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Printing Carnival: Rouen's Abbey of the Conards Expands Its Influence

DYLAN REID

Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, University of Toronto

The Abbey of the Conards, the festive society in Rouen that organized the annual carnival, began to use print in the 1530s to expand its influence. It involved itself in the literary pamphlet war between Clément Marot and François Sagon, and it used printed satirical verse in its carnival celebrations. Its use of print was part of an expansion of Rouen's printing industry into small, ephemeral publications and the emergence of a popular culture of print in the city. Its use of print, however, also brought greater attention from Rouen's authorities, forcing the Abbey to discover the limits of what it could publish, which evolved over the course of the sixteenth century as religious conflicts developed in France.

L'Abbaye des Conards, la société festive de Rouen qui organisait le carnaval annuel, a commencé à recourir à l'imprimé dans les années 1530 afin d'étendre son influence. Elle s'est immiscée dans la querelle littéraire entre Clément Marot et François Sagon, et a employé des vers satiriques imprimés lors des célébrations de son carnaval. Son recours à l'imprimé participe de l'expansion de l'industrie de l'imprimerie rouennaise vers de petites publications éphémères et de l'émergence d'une culture populaire de l'imprimé dans la ville. Cependant, cette utilisation de l'imprimé lui valut également une attention accrue de la part des autorités rouennaises, contraignant l'Abbaye à identifier les limites de ce qu'elle pouvait publier, ce qui a évolué au cours du XVI^e siècle à mesure que les conflits religieux se développaient en France.

The Abbey of the Conards was the festive association that organized Rouen's carnival celebrations in the sixteenth century. *Conard* was, and still is, an insult, indicating, among other things, stupidity or foolishness.¹ The Abbey was headed by a mock abbot and was made up of members of Rouen's middling sort: well-off artisans, merchants, and minor officials who were literate, owned property, but were on the margins of power within the city. The carnival festivities took the form of a parade on the Sunday before Lent that featured elaborate costumes, masks, music, and torches, and included mockery and satire of

1. For a detailed discussion of the term as it was used by the Abbey, see Rouse, "Les Cornards de Rouen." It was an honour to speak about the Conards at a conference dedicated to Natalie Zemon Davis (Communities of Print: Authors, Readers, and Printers in the Early Modern World, September 2024), because my work on them was directly inspired by her seminal article "The Reasons of Misrule." I am grateful to the Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies at the University of Toronto for its continued support of my work.

human foolishness. It was followed by general celebrations and a banquet on Mardi Gras.²

In the 1530s, the Abbey began to use printing to advertise and enhance its festivities and to gain more prominence locally and even nationally. In doing so, it took advantage of and contributed to the development of a popular culture of print in Rouen. At the same time, its expanding use of print brought greater attention from Rouen's authorities, creating difficulties that became more severe later in the sixteenth century.

The emergence of popular printing in Rouen

Rouen was the capital of the wealthy province of Normandy and the seat of the province's archbishopric and the Parlement of Normandy, the royal court of appeal. In the 1530s, it was the second or third largest city in France, comparable to Lyon. In the first half of the sixteenth century it enjoyed a period of relative peace and prosperity—many of the most notable buildings that dominated the centre of the city in the following centuries were built or finished in this period. The city's printing industry, however, while the third largest in France, was well behind those of Paris and Lyon in size. It had begun by printing larger-format professional works for lawyers and clerics as well as textbooks for students, often in Latin (though less so than in Paris and Lyon) and often for the English market. But that market withered after the initial English Reformation. In the 1530s, Rouen's printing industry turned in part to local authors to provide content for its publications. Some of these were serious, high-quality works.³ But, as in other cities, the industry in this period also expanded into printing more French works and more small, ephemeral works that could be quickly and cheaply produced and sold to a broader audience, sometimes relying on local authors for material.

An example of a publisher in Rouen specializing in these new cheap and quickly produced works was Jean L'Homme, who flourished in the same period as the first publications for the Conards, between 1537 and 1544. In the *Bibliographie normande* that catalogues the work of Rouen publishers and printers, the difference in his production from the first generation of publishers

2. For an overview of the Abbey of the Conards, see Reid, "Carnival in Rouen."

3. For the printing industry in sixteenth-century Rouen, see Reid, "Renaissance Printing." See also, for the early sixteenth century, Katz, "Les post-incunables."

in the city is notable. While the earlier generation focused on longer works, generally in quarto or sometimes folio size, L'Homme's production was almost entirely of octavo books, and most of them were only eight or sixteen pages.⁴ Andrew Pettegree discovered an additional cache of L'Homme's publications in Aix and characterizes them as rough productions, "printed in a crude black letter type" and unpaginated, "the most ephemeral of ephemeral works." They generally feature a woodcut on the front—a basic form of advertising—but these were also crude, and often the same ones were repeated. Pettegree assesses that "they could have been dashed out and on sale in less than two days."⁵

L'Homme focused on booklets that shared the news of the day. Other local publishers in this mid-century era looked to short humorous or satirical poems, such as those put out by Yves Gomont. The one that he explicitly takes credit for is *La source du Gros Fessier des Nourrisses* (The origin of the fat ass of wet nurses), an obscene and misogynist poem whose production is as rudimentary as Pettegree describes: a clumsy and irrelevant woodcut at the front followed by fifteen pages of crowded print. Another booklet likely from Gomont, the *Sermon ioyeux dung depucelleur de Nourrisses* (Joyful sermon of a deflowerer of wet nurses), is even more basic—only eight pages, without even a cover page or illustration, similar to a third pamphlet that will be discussed below.⁶ Intriguingly, Gomont may have been closely associated with L'Homme. His address was the same as the one L'Homme gives in two of his early productions—"rue de la Chèvre"—and Pierre Aquilon, following Georges Lepreux, suggests that L'Homme was the printer of Gomont's publications.⁷

Not all short and humorous publications were so crude, however. In 1556, the prestigious publisher Jean du Gort put out a humorous anonymous poem

4. Aquilon, *Répertoire bibliographique*, 45–51.

5. Pettegree, "Provincial News Community," 23.

6. Although the *Sermon ioyeux dung depucelleur de Nourrisses* does not have a known location or publisher, it was bound between two booklets published in Rouen by Yves Gomont, and Aquilon notes that it used the same printing material (Aquilon, *Répertoire bibliographique*, 54). Note that "depucelleur de nourrices" was a term for braggarts who exaggerate their sexual success (ARTFL, *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*, s.v. "depucelleur," accessed 15 September 2025, <https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic5/publicdicos/navigate/15/2368>). For printed works, I have maintained the original orthography, other than resolving abbreviations. All translations are my own.

