



BRILL

The Reach of the Republic of Letters

Volume 1

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VOLUME 168



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The Reach of the Republic of Letters

Literary and Learned Societies in
Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Volume 1

Edited by

Arjan van Dixhoorn
Susie Speakman Sutch



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On the cover: BnF. Manuscrits occidentaux—FR. 19184, f. 295. According to D. Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 299–302, the illustration shows the prince of the Puy of Rouen on a seat at the centre of the stage during a contest.

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CHAPTER TWO

PATRONS OF POETRY: ROUEN'S CONFRATERNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF OUR LADY

Dylan Reid

Introduction

For three hundred years, from 1486 to 1788, the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady in the French city of Rouen organized a yearly poetry contest, called a *Puy*, in celebration of their chosen devotion.¹ The contest was held on the first Sunday after the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8.

On a typical contest day in the early sixteenth century, members of the confraternity, along with the winning poets from the previous year, gathered in the morning at the Carmelite house near the centre of Rouen, where the confraternity was based, to attend a solemn mass. After mass, the head of the confraternity, called the *prince*, and the former princes retired to a private meeting to manage the organization's affairs, including accepting new members and selecting the new prince for the coming year. The competition itself began at around 11 a.m. A large, diverse public audience, from cloth-workers to local gentry, crowded into the large hall. The prince sat at the centre of a stage, in the place of honour, with a panel of learned judges nearby. A cleric pronounced a brief opening exhortation, and the previous year's winning poets returned the symbolic prizes they had won in exchange for prize-money, reciting a short poem of thanks. Then the members of the public who were submitting poems that year, or their representative, came up and read their poems to the assembly. The contest proceeded

¹ "Puy" meant an elevation, hence the stage on which the contest took place. It is generally considered to derive from the Greek "podium." Gérard Gros, *Le poète, la Vierge et le prince du puy: étude sur les puyx marials de la France du Nord du XIV^e siècle à la Renaissance* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1992), 25–30. I would like to thank in particular Katell Lavéant, Sandra Cureau, Arjan van Dixhoorn and Paul Cohen for their helpful insights into this material.

through poems in four fixed formats in French and Latin, each poem on the subject of the purity of the Virgin Mary. Once the winners had been chosen and prizes distributed, the confraternity members and poets retired to a lavish banquet, where they might improvise amusing poetry, or enjoy the performance of a play in praise of the Virgin Mary.²

Rouen's Puy was the most famous of many Puy's in North-Western France in the period, and it has by far the best surviving documentation: two sets of statutes, from 1515 and 1614; a couple of printed books and many manuscripts of the Puy's poetry (some the record of a specific year, some miscellaneous collections), which give us a significant corpus of the writings and some idea of author's names; a membership roll from 1548 to 1653; some miscellaneous legal and financial documents; and a collective biography of its members and poets, written in the eighteenth century.³

Despite this extensive material, the Puy has been neglected by both literary scholars and historians until recently. For a long time, its poetry was treated with condescension, and therefore neglect, by most scholars of French literature. Some early works by local antiquaries, a few

² The procedure of the day is detailed in *Approbation et confirmation par le Pape Léon X des statuts et privilèges de la Confrérie de l'Immaculée Conception* [1520], ed. Édouard Frère (Rouen: Henry Boissel, 1864), b1–b6 (henceforth *Approbation*). The hall used was probably the chapter house (Denis Hüe, *La poésie palindodique à Rouen, 1486–1550* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 269–270).

³ The statutes of 1515 were printed in 1520 (*Approbation*), after they had been endorsed by Pope Leo X. The passage dating the statutes to 1515 is on *Approbation*, b1: “en cest an mil cinq cens et quinze [...] on este faitz pour la manutencion dudict puy et confraternite plusieurs statuz et ordonnances iouxte que cy aprez est contenu” (“in this year 1515 several statutes and regulations were made for the maintenance of the puy and confraternity, which are detailed below”); a similar passage also appears on *Approbation*, a4. The statutes of 1614 were printed in 1615 (*Le Puy de la Conception de Notre Dame, Fondé au Convent des Carmes à Rouen, Son Origine, Erection, Statuts & Confirmation* (n.l.: n.p., [1615]), henceforth *Statuts*) (see Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen (BMR) Fonds de l'Académie 92p for the dating). See Gros, *Le poète*, 219–248, for a full catalogue of the manuscripts; Hüe, *La poésie palindodique*, 431–439, categorizes them into types. The membership roll is BMR MS Y 186. It should be noted that MS Y 186 is currently mis-bound in the BMR: folio 15 should be the first page of text; folios 6–14 should follow 15, but in a different order; the MS is correct from folio 16 onwards. Financial and other documents can be found in BMR Fonds de l'Académie 87p and 92p and Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime (ADSM) D 546, as well as in the records of the Parlement of Rouen. The collective biography is part of a manuscript by Abbé Joseph-André Guiot, secretary of the Puy in the eighteenth century, which was printed later in the nineteenth century as Joseph-André Guiot, *Les trois siècles palindodiques*, ed. A. Tougard (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1898). While Guiot's work contains many minor errors, it reveals that he had access to sources that are not currently available.

individual articles on interesting poems, and attempts to catalogue the manuscripts were the full extent of the studies.⁴ This situation changed in the 1990s with two French literature theses and their related articles: the work of Gérard Gros on the Puy movement in general, and the work of Denis Hüe on the Rouen Puy in particular. Both attempt to develop a broad and more sympathetic understanding of this poetry, and place it within its religious context. Hüe has also encouraged his students to develop closer studies of individual aspects of this poetic tradition.⁵

In terms of history, however, the confraternity remains somewhat neglected. It has been, at best, treated as an interesting curiosity by local historians. Broader historical studies have used it as a useful reference point, whether for understanding confraternities or Rouen's society, but only in passing. Hüe does discuss its history somewhat, but without a great deal of context, and it remains understandably secondary to the vast scholarship he deploys to elucidate the confraternity's literary work and religious context. This article, therefore, will attempt to fill that gap by providing a concise history of the confraternity and its role within Rouen, in the context of Rouen's general history and the development of an urban cultural milieu in France.⁶ The secret of the Puy's longevity lay in its ability to adapt and change according to the shifting currents of urban cultural sociability, transforming from a pious confraternity of the fifteenth century to a literary academy of the eighteenth, with many mutations along the way.

⁴ See Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 18, for a quick summary of these works.

⁵ Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*. Gros, *Le poète*. These works are based on theses completed in 1989 (Gros) and 1996 (Hüe) respectively. My own thesis work on the Puy was prepared during roughly the same period as these works (Dylan Reid, "Literary Aspects of Urban Culture in Rouen, c. 1500–c. 1640" (M.Litt. thesis, Oxford University, 1995), chs. 3–5). Hüe's students Katell Lavéant and Sandra Cureau are also working on aspects of Puy poetry.

⁶ This article draws on other historical work I have done on the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, including chapters 3–5 of my thesis, "Urban Culture"; Dylan Reid, "Moderate Devotion, Mediocre Poetry and Magnificent Food: The Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Rouen," *Confraternitas* 7 no. 1 (1996), 3–10; Dylan Reid, "Piety, Poetry and Politics: Rouen's Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception and the French Wars of Religion," in *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 151–170; and a conference paper, "David Ferrand at the Puy of Rouen: Patois Poetry and Provincial Culture" (presented at the *Society for French Historical Studies Conference*, Toronto, April 2002).

Foundation and context

The statutes of 1515 tell us that the Puy of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady was founded in 1486 by Pierre Daré de Chateauroux, *Lieutenant du bailli* of Rouen, and several other notable citizens of the city.⁷ The founders were significant. The *Lieutenant du bailli* was effectively the leading royal official in the city at the time, in charge of both local justice and defence, and he attracted to his project leading members of Rouen's society.

While the date of the foundation of the poetry contest is undisputed, there has been a longstanding tradition that the associated lay religious organization, the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, was founded well before the Puy—the legend even developed that it was founded in the era of William the Conqueror.⁸ Without going that far, Hüe points to a description of the Puy by the second prince, Pierre Fabri, in a book published in 1514 defending the Immaculate Conception. Fabri describes the foundation of the confraternity by the citizens of Rouen in general terms and then says that it was *augmentee* (augmented or increased) in Daré's time, which Hüe interprets as indicating there must have been a pre-existing organization before Daré arrived on the scene to found the poetry contest.⁹

⁷ *Approbation*, a6–7.

⁸ The ducal foundation myth first appears in the late sixteenth century, in a poem for the Puy by Guy Le Fèvre de La Boderie (Guy Le Fèvre de La Boderie, *Divers meslanges poetiques*, ed. Rosanna Gorris (Genève: Droz, 1993, 360)), in Noël Taillepied's *Recueil des antiquitez et singularitez de la ville de Rouen* (Rouen: R. Du Petit-Val, 1587), 157–158, and in histories of Normandy (see Jean-Claude Arnould, “Noël Taillepied, Charles de Bourgueville et l’historiographie normande du Puy de la Conception à la fin du XVI^e siècle,” in *Première poésie française de la Renaissance: autour des puyx poetiques normands*, ed. Jean-Claude Arnould and Thierry Mantovani (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), 433–445).

⁹ Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 122–123, 226. It is worth noting that *augmenter* could be used simply as an intensifier to *eriger* (to erect, establish), for example *Approbation*, b8, “dieu [...] a esmu les cueurs des devotz chrestiens de ceste cite de rouen a eriger et augmenter ledict puy [...]” (“God moved the hearts of the devoted Christians of this city of Rouen to establish and expand the said puy”). As well, *augmentateur* could mean “protector” or “champion” in the sixteenth century (*Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, ed. Edmond Huguet (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1925–1967), I, 402–403). It may be used in this sense on the title page of the statutes, which addresses the “bienfaiteurs, zelateurs, augmentateurs du bien et honneur de ladite confraternite” (“benefactors, zealots and champions [or enlargers?] of the welfare and honour of the said confraternity”), *Approbation*, a1, and it is possible that Fabri was using the equivalent verb with the meaning “championed.” Either usage could fit into Fabri’s somewhat

However, the introduction to the printed version of the statutes of 1515 states explicitly that the confraternity was founded by the same person as the Puy: “this confraternity was some time ago erected and founded by the deceased [...] Pierre Daré, [...] lord of Chasteau Raoul and lieutenant-general of the *bailly* of Rouen, and several notable persons of this city.”¹⁰ Likewise, the wording of the statutes uses the terms *puy* and *confraternité* interchangeably (as, in fact, does Fabri), which suggests that the Puy and the confraternity were considered much the same thing.¹¹ The statutes of 1515 were drawn up at about the same time that Fabri wrote the passage in question. They were prepared within living memory of the foundation of the Puy—one of the signatory former princes, Jehan de La Pommeraye, was prince only 6 years after the foundation in 1486, and another, Jean Le Saulnier or Saonnier, was prince the year after him.¹² Those who drew up the statutes would have known what the situation had been in 1486. As evidence, a formal legal document attested by several men active when the Puy was founded must take precedence over an aside in a religious text. The evidence of the statutes is all the more powerful in that their purpose was to seek privileges for the confraternity. Given the prestige accorded to age in this period, a long-standing prior existence as a confraternity would have given significant weight to their request for privileges, and would likely have been trumpeted explicitly. The absence of any reference to a pre-existing confraternity in the statutes is therefore telling. The most probable conclusion is that the confraternity was founded by Pierre Daré at the same time as the Puy, in 1486.

ambiguous phrase, which would mean that *augmentee* was not intended to be distinct from the act of establishing the confraternity.

¹⁰ *Approbation*, a4–5: “icelle confraternite avoit des long temps este erigee et commencee par defunct noble et discrete personne Maistre pierre Daré en son vivant seigneur de chasteau raoul et lieutenant general du bailly de rouen et plusieurs notable personages de cestedicte ville.”

¹¹ There is, in fact, a confusing passage in the statutes that states that the confraternity was only founded in 1515 to sustain the Puy (“pour la perpetuation dicelluy puy en cest an mil cinq cens et quinze. A este par lesdicts princes erigee une confraternite et association iouxte que cy aprez sera declare” (“for the perpetuation of this Puy in this year 1515 a confraternity and association was established by the said princes, as detailed below),” *Approbation*, b1) but it probably simply refers to the establishment of a formal organizational structure for the confraternity/Puy.

¹² *Approbation*, b1. Pierre Daré had died by that time, but his relative and successor Louis Daré signed the statutes (Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 229–30, conflates the two). Fabri has by this time moved away from Rouen, which is presumably why he was not among the former princes who signed the statutes.

The timing of the Puy's foundation was significant, in a period when political, economic, cultural and religious factors came together to create the context for the new institution. Politically, it came at a time when Rouen's sense of identity as the capital of Normandy had become unmoored. Four hundred years before the foundation of the Puy, Rouen had been the capital of the powerful, effectively independent Duchy of Normandy, which had just conquered the Kingdom of England. In the intervening centuries, the French crown had reconquered the province and its capital and gradually reduced their independent powers. Soon after the 30-year interlude of English control in the first half of the fifteenth century, King Louis XI formally abolished the Duchy of Normandy, smashing the ducal ring in a ceremony in the great hall of Rouen's castle. Rouen was no longer the capital of a Duchy, and Normandy's political identity was put in flux. Meanwhile, the traditional Ducal exchequer court that implemented Normandy's customary legal code, an occasional feudal court of non-specialist nobles and clerics, was increasingly ineffective by the end of the fifteenth century.¹³

The Puy provided a way to re-affirm Rouennais and Norman identity in a non-political manner. It was part of a campaign by the city's elite to establish Rouen as the centre of power of a new Normandy within the French monarchical system—a campaign that would lead in the same period to the transformation of the old ducal exchequer court into a permanent royal *parlement* court of appeal for Normandy based in Rouen (in two stages—1499 and 1515), which would maintain a distinctive Norman jurisprudence within the royal justice system. It would be the first of many royal tribunals established in the city.¹⁴

The creation of a specifically Norman identity for the Puy was accomplished through its dedication to the Immaculate Conception—a doctrine closely associated with the province. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin holds that the Virgin Mary was, uniquely, conceived and born free of original sin. The history and theology of the doctrine are complicated and ambiguous, but by the fifteenth century in Western Europe the most common understanding of the legend was that Mary's childless parents Joachim and Anne

¹³ Michel de Bouard, ed., *Histoire de la Normandie* (Toulouse: Privat, 1970), 224–225, 242, 255–259, 262; Philippe Goujart, *La Normandie au XVI^e et XVII^e siècles face à l'Absolutisme* (Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France, 2002), 71.

