed 21.09.2017. *Le Trésor de la langue française* gives an attested example for this usage dating to 1538: <http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>, accessed 21.09.2017.

[20]   See DMF, s. v. *nourrisseur*, sense A and B. Consulted online at <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/>, accessed. 21.09.2017. The honouring of Joseph's particular role as foster-parent and provider for Jesus appears to have been embedded in the Huy Carmelites' liturgical practices: Joseph's feast day is marked in their surviving Obituary with the very unusual entry *Sancti ioseph **nutricij d**omini* ('Saint Joseph, **foster-father of the Lord**'; Fonds DBH doc. 43, p. 24). On Latin verb *nutrire*, suffix *nutri-*, and related medieval terms designating the contemporary practice of fosterage, see Anita Guerreau-Jalabert *'Nutritius/Oblatus*: parenté et circulation d'enfants au Moyen Âge' in *Adoption et Fosterage* edited Mireille Corbier (Paris: de Boccard, 1999) 263-290, at 266-268.

[21]   It is attested in Cotgrave (1611) and in Richelet (1680): in both dictionaries, it refers to an adult who raises a child but who is not their parent. Social practices of fosterage appear to have continued from the early medieval period into the seventeenth century: see Guerreau-Jalabert *'Nutritius/Oblatus'* and Tracy Adams 'Fostering Girls in Early Modern France' in *Emotions in the Household, 1200-1900* edited Susan Broomhall (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 103-118.

more commonly-attested medieval word *no[ur]risseur*.[22] Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, citing the *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, likewise highlights the Old French term *norriçon*'s use to mean 'educateur, tuteur, "père adoptif".[23] It would seem likely that the *Huy Nativity*'s unusual seventeenth-century use of the word *nourisons* to designate Joseph responds to the theological significance of the way his role and relationship to Jesus–that of foster-father–is clearly articulated in the medieval source-play. And it is, perhaps, possible that this response is expressed in a word which consciously created an archaic or dated tone, looking back to the source of the play in the convent's medieval past. Our translation, we found, could not express these potential nuances in effect.

We had similar difficulty in conveying the description of God's activity and presence within the human world which is articulated by the three shepherds upon their arrival at the stable, when they describe the wonder of the Incarnation:

> *Voicy le lieu qui est bien reluisant*
> *ou nostre Dieu et sur le foin gisant*
> *voiez la lumier de Dieu eternele*
> *oeuure singulier du grand Dieu*
> *immortele*
>
> Here is the most radiant place
> Where our God is lying on the hay.
> See the light of God eternal,
> Incomparable sign of our great God immortal.

The adjective *singulier* expresses at once the uniqueness and the extraordinary nature of God's *oeuure*. *Oeuure* (present-day French *œuvre*) itself also proved difficult to translate. Its formal register made us discard the literal translation of 'work'. After trying various alternatives, among which: 'unique making', 'unique achievement', and 'incomparable act', we decided to highlight the fact the shepherds were here discussing the light (*la lumier de Dieu eternele*) rather than the event of the Nativity itself (although that, too, is clearly an *oeuure singulier*, and the term would, therefore, seem to refer to both). 'Sign' for *oeuure* appeared to us to be the best possible choice, although this unambiguously associates its referent with the light. We finally settled upon 'incomparable sign'.

The words of the angel to the shepherds presented challenges in translating theological language of a different nature:

> *Gloria jn excelcis deo*

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[22]   See AND, s. *nuriçun*, sense 1 and 2, and commentary. Consulted online at <http://www.anglo-norman.net >, accessed 21.09.2017. *Nuriçun* only appears in one citation with the possible meaning 'foster-father', which dates to 1388. As the AND editors note, if this example does *not* denote a foster-father, it denotes a foster-child. For more instances of related terms meaning 'foster-child', see AND, s. v. *nuriçune*. For the *medieval* French term *nourrisson* (which carries a primary meaning 'food' or 'nourishment' and a secondary meaning 'those brought up by an individual', or 'the education, upbringing of, e.g, a child), see DMF s. v. *nourrisson*.

[23]   '*Nutritius/Oblatus*' 268.

Tres chere frere et amy
grande ioie je vous annonse
car au iourdhuy vous est né le sauve[ur]
qui est crist et seigneur
allez vous en betleem la sité
la vous le truueré en la creche
de drapelet enuelloppez

Gloria in excelcis deo!
Dearest brothers and friends
I bring you news of great joy
For unto you is born this day
A saviour which is Christ the lord.
Go to the city of Bethlehem
You will find him there wrapped in swaddling clothes,
Lying in a manger.

The speech begins with the liturgical Latin *Gloria*, signalling a shift into a heavenly register, which we imagined as highly traditional and formal. The close similarity of the angel's words to Luke 2:11-12 led us to base our translation on these verses from Luke, and thus to reverse the order in which the manger and cloths are mentioned. Furthermore, we decided to cite these words as they appear in the king James Bible: although clearly anachronistic in the context of the play's action, this choice gives a present-day academic audience an instantly recognisable Biblical effect and formal register. Even at the time of its translation, the king James Bible was conservative in its lexical and grammatical choices, and it now represents an archaic English that is nonetheless familiar to most listeners from (for example) Christmas readings. It has become 'traditional', formal, and culturally prestigious: we decided that it would form a legible way of translating the shift in register which the angel brings to the scene.