7. Georges Lepreux, *Gallia Typographica*, cited in Aquilon, *Répertoire bibliographique*, 54. L'Homme gives his address in two early publications (from 1537 and 1540) as "rue de la Chesvre," while Gomont gives it as "rue de la Chievre."

decrying the decline of Rouen's taverns in the face of newly proclaimed official restrictions. The poem lists every tavern in the city in a sixteen-page octavo edition.⁸ Another sixteen-page octavo booklet was published on the same topic by a more obscure publisher, with a simple title page and a poem that satirically took a different tack, imagining women celebrating because their husbands were no longer spending all their time at the taverns.⁹ These two publications in a sense combine two subjects of these kinds of ephemeral publications in Rouen: commentary on the news, in the spirit of L'Homme's publications, with humorous or satirical verse in the style of Gomont's publications. We will look at some additional examples related to the Conards later in this article, but it is reasonable to assume that more of these kinds of booklets were published that did not survive, given their flimsy and ephemeral nature.

The Conards intervene in the quarrel of Marot and Sagon

The Conards took advantage of this developing market by inserting themselves in one of its early manifestations: a literary pamphlet war. Until the 1530s, the Conards had relied on physical performance—speaking and display—for their festivities and, as such, do not show up very much in the historical record. A 1536 decision of the Parlement, concerned about the Conards' mockery of individuals, focuses on forbidding them to scandalize anyone through spoken words, effigies, or images, with no mention of the printed word.¹⁰ But that focus on performance was about to change, as the Conards used print to intervene in the ongoing pamphlet war between the Norman priest and occasional poet François Sagon, a native of Rouen and frequent contributor to Rouen's Puy of the Immaculate Conception poetry competition, and Clément Marot, the most famous living French poet of the time. The quarrel had its origins in 1534, from an in-person argument about religion. Marot went into exile later that year due to his reformist sympathies. In 1536, in response to pieces by Marot written in exile, Sagon wrote a pamphlet accusing him of being a heretic. Marot's supporters counter-attacked Sagon, joined by Marot himself (writing as his valet)

8. *Les tavernes de Rouen*. While the booklet is undated, its later editor, Charles de Beaurepaire, convincingly dates it to 1556.

9. *Le plaisant quaquet*. While the Bibliothèque nationale de France [hereafter BnF] assigns it a date of 1602, the poem itself identifies its date as 1556 (fol. 4r). The BnF copy could be a later reprint.

10. Archives départementales de la Seine-Maritime [hereafter ADSM], 1 B 447, 20 May 1536.

after Marot was allowed to return from exile in 1536. The quarrel erupted into a full-scale flame war between the two poets and their partisans, with numerous scathing verse pamphlets printed by each side attacking the other through 1537.¹¹

The Abbot of the Conards claimed jurisdiction over foolishness—that is, over everyone who qualified as a *conard*. Every year, he awarded the prize of the Abbot's crozier to the local who had done the most foolish thing that year—for example, betting their wife in a dice game.¹² The Abbot decided that, with their heated rhetoric and a key participant from Rouen, the protagonists Marot and Sagon fell under his jurisdiction—“ces deux fols, noz glorieux novices” (these two fools, our glorious novices).¹³ The Conards thus launched into the world of print in 1537 with a pamphlet mocking both sides and decreeing that the two should cease their attacks, the *Appologie faicte par le grant abbe des Conards sur les invectives Sagon, Marot, La Huterie, Pages, Valetz, Braquetz &c.* (The apology of the great Abbot of the Conards on the invectives of Sagon, Marot, La Huterie, pages, valets, hunting dogs, etc.).¹⁴ The title makes fun of the way many of the pamphlets were published under the supposed authorship of the page or valet of the main actors. The pamphlet, after quite a good verse summary of the quarrel so far, expresses a fear that the protagonists will come to blows unless the Abbot intervenes and directs the two to “Ne user de coups, faire, dire, n’escire / Faicts quilz ne soient ioyeux & bon pour rire” (not use blows, nor do, say, or write anything unless it is joyful and good for laughs).¹⁵

As the Abbot no doubt expected, this intervention triggered an abusive response, *Responce a labbe des conars de Rouen* (Response to the Abbot of the

11. Desan, *Le feuillet*, 353–65. Facsimiles of most of the pamphlets are gathered in Picot and Lacombe, *Querelle*.

12. *Les triomphes*, 80. For the jurisdictional claims of the Conards, see Reid, “Chevauchees.”

13. *Appologie*, sig. Aii. For further discussion of the role of the Conards in the quarrel, see Bichüe, “Parodie,” 307–13; Desan, *Le feuillet*, 364–65; Faget, “L’Abbaye,” 239–47. Matéo Faget suggests that another anonymous work, *Ballade a lautheur responsive (sans nom) au lieu d’une missive*, is also part of the Conard engagement in this quarrel. It was published by Cardin Hamillon.

14. The BnF attributes the publisher to Pierre Vidoue, whose address at the time (“Devant le College de Reims”) was the one indicated on the title page of some copies (the one reproduced in Picot and Lacombe, *Querelle*, though not the one available on Gallica/BnF). Vidoue also published other pamphlets in the quarrel. Interestingly, Vidoue was the printer for an earlier book from Rouen: the 1525 collection of poems presented at Rouen’s Puy of the Immaculate Conception.

