

THE TRIUMPH OF THE ABBEY OF THE CONARDS:
SPECTACLE AND SOPHISTICATION IN
A ROUEN CARNIVAL¹

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In February, 1541, the main festive society in the French city of Rouen, the *Abbaye des Conards* (Abbey of the Conards), organized a spectacular carnival.² The celebrations began a couple of weeks before carnival itself, when the “Abbot”, the head of the Abbey, presided over a gathering of his council and subjects. Comic cardinals, princes, lords, dukes and abbots, with absurd titles such as *Frappecul* (smack-bottom), *Rien ne savait* (know-nothing) and *Platte bourse* (empty purse), witnessed their Abbot issue farcical decrees that were to govern the carnival period. On the Sunday before Lent, *dimanche gras*, came the centre-piece of the carnival, the great procession, which, it was claimed, included two thousand participants. It began with the Funeral of Commerce, who was carried on a black litter strewn with white tears, accompanied by children bearing candles and by his officers and servants, such as Credit and Hazard. The household and council of the Abbot followed, preparing the way for the Abbot himself, who rode surrounded by his cardinals. All were dressed in splendid costumes of red damask, with trains of green taffeta carried by children. The magnificent Abbot wore a miter encrusted with jewels, and rode a mule harnessed with gold trappings.

The rest of the procession consisted of men in costumes and masks grouped according to specific themes. Each group was accompanied by drummers, musicians, and torchbearers. Many of these groups,

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² For a discussion of the name “Abbey of the Conards,” see Natalie Davis, “The Reasons of Misrule,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 99. “Conard” is an insult derived from “con,” the female genitalia, and echoing “cornard,” a cuckold. The “Abbey” was, in fact, an association of laymen.

such as the twenty *estonnez du monde*, the astonished of the world, carried placards on which were written amusing or satirical verses, and at regular intervals they read out or distributed longer poems to the spectators. A few groups included carts displaying *tableaux-vivants*. The most elaborate of these was the *Lessive de l'Abbaye*, the Laundry of the Abbey, in which Nobility, the Church, Justice, and Poverty did the laundry, accompanied by Ambition, Avarice, Favour and other allegorical characters. Other groups of men were cross-dressed as women, such as sibyls, muses, ladies and village girls. After the procession was over, the participants dispersed in the streets for the evening, acting and dancing for the female spectators, who were *resjouys*, delighted, to see them. The Conards continued to celebrate in costume the next day, and on Tuesday, *mardi gras*, the Abbey held a public banquet for all Conards in the new Draper's Hall, at which the feasters were entertained by plays, music and other amusements.

The reason we know about the carnival of 1541 in so much detail is that the Abbey published a lengthy description of it later that year, entitled *Les triomphes de l'abbaye des Conards* (*The Triumphs of the Abbey of the Conards*, henceforth *Triumphes*). This remarkable document is one of the most detailed descriptions of a carnival in French, and one of the few that is in the voice of the organizers and participants themselves. Along with a few other publications by the Abbey, and descriptions of and references to the Conards by observers, it provides far more detail about carnival than is usually available to scholars.³

³ *Les triomphes de l'Abbaye des Conards* ed. Marc de Montifaud (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1874), 5–80, *passim* (henceforth *Triumphes*). This text describes the carnival of 1541 (modern dating), with additional material from the 1580s attached at the end. The edition is not particularly accurate, but it is sufficient for the purposes of this article. A copy of the original book, *Les triomphes de l'Abbaye des Conards sous le resveur en decimes Fagot Abbé des Conards, contenant les criees et proclamations faites, depuis son aduenement iusques à l'An present . . .* (Rouen: Nicolas Dugord, 1587) exists in the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen (BMR). The present article does no more than scratch the surface of this complex text, which is in desperate need of a new, scholarly edition. Other historians who have discussed the Abbey's carnival of 1541 are Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule"; Henry Heller, *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth Century France* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 1–9; André Corvisier, "Une société ludique au XVI^e siècle: l'Abbaye des Conards de Rouen," *Annales de Normandie* 27 (1975): 179–193; Jonathan Beck, *Théâtre et propagande aux débuts de la Réforme* (Geneva-Paris: Slatkine, 1986), especially, 53–61; and Charles Mazouer, "Spectacle et théâtre dans la chevauchée des Conards de Rouen au XVI^e siècle," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 13 (1988): 387–399. For the historical background of the Conards, see Dylan Reid, "Carnival in Rouen: A History of the *Abbaye des Conards*,"

The depth of description provided by this account of Rouen's carnival of 1541 can provide useful insight into the meaning and purpose of carnival. Since at least the sixteenth century, observers have struggled with a fundamental paradox regarding theater and other, more ritualized forms of performance such as carnival: do these performances support the mores of society, or do they undermine them?⁴ This question has continued to frame the interpretation of carnival in modern theory and scholarship. Was carnival a release of energy and tension by the populace, a safety valve which enabled the continued functioning of a structured, hierarchical society, or was it a disruptive force which threatened to destabilize that hierarchy and offer an alternative order? Historians who have studied carnival in more detail in recent decades have tended to conclude that it was, in fact, a bit of both; the safety valve/subversion question has started to appear overly restrictive as an interpretive framework.⁵ In the words of Edward Muir, these historians have found that

Carnival did not function in any single way, either reinforcing or subverting authority. Carnival revolved around an ongoing improvised social drama, played out in a highly creative and elastic fashion that evoked multiple meanings, which depended on changing contexts and conditions.⁶

One of the problems with the safety-valve/subversion question is that it interprets carnival primarily in terms of its relation to the

forthcoming in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. Sara Beam, "Farcical Theater and the Reformation of Manners in France, 1500–1650" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999) also deals with the Conards in some detail.

⁴ See Richard Trexler, ed., *Persons in Groups: Social Behavior as Identity Formation in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1985), Richard Trexler, "Introduction," 15–16; and Stephen Orgel, "The Spectacles of State," 101–122.

⁵ Davis, in "The Reasons of Misrule," 102–103, identified these two strains of interpretation. Davis sees Roger Caillois and Keith Thomas on the "safety valve" side of the question, and Victor Turner and Mikhail Bakhtin on the "subversive" side. She herself concludes with a compromise: "the carnival form can evolve so that it can act to both reinforce order and to suggest alternatives," 122–123. Other historians from Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1978), 201–204, to Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 60–61, who have examined the issue have come to the same general compromise. Edward Muir, "Carnival," in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul F. Grendler (New York: Scribner's, 1999), Vol. 1, 347–348, provides a recent summary of these two alternatives.

⁶ Muir, "Carnival," 348.

hierarchical social order of the time, and the social elite who dominated it. The degree of complexity that historians have uncovered in carnival over recent decades requires a less restrictive, more general approach that can encompass the “multiple meanings” Muir describes.