The sisters' affective piety, too, gave rise to some terms which were a challenge to translate, such as the verb *a[d]orer* and its associated adjective *adorable* (used relatively frequently within the play to denote the attitude and feelings of the visiting Shepherds and kings towards Jesus). The modern English terms that have developed from the same etymological roots now have a rather different register from the medieval French: 'adorable' in contemporary English usually connotes a kind of trivial, cutesy excitement about something like a puppy. The profound, more spiritual implications that the verb carries in the *Huy Nativity* are largely lost. We used the doublet 'love and worship' to express characters' sense of affective devotion but also reverence and honour. At times, we used one or the other of the doublet alone if it seemed one emotion was being more insisted on than the other in a particular context. The difficulty presented by *adorer* demonstrates how the theological sense of a word can be lost through a shift in register over time, even if that word has remained recognisably in the language.

Startling shifts in register and tone were also deployed by the dramatists as a theatrical technique within the play. We sought to preserve such shifts and focused on grammar, form, and tone to do so. Changing them would influence the actors' performance, their understanding of the characters, and the effect of these characters on the audience. Beyond

its role in the transmission of the play's content, translation thus impacts the transmission of some of its textual features which play a central role in performance. We tried to maintain the original variations from informal to formal register indicated in the script through the use of the distinction *tu / vous*, and of regular rhymes and polysyllabic words. The Magi's language is a perfect example of formal register: flowery, courteous, and extremely repetitive almost to the point of parody, it features many repeated rhymes and terms, and its metre, while not perfectly regular, is sustainedly more so than elsewhere in the play. These characteristics are particularly obvious in the kings' introductions to one another:

Jaspar
Mon non meseigneur volontier
vous diray san mantir
iay non iaspar et suy Roy
darabie et par plusieur iour
me suy partit sachez que naie
austre volonté que dadorer le Roy
nouvaux nay.

My name, my lords, I will gladly
Reveal to you:
I am called Jaspar and am king
Of Arabia, and it has been many days since
I left there.
I would make known to you that I have
No other wish than to worship
The newborn king.

Melchior
Je suis audit attandant
de lescresture qui dit avant
de iacob lestoille aistreroit
les filïs dis[r]ael a nous vindroit
qui tout les regne terriens
auroit tres biens en se main
sachez que ie suy dune cité
Roialle, qui est dit cité de thar[s]e
et suit par droit non appellez
Melchior bien renomé.

I follow the many sayings
Of those who have prophesied before
That the star of Jacob will be set shining in the sky;
The son of Israel will come to us
Who will hold all the principalities of the earth
Firmly in his hand.
I make known that I come from a royal city, which is named
The city of Tharse;

And I am by right name known as
Melchior, the well-renowned.

Balthazar
Sachez mes seigneur
que mon non est balthazar
et suy Roy couronnet
de la cité de Saba
cy aie une estiolle veut
qui au ciel et apparue
la quel ma issy droit amennez
pour trouuer le Roy nouvaux nay.

I make known, my lords,
That my name is Balthazar
And I am crowned king
Of the city of Saba.
There I beheld a star
Which appeared in the sky
And which has brought me directly to this place
To find the new-born king.

Clearly, we were unable in our translation to reflect the rhythmical and formal features of these lines. We tried, however, in our choice of lexis to convey the ponderous and aristocratic tone taken by the three kings; we wondered whether they are characterised deliberately as slightly pompous, or whether this is simply an example of poor style. However, we decided to attempt to retain their tone because of the various possibilities of characterisation it offered the actors. For example, we translated *sachez* ('know', 2nd person imperative, used repeatedly in the play from one king to another to signal the conveying of information) formally and performatively as 'I make known that…' every time it was used by the kings; the past tense of the verb *voir* as 'I beheld' rather than 'I saw'; and the expression *issy droit amennez* as 'brought directly to this place' rather than (for example) 'brought straight here.' Very occasionally, we were able to recreate particular rhymes in English. For example, we replicated the rhyme that concludes Balthazar's moving description of Jesus's poverty, emphasizing the opposition between Christ's earthly poverty and their own wealth as earthly kings: *nous abonsdons en richesse / et nostre Roy est mit en la chreche* ('We abound in treasure / While our king lies in the manger'). Our half-rhyme couplet provides a sense of conclusion and summary familiar to more modern audiences from Shakespeare's frequent use of rhyming couplets to conclude a scene.

      The most challenging characters to translate were Herod and his Fool, because of their profound rudeness to one another. Herod, for instance, aggressively insults and silences the Fool: *Taisé vous gloutin.* Colloquialisms, as well as the distinction between *tu* and *vous* are key to expressing the transgressive familiarity of the Fool to his superiors. The casual terms in which he addresses the Magi—*Hé, brave gent*—was translated as the similarly colloquial 'Oi, lads!' When he proceeds to insult Herod, we needed to get across not only his rudeness, but also the marked shift from *vous* to *tu* in the middle of the speech:

> *Ha sire a vostre parolle*
> *on antan bien que vous est un tré*
> *bon homme de bien*
> *comant osse tu panser le parole*
> *que tu dit*
> *avec ces noble Roy il ont grande*
> *puissans et san nombre de ian d'arme*
> *et ne vous craing nulemant.*

We decided that the *vous* (*vostre parole)* at the start of the speech was mockingly deferential, and that the shift in register to *tu* (*comant osse tu*) at its centre was very marked. We conveyed the Fool's disrespect with sudden use of colloquialism and obscenity:

> Oh, oh my gracious Lord, one can understand by your words
> That you are a most excellent and noble gentleman!
> But seriously, you idiot, how do even dare imagine the crap that you spout
> About these noble kings?
> They are incredibly powerful and command plenty of armed men:
> They in no way fear you!