15. *Appologie*, fol. 3v.

Conards of Rouen), which seems to object primarily to the idea that the quarrel could come to blows (despite the obviously facetious nature of that concern) and argues that in fact all the many pamphlets were written “seulement par ioy-euse” (only for fun).¹⁶ It was first published in Paris, but it is notable that Jean L’Homme reprinted it in Rouen—it was, after all, news, and news particularly relevant to a Rouen audience.¹⁷ The Abbot replied directly to this response with another pamphlet, *La premiere lecon des matines ordinaires du grand abbe des conardz de Rouen, souuerain monarque de lordre* (The first lesson of the matins ordinary of the great Abbot of the Conards of Rouen, sovereign monarch of the order), written explicitly “contre la response faicte par ung corneur a l’apologie dudict abbe” (against the reply made by a fool/cuckold to the apology of the said Abbot).¹⁸ This one was published in Rouen by Cardin Hamillon, a well-established local printer.¹⁹

The next round from the Conards (though whether it was those from Rouen is unclear) was a pamphlet decreeing a truce between the two, *De Marot et Sagon les treues, Donnez iusqua la fleur des febues* (The truce of Marot and Sagon, given until the flowering of the beans), issued in the name of the secretary of the Conards.²⁰ An anonymous voice took up this call by the Conards,

16. *Responce a labbe*, sig. Av. The publisher, Jean Morin, although based in Paris, also seems to have had a Rouen connection, being probably a son of one of Rouen’s most prominent early printer-publishers, Martin Morin (BnF, “Notice de personne”). While the pamphlet has been attributed to Sagon’s side (Dubosc, introduction to *Querelle*, xxv; Desan, *Le feuillet*, 364), that attribution is uncertain. While the poem does use a disparaging term for Marot’s supporters, “Maroteaulx,” as Desan indicates, that reference is qualified by “(comme tu dis)” (as you say), and the same line uses the disparaging term for Sagon’s supporters, “Sagouyns,” without qualification. *Responce a labbe*, sig. Aiv. As well, the cover woodcut features a poet trampling a monkey, presented in the form of the insulting image used by Marot’s pamphlets to depict Sagon (*sagouin* = monkey). Finally, the publisher Morin was soon after arrested for publishing heretical works (BnF, “Notice de personne”), which suggests a greater affinity for Marot. The booklet may be a neutral contribution that speaks specifically to the Conards, but a closer analysis of the text is needed to establish its point of view.

17. Aquilon, *Répertoire bibliographique*, 45.

18. *La premiere lecon*, title page. For a discussion of the wordplay around *conard/cornard*, see Rousse, “Les Cornards de Rouen.”

19. For Cardin Hamillon I, see Walsby, *Booksellers and Printers*, 443.

20. *De Marot et Sagon les treues* (facsimile edition in Picot and Lacombe, *Querelle*). The secretary signs as being “a Caen.” It is not clear if that refers to the location of publication, the location of the secretary individually, or to an unknown Caen branch of the Conards. The layout of this pamphlet, however, is very similar to that of the *Appologie*, including printed marginal comments. Given there is no other

taking advantage of the “tresues / Ordonnees iusqua la fleur des febues / Par ung Conard” (the truce proclaimed up to the flowering of the beans by a Conard) to advocate for a “banquet of honour” between all of the adversaries that would formalize the truce and achieve a final reconciliation.²¹ The intervention of the Conards largely marked the end of the quarrel,²² perhaps as a sign that the public, so engaged early on, was tiring of the endless invective.

The pamphlets put out by the Conards follow the general format of the other pamphlets distributed during the quarrel and the type of ephemeral works put out by Jean L’Homme. They are in octavo format, eight or sixteen pages, and open with a woodcut. They are, however, somewhat higher quality than L’Homme’s pieces. For one thing, the first two woodcuts are original and specifically depict the Conards, with a trumpeter declaring “O Conards.” As Phillipe Desan writes, the woodcuts that graced the covers of the pamphlets in the quarrel were an important part of the messaging, working with and enhancing the text. They framed the insults being thrown at adversaries (Sagon as a monkey, Marot as a rat) and became part of the developing narrative. As well, of course, they served as a powerful marketing tool, grabbing the public’s attention.²³ By commissioning original, custom woodcuts for their contributions, the Conards were asserting their role as equal participants in this affair. Their woodcuts were also a way to position themselves within the quarrel, as the previous ones by Marot’s and Sagon’s partisans had done. The Conards’ images present the Abbot as an authority, with trumpeters announcing his presence, playing on his claim of being a “sovereign monarch” and also on his assumption of the role of a neutral arbiter who would prohibit further violence and declare a truce. As well as using original woodcuts, the layout of the *Appologie*, in comparison to L’Homme’s productions, is also somewhat sophisticated, including the use of marginal notes. The initial piece was published in Paris by

evidence of a Caen Abbey of the Conards, it seems possible that this piece is from the same organization based in Rouen as the previous one. The copy in the BnF (*Les treues de Marot & Sagon*) appears to be a reprint, probably unofficial (lacking the marginal annotations and with a different woodcut and slightly different title that loses the rhyming of the original).

21. *Le banquet dhonneur*. The language of this piece is more flowery and has more elaborate classical allusions than the verse of the Conards, so it seems likely it was by a separate poet not associated with them. It is, however, bookended with a facetious proclamation in the style of the Conards.

