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## Renaissance Printing and Provincial Culture in Sixteenth-Century Rouen

For much of the sixteenth century, Rouen was the second-largest city in France. Located on the Seine between Paris and the English Channel, Rouen was both an important administrative centre, as capital of the wealthy province of Normandy, and an important commercial and manufacturing centre, as the port that linked river traffic from Paris with the ocean-going traffic of the English Channel.<sup>1</sup>

In the first century after the introduction of the printing press to France, however, the size of Rouen's printing industry did not live up to the city's economic and political importance. The most important printing city in France was, of course, Paris, where the first press was introduced in 1470; it retained the largest book publishing industry in France from that point to the present day. In second place came Rouen's rival, Lyon, the city in the Rhône valley near the borders of Italy, Switzerland and Germany, where printing was introduced in 1473 and quickly grew to rival Paris in both quantity and quality. Between them, these two cities produced 80 to 90 per cent of the books published in France in the sixteenth century (Dureau, 165; Martin and Dureau, 217).

Rouen came a poor third. Its industry began relatively late, in 1485, and it never achieved the same kind of scale as Paris and Lyon. On the other hand, it remained far ahead of any other provincial city in France, and over the course of the sixteenth century the city's printers carved out a solid if modest niche in the French book industry.<sup>2</sup> Rouen became, in effect, a regional centre of production, finding ways to sustain a viable book industry in the face of the national and international scale of production of Paris and Lyon.

My own interest in Rouen lies in its cultural life, and the relationship of the city's local culture to broader cultural developments. This local culture, in particular Rouen's literary life, was of fundamental importance in shaping the development of printing in Rouen, and in this paper I will explore the way in which local culture and the local printing industry

1 For background on Rouen in the sixteenth century, see Benedict, chapter 1.

2 The first surviving book printed in Rouen was a description of the royal entry of Charles VIII into the city, printed by Guillaume le Talleur in 1485 (*Entrée...Charles VIII*; see Le Verdier; Dureau, 173). Aquilon ('Réalités,' 356) describes Rouen as the 'leading provincial city in terms of publishing' ('première ville de province, en matière de librairie').

interacted and affected each other. The city's late start in the printing industry can itself be partly attributed to Rouen's cultural circumstances. On the other hand, having been relegated to a secondary role, Rouen's printers used the city's active literary life as an important part of their strategy to survive and prosper in the face of their dominant competitors.

In terms of culture, the most significant European development over the period under discussion was the dissemination of the Renaissance beyond its birthplace in Italy. In France, the development of the printing industry and of the Renaissance were closely intertwined. The first books printed in Paris were humanist texts for university professors inspired by Renaissance ideals of teaching, while Lyon's printing industry was sparked by its central location in the economic and cultural axis between Italy and southern Germany, which formed the conduit for the spread of Renaissance culture from Italy to northern Europe (Dureau, *passim*; Martin).

Rouen was far outside this axis. Rouen's cultural and economic ties were based on the Atlantic coast, from northern Spain to England and especially in the dense and prosperous network of cities of northwestern France and the low countries. Its cultural life was closely linked with the thriving urban culture that developed in the Duchy of Burgundy during the fifteenth century. As a result of this orientation towards the Atlantic, away from the axis through the centre of Europe that transmitted printing southwards from Germany, and the Renaissance northwards from Italy, Rouen received both developments late and haltingly. Furthermore, Rouen did not have a university, which might have served as a conduit for both printing and for Renaissance ideas. In fact, the first known printed book in Rouen's rival city in Normandy, Caen, which did possess a university, appeared in 1480, five years before the first known printed book in Rouen.<sup>3</sup>

When the printing industry did develop in Rouen, it was strongly shaped by the city's cultural and economic networks. At first, printing serviced the local market, concentrating on religious works destined for the cathedral, the monasteries, and the parish churches of the Archbishopric of Rouen, and legal works for the Parlement, the Norman court of appeal, and other regional law courts. The first printer's workshops congregated around the twin poles of the cathedral and the Palace of Justice.