By contrast, the adoration of the shepherds and shepherdesses, with its repetition and enumeration of Jesus' body parts, proved difficult to translate because of its highly sentimental tone. Gushing over Jesus, they call him *tendrelet*, a cute and tender colloquialism that expresses their closeness to the child. In our search for a modern equivalent, we went from 'little chap' to the more generic 'little one', but were dissatisfied with both. The intimacy and affection of the tone often sound sentimental when replicated in Modern English; some of the work is already done in French by the pronoun *tu*, used to an intimate or equal, with which the shepherds address Jesus. We further struggled to mirror the shepherds' physical, bodily devotion to the baby Jesus in a language that did not sound parodic to a modern audience. A prime example was *o joyeux fron*, which signifies literally 'o happy forehead' and which seemed to recall almost inevitably Shakespeare's mechanicals. Our translation of this and other similar passages, while avoiding the most egregious oddities (we chose 'joyful face' over 'happy forehead'), retained a sense of deep emotional and affective engagement with Jesus's status as a baby which still, in a contemporary context, at times struck us as sounding exaggerated.

The kinds of discussions which we had about specific words or expressions and which we have explored in this section sensitised us to the ways in which the seventeenth-century sisters may have approached their adaptation work. This is particularly true for moments at which terms or expressions are altered between medieval and seventeenth-century play in a more substantive fashion than modernisation of spelling. For example, the Fool's insult to Herod, which we cite above, largely follows the language of the equivalent medieval passage closely. Alterations mainly take place at the level of orthography (e.g. *penser* for *penseir,* or *osse* for *ouse*); however, the final line of the insult has been reworded: instead of in no way fearing Herod, the medieval kings do not consider him worth a button, or a button's worth (*il ne vous priesent pont ung botton*). The meaning of the Fool's words remains broadly the same across the two scripts: he asserts that the kings are unimpressed and undaunted by the prospect of Herod's anger. Yet the later adapters evidently decided to alter the expression in which that sentiment was conveyed. Clearly, it is impossible to say categorically why this

change was made: reflecting on the discussions which we had as we translated cannot simply reveal the reasoning of our seventeenth-century counterparts. However, the range of conversations and dilemmas which formed a core part of our collaborative translation process, and which were often at the level of particular words or expressions, offered us valuable imaginative insights into the *kind* of discussions and shared decisions which may have led the Huy adaptors to reword certain passages in the ways that they did. For example, the *botton* analogy may simply have sounded too archaic or too obscure to the seventeenth-century adaptors. Or, more interpretatively, perhaps the sisters felt a desire to tone down slightly the transgressive humour of the Fool's words at this moment: *il… ne vous craing nulemant* is a statement of fact; a much less challenging, creative, and evocative image than *il ne vous priesent pont ung botton*. Our own work, therefore, led us to think more creatively about the kinds of conversations and processes which may lie behind the seventeenth-century play-text as it currently survives.

Embedding direction in translation

Translating dramatic texts such as this one presents specific challenges and opportunities. We have seen how specific decisions about the translation of language and tone can affect characterisation and performance. More than words only, however, the voices, gestures, costumes, and props, lighting, sound effects, and the architecture, decoration, and facilities of the venue as a whole all convey meaning during a dramatic performance, as Susan Bassnett reminds us.[24] Bassnett argues that the theatrical translator is responsible for the words of the script *only* ('the linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the text that are decodable and re-encodable').[25] However, as we were translating, we realised that we could not function as 'words only' translators, in the way outlined by Bassnett. Perhaps due to our shared experiences as theatre practitioners, rather than translators for the theatre, we found ourselves imagining *mise-en-scène* as we worked, and this exerted an impact on our lexical choices. The times at which our imagination was especially vivid might be conceptualised as a conscious taking on of the role of directors as well as translators, embedding an imagined performance *into* the translated text. This was the case, for instance, with Joseph's words to Mary:

> Joseph a Marie :
> *Noble Dame cet soy sy*
> *ie voy biens que on ne nous veuss*
> *loger nulemant.*
> *ie voy iscy un viel estable :*
> *Loger il nous faudra dedans.*
> *He las noble dame !*
> *que vous faut til ? A mon sanblans*
> *vous estre moult belle et resplandissante*
>
> *Joseph to Mary*

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[24]   Susan Bassnett 'Theatre and Opera' in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* edited Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 96-103, at 96.

[25]   Bassnett 'Still Trapped' 107.

> Noble lady
> I can see that no-one is willing to shelter us tonight.
> Here is an old stable:
> We will have to take refuge within it.
> O noble lady, how can I look after you?
> In my eyes you glow with beauty.

