

Marlowe's Reading of Machiavelli and Anne Dowriche's *The French Historie*

JOSEPH KHOURY

ST FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY

The history of the *Massacre at Paris* is well-known. Typically, the conclusions drawn by the quick and often reactionary readings of the play have been unfairly scornful. It has been called an inferior play, a fragment of a lost original, a hack work, a memorial reconstruction, a propaganda piece, and even “a prostitution of art.”¹ A hint of change came in 1979 when Judith pointed out that “irony pervades *The Massacre at Paris*.”² This was followed in 1983 by Julia Briggs with her copious corrective to this sad history, showing us that the *Massacre* is not a propaganda piece because “in Marlowe’s dramaturgy things are so seldom exactly what they seem” and, contrary to popular opinion, Marlowe “represents the events much as they would have struck an impartial observer of the time.”³ Briggs’s declaration is an important demarcator because she reminds us that Marlowe’s “plays reveal his fascination with morally complex situations,” and wonders “why this play has traditionally been regarded as the exception.”⁴ The disparaging attitude towards Marlowe’s piece is bizarre when we consider that *The Massacre* was the highest grossing play of the season for Lord Strange’s Men,⁵ and today it seems to be unpopular mainly with critics than with audiences or theatre professionals, as the few performances have shown.⁶ My purpose is not to rehash these important arguments but rather to show that Marlowe has in fact thoughtfully given us an important play that deals with what was a shattering event that traumatised Europe.⁷ Marlowe saw that a radical event requires a radical presentation, both in words and staging. His play should be understood as a simulacrum of the

¹ Wilbert Sanders qtd. in Julia Briggs, “Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration,” *Review of English Studies* 34 (1983): 257.

² Weil, Judith. *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin’s Prophet* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 82.

³ Briggs, “Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*,” 259.

⁴ Briggs, “Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*,” 260.

⁵ Sara Munson Deats, “*Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *The Massacre at Paris*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 199.

⁶ Marcus, Leah S, “*The Massacre at Paris*,” in *Christopher Marlowe at 450*, ed. Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Ashgate, 2015), 146.

⁷ Donald R. Kelley, “Martyrs, Myths, and the Massacre: The Background of St. Bartholomew,” *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 5 (1972): 1341.

French massacre. This is to say that Marlowe presents a play that showcases a bloodbath, a regicide, and cold political calculation at the cost of family, all in support of religious and political ideology. Furthermore, Marlowe shows the world a government that turns against its own people because of religious bigotry. Marlowe's approach to the event, I will argue, is based on several elements, including his strong reading of an important source for the play that has only recently been acknowledged, Anne Dowriche's *The French Historie*. Specifically, Marlowe differentiates himself from Dowriche's perspective on the massacre in both his use of Machiavelli and his characterisations of Catherine de' Medici, the Duke of Guise, and Henry III.

Marlowe's play, likely composed in 1592—although it could have been composed at any time between August of 1589 and late 1592⁸—dramatises two events: the first half covers a period of a few months and is devoted largely to the day of the massacre itself on 24 August of 1572. The second half begins the transition at scene ten and then covers the next seventeen years,⁹ including the events from the victory of the Battle of Coutras in 1587 until the murder of Henry III and the accession of Henry IV in 1589 (scenes 13–24). At 1250 lines—about half the size of a standard Renaissance play—the *Massacre* is likely a memorial reconstruction.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear even in this partial text that Marlowe imposes a unity on the two halves by focussing on the rise and fall of the Duke of Guise and Henry III,¹¹ and the play remains coherent and moving both in its use of irony and its aporetic ending. Equally important is the understanding of Marlowe's use of his sources, not all of which have been sufficiently acknowledged. For example, during the five-year period between 1587 and the staging of the play, Marlowe was travelling on the continent and, if he was not a full-fledged spy, he was certainly associating with Walsingham's agents.¹² Walsingham himself was in Paris at the time of the massacre.¹³ Marlowe's focus on Henry's homosexuality, especially Catherine's denigration of her son's sexuality, shows that he was very much aware of the Catholic League's

⁸ Edward J. Esche, "Introduction," in *Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe, Volume V: Tamburlaine the Great, Parts 1 and 2, and The Massacre at Paris with the Death of the Duke of Guise*, ed. Esche and David Fuller (Oxford University Press, 1998), 295.

⁹ Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and Their Sources* (Routledge, 1994), 256.

¹⁰ Esche, "Introduction," 298–99.

¹¹ Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, 251.

¹² Kuriyama suggests that Marlowe was a spy until 1592. Kuriyama cited in Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, 252.

¹³ See also Esche, "Introduction," 308.

pamphlets and their emphasis on Henry's relationships with his minions.¹⁴ Specific to *The Massacre* is a question regarding how Marlowe came to know of Henry III's dismissal of his council. Kocher had dismissed this episode as invented by Marlowe, but in fact it did happen.¹⁵ It seems likely, then, that Marlowe was acquainted with several sources that we have not discovered, sources that he may have borrowed or to which he had access through oral transmission (as suggested by Geoffrey Marsh elsewhere in this issue).¹⁶

Marlowe's presentation of events following the massacre in 1572 and up to the assassination of Henry is sympathetic to both sides of the debate; he is more interested in presenting a contested perspective on history rather than an ideological one.¹⁷ It is particularly instructive to compare his presentation of the events against his main source, Anne Dowriche's *The French Historie*. To do justice to the comparison, we must first look at Dowriche's important but long-neglected poem.

Anne Dowriche's *The French Historie*

Randall Martin points out that Dowriche's poem has historically been wrongly judged as "parochial and artless,"¹⁸ but there are now several decades of excellent work on it to which this paper is indebted. It is a 2400-line poem in poulter's measure and in three parts. The author, through the subtitle, makes clear that she is a devotee of the Puritan cause, a "hot gospeller," as Kenneth Bartlett refers to this kind of fervent Elizabethan.¹⁹ Her subtitle reads, "That is, a lamentable discourse of three of the chief and most famous bloody broils that have happened in

¹⁴ Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, 257.

¹⁵ Paul H. Kocher, "Contemporary Pamphlet Backgrounds for Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," *MLQ* 8, no. 2 (1947): 172.

¹⁶ This may be the case, for example, with *Edward II*, for which Marlowe likely used Jean Boucher's *Histoire tragique et mémorable de Pierre de Gaverston*, published in 1588, a source that may finally solve the mystery regarding whether Edward II is impaled with the rod. Boucher writes that Edward was impaled with "une broche rouge de feu," and that his second favourite, Spenser, was killed because of the "detestation de sa sodomie." Quoted in Briggs, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 264. For a discussion of the debate regarding the impaling of Edward, see Lukas Erne, "Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe," *Modern Philology* 103, no. 1 (2005): 28–50.