As the industry developed across France, however, the logic of mass production soon meant that commercial networks became more important than local markets in enabling the growth of the industry, and Rouen had

3 For the first book in Caen, see Girard, 123. For a brief summary of pre-1500 printing in Rouen, see Girard. For a comparison of Rouen's early printing production with Paris and Lyon, and for Lyon's advantages on the Germany-Italy axis, see Mellot, *L'édition rouennaise*, 28. For Rouen's commercial networks, see Benedict, chapter 1, and Mollat, 119–268. For more details on the socio-economic factors that affected the development of printing in Rouen, as opposed to the cultural factors discussed in this paper, see Mellot, *L'édition rouennaise*, 28–30.

commercial networks in abundance. Although Caen, with its university, got a head start on Rouen because of local demand, within a few years most of the books ordered by Caen's university booksellers were being printed in Rouen or Paris. By the early sixteenth century, Rouen's printing industry was supplying religious works, legal texts, and schoolbooks throughout its traditional commercial network – Normandy, Paris, north-western France and the French-speaking parts of the low countries, and England.<sup>4</sup>

This production was essentially professional, supplying books to clerics, lawyers, teachers, and students who needed them for their work or their studies. This professional orientation was reflected in the format and language of the early industry. A significant number of early Rouen editions, between 1485 and about 1520, were in the large, expensive in-folio format used for important reference works, while few were in the smallest formats. Almost three-quarters of the books published in this early period were in Latin, the language of professional work, while barely a quarter were in French.<sup>5</sup>

In this early professional orientation, Rouen was not much different from other printing centres in France and elsewhere. As the historian Michael Milway has shown in his important study of early best-sellers across Europe, practical religious works and textbooks for students were far and away the most widely published texts in these early years. Paris quickly developed a specialty in publishing religious works such as breviaries and missals, while Lyon developed a market in legal and medical texts (Martin and Dureau, 217–20). In fact, the proportion of in-folio and Latin editions printed in Rouen was lower than in either of these two cities (Girard; Mellot, *L'édition rouennaise*, 30; compare with Labarre, 'Incunables,' 199).

These lesser proportions, however, should not be seen as an indication that Rouen was less dependent on the professional market in the early years of printing, but rather that it focused on the lower end of the market, such as the production of student textbooks. If anything, in fact, Rouen was more dependent on the professional market than other cities. While professional texts dominate Milway's early best-seller lists, there is still room for a few classical and contemporary literary writers in his top fifty authors. Paris supplemented its professional production with a developing

4 See Reid, 'Literary Aspects,' 276–79. Evidence for these networks comes from Aquilon, 'Bibliographie Normande'; Frère; Labarre, *Le livre*, 58. See also Coq, 186, and Febvre and Martin, 180.

5 Calculations based on the production of printers and publishers active 1500–20 listed in Aquilon, 'Bibliographie normande.' His lists are relatively complete for this early period. For the pre-1500 production, see Girard. Most in-folio editions from Rouen before 1520 were produced by two dominant printer/publishers, Martin Morin and Pierre Olivier (Aquilon, 'Bibliographie normande,' 14:19–47, 22:34–71; Frère, *De l'imprimerie*).

interest in editions of classical works, while Lyon developed a thriving production of chivalric romances in French for the entertainment of literate bourgeois across France (Coq, 182–83). Rouen, however, without a market of university-trained humanists or a nation-wide distribution network, did not compete seriously in these non-professional markets in the early years. The few ‘leisure’ works that Rouen produced before 1520 tended to be based on local content and aimed purely at the local market. The first surviving book from Rouen, for instance, is a description of King Charles VIII’s solemn entry into the city (*Entrée ... Charles VIII*; Le Verdier), while the one French poet printed in multiple editions in Rouen was the Norman poet Guillaume Alexis.<sup>6</sup>