One possible solution is to approach carnival, in broad terms, as a means of expression for its participants, like any other form of performance. As with other forms of expressions, such as speech or fine arts, carnival was a channel for the complex and sometimes contradictory feelings and desires of its participants. The result could be straightforward or ironic, lightly entertaining or powerfully subversive, depending on the complex interaction between the intentions of the creators, the expectations of the audience, and the circumstances of the performance. Seeing carnival as a means of expression thus enables us to encompass the multiple and sometimes conflicting purposes and sentiments visible in carnival—joy, playfulness, entertainment, pride, statements of opinion, assertions of status and solidarity, conflict and discontent, subversion and support for the status quo. It can also encompass carnival’s wide variety of different audiences: those at the bottom as well as the top of the social hierarchy; women; outsiders to the city; and the participants themselves.

In the pages that follow, I will use two important elements of the Conards’ carnival of 1541, their use of spectacle and their use of aspects of “elite” culture, to explore some of the ways in which carnival served as a means of expression for its participants. The way these two elements were used in specific incidents of the carnival reveals their important role in the festivities, and sheds some light on the fundamental dynamics of carnival. I will focus on two aspects of each of these elements: music and costume for spectacle, and literary and visual references for elite culture. Spectacle and the use of elite culture also reinforced each other, and as part of this discussion I will bring their interaction into focus by exploring each one’s relationship to a form of elite festivity, the royal entry.

Such a discussion of spectacle and uses of elite culture will inevitably touch on two cultural strategies that have been widely discussed in relation to carnival: appropriation and parody. Both of these strategies involved integrating elements from elite culture into carnival and using them for the Conards’ own purposes. As with the safety valve/subversion dichotomy, however, the concepts of appropriation

and parody tend to focus attention on carnival's relation with the social elite, and emphasize the differences between them. In examining the Conards' use of spectacle, and their use of elite culture, I would like to show that in some ways the Conards also shared many assumptions and beliefs with Rouen's elite. They spoke a language of ritual that was common to all elements of Rouennais society. Appropriation and parody mingled with shared assumptions and language in a complex manner that addressed a variety of audiences, not just the elite, and reflected the varying motivations and sentiments of the individual Conards themselves.

These Conards were from a relatively distinctive and coherent social group within the city. The Abbey of the Conards was made up of artisans, minor officials, and small-scale merchants, men who earned their living primarily through the city-based activities of commerce, trade, or administration. These men, described in England at the time as "the middling sort", formed the backbone of civic life in sixteenth-century cities. They were heads of household, property owners and taxpayers. They were prosperous, independent, and often literate. As James Farr demonstrated in his study of this group in Dijon, they possessed a strong sense of their own honor and dignity. However, they exercised very little power within Rouen, a city dominated by wealthy merchants and royal officials.⁷

Although they formed an essential part of Rouen's economy and society, the artisans and traders who composed Rouen's middling sort did not have many opportunities to express their pride, status,

⁷ For the social status of the Conards, see Reid, "Carnival in Rouen." Beam, "Farcical Theater," 7–9, has found that the members of most other festive societies also came from this socio-economic stratum. For "the middling sort," see Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994), in particular the Introduction by Jonathan Barry, 1–27, and the articles by Keith Wrightson, "'Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England," 28–51, and Jonathan Barry, "Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Association and the Middling Sort," 84–112. For the sense of honor and dignity of this middling sort, see James Farr, *Hands of Honor: Artisans and their World in Dijon, 1550–1650* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). For Rouen's merchant class, see the studies of Michel Mollat, *Le commerce maritime normand à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1952), and Gayle K. Brunelle, *The New World Merchants of Rouen, 1559–1630* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1991); for Rouen's robe class, see Jonathan Dewald, *The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Magistrates of the Parlement of Rouen, 1499–1610* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). For Rouen's city council, see *Comptes-rendus des échevins de Rouen (1409–1701)*, ed. J. Félix (Rouen: A. Lestringant, 1890).

or opinions publicly and collectively, as most public ceremonies were organized and dominated by the civic elite. For instance, some of the Conards participated in the splendid spectacle of formal royal entry processions, as part of a large group of representative townsmen; but they had little say in the overall organization of the procession, the messages transmitted to the King through the displays along the way, or possibly even the design of their own costumes. Even within the procession, they were overshadowed by the elaborate set-pieces designed by the city's most learned churchmen and magistrates. The same was true of other civic rituals, such as the great religious processions on Ascension Day and Corpus Christi, or the annual poetry competition organized by the prestigious Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.⁸ Carnival, with its unofficial stature and tradition of license and excess, offered an opportunity to redress this imbalance. It also offered a prominent location, in the central streets and squares of the city, and a large and diverse audience. Those who watched carnival included a broad cross-section of the society in which the Conards lived: workers and journeymen, women of all classes, clergymen and officials, visitors from the countryside and other towns, nobles and even the King himself. Rouen's carnival was a phenomenon that welled up naturally from a prosperous, coherent and proud social group that needed an avenue of expression. In the following sections, I will explore two of the ways in which they made the most of their opportunity.

Spectacle

Spectacle was fundamental to the celebration of carnival throughout Europe. Even in the simplest rural celebrations, participants disguised their faces, dressed up, played music and lit fires and torches. In the historiography of carnival, however, the element of spectacle has tended to be overshadowed by other issues, in particular the ele-

⁸ For royal entries in Rouen, see Dylan Reid, "Literary Aspects of Urban Culture in Rouen, c. 1500–c. 1640" (M. Litt thesis, Oxford University, 1995), 251–272; for other civic processions, see *ibid.*, 23–28. Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 36, 48–49, 51–52, 63–64, has found a similar dominance of civic festivities by the urban elite in Ghent. In Ghent, however, this elite included prominent guildsmen, who in Rouen tended to be excluded from power. Their exclusion made the need for an alternate avenue of expression all the more pressing.

ment of satire. Carnival satire, such as the mockery of Church, Justice and Nobility in the Laundry of the Abbey described above, has held the attention of scholars because it was a striking and unusual public expression of popular discontent that was potentially subversive of the social order. Its presence demonstrates the significance and potential power of carnival celebrations. Yet spectacle, too, could be powerful and subversive, although in a more subtle way. The Conards used it to complement and enhance satire; but they also used spectacle to express sentiments other than dissatisfaction, sentiments such as pride in their work and assertion of their status within the community.

Music

In some ways, spectacle was even more fundamental to carnival than satire. In 1541, the Abbey almost decided to hold the carnival procession outside the walls of Rouen because the civic authorities had banned the playing of instruments in public in the city. To the Abbey, musical instruments were “the chimes and bells of the convent”, fundamental to drawing a large number of participants and spectators and creating a powerful spectacle in their carnival celebration. To get around the city ordinance, the Abbey appealed, in verse, to the Parlement of Rouen, the royal court of appeal, for permission to march with musical instruments (*trionpher en phiffres et tabours*). The Parlement granted them permission, but added a condition that was even worse: they could not wear masks at night. The Abbot considered this right to be the most important right (*liberté*) the Abbey possessed, the biggest draw in getting Conards to join the carnival procession in fine costume. Carnival could not be held without it, and the Abbey’s council decided to march in a neighboring city instead. The day was saved, however, when Jacques Sireulde, a Conard and usher in the Parlement (*bon conard . . . et bel huissier*), appealed the decision and secured the right to wear masks at night.⁹

⁹ *Triumphes*, 5–6 for the music decree. The description is somewhat obscured by the exaggeration and word-play of the narrative, but the “police si vile” responsible for the ban on music is probably a pun on “police civile,” which I believe refers to the city council. See *Triumphes*, 11–15 for the appeals to the Parlement.

