

**Unreliable Allies in an Uncertain World: Warnings from History in Marlowe's
*The Massacre at Paris***

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In the years immediately prior to the first staging of *The Massacre at Paris* (1593), the leader of the Huguenots in France, Henri of Navarre, had been fighting against both the moderate Catholics under Henri III and the more extreme Catholic League for control of France.¹ Following the assassination of Henri III in 1589, Navarre was crowned Henri IV, but the disputed succession meant that the new king's battles against the League continued until the end of the French Wars of Religion in 1598. England had provided some financial and military aid to Navarre during the civil war, including troops under the leadership of the Earl of Essex, while an expansionist Spain fought on the side of the Catholic League and tried to "exterminate Protestantism" in France.² In *The Massacre at Paris* Christopher Marlowe spoke to English anxieties about the potential spread of the violence in France, which provided "a terrible object lesson in what might happen, should a Spanish invasion or disputed succession destroy the Elizabethan peace."³ Elizabeth and her advisors knew that if the royal transition was not smooth, the existing splits in English religious life between the two confessions and within Protestantism could deepen and England could descend into sectarian violence, confusion and civil war.⁴ Newsletter reports from France had intensified this sense of foreboding through their use of graphic images of brutality and suffering.⁵ Protestants in England were divided over how they should support the Huguenots and Henri of Navarre in particular, who provided an important line of defence against aggressive Catholic powers in Europe. This article examines how Marlowe responds to these divisions

¹ "Huguenot" was the name frequently attached to members of the French Reformed Church from the mid sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century. For more information see *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, 4 vols, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (London: Routledge, 2004), II, 734.

² Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us: Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (London: Routledge, 1996), 62. Maurice Hunt mentions the aid Elizabeth sent to Navarre in "The Double Figure of Elizabeth in *Love's Labour's Lost*," *Essays in Literature* 19, no. 2 (1992): 174. Further details of this assistance can be found in Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy, 1558–1603* (London: Routledge, 2000), 94–95.

³ Malcolm Smuts, "Court-Centered Politics and the Uses of Roman Historians, c. 1590–1630," in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 24.

⁴ Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce: French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1996), 53–54; Alexandra Gajda, "Political Culture in the 1590s: The 'Second Reign of Elizabeth'," *History Compass* 8, no. 1 (2010): 92.

⁵ Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce*, 55.

by deliberately presenting the controversial military figure in an ambiguous light, thus drawing attention to both the risks and benefits of assisting Navarre's forces. It also diverges from previous studies on the drama by demonstrating how Marlowe elicits and reflects a variety of views towards the Huguenot leader among Protestant playgoers from across the social hierarchy and theological spectrum, including both conformists and Puritans.⁶

Review of criticism

Critical discussions about *The Massacre* have hitherto centred on Marlowe's selective use of sources and the similarities and differences between the Huguenot and Catholic characters. In the mid twentieth century, critics highlighted Marlowe's reliance on Protestant pamphlets for much of the first half of the play to create a supposedly jingoistic drama that appealed to the "ferocious Protestant nationalism" of his audience.⁷ However, in *Merlin's Prophet* (1977) Judith Weil questioned this consensus, pointing to Marlowe's ambivalent presentation of the Huguenot leader: "If Marlowe had intended only to reassure and flatter a Protestant audience, he would surely have made Navarre a stronger figure."⁸ Indeed, as Julia Briggs pointed out in the following decade, Marlowe had also adapted less complementary material about the Huguenots from Catholic League pamphlets, so his audience were forced at times to view the historical Massacre from the standpoint of the extremist Catholic perpetrators.⁹ Most recent critics have adopted this more balanced approach, which has the ultimate effect of rendering religious affiliation meaningless. For example, Sara Munson Deats writes that "the good guys and the bad guys are often very similar," and Gillian Woods claims that Navarre's adoption of the language of brutality employed by Catholic characters indicates that "the difference between the denominations collapses."¹⁰ Andrew Duxfield agrees, stating that Marlowe depicts "a morally complex world in which the distinction between Papist and Huguenot is elided."¹¹ In fact, Navarre is sometimes interpreted in a more negative light than Guise. For

⁶ Musa Gurnis demonstrates persuasively that the early modern audience would have included Puritans in *Mixed Faith and Shared Feeling: Theater in Post-Reformation London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 16–23. See also Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5–6.