22. Desan, *Le feuilletton*, 365.

23. Desan, *Le feuilletton*, 360.

Pierre Vidoue, a publisher who had already put out several of the pieces in the quarrel, while the second was published in Rouen itself by a local publisher. It is not clear where the third one was published—possibly Caen, or possibly, given its similar layout, by the same publisher as the *Appologie*.²⁴

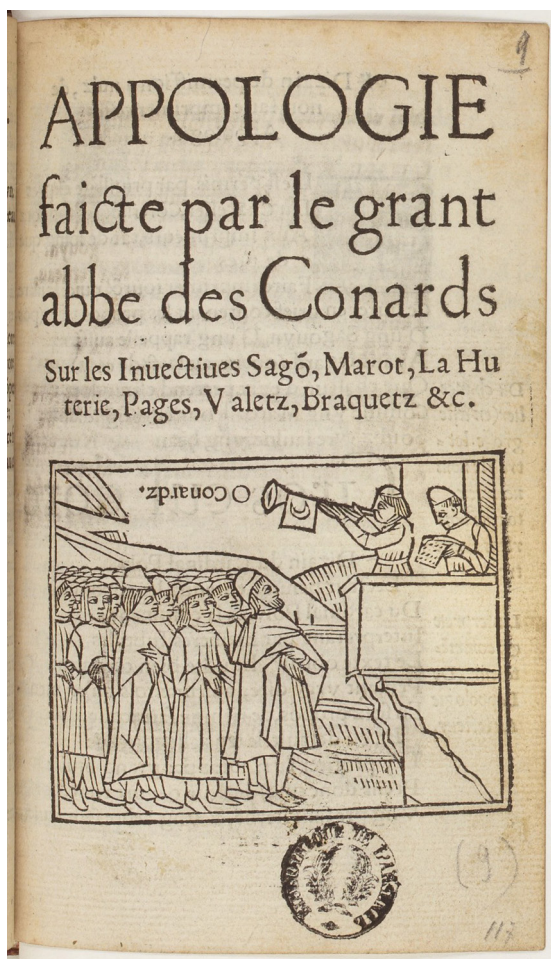


Fig. 1. Cover page of *Appologie faicte par le grant abbe des Conards*.
Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Arsenal, RESERVE 8-BL-8736,
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1521356n/f1.item>.

24. See discussion in the footnotes above regarding each of these publications.

The intervention was an indication of the expanding ambition of the Abbey. At a most basic level, it was a way to advertise their activities and their self-proclaimed role as an arbiter of foolishness, as well as to enhance their status within Rouen. But it also advertised their existence on a national stage. As Desan notes, most of the participants, other than perhaps the already famous Marot, benefitted from the exposure their participation in the quarrel brought them, and the Conards were no exception.²⁵ Their intervention, notably opening with a publication in Paris, made them known outside of their own city, with their impact suggested by not only the *Responce* to their initial sally and the *Bancquet dhonneur* that built on their *Treues*, but also by the known reprints of the *Responce* and the *Treues*.²⁶ Their new national reputation would culminate in 1550, when King Henri II asked to see their procession after completing his royal entry into Rouen.²⁷ Their printed publications elaborated on the Abbot's claim to jurisdiction over foolishness, which, as they would joke in a later piece, meant his jurisdiction was universal.²⁸

Playing with the conventions of the medium with which they were now experimenting, the Abbot claimed that this universal jurisdiction extended to granting privileges for publication. But rather than giving a particular printer an exclusive privilege, as was usual, the Abbot's parodic privilege in the first pamphlet did the opposite—a poem in the ten-line *dizain* format decreed that “Il est permis par privilege expres / [...] Aux Imprimeurs [...] / Faire imprimer jour et nuit sans repos / ce livre” (it is permitted by express privilege [...] to printers [...] to print this book day and night without rest).²⁹

The use of print in carnival

The next stage of the Abbey's use of print was to distribute printed single pages as part of its carnival parade. The parade of 1541 (modern dating) was spectacular, with close to 1,000 participants enumerated.³⁰ All of the participants

25. Desan, *Le feuilletton*, 349, 365.

26. *Les treues de Marot & Sagon* (the version in the BnF). For the L'Homme reprint of the *Responce*, see Aquilon, *Répertoire bibliographique*, 45.

27. Reid, “Carnival in Rouen,” 1041.

28. *Les triomphes*, 105.

29. *Appologie*, fol. 1v.

30. Based on a count of the numbers itemized in *Les triomphes*. See Reid, “Carnival in Rouen,” 1030.

were costumed and often masked, many of them in groups with specific, often satirical themes, which were conveyed through spectacular costumes and *tableaux vivants*, supplemented by spoken or written verse. Often the parade participants carried couplets handwritten on paper that identified them and their message, attached to their back or sleeve, and they also recited longer verses at key intersections. But in at least a few cases, they also distributed printed pages with short poems that explicated the meaning of their grouping.

These printed poems were noted explicitly for two of the most elaborate of these groups, who may have organized themselves independently for the parade with the approval of the Abbot. The “estonnez du monde”—the astonished of the world—all wore couplets on their backs, but they also distributed “quatre dizains imprimes,” four printed *dizains*, with general satire about the world such as “Gens de justice sont de vices marquez, / Ne reste plus que noblesse qui blesse / Pauvre commun” (The judiciary is marked by vice, which just leaves nobility who injures poor commoners).³¹ After them marched the band of the prophets, preceded by torches, drums, and fifes, led by Moses and Saul, and all spectacularly dressed in long embroidered robes. Each of them had a name attached to their sleeve and a quatrain attached to their back, and Saul read out an extended poem at key intersections. As well, the prophets distributed to the onlookers “huictains imprimez,” eight-line printed poems that elaborated on the messages of many of the prophets. The one representing Daniel, for example, told the story of the feast of the Babylonian king Balthasar from the Book of Daniel, where the king’s desecration of the sacred vessels from the temple of Jerusalem led to his “mort subite en douleur et misere” (sudden death in pain and misery), adding meaningfully that “cela nous peut beaucoup signifier” (this can signify a lot to us).³²

The most spectacular section of the parade was a series of carts with *tableaux vivants* that displayed “the laundry of the Abbot,” a satirical presentation of society in which people costumed as avarice, simony, hypocrisy, favour, nobility, the Church, religion, poverty, and so on each did their part in the laundry cycle—nobility beats the laundry, for example, while simony distributes it. In advance of the carts, a costumed man on a horse read out a *dizain* and a longer poem at intersections. But he also handed out (“dispersoît”) copies of the *dizain* to the audience along the route—almost certainly printed, given the volume and

31. *Les triomphes*, 67.