Our close reading and discussion of Joseph's lines, as we considered how best to translate them, drew apparent disconnections and non-sequiturs to our attention. His speech shifts from the logical discussion of shelter in the stable, to a question about Mary's needs, to a statement about her glowing beauty. The latter two elements appear a new folio of the manuscript (F.2r), even though there is a gap at the end of F.1v which could have contained them: perhaps, then, these changes in tone might in part be due to the scene being composed sequentially over a space of time. Nonetheless, the overall effect is one of rather abrupt changes of subject matter. We imagined what might occur onstage to give rise to this: Joseph is in despair because of the poor treatment shown to his pregnant wife, a tired and heavily pregnant woman struggling to sit and get comfortable in a stable. We therefore translated Joseph's words to her as both reassuring and tender, rendering *que vous faut til* as 'how can I look after you?' to give a sense of 'how can I make this space comfortable for you in your condition?', 'how can we make the best of this?'

His next words, a sudden suggestion that Mary is 'resplandissante' very probably draw on a rich, apocryphal, and typological field of imagery describing the Virgin as a source of supernatural light, which was understood at both a figurative and a literal level.[26] Twycross's discussion of occurrences of this motif and its significations offers several points of connection with the *Huy Nativity*'s Joseph; the most pertinent of these, perhaps, relates to Mary's virgin conception and birth. As Twycross summarises, 'the apocryphal motif of Mary's shining face [was]… integrated into the imagery of light surrounding the Incarnation. […] She is like a semi-transparent vessel through which the light of God glows.'[27] Within the *Huy Nativity*, Mary herself will very explicitly parallel the moment of Christ's incarnation with the moment of His birth:

> *Mon pere, <u>Ainsy qu</u>'a la con-*
> *ception nul creature n'y fus*
> *chose du monde,*
> *<u>pareillemant</u> ne fera a la*
> *nativité*

> Father, <u>just as</u> at the moment of conception
> No human acted in any way,
> <u>So</u> no-one will at the Nativity.

She will also refuse Joseph's offer to fetch the midwives who, traditionally, test and confirm her continued virginity after the birth. Her apparently radiant appearance, in the moments prior to this happening, underlines the connection between Incarnation and Nativity, and the

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[26]   Meg Twycross has traced this imagery and the ways in which it was glossed and understood exhaustively: 'As the sun with his beams when he is most bright', *METh* 21 (1990) 34-79.

[27]   Twycross 'As the sun' 52, 58.

assertion of her continued chastity throughout. The fact that it is Joseph who comments on her radiance also connects this moment suggestively to the role sometimes attributed to Mary's dazzling brightness in quashing Joseph's doubts about her pregnancy: 'a confirmation of Joseph's intuition that she is the chosen one of God'[28] and, therefore, a depiction of Joseph which underlines his humility and his comprehension of Mary's role in God's divine plan. The motif of Mary's radiance also appears in the N-Town *Mary Play*, again experienced and voiced by Joseph (although, unlike the *Huy Nativity*, his recognition of this light takes place at the moment at which he returns to find Mary pregnant, not at the Nativity). This led Twycross to wonder whether and how it was physically staged.[29] The *Huy Nativity* does not provide stage directions for this moment, or any explicit suggestion that Mary's 'resplandissante' appearance is anything other than figurative (nor does the earlier Chantilly manuscript's medieval play-text). Nonetheless, our feeling when translating these lines was that the shift in subject matter from one moment to the next was sudden and unexpected enough to suggest a possible non-verbal action of some kind from Mary, triggering Joseph's words about her brightness; following Twycross, we imagined Mary's appearance *literally* altered on stage and wondered whether she was somehow suddenly bathed in light?

A different example of imagined performance occurred as we were translating the scene introducing Herod and his court, where the question of interpreting and translating comedy was central. Although locating humour is always an interpretive and potentially subjective act, we felt that we were justified in assuming that this scene should be played as much for laughs as possible, and in cueing actors to produce this kind of performance within our script. Other medieval plays featuring the character of Herod are known for their parodic portrayal of him. Later in the *Huy Nativity*, too, Herod is given the opportunity for some physical comedy, as he is involved in slapstick confrontations with his Fool, who openly mocks him, presumably to comedic effect. We thus sought to give to the speeches of Herod and his courtiers an exaggeratedly bombastic tone. For example, we translated the messenger's qualification of Jesus's birth as *chose inennarable,* literally 'an unnarratable thing,' as 'something unspeakable.' The word 'unspeakable' in contemporary English brings with it a sense of taboo, of something so shocking it cannot be named, and was a deliberate attempt on our part to accentuate the comedy. The lines of the Clerk who discusses Jesus's birth with Herod were also translated to comic effect: his description of Bethlehem as *assez pres de Jeruasalem* struck us as giving the opportunity for a kind of pedantic over-exactitude: we rendered these lines as: '*relatively* near to Jerusalem'. Herod's verbatim echo of these exact words in his later speech to the people only reinforces the comedy. The choices we made here were suggested by the text, yet still afforded the actors a certain liberty of interpretation, as will become clear in our following discussion of the performance.

The performance at METh 2017

After the pre-performance in our imagination, we witnessed the actual performance of our translation at the Medieval English Theatre Conference in March 2017. In this section, we reflect on the insights this performance brought us, both in terms of our work as translators, and in terms of the possible staging of the *Huy Nativity* in the seventeenth

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[28]   Twycross 'As the sun' 61.