⁷ Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 32.

⁸ Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 101.

⁹ Julia Briggs, "Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration," *The Review of English Studies* 34, no. 135 (1983): 278.

¹⁰ Sara Munson Deats, "Dido, Queen of Carthage and *The Massacre at Paris*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201; Gillian Woods, "Marlowe and Religion," in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 226.

¹¹ Andrew Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 107.

instance, Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman observe that in the second half of the play the Huguenot leader turns into the “supreme opportunist,” while Guise is revealed as both courageous and vulnerable.¹² However, not all recent critics believe that Marlowe dramatised the perspectives of both sides in the conflict. Paul Whitfield White maintains that “from beginning to end the play is rabidly anti-Catholic” and is designed to “excite and cater to the militant Protestantism” of English audiences in the years immediately after the Spanish Armada.¹³ Similarly, Paulina Kewes argues that the play was designed to be “powerfully anti-Catholic and anti-League” in order to encourage Protestants of all denominations to unite against the League and support further military and financial backing of Henri IV.¹⁴ While this reading recognises that the largely Protestant audience and country were fractured and therefore weak, it overlooks the divisive nature of the fictional Navarre and assumes that the playwright had a naïve belief that the significant differences in English Protestant attitudes towards Henri IV could be erased by the staging of the play.

Brian Walsh’s book, *Unsettled Toleration* (2016), has shifted critical attention towards the responses of London playgoers to the representation of multiple Protestant identities in the play. Walsh explores how *The Massacre* challenges assumptions of pan-Protestant solidarity in discourses of religious difference in the period through, for example, the inclusion of the terms “Huguenots,” “Lutherans” and “Puritans,” which “highlight differences, both between English and French Protestants, and within English Protestantism.”¹⁵ This article aims to build on Walsh’s examination of sectarianism by providing an analysis of how Marlowe exploits this religious dissention through his characterisation of the Huguenot leader. However, it departs from Walsh’s central argument that Marlowe intended the play to be a “cautionary tale” about the importance of religious toleration.¹⁶ Rather, I argue that Marlowe’s ambivalent portrayal of Navarre is intended to appeal to, challenge and expose the different loyalties and prejudices of Protestant spectators of various theological and political persuasions.¹⁷

¹² Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources* (London: Routledge, 1994), 256–58.

¹³ Paul Whitfield White, “Marlowe and the Politics of Religion,” in Cheney, *Cambridge Companion*, 79.

¹⁴ Paulina Kewes, “Marlowe, History, and Politics,” in Barelts and Smith, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 149.

¹⁵ Walsh highlights the fact that Marlowe describes Protestants variously as “Huguenots,” “Lutherans” and “Puritans.” See Brian Walsh, *Unsettled Toleration: Religious Difference on the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 34–35.

¹⁶ Walsh, *Unsettled Toleration*, 37.

¹⁷ This refers to spectators from across the full Protestant spectrum of belief—from conformists within the Established Church to members of Separatist sects, and those with different views on foreign policy in relation to England’s relationship with France.

Approaches to Foreign and Domestic Policy

High-ranking Protestants in Elizabeth's government were split over how England should respond to the Huguenot leader's ongoing pleas for assistance. Existing disagreements between different broad confessional groupings within the Privy Council and Court turned into a more ideological confrontation as a result of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572.¹⁸ Those against intervention on the side of the Huguenots and Dutch Protestants tended to be moderate, conformist Protestants, such as Archbishop Whitgift, Sir Christopher Hatton, Baron Buckhurst and Lord Cobham.¹⁹ However, Puritan sympathisers, including notably Lord Burghley, Francis Walsingham, the Earl of Leicester and the Earl of Essex, felt that support for Navarre's campaigns was crucial for the defence of England. These sponsors of the godly at home were the most vociferous in their backing of Navarre, and they put considerable pressure on the often reticent Queen to support his forces.²⁰ Lisa Ferraro Parmelee explains that "zealots like Leicester and Walsingham chafed for a military approach" to religious conflict abroad.²¹ They admired figures such as the Protestant knight Sir Philip Sidney who embodied a "reformed Protestantism of a type compatible with the martial necessities of the Huguenots and Dutch rebels, an appetite for tilting, [and] aggressive vaunting of honour."²² Therefore, Burghley worked together with Walsingham to ensure that the printing presses in England were being used to produce pro-Huguenot pamphlets to rally domestic support for France's Protestant hero, Navarre.²³