¹⁴ Bouard, 259, 262–3. The exchequer court was made permanent and fixed in Rouen in 1499, and was elevated to the status of a *parlement* in 1515.

conceived her while they were apart, the conception being announced to each by an angel.¹⁵

The doctrine and its feast day were developed in Eastern Christianity, and somehow made their way to England in the eleventh century. They were transferred rapidly to Normandy after the conquest, and Normandy became the jumping-off point for the doctrine in France. The Immaculate Conception thus became closely associated with Normandy, becoming known in France as the feast of the Normans (*la feste aux Normands*). This association was reinforced by the story of the miracle of Helsin, Abbot of Ramsey. The legend developed that he was at sea on a mission for William the Conqueror when his ship was caught in a storm and threatened to sink. He prayed to the Virgin for aid, and an angel (or the Virgin herself) appeared and promised safety in exchange for a vow to establish the feast of the Immaculate Conception in Duke William's lands. The ship arrived safely in port, and the abbot carried out his vow. This legend was repeated constantly throughout the centuries as an explanation for the Norman attachment to the doctrine—for example, in the statutes of Rouen's Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception.¹⁶

Since it had little foundation in scripture, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was a source of controversy within the Western Church for many centuries. A commission at the Council of Basel investigated the issue and in 1438 accepted it as true to the faith, but opponents continued to crop up on occasion. In 1475, the Pope issued a Bull forbidding further discussion of the topic, which essentially accepted its existence. Yet it was still considered a potentially contentious issue

¹⁵ Whether Mary was conceived with or without a carnal act hinged on whether the angel used a future tense (“you will conceive”) or a present tense (“you have conceived”) in the announcement—the original texts varied. The Puy's authors took the view that there was no carnal act involved in Mary's conception. In Guillaume Tasserie's play *Le triomphe des Normands* (Guillaume Tasserie, *Le triomphe des Normands suivi de La Dame a l'agneau par G. Thibault*, ed. P. Le Verdier (Rouen: Léon Gy, 1898)) the defender of the Norman celebration of the Immaculate Conception, Duke William the Conqueror, argues that Mary was conceived “en virginité,” virginally (20), while the idea that Mary was conceived by a normal sexual act is put in the mouth of the villain, the heretic Sarquis (21), who is eventually confuted. See Hüe, *La poésie palindromique*, 32–134, for a detailed analysis and history of the complex legend and doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Except where noted, the following discussion of the Immaculate Conception is based on Hüe's work.

¹⁶ Gros, *Le poète*, 109–110. *Approbaton*, a3. For details of the legend, see also the on-line version of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Immaculate Conception,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07674d.htm>, consulted June 2006.

at the Council of Trent. It was not until the nineteenth century that a Pope issued a Bull ratifying it as an article of faith.

Establishing a confraternity in Rouen to champion this cult created a new leadership role within Normandy for the former capital, a lay spiritual one. The timing was significant—the doctrine had only been officially accepted by the papacy the decade before, and it was still subject to attack. This controversy and newness were key in making it effective as a badge of identity, something that made Rouen and its Puy distinct from others. Equally, the doctrine gave a sense of purpose to the confraternity's focus on writing, for it was necessary to create a canon of works supporting this doctrine, and to propagate it both locally and throughout France.¹⁷

The timing of the confraternity's foundation also reflected the expansion of the confraternal movement in Rouen. From 1430 onwards, there was a rapid rise in the number of confraternities in Rouen who wrote down their statutes, probably reflecting an expansion of slightly earlier confraternal foundations. This expansion reached its zenith in the 1470s and 1480s, so that the Immaculate Conception was founded at its height. By the end of the century, there were about 130 confraternities in the city. Rouen's confraternal foundations started earlier and were denser than the rest of Normandy, reflecting the primarily urban nature of the confraternal movement.¹⁸

This expansion of the confraternity movement coincided with a period of economic prosperity and expansion for French cities in general, and Rouen in particular. Rouen in the late fifteenth century was probably the second-largest city in France.¹⁹ Its economic base was widely diversified, including manufacturing, commerce, and both royal and ecclesiastical administration (it was the seat of the Archbishopric of Normandy). Its trading routes linked Paris with the Low Countries and the Atlantic coast. From 1485, it developed an active printing industry that quickly became the third-largest in France. The one attribute it

¹⁷ *Approbation*, a4. Denis Hüe, "Le poète du Puy et ses auditoires," in *Les arts du spectacle dans la ville (1404–1721)*, ed. Marie-France Wagner and Claire Le Brun-Gouanvic (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), 80–109, esp. 93, 102–104.

¹⁸ Catherine Vincent, *Des charités bien ordonnées: les confréries normandes de la fin du XIII^e siècle au début du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: École normale supérieure, 1988), 46–62.

¹⁹ Benedict estimates that Rouen's population was between 71,000 and 78,000 in the middle of the sixteenth century (Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3).

lacked was a university—its scholars traditionally went to nearby Paris, although the English founded a rival university at Caen which survived the French reconquest. Rouen had suffered extensively from the warfare of the early part of the century, not only from repeated sieges but also from the destruction of the countryside and the disruption of trade routes. Its economy began recovering after the city's re-integration into the French monarchy in 1449, especially in the last quarter of the century when long-term regional peace became more firmly entrenched.²⁰

This economic boom was intensified because it took place during a time when France's cities enjoyed a particularly favourable conjunction of political and economic circumstances, which the historian Bernard Chevalier describes as the era of the “bonne villes.” The result was an explosion of urban cultural creativity.²¹ The foundation of the Puy in Rouen coincided with a flowering of other urban cultural projects in the city as its economy recovered. Major productions of mystery plays had taken place in the decades after the return to French rule. Other devotional productions had also developed in the city. The confraternity of the wax-workers, who created a popular wax *tableau vivant* every year in their chapel in the cathedral, proposed to add a Puy to this devotional celebration in 1484, but the cathedral chapter denied permission.²² In 1485, the year before Daré founded the Puy of the Immaculate Conception, Rouen staged for Charles VIII one of the most elaborate and coherent royal entry ceremonies heretofore seen in France. The entry was memorialized in the earliest surviving printed book from Rouen.²³ Meanwhile, the years between 1470 and 1550 witnessed the construction or completion of nearly all of the landmark civic and ecclesiastical buildings built in Rouen before the nineteenth century.

The Puy movement was itself an expression of urban culture. Puy—contests of poetry in praise of the Virgin—first appeared in the

²⁰ For background, see especially Benedict, chapter 1. Also *Histoire de Rouen*, ed. Michel Mollat (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 145 ff.; Michel Mollat, *Le commerce maritime normand à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1952), 119 ff.; and Bouard, 244 ff.

²¹ See Bernard Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIV^e au XVI^e siècles* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1982), 263 ff., esp. 264, 269, 275.

²² *Inventaire-sommaire des Archives départementales antérieures à 1790: Seine-Inférieure. Archives ecclésiastiques. Série G. Tome II: Registres du chapitre*, ed. Ch. de Robillard de Beurepaire (Rouen: Julien Lecerf, 1896), 246, 248. Eugène de Robillard de Beurepaire, *Les puy de palinod de Rouen et de Caen* (Caen: H. Delesques, 1907), 32–34. Gros, *Le poète*, 115. It is possible that this proposal helped inspire the foundation of the Puy two years later.

²³ *Entrée de Charles VIII à Rouen en 1485* [1485], ed. Charles de Robillard de Beurepaire (Rouen: Léon Gy, 1902).

densely urbanized regions at the north-western edge of French-speaking lands in the thirteenth century, with the first one probably in Arras. They spread slowly through the region over the following centuries, arriving in Normandy with the Puy of Dieppe, founded in the first half of the fifteenth century. Rouen's was therefore one of the last to be founded (Caen's was founded in 1527), although it quickly became the most prestigious.²⁴ Most of these Puys were dedicated to an aspect of the Virgin, but Rouen's was the first dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

The Puy of the Immaculate Conception was a manifestation of an urban culture that grew out of the distinctive milieu of cities: a confluence of wealth and education, a concentration of a wide variety of skilled administrative professions, commerce, and artisanal trades, and a tradition of communal forms of organization. This urban sociology, distinct from both court and countryside, demanded a distinctive culture through which to express itself, embodied in communally-based forms of cultural activity such as mysteries and other theatre, royal entries, poetry contests, carnival, and other festive events. The rapid expansion of the confraternal movement was also part of this phenomenon. It may well be that this process in France was part of a European-wide development of urban culture from the late fourteenth century onward (depending on the vagaries of local wars and economies).²⁵

The people

The members, judges, poets and audience of the Puy each had a different sociology, but together made up a remarkable cross-section of the city's population.

²⁴ For a full account of the Puy movement, see Gros, *Le poète*; for the Puys of Dieppe and Caen, see 143–148. The chambers of rhetoric in the Low Countries, discussed by Arjan van Dixhoorn elsewhere in this volume, appear to have been related to the Puys in some way, developing in the Dutch-speaking cities nearby the cities where the francophone Puy movement originated.

²⁵ See George Holmes, *The First Age of the Western City, 1300–1500* (Inaugural Lecture as Chichele Professor of Medieval History at Oxford) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

The princes and members

There was a clear distinction between the members of the confraternity on the one hand, and the poets on the other. There were rarely more than 50 paid-up members of the confraternity. A new prince was selected from amongst the members every year, generally in order of seniority of membership,²⁶ so that every man who joined would expect to become prince if he lived long enough.

Membership in the confraternity was very exclusive. The entrance fee and the yearly fee were five times the average confraternity fee in Normandy.²⁷ But the real hurdle was the cost of becoming the prince, who was expected to pay the considerable cost of holding the competition and especially the banquet. As a result, the membership was drawn from the city's elite—royal magistrates and financial officials, abbots, canons of the cathedral, and members of the old families who dominated the city government. By contrast to most other confraternities, the Immaculate Conception was distinctive in that it brought together important men from a variety of different professions and neighbourhoods of the city. It was the most prestigious confraternity in Rouen, and when Pope Leo X approved its statutes in 1520, he granted it precedence over all other confraternities in Normandy.²⁸

Many powerful members of Rouen society did not join, however, so clearly some additional factor was necessary to induce membership. One such factor was family connections—the members were linked by a complex web of relationships. For example, in 1548 the member Jean de la Place was respectively son-in-law, brother-in-law and nephew of three of his confraternal brothers, and was more distantly related to three others. Certain families had members in the confraternity over several generations—it included some member of the Puchot family for close to a century. Intermarriage continued through the generations: Jean de la Place's grandson, Daniel de la Place, who joined the confraternity in his turn in 1610, was married to a descendant of Jean's

²⁶ A procedure visible in the register (BMR MS Y 186) and codified in the revised statutes of 1614 (*Statuts*, 39). Exceptions may have been made on occasion for particularly distinguished princes.

²⁷ *Approbation*, c2, c8. The yearly fee was 25 *sols tournoi*, and the entrance fee 100 *sols tournoi*. Compare to Vincent, 213.

²⁸ *Approbation*, d4.

fellow-member in 1548, Noël Boyvin (whose descendants Henri and Guillaume also joined later in the seventeenth century).²⁹

Members of the Parlement and other royal officials played a prominent role in the early Puy. Thirteen of the thirty-two known princes from the Puy's foundation to 1524 were royal office-holders.³⁰ Of the former princes who gathered in 1515 to codify the confraternity's statutes, six of the fifteen named were members of the new Parlement. The others included a royal attorney of the Parlement and two royal officials of the *bailliage* court, meaning that over half these members were royal officials.³¹ The royal officials who joined the confraternity, however, were those from long-established local families—which accords with the dense network of relations and intermarriage visible within the confraternity's membership over generations. The Puy in this period was very much the creation of the established elite of the city, and was either not open or not of interest to the many outsiders appointed to the city's new royal offices.

Another inspiration for membership was cultural interests. Many of the members in this early period engaged in cultural or intellectual activity of some kind outside the Puy. Guillaume Tasserie organized mystery productions, and wrote additional poetry and a play in praise of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception; Pierre Fabri also wrote elsewhere in praise of the Immaculate Conception, and published an influential manual of rhetoric and poetry; Jacques Le Lieur was a prominent patron of manuscripts, and wrote poetry extensively outside the Puy; Guillaume Le Roux built the first private residence in Rouen in the Renaissance style, complete with relief sculptures of Petrarch's *Trionfi*; Antoine Bohier, Abbot of Saint-Ouen, initiated a rebuilding program including artistic commissions in his monastery; Baptiste Le Chandelier

²⁹ His relatives were Jacques Le Lieur, Pierre de Quièvermont, Baptiste Le Chandelier, the two Croismares (through his son-in-law) and François Le Lieur. BMR MS Y 186, 7v, 8r, 8v, 10r, 15v, 16v, 41r, 49r, 52v; Henri de Frondeville, *Les conseillers du Parlement de Normandie au seizième siècle (1499–1594)* (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1960), 118, 183, 318, 322, 440; Henri de Frondeville, *Les présidents du Parlement de Normandie (1499–1790)* (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1953), 214; Guiot, 54.