32. *Les triomphes*, 69, 72.

the other similar examples described above. Its verses explained who each of the characters on the carts was and what each was doing.³³ This part of the procession was supplemented later by a related piece of theatre, likely performed at the banquet. So the Conards' satire was conveyed in multiple mutually reinforcing ways, visually, aurally, theatrically, in handwriting, and through print.³⁴

Multiple other short poems are described as being "given" (the verbs *bailler* or *donner*) or "presented" (*presenter*), sometimes at specific locations along the route: "en plusieurs endroits" (in several locations) or "en chacun carrefour" (at each intersection).³⁵ Two of these specify they were handwritten,³⁶ but the others provide no detail. I see a couple of possible interpretations.³⁷ One is that in these cases the poems were given by being read aloud rather than distributed. The laundry of the Abbot description could be a key: "lequel en passant dispersoit aux regardans un dizain, et en certains lieux faisoit lecture d'iceluy" (who in passing dispersed a *dizain* to the spectators, and in certain locations read it out).³⁸ Another is that when the poems were in manuscript, the distribution was more restrained to specific locations or audiences, given the logistics of copying by hand, while cases where no location is specified and distribution was more general would have used print.³⁹ It is also possible that, as in the laundry of the Abbot example above, they were both read aloud and distributed. We cannot know for certain, since the author was writing for an audience most of whom had witnessed the event, rather than historians half a millennium later, and perhaps did not feel the need to provide details consistently.

The final use of print in 1541 was to announce a change of venue for the Abbey's banquet to be held at noon on Tuesday, moving it to the city's new

33. *Les triomphes*, 46, 51.

34. For a detailed analysis of the multiple ways the Conards conveyed their message, see Lavéant, "Stratégies."

35. *Les triomphes*, 29, 33.

36. *Les triomphes*, 29, 56.

37. See also the discussion in Lavéant, "Stratégies," 6.

38. *Les triomphes*, 46.

39. Another potential candidate for the use of print is the group "les umbres de Conardie" (shadows of Conardness), who, in a manner similar to the prophets who used print, "gave" (*donnoyent*) a series of sixteen eight-line poems "au peuple par la ville" (to the people through the city). If they were handed out rather than simply read, doing so by manuscript would have been challenging logistically. *Les triomphes*, 39–45.

Drapers' Hall. The decision was made on the Monday, and a poster with a short poem indicating the change was printed and posted around the city the same day, as well as being supplemented by verbal announcements.⁴⁰ It is an indicator of how quickly print could turn around ephemeral work, even faster than the two days Pettegree estimated for the turnaround of L'Homme's eight-page octavos. In this case, single-page poems were printed on the same day, which also suggests how quickly the short single-page poems for the carnival could have been prepared.⁴¹ Printing had become an accessible tool to disseminate a short message quickly to a wide local audience.

We know about this carnival because the Conards published a complete description of it ahead of the next year's carnival (1542 in modern dating), explicitly to inspire their supporters ("esmouvoir / nos bons suppots") to come out for the upcoming festivity.⁴² This book was until recently only known by a later reprinting, but in 2019 Katell Lavéant discovered a copy of the original edition. It was a much more ambitious production than the carnival sheets or the Marot–Sagon interventions: a handsome, well-printed quarto volume of forty pages, with some decorated initial letters and some complex textual layouts, along with a custom-made woodcut on the title page.⁴³ It created a kind of monument to the Conards—a detailed and more permanent advertisement of how elaborate their production had been and what spectators and participants could expect for future years. In their own words, its goal was to increase the "haut bruit et renom," the fame and renown, of their association. The book opened with an interesting verse exchange with the lieutenant of the bailiff, who was the local royal authority—a verse request for permission to print and a verse reply giving them permission and a privilege for the work.⁴⁴ While the local authorities apparently got into the spirit of the light-hearted exchange, the Conards seem to have had some sense that, perhaps given their satirical content, they should

40. *Les triomphes*, 77.

41. See also Lavéant, "Stratégies," 6.

42. *Les triomphes*, 3.

43. Lavéant, "Une enquête bibliographique." The title of the original edition begins *Le recueil des Actes & depesches faictes aux haultz iours de Conardie, tenus a Rouen depuis la derniere sepmaine de Ianuier jusques au mardi gras ensuyuant [...]*. This edition is not easily accessible, and Lavéant has determined that the later 1587 reprinting titled *Les triomphes de l'abbaye des Conards* is an accurate reproduction of the original text with a few minor spelling variations, so it is used here.

44. *Les triomphes*, 3–4.

get official permission first, in contrast to their publications in the Marot–Sagon quarrel. As well, given the obvious investment made into the publication, the Abbey seems to have been more serious about protecting its rights; the privilege is noted explicitly on the title page, forbidding other printers and publishers to print or sell the book without permission of the Abbot. The printer is not identified, however.⁴⁵

As it turned out, they were right to be concerned about how their satire might be received. Eleven Conards were thrown in jail after the 1542 carnival, and the Abbot had to appeal to the Parlement to get them released. It is interesting to note that the Abbot was not himself arrested, suggesting that those who ended up in jail were part of one specific group with a particularly problematic message. While the records do not specify the charge, at the hearing before the Parlement the Conards were opposed by representatives of the city council, and while the court ultimately ordered the release of the Conards, it specifically forbade them “faire escrire ne imprimer pour publier ne faire aucuns escripteaux, dixains ne autres dittez ou libelles” (to write or print for publication or make any pronouncements, *dizains*, or other writings or pamphlets) without permission, suggesting that they were arrested for something they distributed in print.⁴⁶ While printing brought greater attention to the messages the Conards wanted to express, it also brought greater attention from the authorities and provided firmer evidence of their statements. In this period, the Parlement was specifically concerned about defamatory attacks on prominent citizens,⁴⁷ and it may be that the Conards had defamed members of the city council. On the other hand, just a few months later the city council included the Confraternity of Bonnes-Nouvelles, which was the more formal face of the Conards, in a public procession, so the case did not seem to impact the association as a whole.⁴⁸

45. Lavéant, “Une enquête bibliographique.” The last two pages of the book, which may have provided information about the printer, are missing. Lavéant speculates that the printer could be the brothers Robert and Jean du Gort; while they are known for prestigious and serious publications, they were also responsible for facetious ones—for example, Jean du Gort also published *Les tavernes de Rouen*, noted above.

