

**Rewriting History for the Stage: The Theatricality of the St. Bartholomew's Day  
Massacre in Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (1592)**

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“And now, my Lords, the marriage-rites perform'd, / We think it good to go and consummate / The rest with hearing of a holy mass” (*The Massacre at Paris*, 1.18–20).<sup>1</sup> The very first scene of Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* contains too many references to movements, speech and sounds to allow readers and audiences to overlook their importance in the play as a whole. In that same scene, the verb “to hear” reappears a few lines later when Navarre asks Condé and the Admiral: “Have you not heard of late how he decreed, / [...] / That all the Protestants that are in Paris / Should have been murdered the other night?” (1.31–34). The repetition of the same verb seems to draw a link between the mass celebrated in honour of the marriage between the Catholic Marguerite de Valois and the Protestant King of Navarre and Guise's order to kill all the Protestants in Paris, thus enhancing the religious dimension of the massacre and drawing the audience's attention to the power, but also the dangers, of language and, more generally, sound.

Written twenty years after the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, *The Massacre at Paris* is a play which vividly recounts the events of the night of 23–24 August 1572 in Paris while distorting history. Julia Briggs finds that Christopher Marlowe mainly drew his inspiration from François Hotman's *A true and plaine reporte of the furious outrages of France* (1573) for his depiction of the massacre (the first part of the play) and from various other pamphlets for his depiction of the events that followed the massacre itself (the second part of the play).<sup>2</sup> In any case, Marlowe manipulated his sources in many ways but, most importantly, he turned pamphlets, texts written in prose, into a play.<sup>3</sup> If Anne Ubersfeld defines the theatre as “a gazing exercise,” Christopher Marlowe's play certainly testifies to the power of sight but also to that of hearing.<sup>4</sup> As the King of Navarre puts it at the beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Marlowe, “The Massacre at Paris,” in *Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris*, ed. H. J. Oliver (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). All subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Briggs, “Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration,” *Review of English Studies* 34 (1983): 257–78.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul H. Kocher, “François Hotman and Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*,” *PMLA* 56, no. 2 (1941): 349–68.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre. 2: L'école du spectateur* (Paris: Belin, 2001), 253. My translation.

of the play: “But He that sits and rules above the clouds / Doth hear and see the prayers of the just, / And will revenge the blood of innocents” (1.41–43). Ultimately, Marlowe presents his audience with a massacre that they can see, or at least picture in their mind’s eye, and hear to encourage them to engage with the play and, perhaps to a certain extent, to exacerbate and amplify the religious conflict which was still simmering at the end of Elizabeth’s reign. This is what Patricia Cahill suggests when she argues that by encouraging his audiences to feel the massacre (through repeated references to human and animal skins) and thus by blurring the fine line between past and present, Marlowe established new rules: “*Massacre* similarly traffics in the affective intensity of entangled temporalities: through its restaging of the recent past, it activates and animates this history, providing playgoers with an immersive experience.”<sup>5</sup> In so doing, *The Massacre at Paris* emphatically asserts the ability of theatre and theatricality to arouse emotions and their superiority over all other forms of art to give new life to past events.

The connection between history and theatre is discovered very early on in the play. This analogy is made by the Duke of Guise himself. Before the massacre, he says to his accomplices: “They that shall be actors in this massacre / Shall wear white crosses on their burgonets” (4.29–30). While the reference to this visual element is to be found in Hotman’s pamphlet, the allusion to the murderers as actors is Marlowe’s own addition. The whole massacre is turned into a play featuring the murderers as actors and the play heavily relies on the audience’s senses of sight and hearing to construct a new historic reality. Therefore, Marlowe’s first audiences were given a chance to experience the sheer extent of the horror of that day through what they heard and saw on stage.

My purpose will be to determine the extent to which Marlowe used some elements already present in Hotman’s pamphlet or modified his source to use drama and stage devices to shape the collective memory of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in England. I shall first focus on the dialogues.<sup>6</sup> In his pamphlet, Hotman reports certain exchanges between the

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<sup>5</sup> Patricia Cahill, “The Feel of the Slaughterhouse: Affective Temporalities and Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*,” in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts*, ed. Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 157.

<sup>6</sup> In early modern England, theatre meant dialogue. Thus, it was the fundamental element of a playgoer’s theatrical experience. As Allison Deutermann explains: “theatrical speech [...] might be imagined as sound that penetrates the self regardless of its content.” *Listening for Theatrical Form in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 105. For a more general link between speech and ambient sound in the Renaissance, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), esp. p.46. He remarks: “Speech is not a separate conceptual identity but part of a system of sound that recognises commonalities among human-produced sounds and sounds in nature.”