While this interventionist group sometimes overlooked Navarre's faults in their enthusiasm for his cause, Elizabeth was very conscious of his apparent fickleness and unreliability.²⁴ Richard Wernham reports that Navarre's assurances about his movements and strategy in this period were "very hurried and vague," and experience had shown the English that the Huguenot leader could not be relied on to pay back loans.²⁵ Despite this, the

¹⁸ Simon Adams, *Leicester and the Court* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 33.

¹⁹ Glyn Parry, "Foreign Policy and the Parliament of 1576," *Parliamentary History* 34, no. 1 (2015): 65–66; Linda Woodbridge, "Resistance Theory Meets Drama: Tudor Seneca," *Renaissance Drama* 38.1 (2010): 133; Adams, *Leicester and the Court*, 34.

²⁰ Woodbridge, "Resistance Theory," 132–33; Jane E. Nelson, *Shakespeare and Religio Mentis: A Study of Christian Hermeticism in Four Plays* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 133; Penry Williams, *The Later Tudors: England 1547–1603* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 312–13.

²¹ Parmelee, p. 12.

²² Rory Rapple, *Martial Power and Elizabethan Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 2.

²³ Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce*, 32–33.

²⁴ Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588–1603* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 40; Carole Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 75.

²⁵ Richard Bruce Wernham, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe, 1588–1595* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 283, 264, 197, 206.

pragmatic queen reluctantly sent limited financial aid to Navarre, as she recognised the strategic importance of doing so, but she made it clear that “she was backing him, not as Henri of Navarre, the Huguenot chieftain, but as Henri IV, the lawful King of France.”²⁶ The Queen’s pragmatic, rather than theologically driven, attitude to foreign affairs is evident in the alliances she formed with both Catholics and Huguenots. In order to maintain the peace in Europe, Elizabeth was careful not to be seen to intervene in French internal religious politics during the reign of Henri III and thus wreck the fragile entente between the English and French crowns that could be deployed against Spain.²⁷ Briggs writes that “an ultra-Protestant standpoint ran the risk of undermining the sacred institution of kingship if it presented the Huguenot cause too sympathetically.” She adds that “the direct expression of the kind of ultra-Protestant views that Marlowe has often been credited with in this play, far from guaranteeing financial reward, as some critics have supposed, might well risk official correction.”²⁸ Thus, Elizabeth positioned her approach to foreign policy between those of her interventionist and non-interventionist counsellors, and these three different viewpoints in government demonstrate how divisive a figure the historical Navarre was in England. Marlowe captures Navarre’s controversial reputation in his multifaceted portrait of England’s important but arguably flawed Protestant ally.

The Elizabethan government was not only divided in its approach to Navarre, but also in its sentiments towards the Huguenots who had fled the violence in France following the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. Some of the Queen’s Protestant advisors were suspicious of the refugees’ beliefs and intentions and so did not seek to defend their rights. For example, the Lord Keeper, Sir Nicholas Bacon, declared that the newcomers will “not be trustie to our Cuntrye and so more unmeet to Lyve amongst us,” and Sir Walter Raleigh claimed they “eat our profits and supplant our own Nation.”²⁹ However, despite such misgivings, the Privy Council demanded better treatment of the refugees.³⁰ Moreover, Henry Finch, the Puritan Member of Parliament for Canterbury, may have spoken for other godly ministers when he argued that “their Example is profitable amongst us, for their Children are no sooner able to go, but they are taught to serve God and to flee idleness [...] Our Nation is sure more blessed for their sakes.”³¹ Some Protestants in the ruling class therefore had a favourable and

²⁶ Wernham, *After the Armada*, 162.