¹⁷ See also Esche, "Introduction," 308.

¹⁸ Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche's *The French History*, Christopher Marlowe, and Machiavellian Agency," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 39, no. 1 (1999): 70.

¹⁹ Kenneth Bartlett, "Thomas Hoby, Translator, Traveler," in *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carmine G. Di Biase, (Rodopi, 2006), 128.

France for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁰ The first two sections of the poem recount events in the civil wars leading up to 1572. The third part focuses on the St Bartholomew Day Massacre. Here, Dowriche largely draws from the work of Jean de Serres, whose chronicle was translated by Thomas Tymme in 1574 as *The Three Parties of Commentaries, Containing the Whole and Perfect Discourse of the Civil Wars of France*. De Serres’s chronicle covered the period 1557–1562, including the two events covered by Dowriche, as well as several others, especially the religious edicts and the death of the King of Navarre. Tymme had also added to de Serres the account of the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre provided by François Hotman in *A True and Plaine Report of the Furious Outrages of France*, which was published in English in 1573.²¹ A major feature of the poem is Dowriche’s expert use of rhetoric, notable for giving Catherine de’ Medici one of the most powerful speeches in the poem in which she motivates the French to undertake the gruesome massacre:

Cut off therefore the head of this infectious sore,
So may you well assure yourselves this Bile will rise no more.
The Captains being slain, the soldiers will be faint,
So shall we quickly on the rest perform our whole intent.
Pluck up therefore your spirits, and play your manly parts,
Let neither fear nor faith prevail to daunt your warlike hearts.
What shame is this that I (a woman by my kind)
Need thus to speak, or pass you men in valour of the mind?
For here I do protest, if I had been a man,
I had myself before this time this murder long began.
Why do you doubting stand, and wherefore do you stay?
If that you love your peace, or life, procure no more delay.²²

In a note to this speech, Dowriche adds, “These be the pillars, & this is the fruit of Popish religion.” Dowriche’s Catherine is clearly villainous, politically shrewd, and virulently Catholic. Dowriche also reverses the expected leadership roles the genders of the day were expected to play. I will return to these points later.

Dowriche’s themes are unified, her narrative is multi-layered, and her martyrology is strongly Puritan. This last point presents a major difference between her and Marlowe. Whereas

²⁰ Anne Dowriche, *The French Historie*, ed. Joanne Paul (Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2024), 75. All quotations from the text refer to this edition. My thanks to Dr. Paul for familiarizing me with Dowriche’s poem.

²¹ Paul, “Introduction,” 33.

²² Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 133.

Dowriche is clear about where her religious allegiance lies, Marlowe is not. Dowriche models her poem partly on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* even as she "interweaves heroic stories of Huguenot suffering and resistance with Old Testament, classical, and modern analogues of persecution, deliverance, and divine vengeance."²³ Marlowe, on the other hand, "presents his most brutally unsentimental critique of religiously inspired violence."²⁴

Dowriche's martyrology serves another purpose: she does not just lament the massacre as another Protestant calamity. Instead, following John Foxe, she re-situates it "within a wider heroic narrative of the persecuted elect in which physical suffering becomes an outward sign of divine justification."²⁵ Dowriche "transforms the relatively passive victims found in Hotman into active, heroic martyrs" and "creates a massacre which functions as an instance of the spiritual triumph for the Protestant faith."²⁶ Dowriche does this with her powerful and effective use of several rhetorical devices, including "*parrhesia* (frank speech)," given to those who actively martyr themselves.²⁷

Joanne Paul further points out that "rhetoric and especially *prosopopoeia* was associated with femininity, [particularly] in its potential for duplicity." The connection was made because "*prosopopoeia*, as a form of acting or masking, is ... associated with this stereotype about women's false self-presentation."²⁸ Dowriche's presentation of the Huguenots as constant and of the Catholics, especially their leader Catherine, as duplicitous, ironically strengthens the connection between the device and the perpetuated stereotype about women, even as it attempts, in Dowriche, to present a second—Protestant—feminine ideal, metaphorized with the naked image of Truth. In her writing of history, Dowriche was subscribing to "early modern history's

²³ Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche's *The French History*," 71.

²⁴ Matthew R. Martin, "Introduction," in *The Massacre at Paris*, ed. Matthew R. Martin, (Manchester University Press, 2021), 2.

²⁵ Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche's *The French History*," 73.

²⁶ Micheline White, "'Cunning in Controversies': English Protestant Women Writers and Religious and Literary Debates, 1580–1615," Ph.D., (Loyola University Chicago, 1998), 116, quoted in Paul, "Introduction," 36. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304422527/abstract/4A4458E7BC1B4576PQ/1>.

²⁷ Paul, "Introduction," 39. George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy, A Critical Edition*, Ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn (Cornell University Press, 2007), 312, describes Parrhesia this way:

The fine and subtle persuader, when his intent is to sting his adversary, or else to declare his mind in broad and liberal speeches, which might breed offense or scandal, he will seem to bespeak pardon beforehand, whereby his licentiousness may be the better borne withal. As he that said:

If my speech ha t'offend you any way,

Think it their fault, that force me to say. (original emphasis)

²⁸ Paul, "Introduction," 43.

propensity to convey moral rather than evidentiary truths.”²⁹ Without question, Dowriche’s poem is interested almost exclusively in moral rather than “worldly truth,”³⁰ and makes this position clear in the address “To the Reader”:

Here as in a glass, you shall plainly see the picture of all the moral virtues most lively described, in the strange patience, the godly perseverance, the comfortable orations, sweet speeches, and the constant and famous endings of these sacred Martyrs.³¹

The moral truth that Dowriche conveys is unambiguously Puritan, intended to denigrate Catholicism which, being the religion of the French monarchy, initiated the massacre. Dowriche’s Catherine de’ Medici, whom she glues to Machiavelli with this note, “The queen mother was a good scholar of that devil of Florence, Machiavelli, of whom she had learned many bad lessons, as this,” conveys one of his most important teachings, the ruler’s need to take advantage of *occasio*, or opportunity:

The Prince of *Condé*, with the rest that mischief did procure
Are close within our walls, we have them in a trap;
Good fortune (lo) hath brought them all, & laid them in our lap.
By force or flight to save their lives it is too late,
If we (to cut off future fear and cause of all debate)
Do take the proffered time: which time is only now,
And wisdom matched with policy our dealings doth allow.
We need not fear the spot of any cruel fame,
So long as we may feel some ease or profit by the same.³²

Occasio is the ability to take advantage of the time at hand. To use Machiavelli’s language, it is the time during which a prudent prince uses his *virtù* to take advantage of the *occasione* that *fortuna* has given him. In today’s language, it is the choice of turning a crisis into an opportunity, which Machiavelli conveys in Chapter six of the *Prince*:

And as one examines their [new princes’] actions and lives, one does not see that they had anything else from fortune than the opportunity [*occasione*], which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased. Without that opportunity their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated, and without that virtue the opportunity would have come in vain.³³

²⁹ Megan Matchinske, “Moral, Method, and History in Anne Dowriche’s *The French Historie*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 34, no. 2 (2004): 176.