46. ADSM, 1 B 2051, 27 March 1541. Dates of archival references follow the original, rather than modern, dating.

47. Reid, “Chevauchees,” 180–82.

48. Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen, Archives communales, 14 July 1542, 18 July 1542; Héron, *Deux chroniques*, 165.

The incident also did not stop the Conards from later defaming other citizens in print. Around carnival in 1546, the Conards got in trouble again for distributing “libellos famosos,” defamatory pamphlets, about a canon of the cathedral. The cathedral chapter complained to the Parlement, who issued an edict in response.⁴⁹ But while the Conards again got into trouble for specific printing activities, these did not trigger any general crackdown on their activities.

The evolution of a popular printing culture in Rouen

In this period, individual associates of the Abbey of the Conards also used print to disseminate their work. The Conards were part of a milieu of popular writers and performers that thrived in Rouen in the middle of the sixteenth century. While the information available about them is limited, the production of this milieu is most visible in the manuscript collection of farces and other plays from Rouen known as the *Recueil de Rouen*, one of the most notable surviving collections of these short plays in France.⁵⁰ Of particular note is the farce *Le vendeur de livres*, set in Rouen and of unknown authorship, in which an itinerant book peddler attempts to sell his wares to some women. The humour lies in the women seeking some kind of uplifting or at least pleasant reading, while the bookseller only offers obscene and misogynist works, including the *Sermon ioyeux dung depucelleur de nourrissees* noted above.⁵¹ The farce captures the extent of the trade in ephemeral humorous and obscene works in the city, citing works originating both from other cities and from Rouen itself.

While much remains unknown about the plays in the *Recueil de Rouen*, some of them were written and performed by the Conards themselves,⁵² and some by other local performers known through limited archival sources. The Conards did not print any of their works in this collection, to our knowledge,

49. Rousse, “Le théâtre des farces,” 5:56–57.

50. The manuscript was formerly known as the *Recueil La Vallière*. See Doudet, “Recueil de Rouen,” 48–52; Doudet and Longtin, “Recueil de Rouen.”

51. For the reference to the *Sermon ioyeux dung depucelleur de nourrissees*, see Abd-elrazak and Longtin, *Le vendeur de livres*, 25, 72.

52. Notably *L'Eglise, Noblesse, et Povreté qui font la lessive*, closely related to part of the Conard carnival procession of 1541; *Les deux soupriers de Monville*, in which the Abbot of the Conards chastises Jacques Sireulde for a transgression; and *La farce des veaulx*, performed by the Conards for Henri II after his royal entry into Rouen. For editions of these pieces, see Doudet and Longtin, “Recueil de Rouen,” 308–9.

including *La farce des veaulx* (The farce of the calves) that they performed in front of Henri II in 1550. However, some participants in this milieu of popular writers published other printed works, taking advantage of the expansion of cheap printing noted above. Along with the various unknown writers of the humorous works discussed earlier, some writers known to be associated with the Conards published their own independent works in this vein. In providing Rouen's printers with original material, these writers contributed to the development of a popular printing culture in the city that was marked by the same spirit of humour and mockery as the Conards.

The most notable was Jacques Sireulde, an usher at the Parlement who played a role in the 1541 carnival—he is referred to as a “bon Conard” (good Conard)—and also participated in literary competitions in Rouen. Sometime in the 1540s, he published a thirty-two-page sextodecimo satirical poem in Rouen, *Les abus et superfluitez du monde* (The abuses and superfluities of the world), much of it attacking the wearing of excessively luxurious clothing. At the end, Sireulde added a parodic prognostication that borrows a few lines from the earlier parodic prognostication by Rabelais. We also know of another satirical booklet by Sireulde, *L'ane a l'anon* (The ass to the foal), which is now lost. We know about it because it made fun of a magistrate of the Parlement and resulted in punishment for Sireulde and the confiscation and destruction of the book. It opens the possibility that Sireulde published other booklets that have not survived. In the end, Sireulde regained his position as an usher at the Parlement. He also went on to publish a book with a more substantial religious poem in the context of a short-lived Puy of the Poor, with the support of members of the court. In an attached poem, he lists numerous participants in that Puy, including some participants in Rouen's network of popular writers and performers.⁵³

While Sireulde did not note his connection to the Conards in his surviving satirical book, others did as a way to advertise their work. In 1557, a certain Caillard wrote a humorous poem made up of the local proverbs of children and adults in Rouen, and in the introduction he specified he was “De l'Abbé Raillard” (from the mocking abbey), a reference to the Conards. In his case, it seems plausible this claim was accurate. The content reflects the joyful absurdity characteristic of Conard writings, and Caillard is documented as having participated in other theatrical events that would align with participation in

53. Reid, “Jacques Sireulde.”

the Conards. He is also given a shout-out in Sireulde's poem listing participants in the Puy of the Poor.⁵⁴ On the other hand, one of Yves Gomont's publications, a cheaply printed eight-page octavo parodic and somewhat obscene verse prognostication, with no title page, also claimed to be "imprime par lautorite de labbe des Conars" ("printed under the authority of the Abbot of the Conards").⁵⁵ The content is not really consistent with their work, however; the fairly extensive corpus of satire by the Conards is not particularly obscene, and their printed production, while hardly high quality, always shows a certain effort in presentation. It seems more likely that the anonymous author was claiming association with the Conards in order to boost sales.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, these examples suggest how the Conards were integrated into and helped support a developing popular print culture in Rouen in the middle of the sixteenth century—a culture that also included the booklets about Rouen's taverns noted earlier.