³⁰ Reid, "Urban Culture," 131. Jonathan Dewald's suggestion (*The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Magistrates of the Parlement of Rouen, 1499–1610* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 56–57, also Goujart, 89), that royal officials were not heavily involved in the Puy is based on limited sources.

³¹ *Approbation*, a8–b1.

engaged in humanistic writing and research, and wrote long poems in Latin.³²

However, it was rare for members of the confraternity to compete in the Puy contest itself. Even in the early years, there are only a few examples. Guillaume Tasserie won several times in the early years before his principate in 1499. Jacques Le Lieur was a prolific competitor, but he may have done so before becoming a full member (he did not serve as prince until 1544, the year of his death, suggesting he joined the confraternity later in life). But, apart from isolated exceptions, almost none of the many poets we know of in these early years became a member of the confraternity, and almost none of the known members competed in the contest. For example, of all the poets in competition in 1544, not one appears on the list of members of the confraternity in 1548.³³

In other words, the members of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception joined in order to become patrons of poetry. They were not interested in finding a venue for their own work—they already had the status to enable them to engage in cultural activities if they wished—but rather in providing a venue for others to exercise their poetic talents and celebrate the Immaculate Conception. It has been argued that one of the purposes of confraternities was to allow city-dwellers, by organizing as a group, to emulate the aristocratic practice of founding private chapels, which would be beyond their individual means.³⁴ The Puy in a sense operated in a similar manner for cultural patronage. By coming

³² Tasserie, esp. Le Verdier, introduction, xx–xxii. Pierre Fabri, *Le grand et vrai art de pleine rhétorique* [1521], ed. A. Héron (Rouen: Espérance Cagniard, 1890), esp. Héron introduction, viii–xi. Jacques Le Lieur, *Heures manuscrites de Jacques Le Lieur*, ed. Émile Picot (Rouen: A. Lainé, 1913); Jacques Le Lieur, “*Le Livre enchaîné*” ou *Livre des fontaines de Rouen*, ed. Victor Sanson (Rouen: L. Wolf, 1911); BMR Ms Y 226a. For Le Roux (Guillaume III Le Roux, prince in 1523), see Elisabeth Chirol, “L’hôtel de Bourghtheroulde,” in *Connaître Rouen I* (Rouen: Les amis des monuments rouennais, 1970). For Bohier, see Elisabeth Chirol, “La Renaissance à Rouen,” in *Connaître Rouen I* (Rouen: Les amis des monuments rouennais, 1970). Baptiste Le Chandelier, *La parthénie, ou banquet des Palinods de Rouen en 1546*, ed. F. Bouquet (Rouen: E. Cagniard, 1883), Bouquet introduction, xxiii–xc.

³³ Comparison of BMR Y 17 (collection of 1544) and BMR MS Y 186 fols. 6r–17r (which provides a complete list of the members and new recruits in 1548). The closest connection is that Jehan Desmynieres competed, and Jacques Desmynieres—presumably a relative—was a member. Furthermore, François Le Lieur dedicated poems to the prince in 1544, but did not compete, and joined the confraternity four years later in 1548. He may have chosen not to compete because he did not consider it suitable for his membership ambitions, or else possibly he was serving as a judge that year.

³⁴ Vincent, 143.

together as a confraternity, the members collectively created a patron of poetry for the city, where they could not have had the same impact individually. Yet there was an individual aspect as well. Each member, if he lived long enough to become prince, would enjoy the role of an aristocratic patron for a day, presiding over the contest at the centre of the stage, flattered by poets, dispensing prizes and hospitality, and confident that, at his death, he would be eulogized by a poet.³⁵

The poets

The poets themselves tended to be of a rather different status. It is more difficult to discern their position, as they are rarely identified by more than their name. It is significant, however, that few of them appear in other contexts. A small number became city councillors or other civic officials, but few other than Le Lieur (a longstanding member of the city council) were from the leading families of the city. Most of the poets were probably members of Rouen's 'middling sort'—prosperous and respectable, but not members of the city's top social rank. Those who can be identified by more than just name were often, as might be expected, from the educated professions: clerics, both secular and regular; scribes, teachers, and booksellers; lawyers or holders of secondary civic and royal offices; and a few doctors. But the craft-based content of many of the poems suggests that many were also merchants and skilled craftsmen, such as the sea-captains Jean Parmentier and Pierre Crignon, and the carpenter Robert Becquet.³⁶

Many poets became regulars at the Puy. Their names appear in multiple years, competing in multiple categories, and reappear often in the manuscript collections. For example, at least sixteen of the thirty-seven poets who competed in 1511 competed again in later contests.³⁷ A whole poetic genre developed in which the poet tipped his hat to his fellows by citing and celebrating the names of the regular participants

³⁵ An illustration of the Puy shows the prince on a seat at the centre of the stage during the contest. See Hüe, "Le poète du Puy," 85 and Hüe, *La poésie palindromique*, 299–302. The winners of the *chant royal* and Latin epigram prizes were required to write eulogies for any former princes who died that year (*Approbation*, c5).

³⁶ For Becquet, see Gérard Gros, *Le Poème du puy marital: étude sur le serventois et le chant royal du XIV^e siècle à la Renaissance* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1996), 365. For some other poets, see Hüe, *La poésie palindromique*, 334–341.

³⁷ Comparison of Oxford MS Douce 379 (1511 register of poems) with BMR MS Y 16 (1516), BMR MS M 19 (1522) and BnF fr. 1715 (1533).

and winners.³⁸ The Puy cultivated the growth of a collective body of poets in Rouen.³⁹

When a prize for a Latin poem was introduced, the poets who competed were somewhat different from those who competed for prizes for the French poems. While some poets from the French competition also tried their hand at the Latin, Katell Lavéant's research into this genre suggests that quite a number of these poets were probably students, and many of the others were likely clerics.⁴⁰ Some of the participants in the French competition were probably students, too—the navigator Jean Parmentier may have competed at the age of 16.⁴¹

None of the poets in this early period were women. The first woman that we know of to compete at the Puy was Jacqueline Pascal, Blaise Pascal's sister, in 1640. A few additional women subsequently competed and won prizes, especially in the eighteenth century, but their participation was always regarded as remarkable and exceptional.⁴²

Quite a few poets from other cities took part, particularly from Normandy but also occasionally from neighbouring provinces. Poets from Dieppe and Caen, which had their own Puy and where poets had therefore cultivated the appropriate style, made regular appearances.⁴³ Furthermore, some famous poets from Paris participated, who will be discussed later. The statutes specifically allowed poets to send poems by proxy in order to encourage submissions by notable poets from other cities.⁴⁴

³⁸ For examples, see Jean Lafond, "A travers les manuscrits des palinods de Rouen," *Revue des sociétés savantes de Haute-Normandie* 12 (1958), 15–16; *Petite anthologie palinodique, 1486–1550*, ed. Denis Hüe (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 223, 225, 230; Gros, *Le poème*, 360.

³⁹ *Petite Anthologie*, 398.

⁴⁰ Katell Lavéant, "Project d'édition de l'ensemble de l'oeuvre poétique de Guillaume Thibault (XVI^e siècle) et édition des épigrammes latines" (DEA (MA) thesis, Université Rennes 2—Haute Bretagne, 2002), 54–55. In the register of poems of 1516 (BMR MS Y 16), one of the few where the Latin poems are included, some of the French poets also composed in Latin, but other Latin poets are unknown.

⁴¹ *Fleurs de rhétorique: From Villon to Marot*, ed. Kathleen Chesney (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950), 51–52, 105. Gros suggests (*Le Poème*, 272) the "Le Parmentier" who competed in 1511 was a different person from the navigator Jean Parmentier, but the navigator was also referred to as "Le Parmentier" at times (see for example Hüe, "Un nouveau manuscrit," 193, for a poem from 1518 that is clearly by the navigator). See also Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 372–373.

⁴² For example Guiot I, 62, 112.

⁴³ See Gros, *Le poète*, 202–205, for some of the Dieppe poets.

⁴⁴ *Approbation*, b6.

The judges

The judges who decided the winner of the contest were not necessarily themselves members of the confraternity. In the sixteenth century they included theologians chosen for their learning, and perhaps former princes, well-established local poets and teachers of rhetoric. The judges were chosen by the prince.⁴⁵

In the seventeenth century, the revised statutes are more explicit about the judging. Poets who were recognized as veterans of the contest and frequent prize-winners served as judges, along with certain theologians selected by the prince. The poets judged the quality of the poetry, and the theologians presumably examined the orthodoxy and quality of the religious sentiments, so that by this period there does appear to have been some specifically religious scrutiny.⁴⁶

In the eighteenth century, it appears that some clerical positions related in one way or another to the confraternity automatically granted the right to be a judge at the Puy (*judge-nés*), including the prior of the Carmelites who hosted the event, and the priest of the original parish (Saint-Jean).⁴⁷ It is not clear if this practice was in place in the early centuries, as there is no mention of such a practice in the detailed statutes of 1614, but it is likely that judges who proved their worth would have been invited back regularly.

The audience

The audience for the Puy was large and mixed. In 1515 the Puy was forced to move from its original location, the church of Saint-Jean-sur-Renelle, because the crowds became too large for it to handle.⁴⁸

The audience included a wide range of social classes. An illumination of the Puy in session shows priests and bourgeois sitting in the audience. The country gentleman Gilles de Gouberville attended in 1550 during an extended stay in Rouen. No doubt plenty of other visitors to the city attended—it was a famous event in the region. Several manuscripts were

⁴⁵ *Approbation*, b6. Hüc, *La poésie palindodique*, 285–289, 333–334.

⁴⁶ *Statuts*, 50–54. I am most grateful to Sandra Cureau for sharing her transcript of part of these statutes, which was a valuable supplement to my notes.

⁴⁷ Guiot, *Trois siècles, passim*. Guiot assumes this also happened in earlier centuries, but there is no indication he does so based on solid evidence.

⁴⁸ *Approbation*, a8.

made to order for prominent local aristocrats.⁴⁹ Many of the poems use professional and craft imagery that suggests members of a wide range of crafts and professions were among the listeners.⁵⁰

Finally, it is clear that many manual workers from Rouen's extensive textile industry attended as well. A poem from 1516 by Robert James reviews the well-known poets of the Puy, including "maistre Geuffin Cambrette" who "pleases all of the cloth-workers."⁵¹ A century later, the poet David Ferrand developed a genre of poetry in the local dialect, which he often addressed directly to the cloth-workers in the room.

When he bade farewell to the Puy in 1654, Ferrand addressed what was probably a typical audience for much of the Puy's history, ranging from the "learned men," through the "bourgeois and citizens," to "my good friends the cloth-workers" and the *croque-migots*, the students who came to avoid school.⁵² The audience in that large yet crowded room in the Carmelite house incorporated elements of almost every part of the city's population (excluding only the very poor), all eager to listen to hours of poetry in praise of the Virgin. It showed the degree to which a common civic culture was shared across the city.

The day

The day of the competition was a combination of devotion, administration, poetry and sociability. Examining the various parts of a typical contest day illuminates the different aspects of the confraternity's activities.⁵³

Masses and business meeting

The morning of the contest day was devoted to the confraternity—a devotional mass for the members and the poets who had won the previous

⁴⁹ Gilles de Gouberville, *Journal de Gilles de Gouberville II*, ed. A. de Blagny (Caen: H. Delesques, 1895), 128. *Petite Anthologie*, 377, 398, 402, 413. For the illumination, see the cover of this volume and Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 301.

⁵⁰ Hüe, "Le poète du Puy," 95.

⁵¹ Lafond, 15; *Petite Anthologie*, 225: "plaist a tous ceulx de la drapperie."

⁵² David Ferrand, *La Muse normande de David Ferrand [1625–1653]*, ed. A. Héron (Rouen: Espérance Cagniard, 1891), IV, 10. It seems likely there were women in the audience, but it is hard to find direct evidence.

⁵³ The day is based on the 1515 statutes (*Approbation*). Some details of the proceedings were changed in the seventeenth century, as evidenced in the 1614 statutes (*Statuts*).

year's contest, followed by a business meeting of the prince and the former princes. The confraternity was typical of other Rouennais and Norman confraternities in terms of its devotional nature, but atypical in terms of its organization.

Catherine Vincent, in her study of Norman confraternities, has characterized their piety as moderate, conservative and serene, with little of the intensity common in confraternities in Mediterranean Europe such as the penitents. In Normandy, the emphasis of confraternities was external rather than internal, focusing on the accumulation of good works and the promotion of fraternity.⁵⁴ In this sense, the piety of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception was entirely typical of its province. It provided for the saying of masses, for the funerals of its members, and for the propagation of its devotion. Unlike most confraternities, however, the Immaculate Conception did not take part in city or parish processions, reserving its public devotional activity to the poetry contest. Its devotion to Mary was also typical of Normandy, where she was the most popular patron for confraternities.⁵⁵ The nature of the confraternity's piety would prove significant over its lifetime, as it thrived and declined in part depending on how well it fit with the kind of devotional activity that was dominant in different periods.