Part of the reason for this neglect of the developing literary market could be found in the nature of Rouen’s own cultural life. Literary activity in the city was focused on the Puy, an annual poetry competition in honour of the Virgin Mary sponsored by the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception. This competition was an oral, social event, in which poets read their compositions out loud to the audience, and were judged on their skill in working within fixed formats and subjects. Even outside the contest, the devotional plays and poems that constituted the rest of Rouen’s literary activity in this period were mostly written by the same circle of poets who participated in the Puy. Although founded in 1486, at the same time as the first printing press in Rouen, the Puy remained resolutely oral and manuscript-based for thirty-five years. It was not that Puy poetry was not popular – the annual competition attracted large audiences, and there are many surviving manuscripts of Puy poetry and related works. Rather, printing did not suit the cultural expectations of Puy poets and audiences. Puy poems were subtle variations on a specific theme, the purity of the Virgin, within fixed formats. Their aim was finesse within a common subject and structure, rather than originality or permanence. They were designed to be read out loud at a single occasion, not fixed and immortalized in print in mass-produced volumes. Because of the common structure and subject, individual poems did not really stand out, and in many manuscript collections the poets were not even named. Manuscripts were in many ways more suited to consumers of Puy poetry because owners

6 Most books published between 1500 and 1520 in Rouen that were not religious or legal were works commonly used as textbooks for students, such as works by Aesop, [pseudo-] Dionysius Cato, Baptista Mantuanus, or Boethius (from Aquilon, ‘Bibliographie normande’; compare with Milway, 132–37; Febvre and Martin, 253–56). Six separate editions of Guillaume Alexis are listed in Aquilon’s book lists in the period 1500–20. There were also occasional editions of generic chivalric romances, saints’ lives and other lighter reading, which presaged Rouen’s later development of an extensive market in cheap popular texts. Mellot (*L’édition rouennaise*, 29–30) suggests that Rouen was less dependent on the professional market than other cities, but he does not look in detail at the early, pre-1520 industry.

could pick and choose which poems they wanted to have copied, in effect customizing their selection according to the nature of the collection they desired, whether it was an anthology of winners, the works of a single poet, a commemorative copy, a gift for patrons, or a private devotional work. Thus, for about a third of a century, Rouen's literary life developed fairly independently of the city's industrial, professionally oriented printing trade.<sup>7</sup>

This situation changed in the years around 1530, when the Renaissance started to have a serious impact on Rouen's culture and on French culture in general. While in previous years many individuals had been interested in humanist ideas, and Renaissance imagery had started to appear in art and illustration, it was in the years around 1530 that the Renaissance became the dominant influence in art, literature, and intellectual life in France – a dominance revealed in the spread of its influence to provincial cities such as Rouen. At the same time, the professional market declined somewhat in importance, a decline that was exacerbated in Rouen with the loss of the English market after the Henrician Reformation, and publishers began looking for other markets to fill.

In the centres of French printing, Paris and Lyon, the advent of the Renaissance and the expansion of the publishing market manifested itself in the refinement of two types of high-quality books: first, humanist editions of classical, early Christian, and scholarly texts in Latin and Greek (Febvre and Martin, 264; for Lyon, Davis, 263–70), and second, beautifully illustrated editions of contemporary texts in the vernacular, written or translated by living French authors and infused with Renaissance ideas (Brun, *passim*).

Rouen could not possibly compete in the area of humanist editions. Without a university or a strong humanistic tradition, there was no local talent pool of trained scholars who could have effectively edited and prepared these texts. Furthermore, with its smaller industry, Rouen did not have the capital necessary to finance such high-quality editions.

While illustrated editions of contemporary writing were more accessible, Rouen also had a handicap in that field. The best-known authors and illustrators were largely based in Paris and Lyon, where the Renaissance had permeated the culture sooner and more thoroughly than in Rouen.