³⁰ Paul, “Introduction,” 38.

³¹ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 80.

³² Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 132.

³³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 6.23.

By calling him “the devil of Florence,”³⁴ Dowriche also turns Machiavelli’s teaching into a devilish exercise that masks itself as truth and acts as a motivator for the massacre. She emphasises this by having Satan approve of the use of *occasione*, connecting it to the classical figure of *kairos*, that is, “the right moment or opportunity which must be seized,” which was common “in both Renaissance political and rhetorical writing, as well as Puritan theology.”³⁵ Her Prologue begins with Satan’s oration to the French council in which he exhorts them to

... make show, as though you loved to live at ease,
As weary of these broils, you must entreat to have a peace.
The King as chiefest man this play must first begin,
By loving letters, words, and cheer at first to bring them in.³⁶

The Council follows Satan’s advice. The suggestion is that the marriage between Henry of Navarre and Margaret de Valois was a ruse to make Protestants believe that they are accepted in French society and hence safe. Of special note is Dowriche’s use of theatrical metaphors in her narrative, especially following Satan’s speech, turning Catherine into a dramaturg:

But here the Prologue ends, and here begins the play,
For bloody minds resolved quite to use no more delay.
The Mother Queen appears now first upon the Stage,
Where like a devilish sorceress with words demure and sage
The King she calls aside, with other trusty mates,
Into a close and secret place, with whom she now debates
The great desire she had to quit them all from care,
In planting long a bloody plot, which now she must declare.³⁷

The acting of a part emphasises deception; the intention of the plot is to achieve a secret end. The purpose of playing is to realize the success which *occasione* would give them and which Satan had already approved of earlier. It is the kind of discourse that is also deceptive and irreligious and intended solely to achieve selfish and harmful ends:

He sits not idle now, he calls his wits in place,
Some cunning knack for to contrive to help him in this case.
His wily wilful craft by long experience bred
Hath taught him now an ancient feat to crush the gospels’ head.
Now summons he his men and servants to appear:

³⁴ Dowriche’s use of the trope that Machiavelli is the devil had been well established, as Randall Martin, following Margaret Scott, notes: Randall Martin, “Anne Dowriche’s *The French History*” (1999), 76.

³⁵ Paul, “Introduction,” 49.

³⁶ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 123.

³⁷ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 132.

“Now help me at this need (quoth he) my friends and fellows dear;
Now is the time to stir while matters yet be new,
While blinded minds in doubting hand, not knowing what is true.”³⁸

This kind of discourse had become identified as “Reason of State,” which argues that religion must always remain functional and be used in service of the state.³⁹ Dowriche, however, disavows the functional use of religion, especially in her note in which she slams “Louis the 11” and his supposed use of the phrase “*Qui nescit dissimulare. nescit regnare*: he that cannot dissemble, knoweth not how to reign.”⁴⁰ By connecting Louis’ statement with Elizabeth’s rule, Dowrich “is presenting a form of political thinking associated with Reason of State in contrast to that based on the pursuit of truth, true religion, and godliness.”⁴¹

The truth—*Veritas*—represents the true Puritan religion to which Dowriche herself subscribes, whereas dissimulation and reason of state are represented by the Catholic Catherine or Louis. Ironically, *Occasio*, like *Veritas*, is also traditionally pictured “as a naked woman . . . , with a bald head and long forelock—she can be grasped only as she approaches, not as she departs.”⁴² For the Puritans, “naked truth was . . . a symbol for the stripping away of the trappings and superstitions of the Catholic Church, uncovering the simple truth of God’s Word.”⁴³ Although *Veritas* and *Occasio* are alike in their iconography, they serve opposing perspectives, especially in Dowriche’s poem. Here, *Veritas* represents Dowriche and her Puritanism and *Occasio* represents Catherine de’ Medici and her Catholicism. Naming Elizabeth at the close of the poem suggests that the purpose of *The French Historie* is to counsel the queen to “choose between these two exemplars.”⁴⁴ Ironically, even though she presumably opposes Machiavelli, Dowriche fully takes advantage of his teachings, specifically, to use religion to achieve political success, but by counselling the monarch to action.

Mihoko Suzuki suggests that Dowriche’s purpose in writing *The French Historie* is to counsel Elizabeth on policy by using “strategic indirection” to avoid the fate of those who chose

³⁸ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 88.

³⁹ Paul, “Introduction,” 50.

⁴⁰ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 160.

⁴¹ Paul, “Introduction,” 50.

⁴² Paul, “Introduction,” 51.

⁴³ Paul, “Introduction,” 25.

⁴⁴ Paul, “Introduction,” 51.

a blunter path,⁴⁵ including John Stubbs who likely influenced Dowriche, as suggested by lines from the conclusion of the poem, praying that Elizabeth “hunt” Catholics and yet also avoid a repetition of the French massacre:

The Lord grant *England* peace and mercy from above,
That from the *Truth* no trouble may their fixed heart remove;
With wished life and health, Lord long preserve and keep
That Noble Queen *Elizabeth*, chief Pastor of thy sheep;
And that she may find out, and hunt with perfect hate,
The Popish hearts of feigned friends before it be too late;
And that in woeful *France* the troubles that we see,
To *England* for to shun the like, may now a warning be.⁴⁶

These resemble Stubbs's call to Elizabeth to forgo her proposed marriage to the French and Catholic Duke d'Alençon:

For the Lord's namesake, therefore, O Christian Queen Elizabeth, take heed to yourself and to the Church of Jesus Christ for which he shed his blood, and which he hath shielded under your royal defense; show yourself a zealous prince for God's gospel to the end; foresee, in a tender love to this people committed to your government, the continuance of the truth among them and their posterity.⁴⁷