[29]   Twycross 'As the sun' 65-66.

century. This staged reading was coordinated by Elisabeth Dutton and performed in Glasgow University's James Arnott Theatre. The setting was of course not a convent, and the participating academics were not nuns, but they included a core group who have worked together for many years and who have built strong personal as well as professional relationships with each other. The fact that actors and audience members belonged to the same group of people gave the performance a communal spirit. Spectators enjoyed seeing friends and colleagues play well-known biblical figures, and actors sometimes broke character when delivering a line they knew would amuse their audience. In this respect, if in no other, they perhaps embodied some part of the dynamic that might have been found within a convent. Not only were the participants familiar with one another, they also possessed an extensive knowledge of the medieval period and of its drama in particular. Their expertise on the subject gave some of them a predetermined view of how their roles ought to be played. The actors playing Herod and Joseph, for instance, were aware of these figures' depiction in medieval drama, respectively as a raging yet often comical tyrant, and as a caring old man. Our Sybil and Shepherds confirmed that they had knowledge of their roles' medieval iconography, and adapted their movements accordingly. The participants were given minimal costumes and props, and were asked to read through the script beforehand, but were offered no explicit direction, as the aim was to see how the cast, all expert readers of medieval drama, would respond to our script alone.

As we have noted, many decisions which we made about word-choice within our translation frequently involved us thinking about staging and interpretation of the play in terms of tone, register, and non-verbal actions. Ultimately, our translation is a critical reading of the play, which will inevitably promote a certain kind of production. Once performed, however, we saw that this was not the whole story. While our translation did indeed encode some presupposed interpretative decisions, which were reflected in the actors' performances, certain moments in the play did not always pan out as we expected, and performers were able to bring their own interpretation to the piece. The performance provided us with a fresh approach to the play and a fresh approach to the decisions we had made as translators.

The audience laughed at the comedy we had emphasised and the actors concerned responded to the way we had translated (for example) Herod's speeches to his court, delivering them for laughs. However, when arriving at the stable, Joseph's words did not seem to be directly triggered by Mary's nonverbal helplessness in the precise way in which we, when translating, had imagined. In spite of that, the actor playing Joseph afterwards commented that the translation had clearly communicated to him that this scene should be solemn and gentle. Additional dignity and pathos was created by the fact that Joseph, in accordance with medieval tradition, was considerably older than Mary. She was able to reach the stable before him, which emphasised his own inability to assist her.

The shepherds, too, surprised us in performance. What had seemed to us the extremely saccharine language used about the baby Jesus did not trouble the audience, who found it humorous rather than off-putting; but, crucially, still appreciated the emotional effect of the shepherds' sincerity of feeling towards the baby: much, perhaps, as we can laugh at Shakespeare's Thisbe and still be strangely moved by her despair. The fact that women played all of the shepherds heightened the near-maternal affection shown by these characters to the baby, and audience members discussed afterwards the many possible effects which this aspect of the play might have had when nuns were the women playing these roles.

The three kings made a rather different impression. The performance emphasised the characters' lack of emotional depth as well as their heavily presentational speeches and movements to an even greater extent than was evident while we were translating. We noticed also that our king-actors rushed to give Jesus their gifts, only to realise after a few further speeches had elapsed that they were in fact meant to acknowledge the baby much later, and that there was a very long stretch of dialogue provided to accompany their movement to the manger. For the actors playing these parts to perform their roles accordingly, then, they would need either a large performing space around which to move slowly, or regular stops throughout their journey. We would suggest that the latter is perhaps more likely, considering the highly choreographed way in which the kings' dialogue is composed: each speaks in order, in carefully patterned speeches, and each is apparently followed by a retinue of some sort (Balthasar, for example, is described by Jaspar as arriving with *si grand convoye*, 'such a great entourage', an allusion which recalls lavish late medieval depictions of the journey of the Magi such as those found on the walls of the Magi Chapel in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence). Each stop might, therefore, form a tableau for the audience to behold. Their slow and choreographed approach towards the Holy Family, via Herod's palace, might well also recall a liturgical procession, characterised by movement between various stations upon a spiritual journey towards the sacred.[30] Importantly, this liturgical effect was already suggested in the medieval script, through the use of sung Latin liturgical citations within parts of the kings' dialogue. Elsewhere, we have argued that this feature forms a sophisticated and creative reflection upon the complex temporal qualities of the liturgy, and its rootedness in both scriptural past and living present: this is a quality which the adaptors of the *Huy Nativity* have retained.[31] They further underscored its processional effects by occasionally lengthening each king's speeches and heightening their stateliness.

The buildings of the convent at Huy are no longer standing, and (so far) we have not located any archaeological reports which might map the known topography of the convent architecture in detail. We do not, therefore, have much concrete data about the spaces in which the play may have taken place: given the liturgical tenor of the *Huy Nativity*, most

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[30]   On religious and civic procession in a European context see the essays in *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* edited Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2001). Anne Bagnall Yardley discusses liturgical processions in medieval English convents, arguing that processions unite 'pomp and piety' and are at once lavish events and 'spiritual journeys': *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 113-114. For example, Palm Sunday procession of the Benedictine priory of St. Mary's at Chester, preserved in the early sixteenth-century *Chester Processional*, started with the nuns going from the church door to 'Jerusalem' while singing *Cum approprinquaet dominus*. Once in 'Jerusalem,' they would continue singing before moving to the 'hye crosse in the churcheyarde', and then to the 'crosse on the northe halff' where the gospel was read by a deacon. Finally, the nuns moved back to the church door where the *Gloria Laus* was sung (see Yardley *Performing Piety* 126-127). Processions were also part of the performative tradition of the Huy Carmelite house and its associated organisations; a 1660 letter from the prioress, which survives in the convent archive, requests permission from the dean and chapter of the collegiate church of Nôtre Dame in Huy for the procession of the Confraternity of the Holy Scapular (which was attached to the convent) to change its habitual route, and instead start above the bridge and go around the market place (Fonds DBH doc. 388).