²⁷ Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce*, 12.

²⁸ Briggs, “Marlowe’s *Massacre at Paris*,” 260.

²⁹ London, British Library, Additional MS 33271, fol. 16r–v; Walter Raleigh in Simonds D’Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Printed for John Starkey, 1682), 509.

³⁰ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us*, 38.

³¹ Henry Finch in *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, 506.

benevolent attitude towards the Continental Calvinists, but this set them at variance with the views of many in the lower orders of society. There was much initial sympathy among working people for the plight of refugees in 1572; for instance, many citizens had made generous donations to the French Church in London in order to help it support the refugees who had arrived in this decade.³² However, these feelings of compassion quickly turned to anger, and in the early 1590s riots broke out in London as residents protested against the presence of foreign Protestants. This change in attitude was due in part to resentment of the economic and religious liberties that had been granted to them by the authorities in London and the Privy Council.³³ Anti-immigrant agitation was clamped down on strongly by the authorities, which would have created the impression among many ordinary Protestant workers that their leaders sided with their new, radical Huguenot neighbours.³⁴

Extermination of the Reformed Religion

It was in this environment of mutual suspicion that *The Massacre* was composed and first received. While the French history play could have been written at any time following the assassination of Henri III in 1589, the critical consensus is that Marlowe wrote it in the second half of 1592 and the drama was first staged in January 1593.³⁵ The arrival of the French refugees in London in the previous decades seemed to validate the fears the play voices that dangerous Huguenot theology would spread inexorably. According to certain perspectives in Marlowe's drama, extreme counter measures were therefore needed in an attempt to eradicate it. The anxieties of the Guise faction about the flourishing of the Radical faith are demonstrated, for instance, through the treatment of the Admiral's body. After the murder of this prominent Huguenot, Anjou orders his men to take him away and "cut off his head and hands" (5.42).³⁶ The implied removal of parts of the Admiral's corpse was a sign that the Catholic League intended to dismantle the Protestant body piece by piece before destroying it completely. This act was a way of ensuring that followers of the "standard-bearer to the Lutherans" would be cut adrift, since "the head being off, the members cannot stand" (5.39, 22). Anjou then commands the soldiers to hang the Admiral on the cross "in

³² Walsh, *Unsettled Toleration*, 34.

³³ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us*, 60, 34, 35, 38.

³⁴ Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us*, 33.

³⁵ Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris*, ed. Mathew R. Martin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 39; Martin Wiggins, "Marlowe's Chronology and Canon," in Bartels and Smith, *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, 9; Penny Roberts, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*: A Historical Perspective," *Renaissance Studies* 9, no. 4 (1995): 430.

³⁶ Quotations in this article are taken from Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris*, ed. Mathew R. Martin.

chains” (5.46). The image of the Admiral’s body suspended on the tree in scene 11 is reminiscent of John Foxe’s descriptions of public executions in *Acts and Monuments* that often include details of unrepentant dissenters hanging in chains at the stake.³⁷ John Knott explains that the Protestant martyrs’ joy in their suffering, which was caused by the physical instruments of torture, “shows the limitations of the power of Church or state to control the subversive spirit.”³⁸ Similarly, the soldiers’ actions could be seen as an attempt to humiliate and control the “heretical” faith, but the chains appear to be too blunt an instrument to contain the tiny particles that could still escape from them and circulate further afield. Indeed, the Queen Mother’s statement that “th’air’s not very sweet” confirms that they are travelling through the air already, which suggests that the Admiral’s Protestant spirit is both ethereal and physical (11.16).³⁹ Briggs argues that during the historical Massacre, Catholic murderers were “eager to purge their country of the spreading uncleanness represented by the heretics” and so they regarded the killings as purification rituals. It is for this reason that the Admiral’s body is “symbolically a source of pollution” that proves to be “too powerful and pervasive to be dealt with by any single method.”⁴⁰ The violence against the Admiral and Huguenots in Paris is not simply a localised massacre of Protestant bodies, but rather forms part of a wider metaphysical war against Protestant ideology because Guise extends the butchery across France. He vows to “spare not one” in order to ensure that “there shall not a Huguenot breathe in France” (9.85, 5.50). This annihilatory language serves as a warning that if Protestants from across English society cannot unite to help Navarre defeat the Catholic League, Protestantism itself could face an existential crisis.