The serenity of this devotion should not lead us to conclude that it was not deep, however. In the statutes, the brothers refer to themselves as *zéloteurs* (zealots) of the Immaculate Conception.⁵⁶ Hüe rightly emphasizes their sincere Marian devotion and fervent desire to propagate the cult of the Immaculate Conception.⁵⁷ At least two of the founding members (Fabri and Tasserie) wrote extensively in praise of the Immaculate Conception outside the context of the Puy, as did Jacques Le Lieur in the Puy's second generation.⁵⁸ The Puy's literary mission was a way to intensify this devotion within Rouen and disseminate it beyond the province, while creating a supporting set of devotional texts.⁵⁹

The confraternity was highly unusual, however, in its organization. It was much smaller than most Norman confraternities, which normally

⁵⁴ Vincent, 141–143, 159, 189–193.

⁵⁵ Vincent, 124–125.

⁵⁶ *Approbation*, a1, a5.

⁵⁷ Hüe, “Le poète du Puy,” 93.

⁵⁸ Fabri, *Defensore de la Conception* (published 1514). See Fabri, introduction by Héron, x–xi; Gros, *Le Poème*, 160. Guillaume Tasserie, *Heures de la conception de la Vierge*, in *Petite Anthologie*, 351–356. Le Lieur, *Heures manuscrites*, BMR Ms Y 226a.

⁵⁹ *Approbation*, a4. Hüe, “Le poète du Puy,” 93, 102–104.

had hundreds of members. It was also unusual in its informal, egalitarian structure and elite membership. Most Norman confraternities had an inner core of serving brothers in formal executive positions, who did most of the work and gained more prestige. Only a small number of the wealthier ones ever became master. The broad mass of membership would be drawn from the middling groups of civic society, and would often include women.⁶⁰ In the Immaculate Conception, by contrast, all of the members were men of high status, and all could expect to become prince if they lived long enough. There was no formal executive. The only formal position was the prince, whose term ran for a year. He was assisted by a hired chaplain who did administrative work, and an informal advisory council of former princes who met with him after the mass to choose the next year's prince, accept new members, and otherwise deal with the confraternity's business. In exchange for these additional duties, former princes gained additional benefits, such as more elaborate funerals and having eulogies written for them by the prize-holding poets in the year of their death.⁶¹

The contest

The poetry of the Puy has been analyzed extensively by Hüe and Gros, and so this article will do no more than sketch the broad outlines. All of the poetic forms for which the Puy gave prizes were fixed forms. All of the French forms had a refrain, sometimes known as a *palinod*, a term which became a nickname for the Puy itself.⁶² The notice sent out by the confraternity months before the contest specified in considerable detail the rules of composition for each form, so poets knew exactly what was expected of them.⁶³ A prize was prescribed for each type of poem, in the form of a token given to the prize-winner, which would be returned the next year in exchange for the cash prize.

The first prize established by the Puy was the *palme* (palm) for the *chant royal*, a long poem of five stanzas of usually eleven verses each, with the last verse of each stanza the same repeated refrain. The poem ended with an *envoy*, a final brief stanza of four or six verses that

⁶⁰ Vincent, 202–210, 217–219, 226 ff.

⁶¹ *Approbation*, b2 (election of next prince), c2–c5 (funerals of former princes).

⁶² Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 19–20, for a discussion of the word *palinod*.

⁶³ The notices are reproduced in several of the yearly collections, including Oxford MS Douce 379. Gros, *Le poète*, 149–152, reproduces and analyzes the 1533 notice.

wrapped up the poem's themes and was usually addressed to the prince. The *chant royal* had evolved specifically as a Puy format, and its dignified formality made it the most prestigious (and most common) form of poetry in these contests.⁶⁴ Rouen's contest differed from the older Puy of Amiens in that the refrain line was not set in advance by the prince—rather, poets could create their own.⁶⁵ This flexibility enabled a diversity of invention that may have been a key factor in the greater renown of Rouen's contest. Princes soon began establishing additional prizes, which were almost all named after symbols associated with the Virgin. In 1493 a prize for the second-best *chant royal* was established, which was eventually called the *lys* (lily).⁶⁶

Chants royaux took various forms, including simple praise of the Virgin and militant partisanship for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.⁶⁷ The most common and original format, however, was the development of an allegory for the unblemished perfection of the Virgin, which would be elaborated over the five stanzas, encapsulated in the refrain that ended each one, and finally concluded in the *envoy* at the end.⁶⁸ For example, in 1511, the poem with the refrain “Palais royal construit de pierre dure” (“Royal palace built with solid stone”) describes a great mason who builds a beautiful, perfect palace. The palace is always unblemished, because the door is permanently closed, and only the mason himself can enter it. Over the course of the poem, it is revealed that the mason is God, and the palace is the Virgin.⁶⁹ Some of the most interesting poems are those in which the poet explores a metaphor drawn from his own experience—for example, the sea-captains Jean Parmentier and Pierre Crignon wrote many poems based on nautical life (using metaphors such as a ship, newly discovered lands, or navigation charts and equipment).⁷⁰ In fact, many of the poems used metaphors drawn from the trades practiced in Rouen, such as the textile or printing industry. Hüe emphasizes how remarkable it was to

⁶⁴ The *chant royal* provided the most valuable prize, 100 *sols tournoi* (*Approbation*, b4). For a detailed study of the *chant royal*, see Gros, *Le Poème*, in particular 187, 377, 382, (formality and seniority). See also Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 885–935.

⁶⁵ Gros, *Le Poème*, 128, 135, 191.

⁶⁶ *Approbation*, b4. Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 289.

⁶⁷ For militant poems, Gros, *Le Poème*, 167–172.

⁶⁸ See Hüe's discussion, *La poésie palinodique*, 25–27.

⁶⁹ Oxford MS Douce 379 (the mason poem is on fols. 16v–17).

⁷⁰ Oxford MS Douce 379; Gros, *Le Poème*, 191, 242, 306–310, 344–350. Denis Hüe, review of *Pierre Crignon, poète et navigateur. Oeuvres en prose et en vers*, ed. John Northangle, *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 100:2 (1996), 282–283.

have this kind of attention to human work in a body of poetry in this period.⁷¹ This celebration of artisanal and commercial work is another dimension of the specifically urban nature of the Puy's culture.⁷²

At the beginning of the second decade of the sixteenth century, the Puy branched out innovatively and experimented with applying new styles of poetry to the theme of the Immaculate Conception. Beginning in 1510 or 1511, the *signet* (ring) prize for the *rondeau*, a short and complex poetic form often used for love poetry, brought a different, more intimate and lyrical quality to the contest's poetry. Often, poets wrote *rondeaux* in voice of the Virgin herself, speaking directly to the audience or an interlocutor—a Virgin monologue, so to speak.⁷³

The first and second place prize for the Latin epigram or allegory (*epigramme latine* or *allegorie latine*), offered at least as early as 1511, went in the opposite direction to give the Puy a more formal, scholarly dimension.⁷⁴ This part of the contest remained fairly separate from the rest—some yearly collections do not even include the Latin poems. It was judged separately, and by the seventeenth century, the Latin part of the contest took place a day later.⁷⁵ The final prize to be offered, in 1514, was the *rose* for the *ballade*, a format already common in other Puy. It was shorter than the *chant royal* but also had a refrain. These prizes would remain the full set until the end of the century.

Other kinds of poetry provided some scope for flexibility beyond the strict poetic rules of the contest. The prince could announce a special prize in his year, which could be a way to experiment with possible new formats.⁷⁶ The winning poets from the previous year offered a “grace” poem to the prince when they exchanged their trophy for money, which provided an opportunity for variation in format and subject. Moreover, while the poets were restricted to one official entry

⁷¹ Hüe, “Le poète du Puy,” 95–97 and *La poésie palindodique*, 25–26. See also Gros, *Le Poème*, 287, 209–303 (printing).

⁷² Hüe, *La poésie palindodique*, 940, describes the Puy's poetry as “an urban poetry” (“une poésie urbaine”).

⁷³ Gérard Gros, “Le rondeau marial au Puy de Rouen,” *Nouvelle revue du XVI^e siècle* 14:2 (1996), 117–154, *passim*. Hüe (*La poésie palindodique*, 270) believes that the prize was first offered in 1511.

⁷⁴ *Approbation*, b4. Hüe, *La poésie palindodique*, 290–292.

⁷⁵ *Statuts*, 50–51, 59–60. Latin epigrams are only found in four of the many manuscript collections of poetry (Hüe, *La poésie palindodique*, 390).

⁷⁶ Gros, *Le poète*, 132. Hüe, *La poésie palindodique*, 270. Both the *rondeau* and the Latin epigram seem to have been offered by the prince for a few years before being formally established.

in each category,⁷⁷ they could offer supplemental out-of-competition poems “to the prince,” which provided an opportunity to indulge in more experimental or off-topic poetry.

The most remarkable example of this flexibility was the tradition of amusing and burlesque poems read during the competition. David Ferrand’s work in the seventeenth century is the best-known example, but there is evidence that he was continuing a tradition that began early in the Puy’s history. In 1516, a poem by Robert James enumerating the comic poets of the Puy (Caudebec, Pignollet, Geuffin Cambrette) suggests that amusing poems were a regular feature. A few such poems survive, in the Puy formats but having little or nothing to do with the Virgin, such as Caudebec’s burlesque funeral oration for James and Pignollet in 1522, and an obscure mockery of the festive society known as the Abbey of the Conards.⁷⁸ Two notable examples are *chants royaux* reproduced in the official collection of the year’s submissions of 1533, by pseudonymous authors (Cannillet and Cacheleu). They appear at the end of the *chant royal* section, suggesting that the facetious poems were read at the end of the serious presentations (as David Ferrand’s probably were a century later).⁷⁹ Cannillet’s is an amusing dialogue about the poet’s minimal chances of winning a prize, which incorporates the tradition of listing the notable poets of the Puy. Cacheleu’s tells a burlesque story. The *chant royal* and ballad formats, with their length and repeating punch-line, were well-suited to story-telling—a potential which was exploited both earlier in ribald poems at the 1511 banquet and later by David Ferrand.

⁷⁷ The statutes attempt to restrict various cheating strategies used by poets, including submitting extra poems under the names of others, and re-using poems used in the past or in other contests. *Approbation*, b6–8.

⁷⁸ Lafond, 15–16. For James’ poem, *Petite Anthologie*, 225 (Hüe transcribes his name as “Jo.” rather than “Ro.”). For the poem about the Conards, BMR Fonds de l’Académie 87p, fols. 51–52. Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 303, cites other examples of amusing verse.

⁷⁹ The two 1533 poems are edited by Gros (*Le Poème*, 360–377) (although note that on 361, line 36 should begin “Le bel huysier,” a reference to the poet Jacques Sireulde). He assumes the poems are listed in order of ranking by the judges, but apart from the winners being listed first, the poems could as easily be listed in the order of presentation. There is some evidence that comic poems were presented at the end of the proceedings. At the end of one of his amusing poems, David Ferrand, *Inventaire general de la Muse normande* (Rouen: David Ferrand, 1660), 102, notes it’s six o’clock and time to end the proceedings and go eat. Similarly, in 1516, James ends his light ballad by saying “Je semondz tout la compagnie/Voyre se le soupper est prest” (“I summon everyone/to see if the supper is ready”) (*Petite Anthologie*, 225).

During the competition, the poems were read aloud to the audience from a lectern, either by the poet himself, or a designated reader (contestants were not required to attend in person). The written version of the poem was then handed over to the judges. In the seventeenth century, the whole event took about five hours.⁸⁰ It is not clear how the poems were judged in this early period, but one possibility is that the judges had three poems in the running at a time. If a new poem was read that was superior to one of the existing poems, that existing poem would be put aside and replaced by the new one.⁸¹ The contest was thus very much an oral affair. Poems would be judged on how they sounded when read aloud, as much as how they read on the page. But they would also be gathered together afterwards in a written yearly collection, and often they would be recopied widely. The poetry of the Puy lay on the boundary between oral and written.

The well-established rules and conventions for writing, and the fixed subject, created an approach that was suited to the urban amateur poet, and encouraged broad participation. With expectations clearly set out and possible approaches widely available, the poets could feel confident that they would prepare a poem that would be respectable and would meet the audience's expectations.⁸²

The banquet

After the contest was over and the prizes had been awarded, the members of the confraternity, the judges, and the poets retired to a sumptuous banquet, organized and paid for by the prince.⁸³ The prospect of

⁸⁰ The statutes of 1614 specify that the contest started around one o'clock (*Status*, 42), and David Ferrand in one of his poems writes that it is six o'clock, and therefore time to wrap up the proceedings and get something to eat (Ferrand, *Inventaire general*, 102).

⁸¹ This was the procedure in the seventeenth century, when the poems were judged the day after the public event (*Status*, 52–54), and had already been examined in writing by the theologians. However, it seems to be a procedure derived from oral judging, and I suspect it survived from the previous century when the winner was decided at the public event itself.

⁸² Fabri, 141 (Title page reproduction), says that anyone who follows his Puy-based instructions “pourra facilement et aorneement composer [...] Chantz royaulx, Balades, Rondeaux [...]” (“will easily and elegantly be able to compose *chants royaulx*, ballads and *rondeaux*”).