The Conards and print during the Wars of Religion

After 1546, there are no clear examples of the Conards using print during carnival. A 1557 permission to the Conards from the Parlement to parade at carnival includes a prohibition from offending anyone by various means, including in writing, but it is mentioned in passing and the focus is on performance.⁵⁷ Since the evidence for many of these fragile occasional productions is secondary, it could be they were being produced without anyone commenting on or responding to them, but it is also possible that the Conards had stopped using print as part of their carnival in this period. After the Abbey of the Conards was forced to cease its activities at the outbreak of the Wars of Religion in 1562, however, it did publish a booklet in defence of its activities, as usual in the form

54. Caillard, *La friquassée crottestillonnée*, 2. The date and author are given in the preface rather than on the title page. The 1863 facsimile edition now available is based on a 1604 reprint. The author is very likely the Jacques Caillard who is named as part of a theatre troupe in a decree of the Parlement of Rouen: ADSM, 1 B 577, 27 January 1558. For Sireulde's reference to him, see Reid, "Jacques Sireulde," 282n27.

55. *La grande et veritable Pronostication*. While Gomont is not named specifically, the place of publication, "rue de la Chieure," is the same as the one identified for *La source du Gros fessier des Nourrisses*, and they are bound together. See also Aquilon, *Répertoire bibliographique*, 54.

56. Matéo Faget, however, does consider it to be a genuine Conard production (Faget, "L'Abbaye," 216–17).

57. Rousse, "Le théâtre des farces," 5:81.

of a narrative poem.⁵⁸ The Conards only began their carnival activities again in 1570, now operating with a more formal permission from the Parlement in the more tense atmosphere of the off-and-on civil wars.⁵⁹ There is no specific reference to printing in the permissions from the Parlement but simply a prohibition from offending anyone.

The next clear example of the Abbey using print comes at the end of 1586, when a new printing initiative revealed the very different atmosphere under which they were now operating.⁶⁰ The Conards decided to republish the account of the 1541 carnival, with additional material from more recent carnivals in the 1580s. It was published in December ahead of the upcoming 1587 carnival, no doubt to advertise that event. It was not quite as elegant as the original—an octavo rather than quarto volume—but it was nonetheless an ambitious enterprise, and the Conards went through the trouble of recreating the original woodcut, now presented on the final page.⁶¹ In the spirit of earlier publications (but unlike the official privilege for the original version), the Abbot issued his own privilege for the publication—initially framed in serious, typical language, and given to real printer-publishers (Nicolas Dugord/du Gort and Loys Petit), but gradually sinking into farcical penalties and nonsense verse.⁶² The self-privilege might not have been simply humorous, however. In a period in which the Holy League was increasingly powerful in the city, the Conards might have suspected their publication, with its satire of the clergy from almost half a century earlier, would not be looked on favourably by the authorities and granted an official privilege. Du Gort came from a family with known reformist sympathies. Some members of the Petit printing family were also known Protestants, although Loys Petit also published anti-Protestant tracts. While the Abbey was definitely not Protestant itself, it may have chosen du Gort and Petit

58. This booklet was discovered in the library of the University of Utrecht by Katell Lavéant. See Lavéant, “Une fenêtre”; “Usages et intérêts.”

59. For an overview of the Conards during this period, see Reid, “Carnival in Rouen,” 1045–49.

60. The facetious privilege for this publication is dated 12 December 1586 (*Les triomphes*, 2).

61. Lavéant, “Une enquête bibliographique.” A detailed discussion of this publication can also be found in Lavéant, “Joyful Book.” Note that, like the other publications discussed in this article, I see this book as an initiative of the Conards themselves, rather than an initiative of the printer-publishers, based on the facetious privilege granted by the Abbot and the inclusion of a collection of more recent Conard writings. It is notable that Nicolas du Gort worked primarily as a printer rather than a publisher (Lavéant, “Joyful Book,” 276).

62. *Les triomphes*, 2.

to produce this work because they would be more sympathetic and willing to reprint that potentially problematic older content.⁶³

It is not clear if the recent material from the 1580s had itself previously been printed; some of the pieces are fairly long, so they might have worked better as print than as performance.⁶⁴ This recent material was notably lacking the political satire of the 1541 carnival, no doubt reflecting the changed times. But, as it turned out, simply reprinting the 1541 material, in particular its fairly generic satire of the Church that had passed without comment at the time, was now considered extremely provocative in a period when Protestants were rhetorically attacking the Catholic Church and its clergy and the Holy League was whipping up Catholic fervour. The authorities were no longer just concerned about the defamation of individuals but now also of entire institutions. The vicar-general of the archbishop complained to the Parlement, which allowed his representatives to search publishers' shops and other premises for the book (under the supervision of a magistrate) in order to destroy it.⁶⁵

This is the last time we have evidence for the Conards themselves using print, although other later printed books reference them.⁶⁶ But there is a suggestion that, by this time, carnival had come to be seen as an occasion for anyone to print satirical material. In its 1587 decision about the new publication, the Parlement had prohibited the festive association from "porter ne publier chose qui soit scandaleuze contre lhonneur de dieu et de lad. eglise catholique" (wearing or publishing anything that is scandalous to the honour of God or the said Catholic Church).⁶⁷ To conform to this edict, the next year in 1588, when the association went to the Parlement to seek its usual permission to perform at carnival, the Abbot had renamed himself the "Pere de Sobriete," the Father of Sobriety. The Parlement, satisfied, granted permission to perform the usual

63. Lesens, "Imprimeurs et libraires," 333; Walsby, *Booksellers and Printers*, 320–21, 733–34; Lavéant, "Joyful Book," 276–77. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the Conards and Protestantism, see Faget, "L'Abbaye," esp. 249.