Protestants and their murderers but Marlowe considerably modified these exchanges and encouraged his audience to reflect upon the debates and heated verbal exchanges that he included in the play. I will explore how the Catholics corrupt language and thus expose both the characters in the play and the audience to auditory violence. Then, I shall determine the extent to which the cacophony of non-verbal sounds which emerges from Marlowe's play replaces words when alluding to the theological controversies of that time. Finally, I will show that Marlowe represents the massacre as a dance of life and death in which the dancers, or actors, move to the rhythm of a very precise tune and that the choreography may have reminded the audience of a hunting party. I will therefore draw a link between the sounds of the massacre, the frantic pace of the play and the movements of the protagonists. In the play, the massacre thus seems to become a bow and stable hunt where the sound of the bells stands, in fact, for the sound of the horn while the Catholics are turned into big-game hunters.

### **Debating (or Not Debating) on Stage**

In Hotman's *A true and plaine reporte of the furious outrages of France*, the murders are either described individually or collectively. Similarly, an alternation between highly individualised murders and mass murders is to be found in Marlowe's text. In the play, the scenes staging each of these individualised murders include at least one reference to a theological controversy. The first of these murders is that of the Admiral Coligny that Marlowe rewrites by having him murdered in his bed which is not the case in Hotman's text. In the pamphlet, Coligny is stabbed at home after being shot but the distinction seems to be the emphasis Marlowe places on the bed. The alteration seems at first inconsistent since the Admiral was shot in the arm. The Duke of Guise uses the wound to confirm Coligny's identity once he is dead:

ANJOU: Now, cousin, view him well; it may be it is some other,  
and he escaped.

GUISE: Cousin, 'tis he, I know him by his look.

See where my soldier shot him through the arm (5.33–36)

The wound, which becomes a brand for all to see (Anjou's injunction to take a close look at the dead man might be directed at the audience as well), and the use of a prop on stage, the bed, may have been designed to encourage the audience to remember Coligny as a martyr. Even though Coligny is not necessarily a martyr because he is killed in bed, on stage, the prop materialises his weakness and his suffering as it is reminiscent of the traditional pictorial representation of martyrs portrayed tied to beds, racks or torture beds (see Figure 1 and

Figure 2). The scene may thus be regarded as a visual death-bed scene relating back to an old-established artistic tradition. The bed is also present on stage to sharpen the contrast between Admiral Coligny dying in his bed for his religious beliefs and the death of the Duke of Guise, dying partly in connexion with his wife's love affair. Indeed, in Scene 19, a soldier kills Mugeroun, one of the King's minions, on Guise's order and one of the reasons given for this action is Mugeroun's affair with the Duchess of Guise. The scene opens with these words: "Sir, to you, sir, that dares make the Duke a cuckold, and use a counterfeit key to his privy-chamber door" (19.1–3). In the subsequent scene, King Henry will take his revenge and order Guise's murder for challenging his power, making his death an indirect consequence of his wife's infidelity and instilling elements belonging to a comedy in an otherwise very dark play. The two scenes revolve around the *locus* of the bedchamber, a place of torture in one case and a place of pleasure in the other.



Figure 1: Girolamo de Santacroce, *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*, oil on panel, 66 x 82 cm, c. 1550–1555, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.



Figure 2 : *Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus Triptych*, Dieric Bouts, ca. 1460-1464, M Leuven / Saint Peter's Church, photo: [artinflanders.be](http://artinflanders.be), Dominique Provost.

Moreover, even though it is extremely short, Marlowe imagines a dialogue between the Admiral and his murderer. In Hotman's text, the murder unfolds as follows:

VWhen they were broken into the Admirals chamber, Benuese came to him, and bending his drawn sword vpon him, said, Art not thou the Admirall? he with a quiet and constant countenance, [...] answered, I am so called. And then seeing the sword drawn vpō him, he sayde, yong man, consider my age and the weake case that I am now in. But the fellowe, after blaspheming God, first thrust his sworde into the Admirals brest, and then also stroke him vpō the head<sup>7</sup>

In Marlowe's play, Gonzago first asks where the Admiral is and a very short exchange between the two characters ensues:

ADMIRAL: O let me pray before I die!

GONZAGO: Then pray unto our Lady; kiss this cross. *Stab him.* (5.27–28)

While in Hotman's text the reference is only very vague and imprecise ("blaspheming God"), Marlowe elaborates on it to intensify the conflict and includes a precise reference to the cult of the Virgin Mary and the worship of relics since the character asks his victim to kiss a

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<sup>7</sup> François Hotman, *A True and Plaine Report of the Furious Outrages of Fraunce & the Horrible and Shameful Slaughter of Chastillion the Admirall, and Diuers Other Noble and Excellent Men, and of the Wicked and Straunge Murder of Godlie Persons, Committed in Many Cities of Fraunce, without Any Respect of Sorte, Kinde, Age, Or Degree.*, trans. Ernest Varamund of Freseland (London: 1573), STC 13846, lv, sig. G4r. <https://www.proquest.com/books/true-plaine-report-furious-outrages-fraunce/docview/2240876542/se-2>.