⁸³ We know that the poets were invited to the banquet because, in 1511, a significant number of the poets who took part in the formal contest also took part in the informal contest at the banquet (Oxford MS Douce 379). In 1533, the poet Senynguehen was explicit: “prince du Puy, j'ay bonne conjecture, ce jour d'hui, sous vostre couverture,

enjoying this banquet must have been a considerable incentive for poets to compete in the Puy—a fact mocked by Cannillet in his burlesque poem: “Obtaining the prize is not what brings me here/[...] Tasting wine and getting food?—That’s why I come here.”⁸⁴ Their presence must have added considerably to the prince’s costs. Since this was the princes’ moment in the limelight, they spared no expense in making certain that the banquet, a key part of their role as a patron, was spectacular and memorable, reflecting well on their prestige and generosity. One prince, the magistrate and humanist Baptiste Le Chandelier, wrote a Latin poem describing the feast he put on in 1546. It enumerates three separate services: 32 appetizers, 43 main dishes, and 40 different desserts, all accompanied by elaborate place settings, bouquets of artificial flowers, and musicians who serenaded the company between each service.⁸⁵

The banquet was accompanied, at least in some years, by one or two additional events. In 1511, probably in other years in the sixteenth century, and definitely once again in the seventeenth century, a festive Puy was held amidst the food and drink. The prince gave the assembled poets set refrains, of a ribald or facetious nature, from which they improvised amusing poems. The prize was dinner the next day.⁸⁶ In at least some years, a serious devotional play was performed for the assembled brothers and poets, generally written by an established poet of the Puy.⁸⁷

The banquet reinforced the fraternity among members that was one of the key goals of the confraternity’s devotional mission. In the

Tous vos facteurs [...] joyusement feront chere [...] buvant bon vin [...]” (“prince of the Puy, I have good reason to suppose that today under your patronage, all of your poets will eat joyfully and drink good wine”) (Lafond, 16), as was James in 1516 (*Petite Anthologie*, 225). The same was true in the seventeenth century, when the poet David Ferrand clearly took part in the banquet immediately after the contest (Ferrand, *Inventaire general*, 102). There is plenty of evidence that the banquet took place directly after the contest in the sixteenth century (see also note 79), so Hüe’s concern (*La poésie palinodique*, 292–297) that the evidence is not decisive is unnecessary,

⁸⁴ Gros, *Le Poème*, 362. “Avoir le prix, n’est pas ce qui me maine!/[...] De guster vin ou de vivres pourvoir?/—Vela pourquoy y venir me dispose.”

⁸⁵ Le Chandelier, *passim*.

⁸⁶ Many of David Ferrand’s poems were improvised during the banquet (for example, Ferrand, *La muse normande*, I 19, II 303, III 184, 218; see also Héron’s introduction, xxxii–xxxiii). For 1511, see Oxford MS Douce 379; Hüe, “Rouen, Décembre 1511.”

⁸⁷ Texts survive from 1499 (probably), 1520, and 1544. Tasserie (which also includes Thibault’s 1520 play); BMR Ms Y 17. Le Chandelier, 29, also refers to a play being performed after the banquet that he sponsored as prince in 1546.

statutes the members state that they share “a singular love and brotherhood with one another, founded in the virtue of charity” and promise to be “associated and considered as spiritual brothers.” The virtue of charity, in the traditional sense of peace and goodwill towards all, was fundamental to the mission of confraternities, encapsulated in the fact that Norman confraternities were commonly called *charités*.⁸⁸ The fraternal mission of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception was particularly ambitious—it was one of the few confraternities in Rouen that brought together members from a wide range of different neighbourhoods and professions, building the bonds of horizontal solidarity across the city’s elite that were necessary to enable an effective civic society. The Puy’s vagaries over the centuries would be partially related to the rise and fall of this elite solidarity. Eating together was one of the most fundamental ways to build bonds of trust, and so the banquet, for all its extravagance, played an essential role in furthering this confraternal goal. By inviting the poets to join them, the confraternal brothers also helped to reinforce the vertical ties between the elite and the next layer of Rouen society below them, the middling sort with whom they worked and on whom they were dependent for the successful functioning of the city.

The banquet, however, was also a constant source of difficulty for the confraternity. Competitive impulses meant that princes were always tempted to spend even more than their predecessors, which eventually made being prince unaffordable. At regular intervals, the council of princes expressed concern that the members’ enthusiasm had cooled (*refroidi*) and new members were drying up because of the need to match the “excessive spending” of previous princes. One solution was to set a fixed amount that the prince was expected to spend—but this amount went up dramatically each time (40 *livres* in 1515, 50 *ecus* [150 *livres*] in 1578, 100 *ecus* [300 *livres*] in 1596, 400 *livres* in 1614, 600 *livres* in 1652). The collapse of the Puy in 1654 was partially due to precisely this problem.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Approbation*, c1: “un amour et fraternite singuliere les ungtz avec les autres fondee en la vertu de charite”; “associez et comme freres spirituels reputez.” Vincent, 30.

⁸⁹ *Approbation*, c7–8. BMR MS Y 186, passages from 1578 (29r), 1596 (34r–35v), 1652 (54v). *Statuts*, 71. In addition to money, in the sixteenth century the prince was expected to provide wine.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the banquet began to be seen as a wasteful and unnecessary extravagance.⁹⁰ When the Puy was close to collapse in 1595, the Parlement ordered that:

To encourage devout persons to join the said confraternity, from which several have cooled because of the great expenses spent on banquets and other superfluous things, the court forbids the one who is elected [prince] to spend any funds other than for the divine service, [...] without any feasts or banquets or other extraordinary costs.⁹¹

The fact that the banquet persisted, and came to include many members of the same disapproving Parlement, however, is an indication that its social purpose, although not really consciously defined, remained a key part of the confraternity's success.

Fame and influence

A key part of the Puy's mission was the desire to enhance Rouen's identity and pride, both in the eyes of the city's own people, and in the eyes of outsiders. Enhancing their city's identity and prestige in turn enhanced the status of the confraternity's own members, as leaders of the city.

Influence within Rouen

The Puy was a vehicle for the creation of a cultural tradition that was specifically Rouennais and Norman. One way in which the Puy enhanced Rouen's identity in the eyes of its own people was by elaborating the doctrines and symbols associated with the city. The most obvious such example is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception itself,

⁹⁰ This disapproval was part of a broader trend. In the early seventeenth century, archiepiscopal review of proposed confraternal statutes shows a consistent prohibition of banquets (Goujart, 237). Likewise, Rouen's musical Puy of Saint Cecilia faced similar problems with its yearly banquet, and an interesting transcript of arguments for and against survives in the registers of the Parlement (Dylan Reid, "The Virgin and Saint Cecilia: Music and the Confraternal Puy of Rouen," *Confraternitas* 8 no. 2 (1997), 6–7.

⁹¹ ADSM D 546: "pour exciter les personnes devotes d'entrer a ladictie confrarye de laquelle plusieurs sont refroidiz a cause des grandz fraiz et depenses qui se font en banquetz et autres choses superflues, a ladictie court fait inhibitions et defenses a celuy qui sera eleu [prince] de faire aucuns fraiz et depenses autre que pour ledict service divin [...] et sans aucuns festins et banquetz ou autres fraiz extraordinaires."

closely identified with the province of which Rouen was the leading city. The Puy created a corpus of poetry praising and explaining this doctrine, a corpus that was pronounced to a large and diverse audience of locals and outsiders, and afterwards often recopied.⁹²

Likewise, the Puy's poets elaborated other symbols of Rouennais identity, and linked them to the Immaculate Conception. Thus, several Puy poems play on Rouen's heraldic symbol of the lamb—derived from its textile industry, but full of potential religious symbolism which was fully explored.⁹³ The poets did the same with Norman identity, since anything that enhanced the province's self-regard necessarily reflected well on its capital. The most remarkable example is Tasserrie's play *Le triomphe des normans*, most likely performed after the Puy in 1499, the year he was prince. The play is set in the court of William the Conqueror, the ultimate symbol of Norman identity. Faced with a heretic who claims Mary was conceived sexually like any other human, the Duke defends the Immaculate Conception by bringing the question before a court of law presided over by King Solomon. In the trial that follows, the decisive final witness in favour of the doctrine is the allegorical character representing the common people of Normandy, who speaks in Norman dialect to make a moving testament of his faith in the doctrine. The play cleverly links various traditional symbols of Norman identity—the Duke, the common people, the local dialect—to the idea that Normans are the ultimate defenders of the Immaculate Conception. Furthermore, if it was indeed performed in 1499, its legal theme celebrates an old symbol of Norman sovereignty newly attached to Rouen—the city's designation that year as the centre of Norman lawmaking, with Duke William's exchequer court now settled permanently in Rouen.⁹⁴

A similar dynamic may have been in place in 1515, the year the permanent exchequer court was elevated to the status of a Parlement, a royal court of appeal, making Rouen once again the effective capital of Normandy, at least in judicial terms. It was in this same year that the

⁹² *Approbation*, a4. Hüe, "Le poète du Puy," 93, 102–104.

⁹³ For example, Denis Hüe, "Les Marot et le Puy de Rouen, remarques à propos du MS. BN, F.Fr. 2205," *Nouvelle Revue du Seizième Siècle* 16:2 (1998), 245–247.

⁹⁴ Gros, *Le poète*, 170. The text of the play is available in Tasserrie, 1–73. The editor Le Verdier concludes that the play was performed between 1490 and 1499, but the coincidence of Tasserrie's principate and the establishment of the permanent exchequer in 1499 gives weight to this latter date. Hüe, *La poésie palindodique*, 399–400, also proposes that the play is an affirmation of Norman identity.

princes of the Puy, many of whom were members of the Parlement, drew up a comprehensive set of statutes for the organization, decided to get recognition as the leading confraternity in the city from the Pope, engaged in a fund-raising campaign that established a stable endowment for the prizes and the masses, and moved to a more spacious new home in the heart of the city. Together, these initiatives were designed “for the perpetuation of the Puy,” to put the organization on a solid, permanent institutional footing. The princes were elevating their confraternity to a status and stability worthy of the city’s new role as the centre of royal justice in Normandy.⁹⁵

The Puy also nurtured famous local poets, who appeared regularly as winners, saw their works heavily recopied in the manuscript collections, and were cited with esteem in the poems that enumerate the most notable authors. These enumeration poems create the sense of an *esprit-de-corps*, a joint mission among poets to celebrate the Immaculate Conception and build a thriving local culture.⁹⁶ The four French prizes became a kind of mantra of cultural accomplishment. Cannillet uses them as his refrain, “La palme, lys, le signet ou la rose,” which would be echoed by François Sagon when boasting of his poetic successes: “Sagon a eu Palme Lys Signet Rose.”⁹⁷

The Puy also served as a stepping-stone for writing careers beyond the Puy.⁹⁸ Pierre Fabri used his experience of the Puy in writing his major work on rhetoric, *Le grant et vray art de pleine rhétorique*, which he specifically dedicated to the princes and poets of the Puy.⁹⁹ The second section, on poetry, draws heavily on the practices of the Puy and is full of examples of its poetry. Published in six editions, the book was fairly influential. The *mainteneur* of the *Jeux Floraux* of Toulouse, Gratien du Pont, relied on it extensively when writing his own treatise on poetry

⁹⁵ *Approbation*, a5, a8, b1, “pour la perpetuite dicelluy puy.”

⁹⁶ Lafond, 15–18, and Cannillet’s amusing 1533 poem (Gros, *Le Poème*, 360–369). The most notable authors in the manuscripts from the period 1510–1530 were Nicolas Osmont, Nicolle Lescarre, Guillaume Thibault, and especially Jacques Le Lieur.

⁹⁷ Gros, *Le poème*, 360–362. *Querelle de Marot et Sagon*, ed. Émile Picot and Paul Lacombe (Rouen: A. Lainé, 1920), “Rabais du caquet de Fripelippes,” c2.

⁹⁸ This insight is inspired by Sandra Cureau’s work on the seventeenth-century Puy poet Jean Auvray (Sandra Cureau, “Jean Auvray: saisir la circonstance pour prendre son envol. The Puy de la Conception de la Vierge de Rouen comme tremplin pour le poète” (Paper presented at the T.P.E. (C.E.L.A.M.) seminar, Université Rennes 2—Haute Bretagne, 23 May 2002), 5). She proposes that the Puy served him as a first step and inspiration towards a writing career.

⁹⁹ Fabri, II, 2.

published in 1539. In 1533, many of the young poets who would go on to stand out as the most active literary writers in Rouen in the mid-century cut their poetic teeth by competing in the Puy. François Sagon, future author of numerous published poems as well as controversial pamphlets against Clément Marot, won the second prize for the *chant royal*. Also competing were Guillaume Haudent, who would go on to translate several notable works from Latin; Pierre du Val, who would organize a series of love poetry contests and write Neoplatonic poems and plays; and Jacques Sireulde, who would write satirical poems and plays, and a long poem inspired by another future contest, the Puy of the Poor.¹⁰⁰

Finally, the Puy proved to be influential at building a local culture within the city in institutional terms. The concept of a poetry competition, and the success of the Puy in propagating a doctrine and establishing the prestige of its members, prompted others to adopt and adapt the format. Rouen's Confraternity of the Passion, which had once sponsored mystery plays, around 1543 turned to sponsoring a Puy of the Passion to fulfil its cultural role in the city, although it proved short-lived.¹⁰¹ Sometime in the middle of the century, a Puy of Saint Cecilia was founded in the cathedral to hold a yearly music contest, which lasted until the eighteenth century.¹⁰² More interesting was the Puy of Sovereign Love set up by the poet Pierre du Val. It was an informal gathering, first organized to celebrate a wedding in 1542, at which a contest was held for love poetry, with the entries published together in a book, *Le puy du souverain amour*. Variations of this event were repeated during the decade. It was not a religious event, but it did have religious and campaigning undertones, as Du Val was a Neoplatonist with particular religious ideas which surface in his poetry.¹⁰³ Finally, in 1552, Rouennais involved in the reform of the city's pauper hospital—taking control for the municipality from the Church—began a Puy of the Poor to encourage charity, which was run out of the city

¹⁰⁰ BnF fr. 1715. See also Gros, *Le Poème*, 221 (Sireulde), 234–235 (Sagon). For Haudent, see Guillaume Haudent, *Trois cent soixante et six apologues d'Esopie premièrement traduits de grec en latin* [1546], ed. Ch. Lormier (Rouen: H. Boissel, 1877), Lormier introduction, v. Sireulde's poem is reproduced in *Petite Anthologie*, 332.