Both Dowriche and Stubbs's warnings can be taken as forms of resistance to the queen's acceptance of “feigned friends,” that is, of counsellors and, in Stubbs's warning, of a potential mate. The queen needs to hunt these false friends, who are invariably Catholic. Resisting the queen was dangerous, as Stubbs was to discover, but some Puritans did resist, believing themselves, unlike the Catholics, to be loyal to Her Majesty and to break the law only because the law erred.⁴⁸

Criticising the queen, however carefully, always carried with it the potential of severe punishment. How does Dowriche, who, Suzuki insists, “is critical of Elizabeth because she contested Elizabeth's policies,” escape this potential danger? Suzuki declares that Dowriche's “critique is complicated by her gendered authorial identity and her identification with Elizabeth as a female monarch,” and adds that her “ambivalent representation of Catherine de' Medici as

⁴⁵ Mihoko Suzuki, “Warning Elizabeth with Catherine de' Medici's Example: Anne Dowriche's *French Historie* and the Politics of Counsel,” in *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 176.

⁴⁶ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 161.

⁴⁷ John Stubbs, *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (University of Virginia Press, 1968), 29.

⁴⁸ Paul, “Introduction,” 52.

an effective architect of the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacre functions as a demonized double of Elizabeth as a female monarch."⁴⁹ Suzuki nevertheless makes a distinction between Catherine and Elizabeth, arguing that even though similarities between the two female monarchs exist, especially in their addresses to their people—citing Elizabeth's Tilbury speech—Catherine is not pictured as a ruler but only “in the role of an evil counselor manipulated by Satan and following the tenets of Machiavelli,” not unlike “Lady Macbeth.”⁵⁰

Dowriche also references the famous maxim regarding the lion and the fox,⁵¹ which Machiavelli uses in chapter 18 of *The Prince*. In a note, she declares, “Lesson. A Prince must imitate the natures of a Fox and a Lion: a Fox to allure and deceive, a Lion to devour without mercy, when occasion is offered.”⁵² Although the maxim was widely known, Machiavelli likely borrowed it from Cicero's *De officiis*,⁵³ but he rejects Cicero's conclusions and supports the use of fraud as sometimes necessary to the success of the state. Dowriche, in turn, rejects Machiavelli's conclusions. Her understanding of Machiavelli, however, is skewed by the mediator Gentillet, which differentiates her use of Machiavelli from Marlowe's.

Randall Martin shows that Dowriche's Machiavellian statements correspond closely to Innocent Gentillet's *Discours... Contre Nicolas Machiavel* (1576) which had circulated in Simon Patricke's English translation of 1577 before its printing in 1602.⁵⁴ Because the translation was not available until 1602, it seems that Dowriche was able to read Gentillet in Latin or possibly in the French original.⁵⁵ Unlike Dowriche, Marlowe's Machiavelli does not correspond well to Gentillet's, so he must have known Machiavelli another way, as I will show below. Marlowe took what he needed to interpret a story to suit his own purposes and sought Machiavellism out for particular reasons. Marlowe wanted to transform both Dowriche and Machiavelli, and he wanted his Machiavelli emboldened on stage, even if he was, at first glimpse, caricatured. Before we look at how Marlowe transforms his predecessors, we must look at how England had received Machiavelli.

⁴⁹ Suzuki, “Warning Elizabeth,” 180.

⁵⁰ Suzuki, “Warning Elizabeth,” 182.

⁵¹ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 133.

⁵² Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 133. Dowriche references several other Machiavellian teachings that she had acquired via Gentillet (132–33).

⁵³ Cicero, *On Moral Obligation*, trans. by John Higginbotham (Faber and Faber, 1967), 1.11.34 and 1.13.41.

⁵⁴ Randall Martin, “Anne Dowriche's *The French History*” (1999).

⁵⁵ N. W. Bawcutt, “‘Myth of Gentillet Reconsidered’: an Aspect of Elizabethan Machiavellianism,” *The Modern Language Review* 99 no. 4 (2004): 872–73.

England's Machiavelli

The English were ambivalent towards Italy. On the one hand, Italian learning was highly esteemed, as the reading habits and the number of translations of Italian works of the Elizabethans confirm, and on the other hand, Italy was Catholic and the seat of the Pope. The ambivalence towards Italy included ambivalence towards Machiavelli who, nevertheless, was discussed by writers in the 1540s, and several privileged Englishmen possessed copies of his works. *The Prince* became available to Elizabethan writers in Latin as early as 1560, and in English by 1585. But we know that the Florentine was being read in England earlier in the sixteenth century, as the letter of 13 February 1537 from Henry Parker, Lord Morley, sent to Thomas Cromwell—then Lord Privy Seal, makes clear. With the letter, Lord Morley had also included the *Florentine Histories* and *The Prince*, together with his own marginal notations, and recommended them for study.⁵⁶ Richard Morrison, the previous year, had written *A Remedy for Sedition* in which he names Machiavelli and his *Discourses* with approbation.⁵⁷ Other examples are cited below. Closer to Marlowe's time, in 1579, Gabriel Harvey remarks that friends at Cambridge had become "pretty well acquainted ... with a certain parlous book called ... *Il Principe* di Niccolò Machiavelli." He also added that others were "as cunning in his *Discorsi*."⁵⁸ These would have been available in Italian. Marlowe himself began his university studies at Cambridge in 1580, taking his BA degree in 1584 and his MA in 1587. Between 1584 and 1588, Harvey's good friend, John Wolfe, published five of Machiavelli's works in Italian with false title pages.⁵⁹ Clearly, there was strong demand for Machiavelli's writings for, as Felix Raab

⁵⁶ Kenneth Bartlett, "Morley, Machiavelli and the Pilgrimage of Grace," in *Triumphs of English, Lord Morley: Translator to the Tudor Court*, ed. Marie Axton and James Carley (British Library Publications, 2000), 77–85.

⁵⁷ Bartlett, "Morley," 82.

⁵⁸ Harvey's marginalia are quoted in Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 94. For Harvey's Machiavellism, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read His *Livy*," *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78, and T. H. Jameson, "The 'Machiavellianism' of Gabriel Harvey," *PMLA* 56, no. 3 (1941): 645–56.