cross.<sup>8</sup> On stage, there might be a short pause between Gonzago's order and his action and that pause can be used by the actor playing the Admiral to indicate visually that he will not obey his murderer's order. Coligny's murder is thus directly linked to two doctrinal controversies which are explicitly mentioned on stage. The direct and explicit reference to these key issues must have had a strong impact on audience members and the brevity of the exchange must have contributed to increasing this impact, making these words all the more noticeable. Seroune's murder is strikingly similar. In Hotman's *A true and plaine reporte*, the murder takes place in Angers and is that of Masson de Rivers. In that text, as in Marlowe's, Masson de Rivers's / Seroune's wife opens the door to Mountsorrell. The two men meet and Mountsorrell kills Masson de Rivers / Seroune. The murder is described as follows in Hotman's pamphlet:

and by & by she broughte Mōsorel, to hir husband, who gētly embraced Masson and said vnto him: Canst thou tell why I am come hither? It is to kill thee by the Kings commaundement at this very instant time, for so hath the king commaunded, as thou mayst perceiue by these letters, and therewith he shewed him his dag ready charged. Massō answered that he was not guiltie of any crime, howbeit this one thing only he besoughte him, to giue him space to call to the mercie of God, and to commende his spirit into Gods hande. VVhiche prayer as soone as he had ended in fewe wordes, he meekely receiued the death offered by the other, and was shotte through with a pellet and dyed.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, in Marlowe's play, again, the murder openly results from a disagreement about doctrinal issues:

MOUNTSORRELL. Christ, villain? Why dar'st thou presume to call on Christ, without the intercession of some saint? *Sanctus Jacobus*, he was my saint; pray to him.  
SEROUNE. O let me pray unto my God!  
MOUNTSORRELL. Then take this with you. *Stab him. Exit.* (8.10–14)

The exchange is very short but two major theological issues appear in these lines: the invocation of the saints and the debate over the use of Latin.<sup>10</sup> In this vignette, the parallelism between Mountsorrell's words—"pray to him [*Sanctus Jacobus*]"—and Seroune's answer—

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<sup>8</sup> The cross mentioned in this exchange may refer to the white cross on Gonzago's burgonet or to the hilt of his sword or dagger. However, kissing the cross was a common practice observed by Catholics on Good Friday for instance and it was linked to the worship of relics. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Hotman, *A True and Plaine Report*, lxxvi–lxxvii, sig. K2r–K3v.

<sup>10</sup> Protestants rejected the use of Latin in church services and in their Bibles and favoured the use of the vernacular to make worship more accessible to all. The first official translation of the Bible in English, the Great Bible, was authorised by Henry VIII in 1539. As for the practice of invoking saints, it was a common act of worship in the Catholic Church. Indeed, Catholics believed that calling upon the saints could help their prayers reach God as they played the role of intermediaries. It was one of the practices rejected by Protestant reformers as they thought that all believers had direct access to God and that intermediaries were not necessary.

“let me pray unto my God”—suggests that the opposition between the two characters is doctrinal in nature. They offer up their prayers to two different entities. The juxtaposition enhances the difference of opinion. As a result of the insertion of a dialogue, Seroune’s death is made to look like the direct and even logical consequence of this disagreement, as suggested by the use of the adverb “then.” The scene also draws the audience’s attention to Catholic overreliance on Latin and to Protestant advocacy of vernacular literacy. Significantly, in Hotman’s text, Masson de Rivers is allowed to utter a prayer, which is not the case in Marlowe’s. Thus, not only is the pace of the scene faster and the murderer shown as more ruthless but it also draws attention to the link between Seroune’s plea to pray and his murder.

This leads one to ponder over another characteristic feature of the language used in these dialogues. As has often been noted, the play brings to the fore the powerlessness of speech and verbal communication to solve the interconfessional conflict.<sup>11</sup> And indeed, Marlowe’s play repeatedly stages the failure of verbal communication. In her compelling article about the play, Ruth Lunney suggests that the lack of lengthy dialogues during the massacre scenes was meant to defamiliarize or unsettle the audience and to encourage early-modern playgoers to interpret and decipher on their own what happens to the characters in these scenes.<sup>12</sup> However, the fact that, in the first part of the play, most of the dialogues are cut short or reduced to a few lines may also be analysed as a strategy to fashion the image of