¹⁰¹ See Hüe, *La poésie palindromique*, 308–311.

¹⁰² See Dylan Reid, "The Virgin and Saint Cecilia," 4–7.

¹⁰³ See Pierre Du Val, *Le puy du souverain amour* [1543], ed. P. Le Verdier (Rouen: A. Lainé, 1920), and Pierre Du Val, *Théâtre mystique de Pierre du Val et les libertins spirituels de Rouen au XVI^e siècle*, ed. Émile Picot (reprint Genève: Slatkine, 1969).

hall. Several prominent Rouennais served as prince, and it survived about a decade, until the disruption of the Wars of Religion.¹⁰⁴

While neither of these latter organizations were confraternities, they both followed the successful structure of the Puy as a collective poetry contest that brought attention to a particular cause (Neoplatonic ideas, poor relief), and brought prestige and renown to the sponsors as a group and to participants as individuals. Many poets who participated in the Puy of the Immaculate Conception also participated in these two Puy.¹⁰⁵ The Puy could take some credit for helping to nurture the flowering of urban culture evident in Rouen in the mid-century, although to some extent it was also gradually eclipsed, as the most innovative work was accomplished in other forums.¹⁰⁶

Influence outside Rouen

The Puy also contributed to creating a positive identity for Rouen beyond the city's limits. Rouen became known as a city of poetry. Bonaventure des Périers said "You know, in Rouen they speak only in rhyme," while the poet Jean Bouchet wrote to Jacques Le Lieur "Of all the people of France/It seems to me (I say it without being prompted)/ That the Normans received from the Muses the monopoly/on poetry, so I think and believe." Descriptions of Rouen during the century note the Puy as one of the city's outstanding features.¹⁰⁷

The Puy served as a way of connecting Rouen's local culture to the wider cultural life of France, even influencing that culture for a short period. For the first two and a half decades of its existence, the Puy was very much a local event, with the same few poets winning most

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Sireulde, *Le trésor immortel tiré de l'écriture sainte par Jacques Sireulde* [1556], ed. Charles de Robillard de Beurepaire (Rouen: Léon Gy, 1899), especially the introduction by Beurepaire.

¹⁰⁵ Reid, "Urban Culture," 190, 194–195.

¹⁰⁶ For example, of the nine organizers of the spectacular royal entry for Henry II in 1550, one or two were members of the Immaculate Conception, but five would become involved with the Puy of the Poor. (Sireulde (intro. by Beurepaire), xxv–xxxv, and comparison with BMR MS Y 186 folios 6r–18r (Puy members 1548–49)).

¹⁰⁷ René Herval, *Histoire de Rouen* (Rouen: Maugard, 1947–1949), 50: "Vous savez qu'à Rouen on ne parle autrement qu'en rime." Jean Bouchet, *Epistres morales et familières du Traverser* [1545], ed. Jennifer J. Beard (Paris, La Haye: Mouton, 1969), lxxiii: "Et de tous ceulx de la terre de France/Me semble advis (je le dy sans oultrance)/Que les Normans ont des Muses l'octroy/De poesie, ainsi le pense et croy." *Petite Anthologie*, 367. Taillepiéd, 59–60, 157–158, 160–166.

of the prizes. From 1510, however, the Puy showed considerably more ambition,¹⁰⁸ and between 1510 and 1530 or so, the Puy became part of the mainstream of French poetry. In 1510, it began to broaden its range with new forms of more intimate and more formal poetry. In 1511, the well-known poet of the royal court André de la Vigne came to Rouen to participate in person, writing prolifically in the Puy style and winning several prizes. In the years that followed, the Parisian poets Guillaume Cretin and Jean Marot regularly sent poems to the competition, and sometimes attended it, winning several prizes.¹⁰⁹ Marot's son, the not-yet-famous Clément, participated alongside his father, although he did not win anything. During this period, the poetry of the Puy circulated widely in manuscripts, some beautifully illuminated, of which dozens survive.¹¹⁰ In 1525, the Puy's organizers published a printed collection of Puy verse in Paris.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, Fabri had published his Puy-influenced manual of poetry in 1521. In this period, Puy poetry seems to have been esteemed as on a par with any other poetry of the time. This outreach had two related goals—the propagation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the idea of writing devotional poetry in its honour, and the development of a distinct Rouennais identity as a cultured and devout city.

After 1530, the nature of the Puy's role changed somewhat. The Renaissance was starting to influence French poetry, and although some of the Puy's poetry reflected this influence, it was falling behind the times. Attempts by Jacques Le Lieur and others in this period to invite notable national poets to compete were largely unsuccessful,¹¹² and the reproduction of poems in manuscript began to tail off. Poets who participated in the Puy remained active on the local and national

¹⁰⁸ See Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 238–9.

¹⁰⁹ It is not clear how often they actually attended in person—poets were permitted to send poems through a representative. I suspect they were more likely to win a prize when they attended in person. For the participation of Jean and Clément Marot, see Hüe, “Les Marot.” For Cretin, see Gros, *Le poète*, 208. For André de la Vigne, see Oxford MS Douce 379 (he not only submitted poems in every French category, but also several poems to the prince—including no less than five *rondeaux*—and multiple banquet poems as well) and Cynthia J. Brown, “André de la Vigne au Puy de 1511: étude du manuscrit Douce 379 de la Bibliothèque Bodléienne,” in *Première poésie française de la Renaissance*, 161–192.

¹¹⁰ Gros, *Le poète*, 219–248, provides a comprehensive list of manuscripts.

¹¹¹ *Palinods présentés au Puy de Rouen. Recueil de Pierre Vidoue* [1525], ed. Eugène de Robillard de Beaurepaire (Rouen: Léon Gy, 1897).

¹¹² Their efforts only succeeded in persuading one poet of note to compete at the Puy, Jehan Perréal (Jehan de Paris). Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 358–371.

stage—but for their other projects. The Puy in the 1530s served more as a starting-off point for a poetic career, rather than a vehicle for that career. The Puy's members and poets maintained their connections with important French poets, with Jacques Le Lieur, Baptiste Le Chandelier and others carrying on verse correspondence with the poet Jean Bouchet—but they could not persuade him to compete.¹¹³

The most intriguing connections to the national stage involve the most famous poet of this period, Clément Marot. He had competed in the Puy as a young man, along with his father, but not won any prizes. Hüe has shown that these early experiences had some influence on his poetry, and he was inspired to experiment with the *chant royal* format.¹¹⁴ Another possible connection lies in Marot's organization of *Blasons* in the 1530s—open calls for contributions from French poets to create a collective body of poetry on a specific theme (notably the female body). In a way, these were secular versions of the Puy's open calls for collective verse on a specific devotional theme, and perhaps a sign of a deeper influence by the Puy in propagating the concept of collective thematic poetry. Two Puy poets participated in these national *Blasons*—Jacques Le Lieur and François Sagon.¹¹⁵

Sagon would shortly after launch a vitriolic attack on Marot's sympathies for religious reform—an attack that provoked a national pamphlet war involving many French poets. To some extent, the attack seems to have been the work of someone who was a disappointed admirer—in addition to participating in the *Blasons* project, Sagon had supposedly asked Marot for advice on writing poetry some time earlier.¹¹⁶ Sagon was a priest, however, and perhaps when Marot became known as a reformer Sagon saw a need or an opportunity to set himself apart from

¹¹³ Bouchet, 59 (Thomas Le Prevost), 99, 109 (Jacques Le Lieur), 107 (Baptiste Le Chandelier), 110 (François Sagon), 122 (declining invitation). The poet Michel des Arpens also wrote to Jean Bouchet (Hüe, "Les Marot," 235). See Hüe, *La poésie palindromique*, 362–371, for a discussion of Le Lieur's correspondence with Bouchet, and Jennifer Britnell, "Jean Bouchet et les poètes Rouennais," in *Première poésie française de la Renaissance*, 147–160, for an analysis of this correspondence as a whole.

¹¹⁴ Hüe, "Les Marot." Gros, *Le Poème*, 157–159.

¹¹⁵ Curiously, the poems of the *Blasons* can be found at the end of an edition of the works of Louise Labé, *Oeuvres poétiques précédées des Rymes de Pernelle de Guillet, avec un choix de Blasons du corps féminin*, ed. Françoise Charpentier (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 158–9, 162–3.

¹¹⁶ Hüe, "Les Marot," 235. For a full analysis of the quarrel, see Thierry Mantovani, "La querelle de Marot et Sagon: essai de mise au point" in *La génération Marot. Poètes français et néo-latins (1515–1550)*, ed. Gérard Defaux (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), 381–404.

his putative mentor. During the exchange, Sagon (in the voice of his servant) specifically boasted of his success at the Puy, compared to Marot's failure: "Rouen has seen this François triumph/In its theatre, but never Marot/[...] Seeing as he never won a single prize there."¹¹⁷

The final role of the Puy on the national stage was a sign of its cultural eclipse. In writing his manifesto for French Renaissance poetry in 1549, the *Pléiade* poet Joachim Du Bellay specifically cited the Puy of Rouen as an example of the kind of verse that should be dismissed and replaced by his new poetry:

Leave all these old French poems to the *Jeux Floraux* of Toulouse and the *Puy* of Rouen, such as *rondeaux*, *ballades*, *virelays*, *chants royaux*, songs, and other such trifles that corrupt the taste of our language and serve only to bear testimony to our ignorance.¹¹⁸

The fact that it was mentioned by name is something of a backhanded compliment, showing that it remained well-known, but the put-down proved significant, the beginning of a poor reputation that would dog the Puy's poetry for centuries.¹¹⁹ Although writers such as Barthélemy Aneau and Guillaume des Autelz responded in defence of these verse forms,¹²⁰ from this point onwards the Puy would have little resonance on

¹¹⁷ *Querelle*, "Rabais du caquet de Fripelippes," c2: "Rouen a veu triompher ce francoys [Sagon]/Sur son theatre, & marot nulle foys/[...] Veü que jamais ny gaigna ung seul prix."

¹¹⁸ Joachim Du Bellay, *La deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* [1549] (Genève: Droz, 2001), 85: "laisse toutes ces vieilles poesies francoyses aux Jeux Floraux de Toulouze et au Puy de Rouen: comme rondeaux, ballades, vyrelais, chantz royaultz, chansons et autres telles espiceries qui corrompent le goust de nostre langue, et ne servent si non a porter temoingnaige de nostre ignorance."

¹¹⁹ A few years after Du Bellay wrote, Étienne Pasquier describes Puy-style poetry as obsolete (Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 247). In the eighteenth century Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (online: University of Chicago ARTFL project, <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/encyc/>) wrote of Puy poetry that "only students and mediocre poets still write *palinods*" ("il n'y a plus que les écoliers & les poëtes médiocres qui fassent des *palinods*") (11:785). In the early twentieth century, Eugène de Beaurepaire, in his history of the Puy, was also dismissive of the quality of the poetry (103–104), at one point describing it as "rather tiresome" ("assez fatigante") (12). The fact that almost no-one spent a great deal of time studying this poetry until very recently (Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 17, describes these poems as "relatively unknown" ("relativement inconnus")), although the poetry of the earlier medieval era and the later Renaissance received its share of attention, is itself a sign of the poor reputation triggered by Du Bellay and accumulated over the centuries.

¹²⁰ Gros, *Le poème*, 181–182.

the national stage, and would instead be a purely local affair, influential only in Rouen and perhaps a little in the rest of Normandy.

The Puy's brief spell of influence went through several stages. For twenty-five years or so, from its foundation in 1486 to 1510, it was a purely local affair. The foundation of new prizes around 1510 and the participation of André de la Vigne in 1511 marked a new stage in which the poetry of the Puy became widely read and influential, part of the mainstream of French poetry. The Puy successfully propagated the Immaculate Conception as an inspirational devotion identified with Normandy, helped to shape approaches to devotional poetry, engaged with nationally-known poets, and established Rouen's reputation as a cultured city. From about 1530, the poetry of the Puy was no longer influential, but the poets it cultivated still played a wider role. In this period, the members and poets of the Puy had become part of the literary circles of France—corresponding with poets and humanists, participating in collective writing projects, and publishing works beyond Rouen itself. The difference was that, while their participation in the Puy established their credentials as poets, the poetry of the Puy itself was no longer of interest outside Rouen.

Fluctuating fortunes of a civic institution

After 1550, the Puy had little direct influence beyond the city. It continued to remain central to Rouen's cultural life, however, and by continuing to cultivate a particular form of provincial urban culture, it would have an indirect impact on French culture as a whole. Meanwhile, its vagaries over the next two and a half centuries showed how closely it continued to be entwined with the political, religious, cultural and economic context of the city.