⁵⁹ For a study of Wolfe's printing habits, especially regarding Machiavelli, see Adolph Gerber, "All of the Five Fictitious Italian Editions of Writings of Machiavelli and Three of those of Pietro Aretino Printed by John Wolfe of London (1584–1588)," *Modern Language Notes* 22, no. 1 (1907): 2–6; 22, no. 5 (1907): 129–35; 22, no. 7 (1907): 201–206; and Peter Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 86–110. The history of Machiavelli's reception in England is well documented. The following list is in alphabetical order: N. W. Bawcutt, "Machiavelli and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," *Renaissance Drama* 3 (1970): 3–50 and "'Policy,' Machiavellism, and the Earlier Tudor Drama," *English Literary Renaissance* 1 (1971): 195–209; Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Edward Meyer, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama* (Burt Franklin, 1897); Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart: Essays on*

asserts, “no one copies, translates and illicitly prints a writer if people are not interested in reading him.”⁶⁰ This demand did not necessarily result in a case of straight influence of Machiavelli on the English, but rather points out the uses to which Machiavelli was put.

English ambivalence regarding Italy was a state of mind ripe for exploitation by playwrights, especially in order “to influence audience response and, in some cases, provide cover for political opposition.”⁶¹ Marlowe exploited this ambivalence when he introduced *Machevill* onto the English stage, but rather than reacting to Machiavelli, he was reacting to the English understanding of the Florentine. For some reason, however, most scholars have accepted as a truism that Marlowe’s great contemporary, Shakespeare, simply borrowed ideas and inserted them into his works whereas Marlowe used them to ensure that his plays are a manifestation of his own personality. We should instead be asking how Marlowe reacted to Machiavelli and to English Machiavellism. For example, we know that Marlowe was in contact with Machiavelli’s writings and was intrigued by their potential social and dramatic applications, especially if, as Antonio D’Andrea asserts, Marlowe’s Prologue to *The Jew of Malta* contains a phrase regarding citadels and letters from one of Machiavelli’s lesser read works, *The Art of War*, Book 7.⁶² D’Andrea’s thesis is sound, especially if we remember that Machiavelli’s *Arte della guerra* was

Cranshaw, Machiavelli, and Other Studies in the Relations Between Italian and English Literature from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot (Peter Smith, 1966) and *Machiavelli and the Elizabethans* (Proceedings of the British Academy, Humphrey Milford Amen House, 1928); Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964); and Irving Ribner, “Bolingbroke, A True Machiavellian” *Modern Language Quarterly* 9 (1948): 177–83, “Marlowe and Machiavelli,” *Comparative Literature* 6 (1954): 349–56, and “The Significance of Gentillet’s *Contre-Machiavel*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 10 (1949): 153–57. There are others. Emile Gasquet lists William Cecil, Sir Thomas Smith, Henry Percy, Lord Lumley, and William Watson among others whose libraries contained copies of some of Machiavelli’s major writings; see Gasquet, *Le Courant Machiavelien dans la pensée et la littérature anglaises du XVI^e siècle* (Didier, 1970), 47. George Watson’s “Machiavel and Machiavelli,” *Sewanee Review* 84 (1976): 630–48 also shows that Thomas Kyd himself owned an English manuscript of *The Prince*. Pages 15–33 of George Mosse’s *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Basil Blackwell, 1957) discuss Machiavelli’s influence on England, especially concerning the relationship between Christianity and the idea of reason of state. More recently, Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Duke University Press, 1993), has adumbrated the connection between religion and ideology in England, especially noting Machiavelli’s and Montaigne’s influence on the connection (3–28).

⁶⁰ Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, 52.

⁶¹ Michele Marrapodi, “Introduction,” in *Shakespeare’s Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Michele Marrapodi et. al (Manchester University Press, 1993), 7.

⁶² Antonio D’Andrea, “Studies on Machiavelli and His Reputation in the Sixteenth Century: Marlowe’s Prologue to *The Jew of Malta*,” *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5 (1960): 226–27.

translated into English in 1560 with a five-page dedication to Elizabeth.⁶³ Additionally, I would argue that the reference to the Alps echoes Machiavelli's phrase from the same book 7, where Fabrizio says, "Before our Italian princes had been scourged by men from beyond the Alps, they thought it sufficient for princes to write handsome letters."⁶⁴

Marlowe's Transformation

How, then, does Marlowe transform Dowriche? To begin with, Marlowe's purpose in narrating the events differs from Dowriche's. A major distinction between Dowriche and Marlowe is that Dowriche selects events to narrate "in order to support her own position as author, [emphasising] her central purpose in edifying God's people, and its relevance to a realm governed by a female monarch,"⁶⁵ whereas Marlowe constructs a narrative that remains ambiguous regarding its stance towards the events and their outcome. As Sara Munson Deats puts it, the play "argues on both sides of the question," that is, "as a satire on the treachery or weakness of monarchs and the use of religion as a cloak for Machiavellian policy, as well as a critique of religious violence."⁶⁶ This difference is best gleaned from Marlowe's presentation of the queen mother, which resembles but does not slavishly imitate Dowriche's portrait.

Marlowe tones down Dowriche's presentation of Catherine but maintains her malicious character. He alters her Machiavellian persona, however, because, unlike a true Machiavellian, she is not deceitful enough to hide her malice; that is, she fails "to be a great pretender and dissembler."⁶⁷ In *The Massacre*, she is less active and serves the Guise in the quest they both share, to eradicate the Huguenots. Marlowe also tempers Dowriche by not representing the "process of assimilating French history into English providentialism,"⁶⁸ as the *French Historie* does. Marlowe's modification of his sources is seen particularly in the Ramus episode. In Hotman, the death of Ramus is not dealt with in any meaningful way; he is simply "an item in a list," and in Goulet's *Mémoires* (based on *Le tocsin contre les massacreurs*), Ramus is shown

⁶³ *The Arte of warre, written first in Italiā by Nicholas Machiauell, and set forth in Englishe by Peter Whitehorne, student at Graies Inne...* (London, 1560–1562).

⁶⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans. Ellis Farnsworth, rev. Neal Wood (Da Capo Press, 1990), 7.210.

⁶⁵ Paul, "Introduction," 37.

⁶⁶ Sara Munson Deats, "Dido, Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201.

⁶⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.70.

⁶⁸ Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche's *The French History*," 73.

trying to buy his life with some gold.⁶⁹ Marlowe's account differs markedly from the accounts in his sources. His Ramus is courageous, dignified, and does not have gold to give. He also engages in a discussion of rhetoric, which clearly interests Marlowe who likely studied it at Cambridge, at which time the Ramist controversy was prominent. Most touching, however, is Marlowe's inclusion of Ramus's Catholic friend Taleus who declares to the assassins, "I am, as Ramus is, a Christian" (9.14).⁷⁰ The historical Taleus had already been dead for ten years, but clearly Marlowe wanted to emphasise two things. First, that he is not simply writing Protestant propaganda; and second, he is repeating a theme from his other plays, especially *The Jew of Malta*, that all religions and schisms can be hypocritical.