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<sup>11</sup> In his analysis of *The Massacre at Paris*, Richard Serjeantson concludes: “It is also, in the end, a piece of dark wit about the inefficacy of verbal argument in the face of physical violence.” Richard W. Serjeantson, “Testimony: The Artless Proof,” in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 185. Rick Bowers also notices this characteristic of the Marlovian text: “Dialogue is effectively ‘cut off’ at the same time as moral order is dispelled, but the play itself continues to ‘speak’.” Rick Bowers, “*The Massacre at Paris*: Marlowe’s Messy Consensus Narrative,” in *Marlowe, History, and Sexuality: New Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Paul Whitfield White (New York: AMS Press, 1998), 132. Finally, Evelyn Tribble also analyses this aspect of the play: “The relative proportion of dialogue to stage action in the central massacre scene suggests the inadequacy of mere words to such events. She then goes on to argue that this aspect of the play mirrors the trauma experienced by the victims of these events and adds to the effectiveness of the play. Tribble, “‘Then Breath a While’: Compression, Kinesis, and Temporality in *The Massacre at Paris*,” in *Christopher Marlowe, Theatrical Commerce, and the Book Trade*, ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Roslyn L. Knutson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 58.

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Lunney, “The Bell, the Bodies, and the Bonking: *The Massacre at Paris* and Its Early Playhouse Audiences,” *Marlowe Studies: An Annual*, no. 4 (2014): 102. I am grateful to Dr. Georgina Lucas (Edinburgh Napier University) for suggesting this reference and a few others which have proved very helpful in writing this article.

the Catholics as men who use language as a weapon to humiliate and coerce their victims.<sup>13</sup> This is perhaps best exemplified in the scenes staging the murders of Loreine and Ramus. In these two scenes, the Duke of Guise mishandles language and, as a result, inflicts more pain on his victims. The dialogue preceding Loreine's murder is a case in point:

GUISE: Loreine, Loreine, follow Loreine!—Sirrah,  
Are you a preacher of these heresies?  
LOREINE: I am a preacher of the word of God;  
And thou a traitor to thy soul and Him.  
GUISE: "Dearly beloved brother"—thus 'tis written.  
*He stabs him.*  
ANJOU: Stay, my Lord, let me begin the psalm.  
GUISE: Come, drag him away, and throw him in a ditch. (7.1–7)

In this dialogue, auditory and physical violence are closely intertwined. The Duke of Guise quotes the Scriptures but turns the whole scene into a parody of the Protestant service (as does Anjou when mentioning the psalm). Indeed, Guise here uses words that belonged to a common opening formula in Protestant Scripture readings and sermons but perverts the formula by misquoting the Bible. The 1560 Geneva Bible, the 1568 Bishop's Bible and the 1582 Douay-Rheims Bible all contain a sentence which is close but not identical. In the Geneva and Bishop's Bibles, the sentence reads: "Therefore, my brethren, beloved and longed for" (Phil. 4.1). In the Douay-Rheims Bible, it is slightly different: "Therefore my dearly beloved brethren." Guise uses the word "brother" instead of "brethren" and inverts the order of the words as they appear in two of these English translations of the Bible with which Marlowe and his contemporaries were probably familiar. In so doing, the character alters the Scriptures, brings more chaos into the scene and inflicts even more violence on his Protestant victim. Loreine's very identity is redefined and shifts from a victim of the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre to that of a martyr dying for God and His Word, even if he is not allowed to speak.

This is all the more significant as Guise perverts the rules of the dialogue by not allowing his interlocutor to answer and counter him. As the Catholics constantly prevent the Protestants from speaking, the play also seems to suggest that the violence of the massacre intensifies when the Protestant voice is stifled and is replaced with that of their enemies. The same

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<sup>13</sup> The fact that dialogues are cut off may be regarded as intentional on the part of the Catholic characters or as a way for the playwright to highlight their ignorance. Indeed, these characters can be seen as not being able to use language properly and to engage in any debate. I have already explored this dimension in a previous article. See Jeanne Mathieu, "'Our Quarrel Is No More / But to Defend Their Strange Inventions' (4.2.7–8): The Art of Religious Dispute in Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," *Arrêt Sur Scène / Scene Focus*, no. 3 (2014): 137–45.



failure, intentional or not, to use language and to take part in a formal disputation is to be found in the exchange between Guise and Pierre de la Ramée before the latter is killed.

Ramus was a French Humanist who promoted the use of reason and rhetoric in the search for truth. He is only mentioned in passing in Hotman's pamphlet:

why were so many aged persons, manye that lay sicke in their beds, many gownemen, manye counsellors, aduocates, proctors, Phisitions, many singularly learned professors and teachers of good artes, and among the reste Petrus Ramus that renoumed man throughout the world, many yong students, executed with out hearing, withoute pleading their cause, without sentence of condemnation?<sup>14</sup>

Quite significantly, in Marlowe's play he is among the few characters who are given the right to express themselves before dying. He first asks: "O good my Lord, wherein hath Ramus been so offensive?" (9.23). The ensuing conversation enhances the violent aspect of the whole scene. At first sight, the Duke of Guise seems to organise his speech as a rational and argumentative debate:

And *ipse dixi* with this quiddity:  
*Argumentum testimonii est inartificiale.*  
To contradict which, I say: Ramus shall die:  
How answer you that? Your *nego argumentum*  
Cannot serve, sirrah.—kill him. (9.33–38)