This episode makes it clear that creating spectacle—making noise, wearing masks, brandishing light and wearing elaborate costumes—was fundamental to the celebration of carnival.¹⁰ It was not restrictions on their satirical activity, but rather on the degree of spectacle they could offer, that made them consider the drastic step of holding carnival outside the city. In fact, during the Wars of Religion later in the century, the Conards greatly reduced their satirical activity, but continued to hold successful and spectacular carnivals. Because the satirical and subversive elements of carnival are so intriguing, the spectacular aspect tends to get overshadowed in the relevant historiography; yet it is essential for a full understanding of carnival.

Such spectacle was not a commonplace, inoffensive phenomenon. A great gathering of people such as carnival was, in itself, an unusual event; but individual elements of carnival display were significant in themselves. This significance was demonstrated by the concern these forms of spectacle caused to those who were responsible for public order. The primary issue which threatened to impede the carnival of 1541 was music and noisemaking. In a crowded, compact city, playing music and making noise was an assertive act, which drew a large and animated crowd together. As a result, noisemaking such as the beating of drums in public was often forbidden by the authorities; for instance, in 1558, the Parlement ordered a theater troupe to stop trying to attract an audience by beating drums through the city.¹¹

The city ordinance in place in 1541 banning the playing of instruments in the city was no doubt a result of similar concerns; but the same factors that concerned the authorities about noise-making made it essential to the success of carnival. Playing instruments drew together an excited audience, and gave the event a sense of occasion. Deprived of their ability to advertise their grand procession in the weeks leading up to carnival by marching through the town playing instruments, the Conards instead found a way to advertise their carnival legally while thumbing their noses defiantly at the city government. They marched to the suburb of Saint-Sever across the Seine from Rouen, dressed in costume and accompanied by a mul-

¹⁰ Bernard Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIV^e au XVI^e siècles* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1982), 270–274, has described this exuberant spectacle as “gaspillage joyeux.”

¹¹ ADSM Reg. Parl. 24 Oct. 1556.

titude of flaming torches. There, they were met by their audience, the common people (*menu peuple*), armed with little bells with which they made "more noise than the Greek artillery at the capture of Troy". Each of the Conards was armed with a whistle, with which they created a "diabolical melody", and, making an incredible racket, they all marched to the end of the bridge into Rouen, right under the gates of the city.¹² The Conards were, in effect, mounting a *charivari*, a cacophony of rough music under the doors of the city whose leaders had violated their traditions. They were implying a threat to break down the doors unless they were bought off.¹³ Once they had successfully appealed the city ordinance, the Conards reverted to more melodious instruments. In the carnival procession itself, each separate group of marchers was accompanied by drums, fifes, and trumpets. The importance that was attached to the sense of occasion created by these instruments is evident in the manner in which they were meticulously enumerated by the narrator.¹⁴ Far from being merely window-dressing, music and noisemaking was an assertive, potentially dangerous form of public spectacle that pushed the boundaries of comfortable behavior within the city.

Costume

While the carnival of 1541 began with a burst of noise, it is another form of spectacle that dominates the text of the *Triumphes*. A significant portion of the description of the carnival of 1541 is dedicated to detailed descriptions of the elaborate costumes worn by the participants. These descriptions are given even in the apparently satirical sections. For instance, the *estonnez du monde* rode by holding an upside-down world in their hands, while dressed in robes of white satin pointed with gold, decorated with a lion's head and surrounded by flames made of embroidered crimson satin. The splendor of this

¹² "tels sons sont les timbres et cloches du couvent," *Triumphes*, 6. For the noisy march to the city, where the "menu peuple . . . faisoient plus de bruyt que ne fist l'artillerie des Grecs à la prise de Troye" and the Conards "faisoyent une melodie diableuse," see *Triumphes*, 8–9.

¹³ For a discussion of *charivari*, see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 98–104.

¹⁴ For instance, the Abbot and his cardinals were preceded by "quinze tabours, cinq phiffres et neuf trompettes," *Triumphes*, 37. For other examples of accompanying musicians, see *Triomphe*, 29, 39, 45, 50, 53, 54, 56, 58, 61, 64, 68, 69.

costume was just as important as the absurd and satirical two-line poems bemoaning the corrupt state of the world that they carried over their horses' rear ends.¹⁵

The most magnificent costume of all was worn by the Abbot himself. Like his cardinals, he was dressed in a robe of red damask, with a train of green taffeta that was five and a half feet long (signifying, according to the narrator of the *Triumphes*, the power of his loins (*la puissance de ses reins*)). On his head he wore a jeweled miter; his fingers were covered in jeweled rings; and the buckles of his mule's harness were made of gold. Although some of the description indulges in carnivalesque excess (in particular the description of his "digits, index fingers, thumbs and little fingers, so furnished with good large diamonds, rubies and other jewels . . ."), for the most part the descriptions of costumes, in particular of cloth, are detailed and realistic, consistent in tone and vocabulary with descriptions of costume in other civic events by other observers.¹⁶ Whether or not the jewels were real, the important issue was the overall impression the costume created, and the narrator claimed that the Abbot was so splendid, he could be compared to a Sultan of Babylon or a King of Persia.

This costume was not merely meaningless show, however. It was made up of expensive, prestigious materials that were normally the preserve of aristocrats and other members of the elite. For instance, in a city such as Bologna, which instituted sumptuary legislation in the late fifteenth century, the following items were specifically restricted to members of the city's elite, and forbidden to the major and minor artisans who were the Conards' contemporaries in the city: silks such as damask and taffeta; wearing long trains of cloth on garments; cloth colored with expensive red dye; and the wearing of extensive amounts of jewelry. Even in a city without sumptuary legislation,

¹⁵ *Triumphes*, 64.

¹⁶ "doigts, indices, poulces et auriculaires, si fournis de bons et gros diamans, rubis et autres pierreries. . . ." It is worth noting that the Abbot wore a combination of clerical colors, cardinal's red and bishop's green. For the Abbot's costume, *Triumphes*, 36–37. Compare to the description by an outside observer of the costumes worn by some of the Conards in a religious procession in 1542, from *Deux chroniques de Rouen*, ed. A. Héron (Paris-Rouen: 1900), 165: "six hommes vestuz de cottes d'armes de satin violet ou avoit ung soleil devant et ung derriere . . . tout de brouderie, et six aultres vestuz de cottes d'armes de veloux pers par semblable aiant ung soleil, et le reste semées de fleurons d'or. . . ." See also the costumes worn by artisans and merchants in the Entry of Henry II (see below).

such as Rouen, the elite nature of these garments and ornaments would have been recognized; and the Abbot's costume encroached specifically upon each of these aristocratic purviews.¹⁷ The encroachment was not accidental—many of the Conards were textile workers or merchants who knew very well the significance of different colors and qualities of cloth. The Abbot's splendid costume, and those of the other Conards in the celebration, were conscious assertions of status and honor barely disguised amidst the absurdity of carnival, and the narrator of the *Triumphes* made sure that his readers were aware of it.¹⁸