64. Notably *Les triomphes*, 86–92, 113–19.

65. ADSM, 1 B 689, 17 January 1587. The search was not particularly successful; Lavéant notes that at least five copies survived, a remarkable number for a facetious publication (Lavéant, "Joyful Book," 273).

66. Lavéant, "Joyful Book," 277. Faget analyzes a notable example from 1609 (which happens to be the last year we have evidence of the Conards celebrating carnival) dedicated to the Abbot of the Conards, *La Descente aux enfers, dédiée à M. le grand oeconome des conards* (Faget, "L'Abbaye," 230).

67. ADSM, 1 B 689, 17 January 1587.

festivities. Along with the usual monopoly over masking, however, the Father of Sobriety also asked that “defenses soient faictes [...] a tous imprimeurs et autres de imprimer aulcuns dictons et a toutes personnes d’en porter sans le conge et licence dud. pere de sobriete” (prohibitions be made [...] to all printers or others from printing any pamphlets and to all persons from carrying them without the permission and licence of the said Father of Sobriety).⁶⁸ He was seeking formal approval for the jurisdiction over printing during carnival that he had previously assumed facetiously. The court granted this additional request.⁶⁹ This grant may seem surprising given the Conards’ recent transgression, but since 1570 the Parlement had essentially delegated management of carnival to the Conards, presumably in order to avoid an uncontrolled celebration.⁷⁰ The Father of Sobriety was perhaps concerned that some of the participants might get subversive content printed and carry it in the parade, further undermining the festive society. The Parlement in turn presumably decided that the Father of Sobriety, having been chastised and in order to maintain the association’s standing, would make sure nothing untoward was printed and distributed.

The Conards were again interrupted when the Catholic League took over Rouen later that year. They came back briefly once royal authority was restored in 1594, once again as an “Abbey,” but faded out in the early years of the seventeenth century. However, a decree of the Parlement ahead of carnival time in 1613 provides a salutary coda. The decree makes no reference to the Conards, but it prohibits the creating, writing, composing, tossing, or publishing of “dictums pasques ou autres libelles diffamatoires et scandaleux”—pronouncements, pasquinades, or other defamatory or scandalous booklets. It also prohibits all publishers and printers from printing or publishing any such booklets, and it prohibits anyone who receives them from keeping them.⁷¹ While the Conards had faded away, the tradition of printing satire at carnival lived on.

Conclusion

In adopting the use of printing once it has expanded to smaller, quicker, and more affordable formats, the Conards were making full use of a relatively new

68. ADSM, 1 B 694, 13 February 1588.

69. ADSM, 1 B 694, 13 February 1588.

70. Reid, “Chevauchees,” 192–94.

71. ADSM, 1 B 829, 16 February 1613.

technology to enhance their impact. They used it at multiple levels—through single pages distributed at carnival, through quickly printed short booklets, and through larger, more ambitious books in both 1542 and 1586. With the exception of the Marot–Sagon intervention, however, printing was always secondary, playing a supporting role to their primary focus on the performance of their carnival celebrations. It is impossible to know whether we are missing material, given the ephemeral nature of these publications, but after the initial burst of activity in the decade from 1537 to 1546, there are fewer surviving examples of or references to the use of print. It could be that, after their run-ins with the Parlement in 1542 and 1546 that resulted from printed materials, the Conards decided to focus on performance. Printing materials created solid evidence of what had been said, potentially creating a greater exposure to consequences than an ephemeral performance. It is interesting that the surviving example of a printed work by them between 1542 and 1586 was published in 1562 after their performances were blocked, in a sense becoming an alternative mode of expression. Even if the Conards backed away from print, however, they had helped set the stage for a popular culture of print, which was visible in humorous, satirical, and obscene booklets published in Rouen in the mid-sixteenth century, some by associates of the Conards or by those claiming such an association.

When the Conards returned to print in 1586, the dangers of this medium were much more evident. Not only was the edition of *Les triomphes de l'Abbaye des Conards* ordered to be seized and destroyed, but the attention the publication drew resulted in restrictions on the Conards' performances as well. At the same time as imposing these restrictions, however, the Parlement gave the Conards jurisdiction over printing during carnival. While the printing by the Conards throughout the sixteenth century was subject to censorship, which expanded from the protection of individuals in the first half of the century to protection of the entire institution of the Catholic Church later in the century, that censorship was never a threat to their existence.

The Conards did not just use print—they also wielded their absurdist mockery on the conventions of print by playing with the concept of privileges. The first example turned the idea of a privilege upside down, announcing that all printers were required to republish—effectively pirate—their work (an approach perhaps reminiscent of a comic version the modern Creative Commons licence). This privilege built on the Abbot of the Conards' claim to a jurisdiction over folly and carnival, extending that jurisdiction to the works of the Abbey. The second

example, for the first edition of *Les triomphes* in 1542, was a serious privilege requested from a real authority, but in humorous tones. In this case, the request was prophylactic, to ensure that the satire in the text would not offend, as well as a protection of a significant investment in a high-quality work. Here, it appears to have been successful, although some Conards got in trouble for separate printed material. The privilege in 1586 was in some sense a combination of the earlier ones. It presents, at first, as a typical genuine privilege given to real publishers. It was, however, given not through a genuine authority but rather through the Abbot's facetious jurisdiction, and by the end it descended into nonsense. As it turned out, it was not effective. And yet, the next year, the Parlement in fact granted the Abbot (now the Father of Sobriety) the jurisdiction over printing in carnival that he had long claimed.

The unsuccessful revival of Conard printing in 1586 is the last known example of their printing activity. However, the jurisdiction granted by the Parlement suggests that carnival, inspired by the Conards, had become an occasion to print humorous and satirical verses. From their early excursions into print, the Conards had helped pave the way for a popular culture of small, cheap, quick, and ephemeral satirical and humorous publications in Rouen, both at carnival and at other times. It was a tradition that continued long after the Conards themselves had faded away.

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