7 For the Puy, see Reid, 'Moderate Devotion,' and Hùe. There was one print edition of Puy poetry, known as the *Recueil Vidoue* (reprinted as *Palinods*), published in 1525, almost forty years after the first competition. A modern anthology of Puy poems is available in *Petite Anthologie*, which provides a description of the thirty-eight known surviving manuscripts that include Puy poetry (373–414). Of course, many of the poets of the Puy were lawyers, clerics, and teachers who were consumers of printed books in their professional lives. In these early years, however, they appear to have used print for their work, but continued to embrace a more oral and manuscript culture for their cultural leisure. In fact, manuscripts of Puy poetry continued to be prepared for private use up to the 1540s.

Naturally, these authors published their works with printers in their own cities. Under the developing system of privileges, an early form of copyright, Rouen's printers had to wait several years before they could reprint these popular works, by which time the market might well have been saturated (Febvre and Martin, 241–42; Charon-Parent, 237–39).

To solve this problem, Rouen's printers turned to their local culture. After thirty-five years, the Puy's authors started to appreciate the potential of printing. In 1521, a local printer, Simon Gruel, published the guide to poetry and rhetoric written by the Puy's theorist, Pierre Fabri. Gruel was granted an exclusive privilege in order to support such a large undertaking, and the book was republished several times in Rouen and in other cities.<sup>8</sup> This successful publication of a local author, with privilege, set the pattern for the expansion by Rouen's printer-publishers into the literary market. They recruited poets, polemicists, and translators from the pool of authors developed in the Puy in order to provide content for their editions, which were often illustrated. Because these authors were local, Rouen's publishers could secure privileges for their work from Rouen's law courts.

The masters of this format – small-sized illustrated editions of contemporary vernacular works – were the du Gord brothers, Robert and Jean, and their illustrator brother, Guyon. Over the course of the 1540s and 1550s, they produced a remarkable series of high-quality illustrated pocket editions, mixing reprints of popular books first published elsewhere with editions of local authors for whom they could reserve an exclusive privilege. These local authors included the priest and Puy poet Guillaume Haudent, who prepared numerous translations of Latin works into French; the devotional works of the prior of the local Carmelite order (which hosted the Puy), Mathieu de Landa; the polemical preacher Artus Desirée; and work of the Neoplatonist poet Pierre du Val and his colleagues, who were participants in the Puy but were eager to explore new Renaissance themes and styles. The du Gord's most spectacular productions were Haudent's adaptation of Aesop's fables, for which they acquired a special privilege from the Parlement (Gosselin, 131), and the illustrated account of King Henry II's solemn entry into Rouen in 1550, which is still famous for the quality of its illustrations. In many cases, these local books proved to have a national market beyond Normandy, as demonstrated by their later reprinting in other cities.<sup>9</sup>

In effect, under the impetus of the Renaissance, Rouen's printing industry developed a symbiotic relationship with the city's cultural life.

8 Fabri, i; See Gosselin, 130ff, and Mellot, 'Régime des privilèges,' 138, for privileges in Rouen.

9 Du Gord editions culled from Brun's list of illustrated editions (105–317). There are a total of eighteen listed, but this does not include the known editions of Haudent and Du Val. See also Brun, 51, 93; Haudent; Du Val, 49, 57, 105, 109; *Entrée ... Henri II*.

While the majority of Rouen's publishing output continued to be professional and occasional works, Rouen's writers also provided original material that could be published under the protection of privilege by the city's printing presses, enabling the local industry to develop a specialty in contemporary vernacular works. In return, the printing industry provided an outlet for local authors, providing both the incentive for them to pursue their writing ambitions, and publicity that encouraged others to follow suit. As a result, in the 1540s and 1550s, Rouen enjoyed a kind of golden age of local culture, with three additional poetry competitions being developed in parallel with the traditional Puy of the Immaculate Conception at the same time as this expansion of published works by local authors (Reid, 'Literary Aspects,' 168–99). Rouen's cultural life and its printing industry, both in danger of being overshadowed by Paris and Lyon, formed a mutually reinforcing relationship that allowed them to thrive in the face of their dominant rivals.