In its emphasis on the splendor of the costumes worn, and in the vocabulary used to describe them, the *Triumphes* is strikingly reminiscent of the descriptions of the spectacular processions that accompanied the Kings of France during their formal entries into Rouen. Some of the wealthier Conards who participated in the Abbey's

¹⁷ For sumptuary legislation in Bologna, see Diane Owen Hughes, "Earrings for Circumcision: Distinction and Purification in the Italian Renaissance City," in *Persons in Groups*, 166–167. The evident pride of the Conards in their magnificent costume is interesting when compared to the satirical attacks by carnival writers on women who dressed extravagantly above their station. This was a common theme of the *Mère Folle* of Dijon, (see Juliette Valcke, "La satire sociale dans le répertoire de la Mère Folle de Dijon," in *Carnival and the Carnivalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theater*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Wim Hüsker (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 154–157), and of the Conard Jacques Sireulde, *Les abus et superfluités du monde* (Rouen: Abraham Coustourier, n.d.), who was, ironically, nicknamed *le bel huissier* for his attractive appearance. These attacks again indicate the shared belief throughout society that luxurious clothing constituted a claim to status—a status the male participants in carnival aspired to, but did not want to share with women.

¹⁸ See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2–7, on the power of clothing to shape identity; and Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 22–29, for a discussion of the medieval relationship between clothing and status. Jacques Heers, *Fêtes, jeux et joutes dans les sociétés d'occident à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Montreal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1971), 13–15, also discusses the importance of festive costume as a marker of social status. This costume can be seen as part of a broader phenomenon, laid out by Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), xix, xxi and *passim*, in which public ritual behavior is a fundamental method through which urban inhabitants assert and negotiate the values and honor of their own group within the city, and of the city as a whole. While Trexler often mentions costume and spectacle, notably as part of carnival, for instance in *Public Life*, 226–233, 235–237, his focus is on ritual actions, and he does not really integrate spectacle as such into his analysis. Given its prominence in the quotations he provides about Florentine carnivals, further exploration of the issue of spectacle might provide a useful additional dimension to his sophisticated analysis of Florentine ritual.

carnival celebrations also participated, as representatives of the city's citizens, in the elaborate entry of Henry II into Rouen in 1550.¹⁹ Like the narrator of the *Triumphes*, the narrator of the royal entry lingers delightedly over the description of the costumes worn by these representative citizens, taking a full page to describe the colors, materials and decorations of their costume in detail: white and crimson velour pointed with gold braid, gold buttons and chain, pearls and embroidery.²⁰ These costumes matched in splendor those worn by the senior officials, clergymen and magistrates of the city in the same procession. The richness of the costumes purchased and worn by these artisans and merchants in the royal entry confirms their ability to create the kind of splendid clothing described in the carnival of 1541. Of course, the descriptions of both the royal entry and the carnival may have idealized the effect of the costumes they describe; nevertheless, the similarity of description demonstrates that they were operating in the same basic terms.

The rich costume worn by these Conards as part of the royal entry was certainly a sign of their pride and dignity, but it placed them within the civic and national hierarchy, subordinate to the city magistrates, royal officials and court aristocracy, in a procession designed by clerics and magistrates drawn from the city's elite.²¹ After the official entry, however, the Conards got an opportunity to display themselves on their own terms. Henry II, having heard about the Conards' carnival procession, asked to see it for himself. They paraded for him the next day, capping the spectacle off with a performance of the satirical "Farce of the Calves" (*La farce des veaulx*). The narrator of the royal entry, probably the erudite poet and canon Claude Chappuys, was most impressed by the way the Conards entertained the king and his court "by diverse and sumptuous costumes and mounts, by a train of triumphal floats, by an infinity of torches, by new inventions, subtle and enigmatic sayings, and by

¹⁹ Three of the eleven Conards listed in ADSM Reg. Parl. 27 March 1541 (old style dating) appear in the city council's list of *enfants d'honneur*, representatives of the city's commercial classes, for the entry of Henry II (BMR, Archives Communales, 1 Oct. 1550).

²⁰ *Entrée à Rouen du Roi Henri II et de la Reine Catherine de Médicis en 1550* (Rouen: Espérance Cagnard, 1885; original edition Rouen: 1551), Jiv (*sic*) and *passim*.

²¹ See Reid, "Literary Aspects of Urban Culture," 192–194, 263–268 for discussion of the organizers of this entry.

witty moralities".²² It is notable that Chappuys was as impressed by the spectacle of the procession as he was by the wit of the Conards' performances.

In terms of pure sumptuousness, the carnival described in the *Triumphes* could not match the richness of the costumes worn by the city's elite in a royal entry, or the spectacles subsidized by the city government. The shared emphasis on costume in carnival and royal entry, however, reveals some fundamental commonalities between the attitudes and values of the Conards and the civic and national elites. When they dressed up in spectacular costumes and masks, and marched accompanied by torchbearers and musicians (who also accompanied the royal entry), the Conards were asserting a claim to status and dignity in a language that was shared with everyone else in their society.²³

Furthermore, even if they could not match the royal entry itself in richness, the audience for the Conards in 1550 was as large as the audience for the King's entry itself.²⁴ The Conards possessed something notably lacking in the royal entry—humor, irony and satire. By combining spectacle with wit, the Conards created a show that was as attractive to the onlookers as the extravagant display put on by Rouen's elite.

Sophistication: Uses of "Elite" Culture

The Conards also enhanced their carnival by making use of elements that were normally considered "elite" or "literary". These elements

²² *Entrée à Rouen du Roi Henri II*, R1v. "par diuerse sumptuosité d'accoustrementz & monture, Par traynée de Chars de triumphe, Par une infinité de flambeaux, Par nouuelles inuentions, Subtilz & problemes dictons, & Par plaisantes moralitez." The author was probably the erudite poet and canon Claude Chappuys, according to Margaret McGowan, "Form and Themes in Henri II's Entry into Rouen," *Renaissance Drama* (new series) 1 (1968): 249. For the farce, see *La farce des veaux jouée devant le Roy en son entrée à Rouen* (Paris: Techener, 1834; original edition Rouen: 1550); see also Philippe Deschamps, *Un épisode de l'entrée de Henri II à Rouen: La chevauchée des Conards et la "Farce des veaux"* (Discours de réception à l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-lettres et Arts de Rouen, Fécamp: L. Durand & fils, 1972).

²³ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 86, uses this idea of a "language of festivity"; Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, 62–69, discusses Renaissance clothing as a kind of language.