But Marlowe's major alteration of Dowriche is in his presentation of the Guise. In Dowriche, Catherine is stronger and more ruthless than the Guise. Marlowe reverses these roles, elevating the Guise to the stronger *near*-Machiavellian portrait. Randall Martin argues that, "ironically, Marlowe's subordination of Catherine de Medici's role may be one of the most authentically Machiavellian aspects of his plays" because much of Machiavelli's energy is spent on expounding "*virtu*'s laws [on] gendering personal qualities as political assets or liabilities" by disparaging "traditional female qualities such as trust, dependence, and emotion, while praising male self-reliance, independence of will, and physical aggression."⁷¹ This reading, however, is negated in part by Machiavelli himself when he emphasises the importance of relying on the trust the prince builds in the people, and the strength of will, using a *female* ruler as his example: the Countess of Forlì (Caterina Sforza) who succeeded in holding her state by seeking shelter in a fortress while awaiting foreign help, but also lost her state in the same way later. Machiavelli concludes, "So, having considered all these things, I shall praise whoever makes fortresses and whoever does not, and I shall blame anyone who, trusting in fortresses, thinks little of being hated by the people."⁷² Machiavelli returns to Caterina Sforza in the *Discourses* where he narrates the memorable deception and breaking of faith she uses to retake her city:

Madonna [Lady] Caterina (so the countess was called) promised the conspirators that if they let her enter it [the fortress], she would deliver it to them and they might keep her children with them as hostages. Under this faith they let her enter it. As soon as she was

⁶⁹ Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, 255.

⁷⁰ Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris*, ed. Mathew Martin (Manchester University Press, 2021). All subsequent quotations refer to this edition.

⁷¹ Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche's *The French History*" (1999), 80. Martin cites Hannah Pitkin's *Fortune is a Woman* in support of his argument.

⁷² Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 20.87.

inside, she reproved them from the walls for the death of her husband and threatened them with every kind of revenge. And to show that she did not care for her children, she showed them her genital parts, saying that she still had the mode for making more of them. So, short of counsel and late to perceive their error, they suffered the penalty of their lack of prudence with a perpetual exile.⁷³

The Caterina Sforza episodes confirm Machiavelli's belief that a prince's power relies less on gender and more on *virtù*. Martin's argument also forgets a central characterisation of Catherine in Marlowe, as a Lady Macbeth-like figure who was ready and willing to kill her own children for the sake of political expediency.⁷⁴ This Catherine is very much in line with Caterina Sforza, who is also presented as equal to—perhaps surpassing—any male ruler, also willing to sacrifice her children to hold onto power.

Dowriche doubles down on the gendering and sexualising of Catherine.⁷⁵ In the first two sections of the poem, the narrator tells us, “The Mother Queen as chief doth promise to begin,/ By treason joined with flattery to trap them in her gin.”⁷⁶ Catherine, as we noted earlier, is converted into a dramaturg, the architect of the actual massacre.⁷⁷ This charged reading of Catherine is borrowed by Marlowe, but he reserves the worst characteristics for the Guise, whom he turns into a Barabas-like Machevill bogeyman by lessening the Machiavellian elements of Catherine.

In scene two, Marlowe departs from his sources in Hotman and Goulart. The Guise himself, not Catherine, orders the murder of the Queen of Navarre and the shooting of the Admiral. He also commits murders of which history does not accuse him, including that of Ramus.⁷⁸ In essence, Marlowe presents the Guise as “ambitious, ruthless, consciously dissimulating, yet possessed of the demonic virtues of courage and restless energy.”⁷⁹ He also

⁷³ Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, 3.6.231–32. An extended reading of Caterina Sforza is found in John Freccero, “Medusa and the Madonna of Forlì: Political Sexuality in Machiavelli,” in *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Victoria Kahn (Cornell University Press, 1993): 161–78.

⁷⁴ For similar comparisons of Catherine to Lady Macbeth see Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 106, and Suzuki, “Warning Elizabeth,” 182.

⁷⁵ Jo Eldridge Carney, “‘I’ll Find a Day to massacre Them All,’ Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* and Catherine de Médicis,” *Comparative Drama* 48, no. 4 (2014): 415–35.

⁷⁶ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 89.

⁷⁷ Dowriche, *The French Historie*, 132.

⁷⁸ Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, 254.

⁷⁹ Briggs, “Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*,” 272.

invents the Guise's alliance with Catherine to suit the English view of her and to capitalise on her Florentine heritage, thus cementing her linkage to Machiavelli.

Marlowe purposely complicates the presentation of the Guise. It is true that the Duke historically desired the "extermination of the Huguenots," and he had been in league with Spain; just as it is true that the Pope and Phillip II both desired to murder the Admiral, and that Rome celebrated the Massacre with a *Te Deum* and a special medallion to commemorate the day.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, it seems that Marlowe is suggesting that two wrongs do not make a right—political and religious hypocrisy is still hypocrisy. Georgia Brown argues that Marlowe "plays history against myth" in his translations,⁸¹ and he does the same thing here by turning the Guise into a particular kind of stage Machiavellian. Marlowe portrays the Guise as a *Machevill*, not a true Machiavellian. The distinction between the two forms of the name is important. What has more commonly become known as the *Machiavel* is a stage figure intended to parody the Italian thinker. Marlowe and Shakespeare both use the name *Machevill*, which is intentionally muddled to sound out Mach-evil. Additionally, the murder of the Guise is memorable partly because it is heinously committed, but also because he is presented as a courageous man, even though he aligns himself—even as he is dying—with Catholicism—"Vive la messe! Perish Huguenots!" (21.82). This is to say that the Guise is not successful in his politics and is therefore not a true Machiavellian. In contrast, Henry's death is presented as a direct payback for his treachery.⁸²

As Briggs has noted, the murders of the Duke of Guise and his brother show Henry's hypocrisy and Machiavellism, confirming the contemporary perception of Henry, as evidenced by several Catholic League pamphlets, that he was a hypocrite and an atheist.⁸³ This is to say that although the Guise is the presumed Machiavellian—as is initially supposed of Barabas, the true one is Henry, as is Ferneze in *The Jew of Malta*.⁸⁴ The murder of the Guise occurs within thirty-

⁸⁰ Briggs, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 273. For readings showing that Machiavelli was incorporated into Spanish political thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in considerations of imperialist ambitions and reason of state, see Keith David Howard, *The Reception of Machiavelli in Early Modern Spain* (Tamesis, 2014) and Joanne Paul, *Counsel and Command in Early Modern English Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁸¹ Georgia Brown, "Marlowe's Poems and Classicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121.