This prospect appears more likely when the audience considers that the murders of the Huguenot victims take place in quick succession. The fast pace creates a sense of unstoppable terror—a force and momentum so powerful that it could cross France’s borders. David Riggs writes that “English Protestants foresaw that they too would be slaughtered like animals

³⁷ See, for example, details of the executions of: Robert King, Nicholas Marsh and Robert Debnam in John Foxe, *An Abridgement of the Booke of Acts and Monumentes* (London: 1589), STC 11229, 8th Book, 22; Lord Cobham Fryer Forrest and in *Actes and Monumentes* (London: 1615), STC 17622, 137, 191; and John Hus in *Actes and Monumentes* (London, 1583), STC 11225, 624–25.

³⁸ John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8.

³⁹ Cf. the journey of Machiavelli’s soul, which travels through time and space to introduce Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*. James A. Knapp explains that in the early modern period supernatural spirits seemed to “move between the realms of the immaterial and material in ways that complicated the very distinction between the two” in *Immateriality and Early Modern English Literature: Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 303.

⁴⁰ Julia Briggs, “The Rites of Violence: Marlowe’s *Massacre at Paris*,” in *Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Richard Wilson (London: Routledge, 2013), 229–30.

under Catholic Rule,” since “militant French Catholics, the Pope and the King of Spain remained committed to a policy of brute extermination.”⁴¹ In order to intensify his Protestant and Puritan spectators’ fears that their religious beliefs could make them the next targets of Catholic terror, Marlowe ensures that the confession of the victims is always referred to in murder scenes, despite the fact that these details are not mentioned in the French sources.⁴² In particular, Marlowe often emphasizes the radical nature of the Huguenot victims’ faith, thus drawing parallels with Puritans in England, who were closest to the Reformed French Calvinists theologically.⁴³ For instance, in this short dialogue before L eran’s murder, Guise uses vocabulary such as “preacher,” “Word,” “brother” and “psalm” that is used frequently in Puritan rhetoric and therefore employed to identify L eran with English Puritans:⁴⁴

GUISE: Are you a preacher of these heresies?

L ERAN: 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.

(The Massacre at Paris, 7.2–6)

Marlowe thus creates a connection between the more zealous members of his largely Protestant audience and their French co-religionists around a possible shared fate and a collective identity that could have fostered a greater sense of unity against a common merciless enemy.

Reponses to Navarre during the Massacre

In the face of this religious terror, many English Protestants and Puritans in particular would have expected Navarre to take decisive action to avenge the deaths of their French brethren. However, in the first half of the play Marlowe casts doubt on the judgement and agency of the Huguenot leader because spectators learn that he assigns that duty to Him “that sits and rules above the clouds” (1.41). In fact, Navarre’s declaration to his men that God “will revenge the blood of innocents” encourages the audience to question whether God is on Navarre’s side, since there is no sign of divine intervention when the Huguenots are

⁴¹ David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 32–33.

⁴² See, for example, Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman, *The Plays and their Sources*, 261–91.

⁴³ Walsh, *Unsettled Toleration*, 35.

⁴⁴ Marinus van Beek, *An Enquiry into Puritan Vocabulary* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1969), 37, 48, 63; Allan M. Harman, “The Psalms and Reformed Spirituality,” *Reformed Theological Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 53–62. Other examples are given in Rudolph Chris Hassel, Jr., “The Accent and Gait of Christians: Hamlet’s Puritan Style,” *Religion and the Arts* 7, nos. 1–2 (2003): 103–27.

murdered in the drama (1.43). While some playgoers may have admired Navarre's faith in Providence, to others his words are likely to have appeared as just empty gestures. Therefore he would not have inspired confidence among all members of Marlowe's audience at a time when the English needed a strong ally against the aggressive Catholic League. This may have aroused fears that the international Protestant alliance was weak and built on false assurances.