²⁴ *Entrée à Rouen du Roi Henri II*, R1v.

were part of the culture of Rouen's wealthy and educated canons and magistrates, and especially of the royal court and the writers and artists it patronized. In seeking to understand their use of elite culture, it is important to be aware that the ritual language of the Conards' carnival was, in itself, not far removed from elite culture. We have already seen that the two shared a common fascination and respect for the significance of costume. They also shared many other assumptions about the form and significance of various types of ritual action. Most significant urban events, whether carnivalesque, religious, civic or royal, took the form of a procession through the most important landmarks of the city. Both carnival and royal entries elaborated these processions using floats with *tableaux vivants* whose meaning was explained in accompanying verses. Both preceded these floats with sets of musical instruments such as trumpets and drums. Carnival shared with religious processions the extensive use of light to enhance their sense of occasion—tapers for religious processions, torches for carnival. Finally, all festive events ended with a banquet that reaffirmed the solidarity of those who had taken part.²⁵

The Conards did not, however, simply unconsciously repeat standard ritual behaviors which they shared with the rest of sixteenth century French society. They sometimes manipulated them for their own purposes. For instance, the Abbey's Funeral of Commerce was an elaborate ceremony which paralleled the public funeral of a dignitary, such as the grand funeral of the Seneschal of Normandy, Louis de Brezé, which had taken place in Rouen ten years earlier. Like a formal grand funeral, the Funeral of Commerce was led by a standard-bearer, followed by the deceased's domestics and then a band of orphans in mourning carrying lit tapers. The litter bearing the deceased was followed by the members of his household—only in this case, they were allegorical characters such as Nobility, Church, Labour and Credit—and his dependents, such as Loss, Pain, Worry and Hazard. An elite ritual—the formal public funeral of a significant personage—was transformed into a vehicle for expressing the economic concerns of Rouen's commercial classes.²⁶

²⁵ For Rouen, see Reid, "Literary Aspects of Urban Culture," 41–47; for France in general, see Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France*, 270–273.

²⁶ *Triumphes*, 30–34; *Deux Chroniques de Rouen*, 134–144.

Textual Uses of Elite Culture: Rhétoriciens and Rabelais

The commonalities between carnival and “elite” events extended beyond ritual actions, to include the style of the texts that described or accompanied them. The dominant style of the poems the Conards published and distributed was essentially that of the farces and moralities that thrived at the same time in the squares, fairs and makeshift theaters of France’s cities. Verses were usually written in simple rhyming couplets; occasionally, they took on more complex fixed forms, such as the *dizain* and the *ballade*. Much of the humor involved elaborate word-play, verbal acrobatics and punning, while moral messages were conveyed through allegorical characters, such as the figures of Avarice, Faith, etc. who did the washing in the Laundry of the Abbey, and the dependents of Commerce who attended his funeral. Yet many of these elements—fixed forms, word-play, use of allegorical characters—were also characteristic of the *rhétoricien* style of high literature, which had flourished in the early sixteenth century. It was only just in the process of being superseded by the Renaissance style in 1541, and it was still dominant in provincial towns such as Rouen. The prestigious *Puy* of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, a poetry contest in honor of the Virgin Mary sponsored by Rouen’s civic elite, gave prizes for poems in traditional fixed forms such as the *ballade*, which could involve extensive verbal acrobatics. Meanwhile, royal entries into Rouen were dominated by allegorical characters transmitting moral messages.²⁷

It was not a great stretch for the Conards to borrow directly from elite culture, given that the style of the Conards’ carnival writings was not far removed from the style of France’s elite poets and authors. The *Triumphes* is spiced with a variety of references to “high” literature, including brief references to chivalric romances, to the Bible, and to classical literature, such as the references to “mirror of Socrates” and the siege of Troy cited earlier. At one point, the Abbot proclaimed the appointment of a new cardinal to the public in macaronic Latin, parodying the usual, serious, form of such a text.²⁸

²⁷ See Reid, “Literary Aspects of Urban Culture,” 14–15, 125ff. For the *Puy* see Dylan Reid, “Moderate Devotion, Mediocre Poetry and Magnificent Food: The Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Rouen,” *Confraternitas* 7:1 (1996): 3–10. Examples of the use of the *ballade* form in the *Triumphes* include, 17–18, 51–52, 73–75; *dizains* can be found at, 15, 67–68.

²⁸ *Triumphes*, 6 (chivalric), 69–73 (biblical), 9–10 (latin proclamation).

The Conards' interaction with François Rabelais, a sophisticated author associated with royal and aristocratic patrons, was more complex. Rabelais drew on popular literature as an element in his work, and as a result he struck a chord with the Conards. There are two clear Rabelaisian references in the text of the *Triumphes*, at the beginning and at the end. The Funeral of Commerce, the first big set-piece of the procession, was led by a horseman carrying an ensign declaring "Alcofibras said it well" (*Alcofibras le disoit bien*); "Alcofibras" was the pseudonym used by Rabelais when he published *Pantagruel* and other works. At the end of the carnival festivities, during the banquet held on Mardi gras, a lector read out passages from Rabelais' *Pantagruel* to the assembled diners, in a parody of the monastic practice of reading out loud from the Bible or other worthy texts at dinner.²⁹ The Conards not only felt that Rabelais expressed what they had to say, but were also eager to spread his wisdom to their fellows. The influence of Rabelais in the *Triumphes* may go beyond these simple references, however. The description of the carnival is written in a style strongly reminiscent of Rabelais. As in Rabelais, there are cases of extensive comic listing, such as the twenty-two musical instruments of every conceivable type that the Conards cannot play because of the city council ordinance. His influence is also suggested by the absurdly exact measurements, such as the distance between the rural parish of Saint Julien and Rouen: "four leagues nine feet four inches six and a half lines, in abbot's measure". Furthermore, the general tone of the description of carnival is Rabelaisian: exaggerated and absurd, constantly punning, always using two words where one would do.³⁰ Of course, it is known that Rabelais was himself influenced by popular literature. It may be that in part the *Triumphes* is simply an example of the kind of literature that shaped Rabelais' prose style. Yet the respect and enthusiasm for Rabelais on the part of the Conards is clear, and the stylistic parallels are strong. It may well be that Rabelais was, in turn, exert-

²⁹ *Triumphes*, 30, 79. For Rabelais' use of popular motifs, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

³⁰ For listing, see *Triumphes*, 5-6, compared to François Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, in *Rabelais, oeuvres complètes*, ed. Guy Demerson (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 317 (a list of game hunted) or 348 (a list of hot springs); for measurements, *Triumphes*, 5, "quatre stades neuf pieds quatre pouces six lignes et demie, mesure d'abbé," compared to Rabelais, 223, where a drought lasted "XXXVI mois, troys sepmaines, quatre jours, treze heures et quelque peu davantage."

ing an influence on the popular literature from which he originally drew inspiration. Perhaps Rabelais' use of popular styles had alerted the Conards to the unrealized possibilities of their activities, and helped to inspire them to the remarkable sophistication of the *Triumphes*.³¹

Visual Uses of Elite Culture: The Triumph

The most fascinating and sustained borrowing from elite culture in the carnival of 1541 lay in the concept of the triumph itself. The concept of a real or allegorical triumphal procession, derived from classical art and revived in Italy by Petrarch's *Trionfi* and Mategna's depiction of the *Triumphs of Caesar*, was very popular among Rouen's humanists and civic elite. From the 1520s onwards, decorative art-work in the city often depicted this theme. A mural in the first stone *hôtel* in Rouen, the Hôtel de Bourgtheroulde, portrayed Petrarch's *Trionfi*. In the church of Saint Vincent, the Triumph of the Virgin was depicted in a spectacular series of stained glass windows. When it came time to organize the entry ceremonies for the new Queen, Eleanor of Austria, in 1532, Rouen's city council decided to turn art into reality. The traditional royal procession into the city was transformed into a Renaissance triumph. Richly decorated chariots carried classical gods—Mercury, Juno and Pallas Athena—and allegorical characters—Honor, Triumph and Renown. Everything—chariots, armor, costumes, musical instruments—was decorated in an "antique" style typical of the Renaissance.³²

Nine years later, in 1541, the Conards decided to turn their carnival procession into a triumph of their own. The word is used, not

³¹ Burke, *Popular Culture*, 62, discusses a similar process for Rabelais over a period of centuries; the example of the Conards suggests the back-and-forth influence may have been more immediate. See also Peter Burke, "Learned Culture and Popular Culture in Renaissance Italy," in Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997), 124–135, for a discussion of such reciprocal influence between different cultural strata in Italian culture.