⁸² Briggs, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 272.

⁸³ Briggs, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 271.

⁸⁴ See Weil, *Merlin's Prophet*, and Catherine Minshull, "Marlowe's 'Sound Machevill.'" *Renaissance Drama* 13 (1982): 35–53.

five lines of his meeting with Henry. Henry even takes delight in his murder of the Guise, gleefully declaring, "Ah, this sweet sight is physic to my soule," and then proceeds to show off the murder to the Guise's son (21.87).

But Henry's hypocrisy serves another purpose, forcing us to question his integrity regarding England and Elizabeth in his statement following the murder of Guise (21.89–111). At the same time, we might question his integrity at the end of the play, when he demands continued murder of the Catholics and asks that Elizabeth be saluted in his name. In fact, the dispatches to Walsingham are emphatic that on his deathbed Henry urged Navarre to convert to Catholicism, something that Marlowe likely knew, thus making this scene ironic.⁸⁵ Of course, Navarre accepted the Catholic faith four years later. This hypocrisy reminds us of the initial hypocrisy displayed by Charles IX who had promised the Admiral friendship and safety only a few lines after sanctioning the murder of his subjects (4.23–70).

The motif of hypocrisy compels us to connect the Guise and Henry through their gloating over the bodies of their enemies: the Guise over the Admiral, Henry over the Guise. Henry's gloating makes the audience sympathetic to the Guise and his son, and emphasises Henry's unethical conduct, especially with the younger Guise's question to Henry: "Art thou King and hast done this bloody deed?" (21.117).

As Briggs demonstrates, Marlowe presents the Guise's death from the Catholic League's perspective. Briggs makes her point by focussing on four sections of the play. First, she points to Marlowe's compression of the time between Henry's lie to the Guise about supporting him and the murder (21.33–45).⁸⁶ Second, the Guise shows tremendous courage when faced with impending death (21.56–83). Third, Henry forces the Guise's son to view his father's body and is himself threatened by Henry (21.113–20). And fourth, Cardinal Loreine is mocked before he is murdered (22.1–11). It also behoves us to remember that although the Guise is not a likeable character, he is the protagonist of the play, with his name and his death forming a part of the title. The reality is that there are no virtuous characters in the play, at all.

The Guise is not Machiavellian for another reason. As we saw above with Catherine, the best Machiavellian is one who is not perceived as such. Machiavelli's advice to the prince is abundantly clear: "It is not necessary for a prince to have all the [good] qualities...but it is

⁸⁵ Briggs, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 271.

⁸⁶ Briggs covers the four areas in "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 265–67.

necessary to appear to have them.”⁸⁷ In *The Massacre*, Henry appears to be good but proves to be bad, and the Guise appears to be bad, proudly displays himself as bad, but lacks the ability to grasp the Machiavellian *occasione* offered him by *fortuna*, failing to apply this paramount Machiavellian lesson by not accepting the crown when it was extended to him:

HENRY: Guise, wear our crown, and be thou King of France
And as dictator make or war or peace,
Whilst I cry *placet* like a senator.
I cannot brook thy haughty insolence.
Dismiss thy camp or else by our edict
Be thou proclaimed a traitor throughout France.
GUISE: [*Aside.*] The choice is hard. I must dissemble. (19.55–61)

The Guise commits the same error as Giovampagolo Baglioni had when he did not take up the *occasione*—opportunity—to kill Pope Julius II in 1505, an act “whose greatness would have surpassed all infamy, every danger, that could have proceeded from it.”⁸⁸ Marlowe’s characterisation of the Guise suggests that he read Machiavelli carefully and saw in his writings the opportunity to present a new kind of political thought, as I will now outline.

Without question, then, Marlowe is a serious political thinker who read widely and was well-versed in the history of the French civil wars.⁸⁹ Like Machiavelli, he was not interested in presenting everyday political thought; rather, he was interested in studying the possibilities of extreme politics. He wanted to ask the question, What would happen when unexpected crises occur?⁹⁰ He was also questioning early modern absolutist political thought which had argued that the sovereign had the right and duty “to use extralegal violence to resolve crises, actual or potential, that threaten the state.”⁹¹ In this short drama, as we have it, Marlowe stages twenty killings and uses the word “massacre” eleven times. I suspect that the complete play would have had both more occurrences of the word and more killings. Nevertheless, Hammill argues that for Marlowe “massacre is a necessary, not incidental, component of sovereignty—part of its broader political logic,” and that he “reveals what absolutist political thought obscures, calling out and

⁸⁷ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.70.

⁸⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.27.63.

⁸⁹ See Graham Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” *ELH* 75, no. 2 (2008): 291.

⁹⁰ Hammill agrees with this sentiment, although he does not refer to Machiavelli (“Time for Marlowe,” 291).

⁹¹ Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 292.

making explicit the logic of violence implied in nascent absolutist political thought.”⁹² Marlowe does this by translating “the violence of massacre into theatrical form, exploring the ways in which affective responses to representations of the political act repeat the violence of the act in an aesthetic register.”⁹³ And Marlowe had a precedent for this kind of political theatrics. It would be difficult for someone who had read *The Prince* to miss this terror-infusing episode from Chapter seven:

And because this point is deserving of notice and of being imitated by others, I do not want to leave it out. Once the duke [Cesare Borgia] had taken over Romagna, he found it had been commanded by impotent lords [and] full of robberies, quarrels, and every other kind of insolence, [and] he wanted to reduce it to peace and obedience.... So he put there Messer Remirro de Orco, a cruel and ready man, to whom he gave the fullest power. In a short time Remirro reduced it to peace and unity, with the very greatest reputation for himself. Then the duke judged that such excessive authority was not necessary, because he feared that it might become hateful.... And because he knew that past rigors had generated some hatred for Remirro, to purge the spirits of that people and to gain them entirely to himself, he wished to show that if any cruelty had been committed, this had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister. And having seized this opportunity, he had him placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied.⁹⁴

An act that would leave the audience “at once satisfied and stupefied” would be memorable. By shocking the audience, Marlowe forces them to internalise the fear that political violence creates in the public. Reminding them of the power that monarchs had over their subjects, Marlowe makes the audience experience “an overwhelming sense of terror ... collectively stand[ing] in as the massacred multitude by which the sovereign maintains a hold on life.”⁹⁵ Or at least the sovereign has the potential to do this. Elizabeth herself tended to respect the constitutional prerogatives of parliament and was wary of resorting to violence unless absolutely necessary. However, having the precedent set by France makes the question in England worthy of being asked, at least obliquely.