[31]   Cheung Salisbury, Dutton and Robinson 'Medieval Convent Scripts'; also Olivia Robinson 'Feminizing the Liturgy: The N-Town Mary Play and Fifteenth-Century Convent Drama' in *Drama and Pedagogy* edited Dutton and McBain 71-88, at 79-86.

especially the processional aspects of the three kings' scenes, the church and the immediately surrounding areas are a distinct possibility. Surviving buildings accounts from the late fifteenth century show that the then newly-refurbished conventual church was equipped with at least two side chapels–one dedicated to St Michael and one to the Virgin Mary. The latter had two parlours, as well as a small room behind it.[32] There are several references in the accounts to stone *greis* (steps) which lead up to the chapels, and in 1479 the sisters had *les fourmes de hour* (the structure of the platform) built. This *hour*–a term which can refer to all kinds of wooden platforms or daises and which is sometimes used in a theatrical context to denote a stage[33]–is mentioned several times in the accounts, often with chairs, very probably indicating a wooden gallery within the church, with appropriate seating. It was linked to a dormitory, which was situated above the chapter house and next to the church, by a small doorway or wicket, and to the ground floor interior of the church by a wooden staircase. There was, therefore, quite a complex distribution of space available to be exploited within the conventual church which might make processional performance within it particularly effective.

Experiencing the performance of our script as actors and audience members re-ignited our reflections on the process of translation. It demonstrated how perceptions of tone can vary from page to stage. We had worried about the shepherds' speeches, yet their sentimentality did not disturb a contemporary audience. The kings' stateliness and pomp also emerged more strongly than anticipated. These unexpected differences in perception drew our attention to the subjectivity of translators: performance firmly confirmed that translation is always the product of one or more subjective individuals. Presumably, this was also true for the sisters who adapted the *Huy Nativity.* Our rendition of the tones and registers we had perceived seemed to be at times successful, for instance in the case of comical elements. It became obvious, however, that we had lost control over what was no longer a text on a page. Some of the directions we had embedded in the script were taken up, but actors and audience alike brought their own ideas and sensitivities to the performance. We had, to a certain extent, envisioned our work as directorial and were confronted with the tangible realisation that theatre truly is a collaborative art form, where multiple people open unexpected and enriching possibilities of interpretation.[34]

Performing this script at METh additionally helped us to reflect on the seventeenth-century staging of the Huy play. We could not gain indisputable answers from witnessing this *mise-en-scène*, but we were made aware of certain practical issues of performance and of certain effects the plays might have had on their audience. The playful interactions between

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[32] The church was again refurbished in the late seventeenth century (see Alain Orbain 'Vestiges d'Architecture Hutoise: Les églises St Martin d'Outremeuse et St Germain' *Bulletin de la commission royale des monuments et des sites* 8 (1979) 76-89 n.36). It is unclear how much it had changed in the interim period, when the *Huy Nativity* was copied. The fifteenth-century buildings accounts are found in Fonds DBH, doc. 333. A brief narrative account of the construction and renovation of some of the convent buildings soon after its arrival in Huy is also found at the opening of the community's Obituary book, Fonds DBH doc. 43.

[33] See DMF s.v. *hourd* (1), sense I. Consulted online at <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/>, accessed. 28.06.2018.

[34] Bassnett 'Still Trapped' 107.

audience and actors, as well as the Magi's liturgical movements, are potent examples of previously unforeseen staging possibilities, revealed by contemporary performance.

Theatre as commemorative practice

As we have seen, our reflections on our own translation practice and the realisation of our translated script in performance provided us with practice-based, experiential perspectives from which to consider the work of the seventeenth-century nuns. The parallels between the nature of our work and that of the Huy nuns' prompted us to reflect on the nuns' creative decisions and potential difficulties while adapting a medieval play, but they also prompted questions concerning sisters' relationships with their own conventual past and its cultural productions: why might a seventeenth-century community choose to undertake this adaptation? There are, of course, differences between our relationship to the text we translated, and that of its authors to their medieval source-manuscript. In our case, there is a significant temporal and emotional or identity-related distance between translators and seventeenth-century script. We were not rewriting a cultural artefact from our own past or that of a community or group to which we belonged. Not only was the opposite true of the sisters who adapted the play in MS Chantilly 617, there is also evidence to suggest that the medieval play-script itself was potentially still in use a long time after its copying. The manuscript's final folio (F.27v) contains the signature of a sister Eliys de Potiers who is known to have been in the convent between the dates of 1583 and 1612.[35] Eliys' signature suggests that the plays within the medieval manuscript may have been known to several generations of sisters. The *Huy Nativity* may not have been the result of a sudden desire to rework an object from the distant past; rather, its adaptors may have been updating a medieval text and event which was still familiar to the community because frequently reiterated. Alternatively, Eliys' signature may mark a new interest in a play which had been discovered or re-discovered amongst community possessions. In either case, the seventeenth-century Huy nuns clearly chose to use and actualize their own predecessors' work rather than to create an entirely new piece of theatre. In this final section, therefore, we consider *The Huy Nativity* alongside conventual and formal memorial strategies, exploring the ways in which the play might be conceptualised as a communal act of commemoration.