³² See Reid, "Literary Aspects of Urban Culture," 253, 260–263; also articles by E. Chirol, "La Renaissance à Rouen" and "L'hôtel de Bourgtheroulde," and F. Perrot, "Le vitrail à Rouen," in *Connaitre Rouen* (Rouen: 1970); and *Les entrées de Éléonore d'Autriche Reine de France et du Dauphin fils de François I dans la ville de Rouen au mois de février 1531*, ed. André Pottier (Rouen: Henry Boissel, 1866; original edition Rouen: n.d.). See Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450–1650* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984; first edition 1973), 44–47, for background on the triumph tradition.

only in the title of the text, but also in the poems and descriptions of the carnival procession, such as their appeal to the Parlement to be allowed to “triumph during these festive days” (*trionpher ces haut jours*). Like the triumph of the Queen in 1532, the Conards processed in coherently costumed groups whose focus was their leader, the Abbot, and his nobility and household, accompanied by spectacular floats and explanatory devices. That their intention to appropriate the concept of the triumph was deliberate is most evident in “The Laundry of the Abbey”, which paralleled the triumphal chariots of the entry of 1532. Like the triumph in the Queen’s entry, the Abbey’s laundry consisted of a series of carts decorated in a classical style:

In magnificent pomp and triumph, seven chariots built with skillful architecture in the form of antique theaters [were] subtly driven by certain instruments in the chariots, which were hidden by their adornments and golden cameos. There were well-adorned cornices, with their very artful friezes and architraves, and at the bottom a rich molding, that followed the higher cornice.³³

The vocabulary used—the way the *chariots* were *enrichis*, decorated with *mouleurs* and *frises* in an *antique* style, surmounted by a *chaire* on which the allegorical character sat—is the same as in the triumphal entry of the Queen in 1532.³⁴ As in the Queen’s entry, each cart carried an allegorical female figure, elaborately dressed with accoutrements such as a laurel wreath or wings, whose title was engraved on the side of the cart, and whose meaning was explained by an accompanying poem. The difference was that these allegorical figures had satirical names—Church, Nobility, Justice, Poverty, Ambition, Simony, and so on; and rather than presiding over an elegant triumph, each of these splendidly attired figures was doing their part of the laundry.³⁵

The echo of the royal entry was completed by the following group in the procession. Four men representing the four estates led a lit-

³³ “en grande magnificence de pompe et triomphe, sept chariots faits par bon art d’architecture en forme de theatres d’antique, conduits subtilement par certains instrumens estans dedans lesdits chariots, qui n’estoyent veuz pour les enrichissemens et syrages d’iceux. Y avoit corniches fort bien enrichis, avec leurs frises et arquitraves de grand art, et au bas une solebasse ou mouleure fort riche, suivant la corniche haute;” *Triumphes*, 45.

³⁴ See *Les entrées de Éléonor d’Autriche . . . 1531*, no pagination: the chariots of Mercury and Pallas.

³⁵ *Triumphes*, 13, 46–53.

the square chariot, decorated with tapestries and covered with a *ciel ou poile moult riche* ("very rich canopy") held up by *quatre piliers d'antique* ("four antique pillars"). In it were a pope, emperor, king and fool, tossing the world between them like a game, "so that it suffered greatly at their hands". A *poile* or *ciel* was a distinctive piece of ritual apparatus, the ceremonial cloth held over the person of the King by four local notables during his royal entry into a city. This scene, with its three rulers and a fool covered by the *poile*, held up by pillars decorated in the "antique" style, was a clear parody of the King's role in a triumphal royal entry. Rather than portraying a single source of power and authority, as in a triumph, however, the scene portrayed multiple rulers as a source of instability governed by whim.³⁶

Interpretations of the Uses of Elite Culture

The Conards' uses of elite culture can be interpreted in a number of ways. One interpretation sees this kind of phenomenon as a form of appropriation, in which popular culture takes elements of elite culture but transforms or adapts them, whether consciously or unconsciously, to suit popular attitudes and achieve popular purposes, thus in a sense making them its own.³⁷ A more radical interpretation, derived from Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque in Rabelais, sees these kinds of borrowings as a form of subversive parody in which elite culture is brought down to earth, degraded and transformed by being infused with themes and motifs derived from the body and the material world: "all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images".³⁸ These two interpretations have

³⁶ *Triumphes*, 53, "de sorte qu'il eust beaucoup à souffrir entre leurs mains." For the *poile/ciel* in royal entries, see Bernard Guenée and Françoise Lehoux, *Les entrées royales françaises de 1328 à 1515* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1968), 13–15, 19–20. The cart may have been an attack on the king of France's enemies—the pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, the king of England—but the fact that they are taking his place in the triumph suggests a satirical comment on the monarch's ability to keep France safe from her enemies.

³⁷ See Roger Chartier's discussion of the concept of appropriation in Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 10–14; Davis, "Printing and the People," in *Society and Culture*, 209ff., esp. 225, and Burke, *Popular Culture*, 60, 122–124 described this process without applying a specific term to it.

³⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 370. For his full discussion, see 309ff., 370ff. Bakhtin's complex interpretation includes a belief that such parody "renews" the

superseded the more traditional “mimetic” interpretation, which saw popular borrowings as simply inferiors crudely mimicking their betters.³⁹ By demonstrating a certain distance and difference of purpose in popular uses of elite culture, theories of appropriation and parody raised the status of popular culture by granting it a will and intelligence of its own. As we have seen with the issue of costume, however, to some extent the Abbey of the Conards actually shared a common cultural language with France’s elite culture. The Conards do not, in fact, fit comfortably into the category of “popular culture”, and in many ways they overlapped the culture of Rouen’s elite.⁴⁰ It is therefore possible to modernize the mimetic interpretation if we suppose that, in some of their apparent borrowings, the Conards were simply speaking a language they shared with the elite, as opposed to distancing themselves or crudely miming. If the use of elements of elite culture is approached, initially, as contributing to the middling sort’s ability to express themselves, each of these interpretations can be given its due as the full complexity of the Conards’ relation to elite culture emerges.