Navarre's expressions of his hopes and predictions for the future could also have been regarded by many spectators as unreliable verbal signs. For example, his instruction to his men in scene 1 to pray that God will make "His Gospel flourish in this land" is likely to have rung hollow with even Marlowe's earliest audiences (1.56). This is because the historical Navarre was under enormous pressure to convert to Catholicism at this time, so it was far from certain that Protestantism would thrive in France. As early as August 1589, over three years before the first performance of *The Massacre*, Navarre had agreed to submit himself to the decision of a national council in the matter of religion in exchange for the allegiance of Catholic princes and nobles during the succession, so his conversion cannot have been entirely unexpected.⁴⁵ Wernham points out that "the conversion can hardly have come as much of a surprise to Elizabeth or her ministers. From at least the summer of 1592 they had been amply warned about Henri's poverty, the weakness of his forces, and the pressures upon him to receive instruction in the Catholic faith."⁴⁶ Therefore, some playgoers may have viewed the fictional Navarre's words through an ironic lens, recognising that his vulnerable position meant that his conversion was in all likelihood inevitable. This would have heightened existing anxieties that England's real-world ally would leave the Protestant nation increasingly isolated.

In the second half of the play, Navarre's character changes abruptly as he takes a more active approach to defeating the Catholic League, deciding to fight for his claim to the French crown following the murder of King Charles. In this battle for succession, Navarre positions himself as a defender of Protestantism and declares that he intends "to labour for the truth / And true profession of His holy Word" (13.50–51). Navarre later ascribes his victory against the Duke of Joyeux to God: "Thus God, we see, doth ever guide the right, / To make His glory great upon the earth" (18.3–4). It is likely that for some spectators these rousing statements would have elevated his status to that of a heroic Protestant warrior, while

⁴⁵ Nicola Mary Sutherland, *Henry IV of France and the Politics of Religion: 1572–96*, 2 vols (Bristol: Elm Bank, 2002), II, 271; Edmund H. Dickerman, "The Conversion of Henry IV: 'Paris Is Well Worth a Mass' in Psychological Perspective," *The Catholic Historical Review* 63, no. 1 (1977): 7.

⁴⁶ Wernham, *After the Armada*, 491.

for others the sudden transformation of Navarre's character would have underlined the impression that the Huguenot chief could not be trusted, particularly as "the rebellious King Navarre" is revolting against the lawful king Henri III (17.3). The potential for such contradictory responses demonstrates how Marlowe uses Navarre to elicit differing reactions from the majority Protestant audience.

The inclusion of Plessis in scene 16 as Navarre prepares for battle is significant because it draws attention to the historical Navarre and Philippe Duplessis-Mornay's strong association with Huguenot resistance theory, which urges citizens to resist usurper or tyrant kings.⁴⁷ For example, in the Monarchomach treatise *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579) Duplessis-Mornay declares that "the laws of nature, of nations, and the civil law command us to take up arms against these tyrants."⁴⁸ Such statements had troubling implications for the safety of Elizabeth, especially in light of contemporary concerns about potential attempts on the Queen's life following the recent assassinations of Henri III and the Prince of Orange, and the extremist Puritan William Hacket's attempt to "establish himself as the new Messiah."⁴⁹ For this reason, moderates in the Church of England chose not to offer wholehearted support to Navarre. They claimed that Monarchomach literature was seditious and a sign that Huguenots had turned away from the Church Fathers and towards the dangerous beliefs of Continental radicals. For example, Matthew Sutcliffe, Dean of Exeter, concluded that Huguenot resistance theory was "the sweete reformed doctrine (as they call it) of the perturbbers of our state."⁵⁰ The leading churchman Richard Bancroft also attacked Huguenot resistance tracts, arguing that "Protestant theories of rebellion were as dangerous as Catholic ones."⁵¹ He reminded his audience that England's near neighbour Scotland had recently suffered a Puritan revolt against King James VI, in which "the new erected government was the mother of all faction, confusion, sedition, and rebellion: that it was an introduction to Anabaptisme and popularitie: that it tended to the overthrow of his state and Realme, and to the decaie of his crown."⁵² The more conservative and conformist sections of Marlowe's audience might therefore have been alarmed by Navarre's talk of fighting in the name of God because it could have aroused fears of insurrection by radical Protestants.