⁹² Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 292.

⁹³ Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 293.

⁹⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 7.27-28.

⁹⁵ Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 304.

The Massacre makes striking use of gestures. The Guise's policy of massacring the Huguenots is, ironically, not spoken but gestured at. In a rather fascinating moment, even in a corrupt text, the stage direction has been preserved:

Then, Guise, since thou hast all the cards
Within thy hands to shuffle or cut, take this as surest thing:
That, right or wrong, thou deal thy self a king.
Ay, but Navarre. Navarre, 'tis but a nook of France,
Sufficient yet for such a petty king
That with a rabblement of his heretics
Blindes Europe's eyes and troubleth our estate.
Him will we—

Pointing to his sword (2.87–94)

Hammill argues that “[b]y connoting massacre through a theatrical gesture, Marlowe encourages his English audience to consider themselves part of the group that the Guise plans on murdering, drawing English playgoers into sympathetic identification with the victims of this violence.”⁹⁶ This gesture will be repeated later by Mountsorrell before killing Seroune: “Ay, ay, for this, Seroune, and thou shalt ha’t. *Showing his dagger*” (8.6). Why does Marlowe do all this?

The answer, it seems, is that he was using the terror the French experienced, which had brought a flood of refugees to England, to try to educate the public against religious extremism. Here, as Hammill aptly puts the matter, “Marlowe reverses the priority given to reason over passion. Instead of educating through delight, he implicates through terror.”⁹⁷ The play becomes “a cautionary tale against [Elizabeth] taking up Henry’s course of action,” which is the call for more massacres.⁹⁸ Marlowe’s play acts as a *speculum principis* of sorts, which is in line with Dowriche’s intention with her *French Historie*.⁹⁹

Traditional criticism of the play fails to understand its spectacle or humour. The few stagings of *The Massacre* have shown that it is funny and powerful.¹⁰⁰ The outlook towards it is not unlike that of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* about which Jan Kott declared, “I have recently reread it, and found it ridiculous. I have seen it on the stage, and found it a moving

⁹⁶ Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 306.

⁹⁷ Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 304.

⁹⁸ Hammill, “Time for Marlowe,” 308.

⁹⁹ See Suzuki, “Warning Elizabeth,” (2009).

¹⁰⁰ Marcus, “*The Massacre at Paris*,” 146.

experience. Why?"¹⁰¹ It seems that we tend to cast aside plays as inferior when they do not fit a paradigmatic mould in which we expect them to fit. *The Massacre*, however, will not let us cast it aside. The facts speak for themselves: the play was a blockbuster in its day; it influenced other playwrights, including Shakespeare, not only in *Julius Caesar* but also in the earlier *Titus Andronicus*, which also displayed a lot of butchery;¹⁰² and it featured the usual Marlovian traits that made his plays so popular, an ironic structure and ambiguous characters that "create an interrogative drama."¹⁰³ Finally, criticism has also failed to recognise that *The Massacre* did something else that Marlowe was fond of doing: it pushed the boundaries of decorum and politics just far enough not to get him into too much trouble. Marlowe had recognised that his queen was outraged by the massacre, but also "tempered her reaction ... so as not to jeopardize Anglo-French amity."¹⁰⁴ He also recognised that Elizabeth was reluctant to criticise another female monarch, and therefore she would not have publicly said anything about Catherine.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, a surge of pamphlets with anti-French government propaganda appeared in England, which Elizabeth did not suppress; she happily used "the nascent print industry to advance anti-French and anti-Papal discourse when the court itself had to be more diplomatic."¹⁰⁶ The one exception to Elizabeth's tolerance of pamphlets was John Stubbs's opposition to her consideration of marriage to the Duke d'Alençon, for which Stubbs had his right hand cut off, thereafter raising his left hand to cry out "God save the Queen" before he was imprisoned. And because Stubbs is one of the earliest writers to use the word "massacre" in English, and uses theatrical metaphors to direct his anti-French propaganda against the Florentine Catherine,¹⁰⁷ his pamphlet may have also been a source for Marlowe.

As he pushed some boundaries, Marlowe also contained other boundaries. He paints the Guise in a similar fashion to Tamburlaine, simultaneously admired and despised, and Henry III

¹⁰¹ Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Bolesław Taborski (Methuen, 1964), 346.

¹⁰² Carney argues that Shakespeare's Tamora "powerfully evokes the Catherine de Médicis understood by popular and political discourse in late Elizabethan England as well as the Catherine de Médicis represented in two pre-texts or co-texts: Anne Dowriche's narrative poem, *The French History*, and Christopher Marlowe's play, *The Massacre at Paris*." See "'I'll find a day to massacre them all'," 416.

¹⁰³ Deats, "Dido, Queen of Carthage and *The Massacre at Paris*," 200.

¹⁰⁴ Nate Probasco, "Queen Elizabeth's Reaction to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre," in *The Foreign Relations of Elizabeth I*, ed. Charles Beem (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 77–78.

¹⁰⁵ Carney, "'I'll find a day to massacre them all'," 418.

¹⁰⁶ Carney, "'I'll find a day to massacre them all'," 418.

¹⁰⁷ Carney, "'I'll find a day to massacre them all'," 419.

and Edward II are similarly characterised.¹⁰⁸ But characterising these men in the same way does not mean that Marlowe agreed with their outlooks on life and politics. Henry's religious intolerance and his urging of a continued massacre of his subjects would surely have been considered at least unjust, if not outright blood-curdling, by the audience and by Elizabeth. This is yet another way in which Marlowe differs from Dowriche: her martyred victims "embrace a pacifist Christian heroic,"¹⁰⁹ whereas Marlowe's victims send signals of horror totally severed from martyrdom or heroism. Unfortunately, criticism of Marlowe's plays has tended to read his characters largely in the light of heroism at the expense of victimhood or irony because we have tended to think of Marlowe as a writer with a single, overarching message, a unity of purpose—philosophical, moral, political, or otherwise. I suggest that he is not monolithic in his works, and I would go so far as to suggest that his plays tend to be aporetic, more complex, and more ironic than we have read them.

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¹⁰⁸ Briggs, "Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*," 264.

¹⁰⁹ Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche's *The French History*," 83.

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