In some of the cases discussed above, there is certainly an element of Bakhtinian parody—of taking an official form and bringing it down to earth. The transformation of a classical triumph into a washing day evidently fits this interpretation, as does the transformation of royal authority into a game of catch. Royal entries were a demonstration of power and status by the civic elite, which reproduced the urban and national hierarchy in procession form. By showing that they could reproduce the same effect, and then applying it to such a menial task as laundry, or the whimsical activity of a game, the Conards were taking the sting out of this ceremonial assertion of authority. In some sense, by bringing the rituals of authority down to earth they made it easier to ritually establish their own status in relation to the civic elite.⁴¹

object of degradation, but a full Bakhtinian interpretation of the *Triumphes* would require a closer reading of the text than is possible here.

³⁹ See Burke, *Popular Culture*, 58; Davis, “The Reasons of Misrule,” 102.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the Conards and cultural categorization, see Reid, “Carnival in Rouen,” where I propose that the Abbey of the Conards is best understood as part of a specifically urban culture.

⁴¹ See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 145ff., for his interpretation of abuse and insult as part of the carnivalesque.

There is also an element of appropriation, of using and transforming an elite format for their own purposes, in some of the elements described above. In the Laundry episode, the Conards are using the rhetoric of the triumph, which normally possesses no irony, to make a satirical point about the groups that dominated French society. In this, their purpose is distinct from the simultaneous act of bringing the format of the triumph down to earth, which could have been accomplished without the satirical message. In the episode of the Funeral of Commerce, by contrast, there is little indication of any intention to mock the format of the grand funeral. There is no vulgar imagery of the body or the material world. Rather, the satirical point about the economy, an issue close to the hearts of the artisans and merchants who were the members of the Abbey, was very serious. Rather than Bakhtinian parody, it is a case of straightforward appropriation, of transforming the ritual of the grand funeral into a vehicle for political comment.

To some extent, the Conards' uses of elements of elite culture were also straightforward attempts to make their carnival more sophisticated and effective. The familiar, dramatic funeral format was being used to drive home the political message in a more memorable manner. Likewise, the elaborate decoration of the triumphal carts of the Laundry of the Abbey was not simply ironic. It was also a means of supplementing the spectacle discussed earlier, the "magnificent pomp and triumph" that the narrator boasts about while emphasizing the richness of the chariots. More significantly, the Conards' use of the culture of Rouen's elite was a demonstration of their sophistication. The use of "antique" style decorations and the classical architectural terms and elements that were the basis of the Renaissance style (*corniches, frises, arquitraves, mouleures*) showed that the Conards were able to reproduce the new style of the civic elite.⁴² This message was conveyed again when the Conards processed for Henry II right after his magnificent official entry, once more using "triumphal chariots" to impress the Renaissance sensibilities of the narrator and the court.⁴³ In this sense, their use of elite elements

⁴² According to Strong, *Art and Power*, 46, decorations "à l'antique" were key identifiers of a Renaissance triumph.

⁴³ Strong, *Art and Power*, 47, describes Henry II's entry into Rouen as "a complete re-enactment of a Roman imperial triumph."

was hardly appropriation, because such spectacle was already part of their own language. After all, the sophisticated Renaissance trappings designed by the elite for the royal entries had actually been made by Rouen's craftsmen, including no doubt many of the Conards. They were delivering a similar message, in the same language of triumph and Renaissance style, as the civic elite themselves.⁴⁴

Borrowings from literary and artistic culture were, in part, a way of enhancing the effect of carnival. The reproduction of the triumphal style in carnival, and the integration of elements of elite literature and ritual, was an assertion of status through a demonstration of the Conards' sophistication, their mastery of the culture of the elite. Of course, it was easier to rise to the level of elite sophistication when it had already been brought it down to earth. Thus Bakhtinian parody, appropriation and straightforward sophistication worked together to assert the status and express the sentiments of the Conards.

Conclusion: Audiences

It is easy to see how the spectacle and the use of elite culture described in this article were directed towards Rouen's elite, but even within this relationship carnival expression was complex. It could take the form of opposition, through satirical attacks on political authority, but it also made a claim to match the elite and be included in it, through the ability to reproduce elite spectacle and work within the terms elite culture. It was at once exclusive and inclusive.

The carnival was not simply a reaction to the elite, however. If we approach carnival as a form of expression that emerged naturally from a prosperous and confident social group, we can explore the full complexity of the carnival's messages. Naturally, the middling sort's relationship to various elites was a dominant theme in their lives, and thus played an important role in carnival. Yet carnival was also directed at other audiences. If the display of spectacle and sophistication was partially intended to show the elite they

⁴⁴ Arnade, *Realms of Ritual*, 60–61, says that in Ghent as well, carnival took the form of a "clear parody of standard entry ceremonies," which, according to Arnade, likewise demonstrated that all levels of society were speaking the same cultural language.

could be matched, it was also intended to impress the middling sort's inferiors in Rouen's social structure. After the Abbot made his proclamation in Latin, we are told that the *menu peuple*—the common people—were *esbahis*, astonished, to see the Abbot display such learning. Even allowing for carnivalesque exaggeration, the intention to impress through their mastery of this elite language is clear.⁴⁵ The rich spectacle and costumes of the carnival were equally intended to impress the common people with the wealth and status of the craftsmen and merchants for whom many of them probably worked. Yet the Conards' message to the *menu peuple* of the city was not just one of superiority. There was also a sense of fellow-feeling, as when the common people joined with the Conards in their noisy demonstration at the gates of the city. In some sense the Conards felt themselves to be spokesmen for all of the powerless in Rouen society, and in their procession they spoke in the name of the people in general, the "Pauvre Commun", in the face of the powerful and corrupt.⁴⁶ Their satirical messages were conveyed on behalf of their social inferiors as well as themselves. As with the elite, the message of the carnival to the city's common people was complex, both an exclusive demonstration of superiority and an inclusive statement of commonality.

Carnival expression was also directed at women, all women in general but especially the women of their own social stratum who were potential marriage partners for bachelor Conards. The displays of skill and splendor by the Conards—the sophistication, wit and daring of their poetry and set-pieces, the richness and vibrancy of their costumes—were in part demonstrations of masculine prowess designed to impress the women of the town. During the procession, Conards gave bags of sweets and witty poems to the women who were watching from shops and windows, and showed off their horsemanship to them. Afterwards, they traveled from house to house in their costumes, especially visiting those houses with many women in them, acting and dancing to impress them.⁴⁷ For many Conards, the city's women were probably a far more significant audience than their social superiors or inferiors.

The carnival was also intended for outsiders, whether they were from the rural hinterland or from other cities. When the country

⁴⁵ *Triumphes*, 11.

⁴⁶ See *Triumphes*, 31, 33, the *Lessive* (46–53) and the *Prophetes* (69–75).