The wars of religion

If the Puy was no longer at the forefront of cultural life even within Rouen, this may have worked to its advantage upon the outbreak of the Wars of Religion in 1562. In April of that year the city's Calvinist party seized control of the city. After a short but devastating siege, the city was retaken in October 1562 by royal forces. Amidst the religious and economic upheaval, the other expressions of Rouen's thriving urban culture—notably those that were suspiciously innovative or disruptively

popular—disappeared or were significantly set back.¹²¹ The Puy, however, with its safe, respectable and extremely Catholic devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, and its solid and well-connected membership, survived.

The Puy's fortunes over the next three decades closely mirrored the ups and downs experienced by Rouen during the on-and-off civil war known as the Wars of Religion.¹²² The overall decline of traditional confraternities amidst the religious ferment was partially mitigated for the Immaculate Conception by its use as a network for radical Catholics when faced with a Protestant threat.

In the first phase, from the rise of the Protestant Church around 1559 through a decade of constant tension between the religions within Rouen after 1562, the Puy's prestige, broadly-based social networks, and traditionally Catholic devotion led it to become a makeshift rallying point for radical Catholics. It was used to help consolidate a loose network linked together by family, neighbourhood, and clientage ties as well as partisanship, which included men of somewhat lesser status than in the past, merchants and wealthy artisans.¹²³

In 1572, Rouen experienced a version of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, which cowed and greatly reduced the Protestant community in the city.¹²⁴ With the threat passed, the impetus for joining the confraternity for partisan reasons dissipated, and almost no new members joined over the following decade. It was part of a wider trend—traditional confraternities such as the Puy were going into serious decline in Normandy and across France in this period.¹²⁵ At the same time, the prestige of the confraternity had been diluted by the lesser status of new members. As the turn came for the less wealthy

¹²¹ The Puy of the Poor disappeared. Pierre Du Val's various experiments had already ceased when he fled the city for religious reasons in 1553. Theatrical production of farces declined greatly around this time. The Abbey of the Conards carnival society ceased its activities for a decade.

¹²² Except where noted, the analysis of the Puy during the Wars of Religion is based on Reid, "Piety, Poetry and Politics."

¹²³ Several new members were connected through the parish of Saint-Vivien, a poor neighbourhood bitterly divided between the two religions. Several members also had ties to the Guise clientage network in Normandy (Reid, "Piety, Poetry and Politics," 154–156). Men of lesser status include the goldsmith Pierre de Houppesville, and the merchant dyer Richart Behault (BMR MS Y 186, 25r, 28r).

¹²⁴ Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion*, 151.

¹²⁵ Vincent, 54. Stephano Simiz, *Confréries urbaines et dévotion en Champagne (1450–1830)* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq (Nord): Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001), 132, 144, 147.

new members who had joined in the face of the Calvinist threat to become prince, they were refusing because of the costs. In 1578, the prince called an emergency meeting because the ardour of the members had “cooled” (*refroidiz*). The meeting agreed to set a fixed sum for which the prince would be considered to have discharged his duties, but it had little effect.¹²⁶

Just as the Puy ran out of members who could serve as Prince, it was saved by the next twist in the civil wars, when the Protestant Henri de Navarre became heir to the throne of France in 1584. A Catholic League was formed to oppose him, and for the decade after 1585 members of this league in Rouen drew on their family, business and partisan networks to keep the Puy, which was now associated with their cause, alive. It was on life-support, however, finding a new prince year-by-year, as the fervour of Rouennais in this time of crisis was directed towards more intense new devotions.

Finally, in 1595, came the Puy’s crisis and resurrection. The Catholic League had seized control of Rouen with the outbreak of open civil war between the Catholic League and royalists in 1589. The city resisted a devastating siege by the new King Henri IV, in 1592, but was handed over peacefully to royal control by its governor in 1594. In 1595, the Puy needed a new prince, but no-one wanted to join a confraternity closely associated with the losing cause. The former princes even sued a cathedral canon in an attempt to force him to take on the role and the costs, but the Parlement dismissed the suit.¹²⁷ For perhaps the first time in a century, the Puy of the Immaculate Conception was not held.

Fortunately for the Puy, the lawsuit caught the eye of the President of the Parlement, Claude Groulart, who had led the faction of the Parlement that supported Henri IV and who had set up an alternate court in Caen during the period when the Catholic League controlled Rouen. Groulart, the leader of Rouen’s elite, needed to find ways to restore the city, to reconcile Rouen’s divided elite, and to re-establish his own credibility with the city’s old Catholic families after having supported a Protestant king in a siege of the city. As an open, prestigious social network dedicated to creating fraternity, the Puy was an excellent vehicle for rebuilding elite social ties shattered by civil war.

¹²⁶ BMR MS Y 186, 29r.

¹²⁷ ADSM D 546. The suit was not as strange as it seems—there were four confraternities in Rouen who enjoyed the right to co-opt any person to be their head, but the Immaculate Conception was not one of them.

As a traditional, Catholic symbol of the city, its resurrection would serve both to restore civic morale, and to show Groulart's dedication to the city and to Catholicism. Finally, its serene, conservative form of devotion, which had been an unappealing drawback during the years of crisis, was now just what was needed to restore calm.

In 1596, Groulart saved the Puy from collapse by joining the confraternity, along with several of his allies in the wars. They worked together with the existing leaders, who had been their Catholic League opponents, to restore the confraternity, signing an agreement together which re-established the confraternity's finances.¹²⁸

Peace and restoration

The restoration of the Puy was completed over the subsequent twenty years. At an institutional level, the confraternity's finances were put in order. Groulart had a permanent stage built in the Carmelite house for the contest—legend has it that he used materials salvaged from Henri IV's royal entry in 1596.¹²⁹ He also found a copy of the statutes printed in 1520 and in 1597 got the Parlement's permission to authorize them as still valid. They were very out of date, however, and the confraternity subsequently developed a revised set of statutes, approved by the archbishop in 1614 and printed in 1615, which completed the reform.¹³⁰

The Puy's poetry was also desperately out of date. It had almost completely bypassed the *Pléiade* movement, which had transformed French poetry and introduced many new forms and styles.¹³¹ By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *Pléiade* was itself being replaced by new

¹²⁸ BMR MS Y 186, 34r–36r. Reid, "Piety, Poetry and Politics," 159–162.

¹²⁹ The legend was repeated by David Ferrand in 1654 (Ferrand, *La muse normande* IV, 7). The confraternity had decided to erect the stage on 3 April 1596 (BMR MS Y 186, 35v), well before the entry, but it is possible that construction did not actually begin until just before the contest in December, after the royal entry on 16 October.

¹³⁰ *Statuts*. BMR Fonds de l'Académie 92p includes copies of: the 1597 permission to reprint the 1520 statutes book; confirmation of the new statutes by the Archbishop (Cardinal de Joyeuse) and the Parlement in 1614; and the Parlement's permission to print the statutes in 1615. See also ADSM D 546 for the 1597 decision; the *Statuts*, 35, for the old statutes being out of date.

¹³¹ Two well-known *Pléiade*-influenced poets based in Normandy competed during the Wars of Religion, Vauquelin de la Fresnaye and Guy Le Fèvre de La Boderie, but they had no significant influence (Le Fèvre de La Boderie, 215–219, 358–362. Aimé-Prosper Lemerrier, *Étude littéraire et morale sur les poésies de Jean Vauquelin de la Fresnaye* (reprint Genève: Slatkine, 1970), 104–107; Guiot, II 147).

approaches. Meanwhile, the Puy's forms were still based on those of a century before. Groulart began the process of modernizing the poetry by establishing a prize for *stances*, a distinguished format well-suited to devotional poetry.¹³² In subsequent years the *anneau* (ring) prize for the sonnet was introduced to replace the antiquated *rondeau*, and prizes for the French and Latin ode were introduced.¹³³ Remarkably, though, the prizes for the *chant royal*, the *ballade*, and the *epigramme latine* were also re-established, and the *chant royal* remained the flagship format.¹³⁴

The Puy's membership was also transformed. By contrast to the mixed membership of the Wars of Religion period, the reformed confraternity was once again drawn almost solely from the upper echelon of Rouen society, as it had been in the early sixteenth century. Some of the same families still appeared, although an increase in the number of noble titles reflected the ennoblement of many of the city's leading families over the century through royal office-holding. The Puy even recruited the most senior members of the upper nobility in the province, such as the royal governors.¹³⁵ The poets remained largely drawn from the next tier of Rouen society, middling professionals (clerics, doctors, lawyers, teachers), students, and master artisans (printers, surgeons), although there was the occasional poet of higher standing.¹³⁶ As in earlier periods, the Puy served as a starting point for poetic careers, and some local poets who participated went on to write other poetry, such as the surgeon Jean Auvray and the priest Hercule Grisel, author of an extended Latin poem about Rouen's yearly cycle of festivities.¹³⁷

¹³² See Nicolas Lombart, "Des stances pour la vierge: Claude Groulart et la rénovation des palinods de Rouen (1595–1596)," in *Première poésie française*, 447–461.

¹³³ BMR Fonds de l'Académie 92p (sonnet foundation by Marin le Pigny, 1614; Latin ode foundation by François de Harlay; French ode foundation by Barthélemy Hallé, 1627). *Statuts*, 54–58. The prize for the French ode was already in place in 1614, but lacked a solid foundation until 1627.

¹³⁴ *Statuts*, 27–28. Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 250, provides a chart of the seventeenth-century prizes. The *chant royal* remained the most lucrative prize, at 12 *livres*, and even the second prize for the *chant royal*, at 8 *livres*, was more valuable than the prizes for other forms.

¹³⁵ Reid, "Piety, Poetry and Politics," 131–132. Families active in the Puy in the first half of the sixteenth century whose direct descendants continued to play a role in the first half of the seventeenth century included the Boyvin, La Place, Le Roux and Puchot.

¹³⁶ Status can be discerned for a few poets in the collection of poems 1612–1630 and 1631–1641 in BMR Fonds de l'Académie 87p.

¹³⁷ For Auvray, see Cureau, "Jean Auvray" and Sandra Cureau, "Jean Auvray: la découverte d'un imprimé posthume de 1624 relance l'enquête sur sa vie et son oeuvre," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, n°1, janvier 2007, 201–213. For Grisel, see

The one truly remarkable poet—partially through self-promotion—was the printer David Ferrand. In the 1620s he began a tradition of writing entertaining *chants royaux* and other verse for the Puy in a version of *purin*, the local dialect of Rouen's working classes. The poems often reflected the mores and the feelings of Rouen's popular classes. He became something of a fixture at the Puy, and published his writings yearly in a collection called *La muse normande*.¹³⁸ He sustained the tradition of popular and amusing verse that had existed a century before. Furthermore, by writing in local dialect on local affairs, he reinforced the sense of the Rouennais identity of the Puy, which was somewhat lost in other respects now that the Immaculate Conception was widely accepted. He also encapsulates the way in which the Puy remained a way for the elite to connect to the social tiers beneath them, both by hearing his point of view, and by continuing to invite the poets to join them at the banquet.

The revived Puy was part of a wider moment in Rouennais culture. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Rouen was the leading city in France for the publication of literature, including collections of poetry.¹³⁹ The most prominent publisher was Raphaël du Petit-Val and then his son, David, who was a frequent competitor and prize-winner in the Puy. Although the Puy itself was of only minor literary significance, it nonetheless played a role in establishing an audience and an environment for a strong literary life. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the Puy revived, a new style of literature also emerged, often called neo-classicism, which embraced many of the elements of Puy-style poetry, such as a focus on restraint and rules, and on worthy subjects such as religion, duty and patriotism—displacing the *Pléiade* championed by Du Bellay when he dismissed the Puy as irrelevant. The leading exponent of the new style was François de Malherbe, a scion of a family of royal officials from the Norman city of Caen, which had its own Puy—a similar and closely related milieu to that of the Puy of Rouen.¹⁴⁰ One of the new style's most famous practitioners would be the dramatist Pierre Corneille, who grew up in

the editor's introduction to Hercule Grisel, *Les fastes de Rouen* [1643], ed. F. Bouquet (Rouen: H. Boissel, 1870).

¹³⁸ Héron, introduction to Ferrand, *La muse normande*, xv–xvi.

¹³⁹ Jean-Dominique Mellot, *L'édition rouennaise et ses marchés (vers 1600–vers 1730): dynamisme provincial et centralisme parisien* (Paris: École des Chartes, 1998), 115–169.

¹⁴⁰ For the development of this connected milieu amidst the Wars of Religion, see Reid, "Urban Culture," 209–215.

Rouen, attended its Puy, and whose brothers won prizes at it.¹⁴¹ It was a moment—a few decades—in which Rouen was a true centre of cultural life.¹⁴² Although the Puy itself was now a purely local phenomenon, it served as a vehicle for the propagation and reinforcement of a specific set of values typical of the urban elite, one that would spread in France through other means.

The beginning of the seventeenth century was a period in which the last vestiges of the flourishing late medieval urban culture of France largely expired. In Rouen, the festive society, the Abbey of the Conards, re-established itself after the civil wars but disappeared in the 1610s. The royal entry of Henri IV in 1596 was the last of the truly civic entries, subsequent ones being largely stage-managed by the monarchy. Mysteries and farces were long gone, replaced by fully professional theatre troupes performing new styles of plays.¹⁴³ In a way, the Puy regenerated itself in part by absorbing the detritus of this past urban culture and incorporating it into a format suitable for a new age—incorporating a permanent stage salvaged from the last royal entry, providing a home for the populist voice of David Ferrand after the Conards who had once fulfilled this role had disappeared.