The seventeenth-century nuns' awareness of their convent's past literary culture and traditions, and their desire to keep these present are attested to by Eliys de Potiers' signature on Chantilly 617 and by the existence of The *Huy Nativity*. We have not uncovered any other examples of a post-medieval religious community reworking or repurposing an earlier entertainment as a form of commemoration or a new performance. However, it is clear that established institutions of all kinds consolidated their sense of communal identity by evoking past members and their activities more broadly through a variety of means, and that the memory of an earlier heritage was often deployed and cultivated as part of this endeavour during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At Balliol College, Oxford, for example, a Fellow named John Atkinson recorded the names and obits

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[35] See *Mystères et Moralités du Manuscrit 617 de Chantilly* edited Gustave Cohen (Paris : Champion, 1920) c-ci.

of his institution's medieval benefactors in the back of the College Register in 1568.[36] This act is an example of a deliberate deployment of a shared institutional past which constructs or performs a Catholic heritage for his institution in the context of the English Reformation.

Many, if not all, medieval religious houses celebrated and commemorated their own history, heritage and past members as part of their identity through a range of ritual and cultural practices; at times, as in the case of Huy, through creative activities. *The Ordinale and Customary* of Barking Abbey contains, for instance, numerous feasts tailored specifically to this convent. Such modifications of the liturgy are, as Anne Bagnall Yardley asserts, acts of 'creative engagement' driven by the nuns and particularly by the abbesses, even if not verifiably composed by them.[37] These feasts repeatedly commemorate, for an audience of nuns and at times for the laity, the abbey's prestigious past association with holy figures and its cultural heritage.[38] Burial traditions at Barking Abbey continued to celebrate the nuns' history and to render it visible in the present: some abbesses were buried, as the *Ordinale* indicates, in various parts of the conventual church.[39] Walking in this space daily, the nuns would be physically confronted with their predecessors. [40]

Commemorative practices in the Huy Carmelite house, too, straddled past and present in important ways, emphasising a kind of a-temporal continuity within the community even as they engaged with specific, local moments of rupture or change, and so acknowledged the specificity of a particular moment in time. The convent's Obituary survives in its archive and preserves entries from soon after the foundation of the Huy house (in 1466) to the seventeenth century and later.[41] The book records the anniversaries of saints, and integrates them with obits of prominent members of the Carmelite order and the convent's own sisters, along with their families, lay donors, and friends.[42] The *familia* in whose centre the convent

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[36]   John Jones *Balliol College: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 75.

[37]   Anne Bagnall Yardley 'Liturgy as the Site of Creative Engagement: Contributions of the Nuns of Barking' in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture: Authorship and Authority in a Female Community* edited Jennifer N. Brown and Donna Alfano Bussel (York: York Medieval Press, 2012) 267-282, at 267-268.

[38]   The principal feasts of St. Ethelburga (11th of October) and St. Erkenwald (30th of April), for example, celebrate, respectively, the first abbess and the founder of Barking abbey (*The Ordinale and Customary of the Benedictine Nuns of Barking Abbey* edited J.B.L. Tolhurst (London: Harrison, 1927-28) 319, 221, 10, 4).

[39]   *The Ordinale and Customary* 361-62.

[40]   Alison Findlay *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 151.

[41]   Fonds DBH doc. 43. For the particular structuring of Obituaries according to liturgical calendar rather than chronological date, see, e.g., Charlotte Stanford *Commemorating the Dead in Late Medieval Strasbourg: The Cathedral's Book of Donors and its Uses (1320-1521)* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) xv.

[42]   The Obituary situates its commemorative entries specifically in the context of the history of the house at Huy: it opens with a short chronicle detailing the arrival of the first sisters from Dinant, and the foundation and building of the convent. This mixing of liturgical with self-referential content is a common feature of such manuscripts; see David Carrillo-Rangel, Blanca Garí, Núria Jornet-Benito 'The Devotional Book in Context and Use: Catalan Poor Clares and English Birgittines: Spaces, Performance, and Memory' in *Religious Practices and Everyday Life in the Long Fifteenth Century (1350-1570)* edited Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues and Ian Johnson (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming 2018).

sits is thus commemorated through appropriate anniversary prayers or reading out of names.[43] The structure of the Obituary thus facilitates *repeated* commemoration, keeping the past present. Yet the Obituary is also a changing object through time, as the multiple hands on many of its pages, in some cases spanning centuries, attest: it both is and is not a 'medieval' book. It bears witness to particular, chronologically-definable moments, such as the passing of X on Y date, even as it unites the whole community into one bibliographic and conceptual space and links the *familia* together through repeated vocabulary and formulae as well as through the repetition of anniversary commemorations.