⁴⁷ *Triumphes*, 76–77.

gentleman Gilles de Gouberville spent a winter in Rouen, one of only two events he thought worthy of recording in his journal was the carnival procession of the Conards.⁴⁸ For these outsiders, the Conards were conveying a message for the entire city, elite, middling sort and common people together. The wealth and sophistication displayed by the city's middling sort reflected the wealth, pride and status of the city as a whole. When the Conards paraded for the King and court in 1550, they were not only showing off the middling sort to the monarchy; they were also showing off the glory of Rouen by comparison to Paris and the other cities of the Kingdom. Such a display by the city's middling sort boosted the status of the whole city, including Rouen's elite, in relation to their social rivals and superiors in the capital and at the court. That Rouen's elite felt this pride is shown by the glowing description of the Conards' procession by the narrator of Henry II's entry, the cathedral canon Claude Chappuys; it was echoed forty years later by the canon Noël Taillepie, who included a description of the Abbey as part of his account of the noteworthy aspects of the city of Rouen.⁴⁹

Finally, and most importantly, the Conards' carnival was directed at themselves, a celebration with their colleagues of their own prosperity, their skill, their sophistication, their exuberance, and their wit.⁵⁰ It is significant that, though their carnival began as a public procession that passed through significant civic spaces shared by all the inhabitants of Rouen, it ended in a space that was indubitably their own, the splendid new Draper's Hall.⁵¹ When a Conard read from *Pantagruel* at their Mardi gras banquet in this hall, there were no women, commoners, members of the elite, or outsiders present. They listened to Rabelais because they shared his laughter, not because they wanted to impress anyone. Likewise, when they dressed up in magnificent costumes and built spectacular triumphal chariots, they were not only trying to impress others. They were using and

⁴⁸ Gilles de Gouberville, *Journal de Gilles de Gouberville*, ed. Comte A. de Blagny (Caen: 1895), 134.

⁴⁹ Noël Taillepie, *Antiquitez et singularitez de la ville de Rouen* (Rouen: 1587), 61–62.

⁵⁰ Heers, *Fêtes, jeux et joutes*, 13, 18, emphasizes that most festivals are fundamentally triumphs, celebrations by the participants of their own status and values.

⁵¹ The *Triumphes* does not describe the route of the carnival procession, but it did start at the *Vieil Palais*, the seat of the royal governor, and it ended at the *Pont de Robec* (the bridge over a stream that passed through the city), a public square which was usually a one of the stages for royal entries. The route would have taken the procession through the center of Rouen.

celebrating their skills and knowledge, as artisans and merchants, for themselves and their colleagues. Textile workers and merchants, tailors and hatters, leather workers and shoemakers, goldsmiths and jewelers, carpenters and joiners, printers and clerks, sellers and preparers of food and drink—all of these artisanal skills contributed to making carnival a spectacular event.⁵² Normally, Rouen's artisans created these masterpieces and supplied these events for others, for clients who used and displayed them for their own enjoyment, as symbols of their own status. In carnival, these artisans had an opportunity to create them according to their own design, to be displayed and enjoyed for themselves in company with their colleagues. By appearing in public together, dressed in a distinct and striking fashion, processing as a unit, and eating together at the banquet, the Conards reaffirmed their bonds with each other and their solidarity as a group.⁵³

Yet, even within the group, there could be a complex mix of intentions and understandings of what they were doing. As we have seen, there were a variety of different purposes to the carnival of the Conards—assertions of status, statement of opinions, entertainment. The weight of each of these meanings depended partially on the reception by the audience, but it also varied according to individual members of the Abbey within the same celebration. For instance, at least two members of the Abbey eventually became significant leaders of the Huguenots in Rouen twenty years later. For them, the religious and political satire of the Abbey was probably intended to be subversive of the social order, and in fact, a year after the carnival described in the *Triumphes*, both were arrested for distributing scandalous pamphlets.⁵⁴ On the other hand, Jacques

⁵² Many of these professions are listed in the call of the Abbot to his supporters from the carnival of 1586—drapers, silk-merchants, hatters, goldsmiths, grocers, tanners, dyers, and wool-workers; *Triumphes*, 103.

⁵³ Robert B. Seaberg, "Ritual Behavior and Political Solidarity: Radical Groups in Revolutionary England," in *Persons in Groups*, 123–132, in his discussion of the Levellers during the English Civil War, makes the point that collective displays of ritual behavior or symbols by a social group *in public* is a particularly potent method of creating group solidarity, see 129–130.

⁵⁴ ADSM Reg. Parl. 27 Mar. 1541 (old style dating). ADSM Série G, Registres du Chapitre, 3 June 1562. Noël Cotton and Isaac Jehan, both among the Conards arrested in 1542, were among the leaders of the Huguenots who seized the Cathedral silver during the Protestant regime in 1562. Cotton was executed later that year for his leading role in the Protestant rebellion.

Sireulde, the good Conard and handsome usher of the Parlement, later published works satirizing the moral behavior of Rouennais, satire which was directed at all members of society, and which could be seen as supporting the social order. He happily participated in and praised a series of events organized by the judicial and religious elite of Rouen, and wrote a long poem defending the Catholic doctrine of good works.⁵⁵ Other Conards, such as the Abbot of the *Triumphes*, Guillaume le Jeune, an otherwise obscure merchant of modest means who had to extricate his more radical associates from jail a year later, were no doubt in carnival to show off, to indulge in spectacle and demonstrate their status.⁵⁶ Finally, many of the Conards were there to meet women and have fun together, like the Conards who paraded around night and day after the procession, flirting and dancing with the female spectators, and then ate, drank and laughed together at the Mardi gras banquet.⁵⁷

By approaching carnival as a means of expression for Rouen's artisans and small merchants, we can encompass the multiplicity of messages and audiences of carnival without having to choose between them. Through carnival, the Conards asserted their prosperity and status through spectacular display, an assertion that was directed not only at the city's elite, but also at the city's common people, at women, and at humble or distinguished visitors from out of town. The Conards reinforced this message by displaying their sophistication through their mastery and manipulation of elite culture. The most fundamental meaning expressed in carnival, however, was not to their audience, but to themselves. To each other, they expressed their solidarity and mutual support, their shared interests and values, their pride in their skill and wit, their willingness to appear in

⁵⁵ Sireulde, *Abuz et superfluité*; ADSM Reg. Parl. 5 July 1547; Jacques Sireulde, *Le trésor immortel tiré de l'écriture sainte par Jacques Sireulde*, ed. Charles de Robillard de Beaurepaire (Rouen: Léon Gy, 1899; original edition Rouen: Martin le Mesgissier, 1556), written to commemorate the *Puy des Pauvres*, a poetry contest organized by members of Rouen's elite. Sireulde also competed in the 1533 *Puy* (poetry contest) organized by the elite Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception. Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 1715, records poems submitted by him in each French category.

⁵⁶ It was the Abbot, Guillaume le Jeune, who appealed to the Parlement to release his compatriots after they had been arrested in 1542; ADSM Reg. Parl. 27 Mar. 1541 (old style dating). The Abbot in the carnival of 1541 was called Guillaume, *Triumphes*, 77, and was probably the same man. In 1567, Guillaume le Jeune contributed the modest sum of 100 *sous* in a tax on merchants to build a new Merchant's Exchange building in Rouen; ADSM Série C 216, 8.

⁵⁷ *Triumphes*, 76–80.

public and eat in private together. This communality would be shattered by religious divisions and economic changes later in the century, and the loss of this communality would be a decisive factor in the eventual demise of the Abbey itself at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See Reid, "Carnival in Rouen."