⁴⁷ Biancamaria Fontana, *Montaigne's Politics: Authority and Governance in the Essais* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 120.

⁴⁸ Stephanus Junius Brutus [pseud.], *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos*, ed. and trans. George Garnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 150.

⁴⁹ Chloe Kathleen Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism: Politic Religion and Post-Reformation Polemic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 150–51.

⁵⁰ Matthew Sutcliffe, *An Ansvvere to a Certaine Libel Supplicatorie* (London: 1592), STC 23450, 69.

⁵¹ Preedy, *Marlowe's Literary Scepticism*, 148.

⁵² Richard Bancroft, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse* (London: 1588), STC 1347, 75.

Navarre reveals to Plessis and Bartas what audience members might have suspected were his true motivations for fighting for the French crown:

NAVARRÉ: The power of vengeance now encamps itself
Upon the haughty mountains of my breast,
Plays with her gory colours of revenge,
Whom I respect as leaves of boasting green
That change their colour when the winter comes,
When I shall vaunt as victor in revenge. (16.20–25)

Feelings of personal pride and the desire for revenge against the King are uppermost in Navarre's mind in this speech as he imagines his army, personified as the goddess Revenge, camped figuratively on his proud breast. These sentiments make Navarre's pronouncement a few lines earlier about acting 'in honour of our God' seem insincere (16.11). The speech thus serves to potentially discredit the view that Marlowe's Navarre and his historical counterpart are godly warriors who are concerned solely with planting "the true succession of the faith," and it aligns them instead with the violent and self-interested Guise (16.18). For instance, the malevolent tone of the "gory colours of revenge," which change hue in winter as his intentions darken, resonates with Guise's description of day turning to "ugly night" in anticipation of the murders he will commit (2.5).

In the aftermath of his battle with the King's forces, Navarre draws the audience's attention to the high human price paid by soldiers, including the poor English men who fought for him:

NAVARRÉ: How many noblemen have lost their lives
In prosecution of these cruel arms
Is ruth and almost death to call to mind,
But God, we know, will always put them down
That lift themselves against the perfect truth. (18.9–13)

This lament suggests that the social status of soldiers in Marlowe's audience could have affected their perception of Navarre in the play. The "noblemen" glorified here could refer to those forced to fight by the historical Navarre's Puritan supporters in the Privy Council, and the play on "noble" raises the question of how many aristocratic leaders had paid the same price.⁵³ Curtis Bright prefers to call Burghley's conscripts from the lower orders "cannon fodder" and explains that "the French campaigns were highly unpopular at home, with many

⁵³ Adam N. McKeown reports that over 13,000 English soldiers were deployed in 1592, mostly to support Henri IV's troops in France in *English Mercuries: Soldier Poets in the Age of Shakespeare* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 39; Nick de Somogyi also discusses the high human cost of contemporary warfare in *Shakespeare's Theatre of War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 4.

of the English forces deserting their posts.”⁵⁴ Moreover, some English Protestants were angry at the Huguenots for having to “dy like dogges as sacrifice for you” in savage foreign wars.⁵⁵ Their sacrifices appear to have not been appreciated because, according to Christopher Haigh, the French Protestant troops treated their English counterparts with “hostility.”⁵⁶ This may have been because Protestants in Navarre’s forces were not united theologically, since English soldiers would have come from churches with very different ecclesiastical structures and forms of worship to that of their fellow Huguenot soldiers. The “truth” that Navarre refers to here is therefore not as “perfect” and unifying as he suggests. Thus in this speech Navarre conveys the tension between the aggression of the interventionist faction in England and the reticence of many working people who were aware of the horrific consequences of war for them.