The Latin terms, *ipse dixi* and *nego*, the verbs "contradict," "say" and "answer" all belong to a class of verbs that John L. Austin calls "expositives."<sup>15</sup> However, here, they are deprived of their argumentative function since Ramus is doomed to die and the outcome of the debate has already been decided.<sup>16</sup> Quite surprisingly, Anjou allows Ramus to answer the Duke but the latter refuses to reply. Instead of complying with the rules of the art of debate, he only orders the murder of his opponent: "Stab him, I say," (9.54). The dialogue is turned into a monologue and the whole scene ends with Ramus's death. The scene can be read, again, as the parody of a formal disputation with a burlesque and macabre effect.

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<sup>14</sup> Hotman, *A True and Plaine Report*, lxxiiii, sig. Kv.

<sup>15</sup> Austin defines expositives as follows: "They make plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how we are using words, or, in general, are expository. Examples are 'I reply,' 'I argue,' 'I concede,' 'I illustrate,' 'I assume,' 'I postulate'." John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 151.

<sup>16</sup> Before and during the exchange between the two characters, Guise repeatedly announces that Ramus will die. He first says "Stab him" (9.22) at the beginning of the scene, then announces Ramus's death as the conclusion of the mock argumentative speech that he delivers "To contradict which, I say: Ramus shall die" (9.35) and "kill him" (9.38). Finally, he repeats the order after Ramus has been allowed to reply: "Stab him, I say" (9.54). The order to stab the character, which is repeated twice and frames the dialogue, strengthens the idea that words are of no use and that the dialogue has not changed the outcome.

Finally, in addition to not wanting, or not being able, to debate with their opponents, the ultimate goal of the Catholic characters, in Marlowe's play, is to silence the voice of their enemies. Significantly enough, the description of Ramus's murder is framed by two verbs which are linked to speech. He first asks the Catholics: "O, good my lord, let me but speak a word" (9.38). Anjou answers: "Well, say on" (9.39). Ramus's reply is the longest cue in the massacre scene. He is allowed to utter 13 lines but, once done, the Duke of Guise starts speaking and he focuses on Ramus's voice and speech: "Why suffer you that peasant to declaim? / Stab him, I say, and send him to his friends in hell" (9.53–54). Here, the exchange degenerates into a fight in which what is at stake is the very ability to speak as the use of the verbs "speak," "declaim" and "say" illustrates. Moreover, the phrase "I say" used by the Duke of Guise shows that his words will replace Ramus's, which, on stage, symbolises his victory. He first silences his enemy by denying him the right to speak and then kills him.

These elements testify to the fact that the verbal exchanges contained in the succession of short episodes are meaningful. However, the voice of the actors was not the only sound that could be heard on stage. Marlowe included many other sounds in the massacre scenes and as Evelyn Tribble remarks, the soundscape of the play is "by far the most compelling means ensnaring the audience in the events of the massacre."<sup>17</sup>

### **The soundscape of the massacre**

Perhaps the most significant sound that rang out on stage during the performance of *The Massacre at Paris* was the sound of the bells. It is to be noted that the sound is not absent from Hotman's description of the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre. Indeed, he writes: "and the token to set vpon them, should be giuen, not with a trumpet, but with tocksein or ringing of the great bell of the pallace, which they knewe to be accustomed onely in great cases."<sup>18</sup> However, Marlowe seems to make special use of it. The bells are mentioned before the murder of the Admiral. The Duke of Guise first describes his plans:

Then I'll have  
A peal of ordinance shot from the tower,  
At which they all shall issue out and set the streets;  
And then, the watchword being given, a bell shall ring,  
Which when they hear, they shall begin to kill,  
And never cease until that bell shall cease (4.33–38)

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<sup>17</sup> Tribble, "Then Breath a While," 65.

<sup>18</sup> Hotman, *A True and Plaine Report*, lii, sig. G2v.

These words insist on the simultaneity of the murders and of the ringing of the bell through the repetition of the verb “cease” which applies both to the event and to the sound. The paronomasia linking the words “ring” and “kill,” both to be found at the end of a line, strengthens the link between the ringing of the bell and the massacre. The sound of the tocsin becomes the background noise of the massacre. At the end of the night, the Duke of Guise indicates: “And now stay that bell that to the devil’s matins rings” (9.86). The primary function of the sound of bells is here corrupted as the sound aurally materializes not a call to convene to pray but to kill. The religious ceremony that should have taken place between the first and the second peal of bells is turned into a bloodbath, perhaps recalling contemporary debates over the Eucharist and the use of sacring bells.<sup>19</sup> Then, before the beginning of the massacre, the bells are mentioned twice. The first of these occurrences is to be found in the speech delivered by the Duke of Guise, who orders:

Mountsorrell, go shoot the ordinance off,  
That they which have already set the street  
May know their watchword; then toll the bell,  
And so let’s forward to the massacre. (5.53–56)

A few lines later, the stage direction confirms that the orders given by the Duke have been carried out: “*The ordinance being shot off, the bell tolls*” (5.60 SD). Marlowe thus adds the sound of the artillery (the ordinance) and retains that of the bells to suggest that the murderers are traitors to their country as much as to God. The juxtaposition of these sounds during the first performance of the play in January 1593 was also probably designed to render the whole scene more spectacular and memorable. As Ruth Lunney argues when analysing the soundscape of the massacre scenes: “The scenes of the tolling bell offered the early audiences an intense emotional and physical experience, boosted by a prolonged period of anticipation and apprehension.”<sup>20</sup> This very physical and unsettling experience might have been enhanced by the sound of the Catholics knocking on their victims’ doors. While that sound is often mentioned in contemporary accounts of the events and in Hotman’s text, Marlowe made it

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<sup>19</sup> Bells were very much associated with Christian worship, as Marlowe’s reference to bells in *The Jew of Malta* suggests. At the beginning of Act 4, Barabas notices: “There is no music to a Christian’s knell / How sweet the bells ring, now the nuns are dead / That sound at other times like tinkers’ pans!” Christopher Marlowe, “The Jew of Malta,” in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.1.1–3. However, their use became controversial after the break with Rome. Even though bells did not disappear in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, there were several types of bells and some of them were rejected by the reformers, especially sacring bells which were rung when the Host was elevated. For instance, the Edwardian Injunctions of 1547 made the ringing of bells during the Sunday service illegal even though they retained the ringing of a larger bell before the sermon. See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 452.

<sup>20</sup> Lunney, “The Bell, the Bodies, and the Bonking,” 95–96.

audible on stage for his audience.<sup>21</sup> Before Seroune's murder, his wife, who only delivers three lines, takes note of a sound: "Who is that which knocks there?" (8.1) and Talaeus may refer to a similar sound when he warns Ramus: "The Guisians are / Hard at thy door, and mean to murder us" (9.7–8). These two possible inner stage directions coupled with the reference to the screams coming from the Protestants thrown into the river Seine at the beginning of scene 9 participate in the creation of an overloaded and overwhelming soundscape for the audience, with the sound of bells providing a continuous sonic background. The Catholics may not be able to penetrate the ears of the Protestant characters nor that of the audience with words, due to the brevity of verbal exchanges, but they penetrate the private space of their victims (their houses, their bedrooms) with their weapons and invaded the playhouse with loud noises. The Catholics' use and misuse of language combined with these loud noises once again increases the intensity of the violence unleashed against the French Huguenots.

Moreover, the term "ordinance," which is used in the play, is ambiguous since it can refer to a piece of artillery (most often spelt *ordnance*) or to a religious rite or decree (*ordinance*).<sup>22</sup> The sounds of the massacre take on a clear religious dimension. Finally, the phrase "a peal of ordinance," used by Guise in Scene 4, refers both to the political and to the religious conflict because "peal" is used to describe the chime of bells or the sound of the cannon. The collocation which is the most commonly found is "a peal of bells" rather than "a peal of ordinance" even though the use of "peal" to describe cannon fire is quite common in early modern drama. This shows how Guise blends religion and politics and indicates that the massacre will lead to a civil war, which is shown in the second part of the play.

In Guillaume Delaveau's 2007 adaptation of the play, the soundscape of the massacre was characterized by the overwhelming presence of Latin, another Catholic symbol. Indeed, in her performance review of the production, Nathalie Rivère de Carles indicates that the murder of the Admiral was performed as a pantomime to the sound of the Angelus, a prayer in Latin. After the murder, the director decided to add a sequence. Nathalie Rivère de Carles describes how: "a group of Catholic priests in ceremonial garb [...] began celebrating the

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<sup>21</sup> For other examples and the significance of this action, see Jérémie Foa, *Tous Ceux Qui Tombent : Visages Du Massacre de La Saint-Barthélemy* (Paris: La Découverte, 2021), esp. 40–41 and 52.

<sup>22</sup> As Paul Kocher notices, the sound of the ordinance was added by the playwright himself: "Marlowe's 'peal of ordinance shot from the tower' is not mentioned by any of the accounts, early or late, and is palpably a stage device; loud noises off-stage are very stirring to some types of spectators." Kocher, "François Hotman and Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 357n20.