Commemoration of the dead, then, is effected rhetorically or performatively by, in the evocative words of David Carrillo-Rangel, 'praying them back' into the community through anniversary celebrations and prayers for the dead.[44] Carrillo-Rangel here refers particularly to the accretive addition of personal rubrics and prayers to prayer books passed between members of a Birgittine community over time, constructing collective, communal memory.[45] Yet the image of a 'pray-back' might also describe the repeated practices of commemoration tied to more structured, cyclical, liturgical celebrations which the Huy Obituary facilitates. Furthermore, many of the Obituary's entries remind the community of the 'presence' of the dead all around them within the every-day objects and buildings which surround the sisters. This is done by the common practice of using an individual's obit not just to record for future use the date of their anniversary, but also to list in close detail post-mortem donations to the house, and/or donations made during that person's lifetime. Some of these gifts take the form of money, land, or comestible goods; but many are, of course, *things*, such as textiles, vestments, and other costume, works of art, relics, objects for ceremonial use within the convent and its church. These are objects which may on occasions have been repurposed for theatrical activities within the convent (and possibly even outside it): sisters may have deployed various kinds of donated objects bearing commemorative resonance within their theatrical work, both in the fifteenth century and later.[46] Even if this did not happen and such bequeathed items were *not* used 'onstage', they would still have possessed multiple significations: they embodied a recorded connection to the person who gave them, traceable

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[43]   On the *familia,* see Stanford *Book of Donors* 256.

[44]   'Elizabeth Edward's Devotional Book: Uses of Liturgical Books for Private Reading in Syon Abbey' paper delivered at the *Women's Literary Culture and the Medieval Canon* conference in Bergen, June 2017. We are very grateful to David for his helpful and constructive feedback on an early draft of this article, and for his generosity in sharing his unpublished paper and forthcoming work with us.

[45]   See also: David Carrillo-Rangel 'Textual Mirrors and Spiritual Reality: Exempla, Mnemonic Devices and Performance in the Birgittine Order' in *Continuity and Change: Papers from the Birgitta Conference at Dartington 2015* edited Elin Anderson, Claes Gejort, E.A. Jones, and Mia Åkestam (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhetsakademien, 2017) 160-183, at 173-174.

[46]   James Stokes gives an example of an English monastic house utilising its sacred textiles in performative activities: in 1440, the visitation records of Thornton Abbey (Augustinian, male) record that: … *sacrista accomodat vestamenta Meliora Monasterij ludentibus ludos noxios in partibus inter laicos per quod deteriorantur et scandalum generator Monasterio petit* ('… the sacrist is lending the monastery's better sets of vestments to those playing harmful pastimes/games in parts among the laypeople. On this account they are damaged and a scandal arises concerning the monastery'). *REED Lincolnshire* edited James Stokes (London: British Library; Toronto and Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

through that person's obit, whilst being reused over time within the convent by different sisters in new contexts.

The *Huy Nativity* seems, to us, to take part in a much wider culture within the convent in which it was composed and performed, involving the reiterative commemoration and celebration of the house's history and heritage through a variety of cultural, performative, and liturgical means. The reworking of a pre-existing medieval play, we suggest, participates in the processes of shaping the nuns' identity as members of a specific community, with a well-defined past.[47] The seventeenth-century sisters' translation, adaptation, and likely performance of the medieval play produced in their own convent might, therefore, be read as a powerful method of aligning themselves with their predecessors and bringing the creative work of those predecessors into the present time, uniting the sisters in one devotional community.

APPENDIX: Synopsis of the *Huy Nativity*

- The *Anoncement*: a prologue, not attributed to any character.
- Joseph and Mary look for lodgings; they rest in an old stable; Jesus is born; Joseph and Mary worship Jesus; Joseph worries about the well-being of Jesus in the cold but Mary reassures him and prays to God.
- The angel appears to the shepherds; they rejoice and make their way to the stable; the shepherdesses Mahai and Eylison follow them; the shepherds and shepherdesses arrive at the stable and adore Jesus; they rejoice and sing a song to Mary, which draws the attention of two more shepherds who join them to worship at the crib, before leaving.
- Jaspar, Melchior and Balthazar meet, introduce themselves and state their intent.
- A Duke tells Herod that three kings have come to worship Jesus the king of the Jews; on the advice of the Duke, Herod asks his messenger to bring him a clerk; Herod asks the clerk to tell him the place of Jesus' birth; Herod addresses the people and tells them the news; the people claim they will never have another king; Herod orders his messenger to find the Sybil; he asks her if there is anyone in the world higher than him in power; the Sybil answers, following her vision, that Jesus is.
- Herod orders the messenger to bring him the kings; Herod welcomes the kings and asks them about Jesus; Herod's Knight and Duke talk of the kings; the Fool tells the kings Herod's real intentions are not friendly; the kings take their leave, suspicious of Herod and his court.
- Jaspar prays to God; the kings find the stable and offer Jesus their gifts in turn; as they are about to leave, the angel warns them not to return to Herod.
- Herod is angry because the kings have not returned and argues with his Fool; Herod orders the Seneschal to bring him the three kings and vows vengeance.
- (unfinished)

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[47] If, as Delbouille suggests, the play was perhaps played before royalty as well as internally within the convent, it would additionally have formed a way of communicating that identity to those outside of the cloister.