A problem, however, was that those printers and writers who were most interested in the new Renaissance ideas also tended to be most interested in new religious ideas. As the Protestant movement gained strength in France during the 1550s, the authorities began to react and pursue its most prominent exponents – which included writers and printers. The poet Pierre du Val, who mixed very unorthodox religious ideas into his poetry, fled Rouen early in the decade (du Val, 71). Despite their publication of the works of the anti-reformist cleric Artus Desirée, the du Gord brothers were also suspected of reformist sympathies. Notably, they also republished Clément Marot's reformist translation of the Psalms, ironically using some of the same biblical illustrations that they used for anti-reform works of Desirée. Robert du Gord's career was ended when he was murdered in 1572 during Rouen's version of the Massacre of St Bartholomew (Lesens, 333). These types of attacks during the religious conflicts of the second half of the century created a kind of cultural chill that discouraged further experimentation with new ideas.

On the other hand, the book industries of Paris and Lyon were even more adversely affected by these developments. The most famous of the humanistic printers in Paris, Robert Estienne, left for the Protestant city of Geneva in 1550. In Lyon, a significant proportion of the city's most notable printers and publishers also left for nearby Geneva, in the process orienting their production more explicitly towards reformist religious texts rather than the Renaissance works of the mid-century (Higman, 'Levain,' 320–23, and 'Domaine,' 113–18).

Meanwhile, in Rouen a series of Catholic printers took up the production of contemporary vernacular works that the du Gordes had started. Printers such as Martin Le Megissier, the Mallard brothers, Nicolas Lescuyer, and Georges L'Oyselet printed the works of writers from around France and from Normandy itself (Aquilon, 'Réalités,' 362). At the same

time, Rouen's cultural life, depressed by the economic problems and the chill on cultural innovation caused by the war, gradually developed a new aesthetic more in tune with its provincial mind-set. Rouen's elite abandoned the Renaissance's philosophical and aesthetic experimentation, but integrated the Renaissance emphasis on the classics and its ideal of clarity into conservative themes of duty, loyalty, and religious devotion (Reid, 'Literary Aspects,' 211–15).

When the Wars of Religion ended in the 1590s, Rouen possessed a specialization in printing high-quality, small-format editions of contemporary vernacular literature, and a conservative but classical cultural style, which were both well suited to a nation eager to leave a civil war behind it. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Rouen's printing industry exploded in size. As pocket-sized editions of contemporary literary works became the most rapidly expanding sector of the French printing industry, Rouen's printers built on their experience to develop a dominance in this sector, publishing more of these works than either Paris or Lyon. Fully 40 per cent of the books printed in Rouen fit into this category.<sup>10</sup> Naturally, many of these books were the work of authors from elsewhere in France, but some continued to be the work of local authors from Rouen or from Normandy, and by this means the influence of the Norman literary style was distributed throughout France, becoming one of progenitors of the neoclassical style that was to dominate French culture throughout the seventeenth century. This process culminated in the career of the great French dramatist Pierre Corneille, a native of Rouen who lived there for most of his working life, and most of whose works were published in Rouen by the notable printer Laurent Maury.

Rouen's cultural life and printing industry profoundly affected each other throughout the first century of printing in the city. Initially, Rouen's cultural environment adversely affected the development of printing. With a traditional culture based on oral and manuscript transmission, situated outside the innovative Germany-Italy axis and lacking the authorial and editorial resources of a university, Rouen's printing developed late, and did not move beyond the basic professional market for many years. With the advent of more widespread Renaissance influence, however, the city's printing industry and cultural life found in each other a source of mutual reinforcement, enabling each other to develop a niche in the face of the dominance of Paris and Lyon. This niche, in high-quality but small-format versions of contemporary vernacular works, proved to be more resistant to the damages caused by thirty years of civil war than the more prestigious specializations of Lyon and Paris. Despite Rouen's difficulties during these years, the symbiosis between its printing industry and its literary life

10 The explosion of literary publishing in post-1600 Rouen is exhaustively described in Mellot, *L'édition rouennaise*, part 1, especially chapter 3, 115–69.



continued to mature, so that by the time the wars had ended, Rouen was poised to take a more prominent role in both fields of endeavour that it had ever done before.

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