The Puy survived and thrived again because it could be adapted to a new, more formal style of culture. Its hierarchical structure of patrons and poets was well suited to the more hierarchical ethos of seventeenth century civic and national society. Its insistence on rules adapted easily to an approach to culture where rules and order were prized. Its conservative, serene approach to devotion was a safe respite for the elite after the intense and disruptive popular devotions of the final years of the religious wars. Formal, hierarchical and orderly, the Puy was just what the civic elite desired after the disruptions of civil war.

Political troubles

As an expression of Rouen's elite, however, the Puy suffered when the elite encountered problems. Throughout the 1630s, Rouen witnessed a series of outbursts of popular disaffection in response to the rapidly

¹⁴¹ Édouard Frère, *Une séance de l'Académie des Palinods en 1640* (Rouen: Auguste le Brument, 1867).

¹⁴² Bouard, 375–376.

¹⁴³ Dylan Reid, "Carnival in Rouen: A History of the Abbaye des Conards," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22:4 (2001), 1048–1052; Sara Beam, "Farcical Theatre and the Reformation of Manners in France, 1500–1650" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999), 193 ff.; Chevalier, 284.

increasing burden of royal taxation—a resentment that was shared by the city’s elite.¹⁴⁴ In August of 1639, a more serious revolt broke out in Rouen, simultaneously with other revolts in Normandy. Mobs rioted and murdered one financial official, and later in the month sacked the offices and houses of others. The Parlement and city authorities were slow and ineffectual in their response to this attack on royal authority. The crown, angered by this weak response, sent the Chancellor Séguier to investigate and impose punishment. Séguier meted out summary justice to the rioters, ordered a series of punishments for the city, and then suspended most royal officials and courts, including the Parlement, which was replaced with a temporary commission. When it was finally reinstated, it was divided into two separate courts, each sitting half the year, and many new positions were created.¹⁴⁵

The disgrace of the city’s elite was reflected in the Puy. David Ferrand, for one, was caught in a bind, trapped between pressure from his popular audience to reflect their grievances and pressure from the princes to suppress any reference to the recent revolt. At the Puy of 1639, he abdicated his usual persona and wrote in pure French, bitterly proclaiming “He knows much who knows when to be silent.”¹⁴⁶ The response to the revolt and then the reform of the Parlement prompted a bitter internal quarrel within the court that pitted the conciliatory First President against the hard-line President *à mortier* Raoul Bretel de Grémonville, Claude Groulart’s son-in-law (who had been prince in 1618).¹⁴⁷ With the city’s elite disgraced and then engaged in an internecine struggle, few were any longer interested in joining the confraternity that was the most notable expression of that elite, and whose members were embroiled in the opposing factions. Another factor may have been that the confraternity’s membership was becoming so rarefied, with members of the senior nobility joining, that even a mere rank-and-file member of the Parlement no longer felt up to the task socially or financially. Only two new members, both from the aristocratic d’Harcourt family, joined after 1639.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Goujart, 188 ff. Bouard, 277–278.

¹⁴⁵ Goujart, 210–219. Bouard, 282–283. Paul Logié, *La Fronde en Normandie* (Amiens: n.p., 1951), 100. Séguier received his orders 15 December 1639, just after the Puy was held, and arrived 19 December.

¹⁴⁶ Ferrand, *Inventaire général*, 241–244: “Il sçait beaucoup qui sçait à temps se taire.”

¹⁴⁷ Goujart, 213, 218. BMR MS Y 186, 41r; Frondeville, *Présidents*, 76–80.

¹⁴⁸ They joined in 1643 (BMR MS Y 186, 53r). It was the same year François d’Harcourt was appointed the King’s Lieutenant-General in Normandy (Logié, 112),

Ironically, the city's disgrace also resulted in the Puy's last cameo appearance on the stage of national culture. Séguier's assistants included a senior financial official named Étienne Pascal, who brought his son, Blaise Pascal, and his 15-year old prodigy of a daughter, Jacqueline Pascal.¹⁴⁹ In 1640, Jacqueline competed in the Puy and won the prize for best *stance*, the first woman ever to win a prize at the Puy. The famous playwright and Rouen resident Pierre Corneille, who was in the audience, stepped forward with a brief poem celebrating this remarkable achievement. The next year, Corneille's younger brother Thomas, only sixteen himself, competed and won the prize for the *ode française*, while his older brother Antoine, a canon regular, celebrated the previous year's event with a *chant royal* whose refrain was "La seule fille en ce Puy triomphante" ("The only girl triumphant in this Puy").¹⁵⁰ Thomas would go on to be a playwright almost as successful as his brother on the national stage. The prizes for Jacqueline Pascal and Thomas Corneille were small incidents at the beginning of remarkable if divergent careers in French culture, a sign that, even if the Puy itself was no longer significant, it was part of a vibrant civic cultural life that nurtured writers of national talent.

In 1649, the revolt known as the *Fronde* broke out across France, involving disgruntled aristocrats, royal officials, and populace against the regency of Anne of Austria and her primary advisor, Cardinal Mazarin. Normandy's governor, the Duc de Longueville (who had been prince of the Puy in 1635), joined the revolt and came to Rouen to attempt to rouse it to the cause. The city's elite was divided once again, and although the city welcomed his arrival, it did not join the revolt. Longueville was soon captured, imprisoned, and induced to rejoin the royal party.¹⁵¹ Such conflicts did nothing to improve the fortunes of the Puy. In 1651, the Puy had run out of members who had not yet served as prince. The Duc de Longueville, perhaps in an attempt to re-

which suggests it was seen as a good way for the King's new representative to connect with the city's leaders.

¹⁴⁹ Goujart, 216.

¹⁵⁰ Frère, repeated in Philippe Deschamps, *Les concours poétiques à Rouen: le puy des palinods (1586–1959)* (Rouen: AMR-Connaissance Rouen, 1984), 7–9. Guiot, I 196, 197, II 154. Pierre Corneille is said to have submitted a poem, but not won a prize, in 1633, but although Frère cites the supposed poem, the validity of this claim is uncertain. Another woman, Mademoiselle d'Argences, won a prize again a few years later, in 1653 (Guiot, I, 62).

¹⁵¹ Logié, *passim*. Goujart, 221–22. BMR MS Y 186, 46v (Longueville joined in 1626), 54r (refers to him being prince in 1635).

ingratiate himself with the city's elite, stepped in to help cover the costs of the contest and banquet. But his presence probably only made the confraternity less attractive politically, and his generosity made it more intimidating financially. In 1652, the Puy still could not find a prince, and he covered the expenses once again. The confraternity attempted to control the spiralling costs by setting a new limit—the enormous sum of 600 *livres*—to the amount the prince was expected to pay, but this measure had little effect. The President of the financial court, the *cour des aides*, stepped up to serve as prince in 1653, but no more new members could be found after that.¹⁵² From 1654, the Puy ceased, and David Ferrand published his *adieux* poem to mourn its passing.

Evolution into an Academy

The confraternity itself was not dissolved, however, and it continued to possess considerable financial resources.¹⁵³ In 1669, fifteen years later, the Puy was re-started on a consistent yearly basis.¹⁵⁴ Soon the Puy, showing the flexibility which kept it relevant over the centuries, began to evolve once more. By the end of the century, the worthy subjects of the Puy's poetry had broadened from the purity of the Virgin to include history, mythology, and patriotism as well as a range of religious and biblical topics.

The organization that managed the Puy was increasingly referred to as an Academy—the Academy of the Immaculate Conception, or the Academy of the *Palinods*.¹⁵⁵ The organization was jumping on a bandwagon—many provincial cities were founding academies dedicated to the encouragement of the Arts and/or the Sciences. There is no evidence, however, that the Puy actually applied to the crown for patent letters that would have formally turned it into an academy—by contrast to the *Jeux Floraux* of Toulouse, also a long-standing traditional

¹⁵² BMR MS Y 186, 53v–55v.

¹⁵³ ADSM D 546: inventory of contracts. The final passage in BMR MS Y 186, 55v, written in 1657, refers to the last prince (in 1653), Pierre de Becdelièvre, holding in trust the confraternity's assets, which amount to the considerable sum of 1400 *livres*.

¹⁵⁴ Guiot, *passim*. From 1669 onwards, Guiot consistently cites several different prize-winners for most years. In ADSM D 546, there is an inventory of the confraternity's resources drawn up in 1669, which also suggests that this year saw a coherent campaign to re-organize and re-invigorate the institution. David Ferrand's widow put out a collection of his poetry in 1669 to capitalize on the revival, although the revived Puy banned facetious poetry (Héron, introduction to Ferrand, *La muse Normande*, xl).

¹⁵⁵ Guiot, *passim*. Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 256.

poetry contest, which formally converted into an academy, with royal patent letters, in 1695.¹⁵⁶ In 1744, a formal Academy of Sciences, Arts and Belles-Lettres was established in Rouen, and the two institutions quickly arrived at a *modus vivendi*, with many of the Puy's princes and judges after 1744 also members of the Academy.¹⁵⁷ The Puy also noticeably increased its links with other cities in France, with a significant increase in poets from Caen and other cities, and also the recruitment of distinguished princes from bishops, intendants and other dignitaries across France, perhaps reflecting the development of a nation-wide 'Republic of Letters.'¹⁵⁸ Over the course of the eighteenth century, the Puy continued to adapt, revising its statutes and poems repeatedly, and finally abolishing the *chant royal* in 1732.¹⁵⁹

The Puy thus managed to re-invent itself in the eighteenth century to fit into the emerging enthusiasm for academies. In many ways, the evolution was a natural one—academies performed a similar function to the Puy of earlier centuries, providing a network of sociability for a city's elite, and enhancing the self-image of a city by promoting its cultural and intellectual status. Remarkably, it was not the only one—Puy continued to survive in cities such as Caen and Douai as well. But Rouen was regarded as the archetype, and was the example cited in dictionaries of the period.¹⁶⁰ By the time the Puy's three-hundredth anniversary approached in 1786, however, the institution appears to have been in some difficulty. In 1789, amidst the ferment of political events, the Puy's organizers decided to suspend the contest.¹⁶¹ It was never held again.

¹⁵⁶ Daniel Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province: académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789* (Paris: Mouton, c1978), 19, 21 and *passim*, for the French academy movement in general.

¹⁵⁷ Guiot, II 26, 178, 207, 208, 256 and *passim*.

¹⁵⁸ Guiot, *passim*.

¹⁵⁹ Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 253–254.

¹⁶⁰ Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* includes an entry for the *Puy de la Conception* of Rouen (13:590), the only Puy that has its own entry. It also includes an entry for *Palinod* as a type of poetry (11:785) which cites Rouen, Caen and Dieppe as places where it is practiced. Likewise, Hüe, "Le poète du Puy," 84, cites the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*'s entry under "puy."

¹⁶¹ Hüe, *La poésie palinodique*, 257.

Conclusion

The Puy of the Immaculate Conception emerged from a specific urban culture, one that also produced urban artistic forms such as royal entries, mysteries, carnival, and popular theatre. It is a culture that can be seen in cities across Europe in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, taking many different forms, each one varied but each sharing some fundamental themes grounded in the urban environment—communal organization, civic identity, and a milieu of craft, commercial and administrative work. Like many of them, its cultural production was public and shared, and included an element of public performance.¹⁶² The Puy's large and varied range of participants and audience showed that certain basic assumptions of this culture were easily shared across a wide spectrum of the urban population.

The Puy was unusual, although not unique, in its ability to constantly re-invent itself to adapt to new eras, which enabled it to survive and thrive over three centuries. The fluctuations in its fortunes were directly related to the political, religious, cultural and economic context of Rouen over these centuries. It survived these fluctuations because it was so effective at enhancing civic identity and the sense of community within the city, especially within the elite. Ultimately, the Puy was the creation of the leaders of Rouen's society—a way for them to enrich their community, enhance their prestige and their connections within the city through patronage, and improve their city's image to the outside world. When the elite was split, as during the religious wars of the sixteenth century or the factious politics of the mid-seventeenth century, the Puy itself inevitably declined.

In the second generation of its existence, from about 1510 to 1530, the Puy became part of the French literary world, establishing connections with other contests and with leading writers. It helped to set the tone of French poetry for a time. This flowering was brief, however, and the Puy's slowness in adapting its literature—a result of its communal basis—meant that its prominence eventually made it a target

¹⁶² For a good discussion of current ideas and historiography around the concept of urban culture and the important role of performance and collective activities within it, focusing on the Low Countries, see Anne-Laure Van Bruaene's discussion, 376–380, in her article, “‘A wonderfull tryumfc, for the wyynnyng of a pryse’: guilds, ritual, theater, and the urban network in the Southern Low Countries, ca. 1450–1650,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59:2 (2006), 374–405.

of disdain. Even then, it continued to support a vibrant local culture, providing a venue and a stepping-stone for local careers in writing. At a deeper level, the Puy remained part of the French literary world over the long term. By sustaining an approach to literature that reflected the fundamental values of provincial city-dwellers, it helped to shape attitudes and audiences. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Rouen for a few decades became the centre of literary publishing in France, these values would be fed back into the literary mainstream and contribute to shaping French culture as a whole.

In the eighteenth century, the Puy's own transformation into an academy was an incomplete adaptation to the latest trend. Yet the academy movement was itself merely the latest manifestation of the same desire for urban cultural and intellectual sociability that had formed the Puy two hundred years before. Many of the academies originated in informal associations of well-educated wealthy men who gathered to eat, drink, talk and play literary games together¹⁶³—very much like the Puy. They then developed a more formal structure in an effort to bring glory to themselves and their city—again, very much like the Puy. The forms—confraternity versus academy, religion versus science, poetry versus academic speeches—may have changed, but the essence was much the same, which is why the Puy was able to adapt to the new paradigm.

¹⁶³ Roche, 26–28.