Eucharist in Latin. [...] The screen replayed a close-up of the holy mass enacted on stage.”<sup>23</sup> Sounds and images were thus combined to shape the audience’s perception and interpretation of these events. And indeed, if, in the play, sounds are used to alter the way in which audiences view the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, arguably much more than in Hotman’s text, it also brings to the fore the importance of all the references to movements. Indeed, the whole massacre seems to be turned into a dance of life and death to the sound of the bells.<sup>24</sup> This aspect was reinforced by the presence of a piano on stage in Delaveau’s production of the play and by the fact that David Bowie’s *Space Oddity* was played through loudspeakers during the performance.<sup>25</sup>

### The choreography of the massacre

Throughout the play, Marlowe insists on the position and movements of the protagonists on stage, thus creating a very particular choreography associated with the massacre. This choreography may have reminded the audience of a hunting party with the sound of the bells replacing the sound of the horn. This connection between the human and animal worlds is already established in the title of the play since as Patricia Cahill reminds us: “the word ‘massacre,’ which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, did not enter into English until the late 1570s and did not become a proper name for a historical event until the French atrocities, is derived from the Old French word for ‘slaughterhouse’ and ‘butcher’s shop’.”<sup>26</sup>

The motif of the massacre as a hunting party comes from Hotman’s pamphlet in which Catherine de Medici thus describes the Catholics: “so as they were so snared that they could

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<sup>23</sup> Nathalie Rivère de Carles, “Le Massacre à Paris (The Massacre at Paris),” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25, no. 4 (2007): 146.

<sup>24</sup> There are many references to the movements of the characters, especially to their entrances and exits, in the massacre scenes. Spatial prepositions and action verbs recur. For instance, the Old Queen enters at the beginning of Scene 3, dies and Coligny says “Come, my Lords, let us bear her body *hence*” (3.29). The murderers are said to “Break *into* the Admiral’s house” (5.8) a few lines before Guise orders his body to be thrown down: “Then throw him *down*” (5.32). Seroune’s murder follows the same pattern. The stage direction indicates that Mountsorrell, his murderer, enters the stage, then Seroune’s wife orders her husband to come down—“Husband, come *down*, here’s one would speak with you from the Duke of Guise” (8.3–4)—before they all leave the stage. Finally, at the beginning of Scene 9, Ramus describes the movements of the murderers: “I fear the Guisians have *pass’d* the bridge,” (9.3), then Talaeus indicates that they have come closer when he says: “The Guisians are / Hard at thy door and mean to murder us. / Hark, hark, they *come*; I’ll *leap out* at the window” (9.7–9). My emphasis. These movements may have reminded the audience of traditional representations of the dance of life and death, or *danse macabre*, a prime example of which is Pieter Bruegel’s painting *The Triumph of Death* (1562). Clayton Mackenzie finds that the presence of black humour in the massacre scenes, the lack of compassion on the part of the murderers and the fact that death spares no one in the play (from schoolmasters to Kings) are also characteristic features which may have reminded the audience of a dance of death. See Clayton G. Mackenzie, “*The Massacre at Paris* and the *Danse Macabre*,” *Papers in Language and Literature* 43, no. 3 (2007): 311–44.

<sup>25</sup> Rivère de Carles, “Le Massacre à Paris,” 144.

<sup>26</sup> Cahill, “The Feel of the Slaughterhouse,” 162.

no way escape.”<sup>27</sup> The image of a hunt recurs several times throughout the pamphlet. However, in the play, the hunting imagery seems to invade the massacre scenes and redefines the identity of the Catholics as hunters and that of the Protestants as prey.<sup>28</sup> Very early on in the play, the Queen Mother compares the interconfessional feud to a hunt: “Now have we got the fatal, stragging deer / Within the compass of a deadly toil” (4.2–3). The image of the snare which is to be found in Hotman’s account of the events is here replaced by that of a toil. This word refers to a particular type of hunt known as net hunting. During these highly ritualised hunting parties, the game, usually deer, was enclosed in a circular space surrounded by nets. The hunters, on horseback, could then easily shoot the animals which were trapped and could not escape (see Figure 3). This type of hunt was associated with continental Europe and was strongly criticised for its lack of sportsmanship. This is what leads Raymond Monelle to write about “the dysphoric aspects of the *chasse aux toiles*.”<sup>29</sup>



Figure 3 Diego Velázquez, *Philip IV Hunting Wild Boar (La Tela Real)*, oil on panel, 182 x 302 cm, c.1632–37, National Gallery, London.

<sup>27</sup> Hotman, *A True and Plaine Report*, xlix, sig. Gr.

<sup>28</sup> The figure of the hunter was not necessarily positive in the Renaissance. Michel de Montaigne attacked hunting, and hunters, in his essay “On cruelty”: “Natures given to bloodshed where beasts are concerned bear witness to an inborn propensity to cruelty.” Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. Michael Andrew Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 485.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 95.

The technique and the weapons used by the Catholics in Scene 9 could also remind the audience of a bow and stable hunt. Edward Berry describes this particular form of hunting as follows:

In the most common form of such a hunt, deer were driven before stationary hunters armed with cross-bows, who were positioned in ambushes or specially constructed stands. Greyhounds, which hunted by sight rather than scent, were often used in such hunts, both to chase the deer to the waiting hunters and to run down those that had been wounded.<sup>30</sup>

The resemblance between this description and what is described on stage is striking:

GUISE: My Lord of Anjoy, there are a hundred Protestants  
Which we have chas'd into the river Seine,  
That swim about, and so preserve their lives.  
[...]