In spite of the terrible price that soldiers paid on the ground, Navarre’s emphasis on the importance of his alliance with Queen Elizabeth could have had the effect of drumming up support for the real-life French leader. Navarre speaks emotively of the need to work jointly with the English monarch to “beat the papal monarch from our lands / And keep those relics from our countries’ coasts,” in a reference to the contemporary fear that King Philip II was planning to launch a second Armada (18.16–17).⁵⁷ This heightened language underscores why robust joint action is necessary in the play-world and outside of the theatre in order to save both countries from the expansionist Catholic powers. Yet some spectators may have known that Elizabeth and the Protestant princes of Europe had been accused of failing to support Navarre adequately in his fight against the Catholic League. Leah Marcus writes that Elizabeth’s lack of enthusiasm and support for her religious brethren had caused widespread resentment in England and led to accusations that she shamefully “emasculat[ed] the international Protestant cause” and “scandalously failed to return” the affection and loyalty that Navarre had shown her.⁵⁸ In light of her current heavy financial commitments at home and abroad, the Queen stated in 1590 that she would only provide more money to Navarre’s army if the German Protestant princes also came to his aid. However, they were reluctant to contribute more to the international Protestant alliance due to sectarian differences, as “the

⁵⁴ Curtis C. Bright, *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama in the Elizabethan Era* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 3, 114.

⁵⁵ “A Libell, fixte vpon the French Church Wall, in London. Anno 1593,” in Arthur Freeman, “Marlowe, Kyd, and the Dutch Church Libel,” *English Literary Renaissance* 3, no. 1 (1973): 50, line 34.

⁵⁶ Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 2013), 170.

⁵⁷ Carol Z. Wiener, “The Beleaguered Isle: A Study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Anti-Catholicism,” *Past & Present* 51, no. 1 (1971): 49; Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, 57.

⁵⁸ Leah S. Marcus, “*The Massacre at Paris*,” in *Christopher Marlowe at 450*, ed. Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 155.

Lutheran princes and cities [...] felt no great love for a Calvinist King of France.”⁵⁹ It is ironic that a Catholic king enabled Navarre to succeed him as the next Protestant king of France, and a sign of how weak and fractured the European Protestant brotherhood of English, Dutch, French and German forces was that it was unable to prevent Henri IV from having to convert to Catholicism in 1593, the year *The Massacre* was first staged.⁶⁰

In the play, Marlowe uses very recent French history to make his audience uneasy about the future of Protestantism not only in France but in England too. The determination of the Guise faction to wipe out every atom of the Reformed faith, and the terrifying momentum behind the fictional Massacre indicate that the Catholic League did not intend to stop the terror at France’s borders. As the historical Navarre was England’s key ally against the League, the controversial question of how much financial and military aid Elizabeth should provide for his forces had potentially momentous consequences for England. Marlowe’s approach to the characterisation of Navarre demonstrates how divisive this foreign policy issue was because by presenting an ambiguous portrait of the Huguenot leader, he evokes feelings of both admiration and mistrust in his English co-religionists. Navarre is presented at once as a brave and devout warrior who fights for the defence of Protestantism, but also as an unreliable and power-hungry opportunist who threatens the divine right of monarchs to rule. This dichotomy reflects an English political context riven by interconfessional tensions between different Protestant groups along the theological spectrum and across the social hierarchy. By making these divisions the focal point of the London stage, Marlowe potentially challenges any notion that Protestants were a united group and thus exposes the weaknesses within England that could be exploited by her Catholic foes and destabilise the country after Elizabeth’s death. However, the flaws in Marlowe’s protagonist signify that the drama was not intended to be a moralist appeal to the audience to unite behind the French Protestant leader against a common enemy. More broadly, this article suggests that Marlowe had a strong interest in the increased fragmentation of English and European Protestantism in this period, so complexity of religious belief, rather than the familiar Catholic-Protestant binary, should be considered by historicist scholars in future studies of Marlowe’s plays. Further, an examination of the effects of these splits in Protestantism on society could reveal new layers of meaning in Marlowe’s works and that of other early modern playwrights.

⁵⁹ Wernham, *After the Armada*, 266–67.

⁶⁰ Wernham, *After the Armada*, 488.

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