DUMAINE: Go place some men upon the bridge  
With bows and darts, to shoot at them they see,  
And sink them in the river as they swim.

GUISE: 'Tis well advis'd, Dumaine; go see it straight be done. (9.56–63)

The Protestants have been driven into the river Seine only to be targeted by archers who are positioned on a bridge higher up and the hunters, like the hounds, rely on sight to kill their prey as the repetition of the verb “see” in the words uttered by the Duke of Guise and Dumaine suggests. The hypotyposis, and the emphasis on the movements of the characters, or lack thereof, serves the purpose of stirring up a vivid memory of these events in the audience’s mind by conjuring up an image they were familiar with and of denouncing the actions of the Catholics. Indeed, bow and stable hunting was often seen as being deprived of any ritual value: “Descriptions of hunting in parks suggest that, unlike *par force* hunting, this sport was not considered an end in itself, an action invested with the significance of ritual, but an adjunct to court pageantry.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, unlike *par force* hunting, bow and stable hunts were organised in such a way as to exonerate the hunters (usually noblemen) from making too much effort and to prevent them from getting hurt.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, bow and stable hunting was considered less respectable than *par force* hunting and, in 1531, Thomas Elyot had described this type of hunt as follows: “Killing of deer with bows or greyhounds serveth well for the pot, (as is the common saying,) and therefore it must of necessity be sometime used. But it

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<sup>30</sup> Edward I. Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Alison Sim, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Tudor England* (New York: The History Press, 2011), 383–84.

containeth therein no commendable solace or exercise, in comparison to the other forms of hunting, if it be diligently perceived.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the massacre turns into an empty ritual defined by the movements of the protagonists. Finally, the repeated references to hunting combined with the fact that the Catholics are disguised and that the massacre occurs at night help designate the hunters as poachers. According to Roger Manning, the law was very clear: “Thus, the Game Laws made crimes of hunting without a sufficient estate, hunting at night or in disguise, breaking into a park, or being in possession of hunting weapons, nets, or hunting dogs.”<sup>34</sup> Through the actions, movements and outfits of the characters on stage, the massacre becomes a grotesque and inverted, or topsy-turvy, ritual enacted on stage.

Marlowe uses stage devices to shape the collective memory of the events of the St. Bartholomew’s night. The quality of the text that has survived may be poor, but some features of the play can still be read as elements helping us understand the methods and methodology at work when rewriting history for the stage. Through the use of moving *tableaux vivants* on stage or the direct allusion to theological issues in his dialogues, the playwright enhances the religious dimension of the confrontation. The dialogues are truncated to paradoxically underline the Catholics’ cruelty. On stage, silence speaks volumes and words are used to destroy the Protestants, mainly through parody and black comedy. The soundscape of *The Massacre at Paris* is also full of “sound and fury” which, again, encourages the audience to consider this event as part of a wider confrontation between Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>35</sup> The sound of the bells and that of the Catholics knocking on the doors add up to create a striking and memorable experience for the audience. Unsurprisingly, as Patricia Cahill reports, Roman Paska’s 1998 adaptation of the play featured loud music.<sup>36</sup> David Bowie’s *Space Oddity* could also be heard in Guillaume Delaveau’s 2007 production of the play.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the play visually redefines this fight as a hunting party with the Catholics as poachers and the Protestants as helpless prey. By appealing to his audience’s senses of hearing and sight, Marlowe ultimately asks them to use the play and their imagination to reinvent or recreate the events of that night in Paris. As the

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named the Governour*, ed. Foster Watson (London: J. M. Dent, 1907), 83.

<sup>34</sup> Roger B. Manning, *Hunters and Poachers: A Social and Cultural History of Unlawful Hunting in England, 1485–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 59.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the dichotomy is much less visible and much more ambiguous in the second half of the play. For an analysis of the ambiguous figure of Henri IV, see for instance Bowers, “*The Massacre at Paris: Marlowe’s Messy Consensus Narrative*” or Penny Roberts, “Marlowe’s Massacre at Paris: A Historical Perspective,” *Renaissance Studies: Journal of the Society for Renaissance Studies* 9, no. 4 (1995): 430–41.

<sup>36</sup> Cahill, “The Feel of the Slaughterhouse,” 156.

<sup>37</sup> Rivère de Carles, “Le Massacre à Paris (The Massacre at Paris),” 144.



Chorus puts it in William Shakespeare's *King Henry V*, a paradoxically much lighter play: "On your imaginary forces work / [...] / Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Act 1, Scene 0, Lines 18 & 34.

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