

Anne Dowriche, *The French Historie*, ed. Joanne Paul (CRRS, 2024), pb, ISBN 9780772710802, \$17.00 USD.

JOANNE HILL
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

The Tudor and Stuart Texts series, published by the Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies at the University of Toronto, offers accessible critical editions of English works that are not readily available for students and teachers. The latest addition to the series is Joanne Paul's 2024 paperback edition of Anne Dowriche's epic poem, *The French Historie* (1589). This poem presents an English Puritan perspective on three key events from the French Wars of Religion. With its clear relevance to the fields of early modern Puritanism and sixteenth-century French history, and special significance as one of the few books written entirely by a woman before the seventeenth century, the poem has long merited greater critical attention. Joanne Paul's fully edited scholarly edition addresses this gap in scholarship, offering a comprehensive introduction to the poem and an accessible, modernised text, accompanied by detailed annotations. This indispensable resource, priced at just \$17.00 USD, is likely to achieve its aim of bringing Dowriche's poem to a wider audience, including undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Paul, whose research centres on the intellectual and cultural history of Early Modern England, opens her introduction with a useful critical survey on the works of Anne Dowriche, an important yet often overlooked author from this period. Paul traces trends in scholarship since the nineteenth century, focusing on why *The French Historie* has been largely neglected by critics, and the challenges they have faced in categorising a text written by a female writer that lends itself to multiple interpretations. For instance, while the poem has often been read solely as an expression of personal piety, Paul seeks to emphasize its significance as a deliberate intervention in Elizabethan political thought. She moves on to an examination of Dowriche's biography, shedding light on the influences that shaped her life and work, such as the poet's family background, local radical Protestant networks in Devon and gendered expectations placed on clergy wives. For readers less familiar with the religious context, Paul supplies a brief but essential history of Protestantism and Puritanism in England in the sixteenth century, and an overview of key figures involved in the French Wars of Religion. Importantly, Paul connects the role of Huguenot leaders in the French Wars to Elizabethan politics, thus pointing to Dowriche's possible political objectives in writing the poem.

In the detailed introduction to the text itself, Paul situates her discussion of the edifying purpose of the poem logically alongside an exploration of the ideas contained in the frontispiece, Dowriche's dedication to her brother and her Address to the Reader. Paul then provides useful historical context about the three events around which the poem is structured: the arrest of a group of Protestants in the rue St-Jacques in Paris in 1557; Anne du Bourg's bold criticism of the French king in 1559; and the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris in 1572. Her insights into the likely personal, gendered, political and religious motivations behind Dowriche's selection of these events, and the poet's manipulation of the source material to align with her aims, are illuminating in this section. In addition, Paul's analysis of how Dowriche asserts her authority as a woman through her use of glosses and the employment of an unconventional metre is especially thought-provoking. Of particular interest to me were Paul's observations on Dowriche's transformation of "passive victims" of religious violence into "heroic martyrs," and her comment on how the relationship between the English and French Protestant speakers in the poem reflects the dynamics of the historical European Protestant brotherhood (36).

In the next section of the introduction, which focuses on contemporary history and politics, Paul builds on her analysis of the poem. She considers how the speeches Dowriche constructs for Huguenots and Catholics might have been received by early modern readers, in view of sixteenth-century conceptions of history and truth. Paul also examines the wide range of rhetorical techniques that Dowriche employs to stimulate her readers' senses and emotions in these monologues. Indeed, Dowriche's very engagement in the male-dominated fields of rhetoric and politics underscores her importance as a female writer in this period. As Paul points out, Dowriche's intervention in politics includes rare explicit references to Niccolò Machiavelli. His advice is shown to have a discernible influence on the words of Catherine de' Medici in the poem, whose portrayal invites reflection by English readers on conceptions of femininity in a country ruled by Elizabeth I. Modern Marlovians may be particularly interested in the parallels Paul draws between Dowriche's presentation of Catherine de' Medici and the Machiavel, and Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (1589–90) and *The Massacre at Paris* (1593).

Following her analysis of the poem, Paul provides a comprehensive bibliography and suggestions for further reading. Under 'Conventions', Paul explains her decision to modernise the text to improve accessibility, and to relocate the extensive marginalia to the footnotes, italicising them to ensure they are clearly distinguishable from the other references. In the footnotes, Paul elucidates some of Dowriche's biblical references, thus providing

helpful context for the modern reader. The glossaries of names and terms at the end of the book are also essential for readers unacquainted with the historical, mythological and biblical figures mentioned in the text.

Given the relative obscurity of *The French Historie*, an overview of the key themes feels appropriate. In terms of style, the metre and dramatic structure are very distinctive. While the poet's use of rhyming poulter's measure may feel unfamiliar to readers accustomed to the more popular blank verse, I found that its rhythm enhanced the clarity of the text. Moreover, the theatrical nature of much of the action, which is embedded within a frame device, and the graphic descriptions of places and gruesome events, help to bring the narrative to life. The influence of vivid depictions of Protestant martyrdom in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* can be observed in the poem, especially in the expressions of joy and courage by the godly in their suffering as they face their deaths at the hands of cruel Catholic characters. Monologues from these prominent "actors" and the reported reactions of an "onstage audience" emphasise the performative elements of the poem. Another way in which Dowriche draws attention to the poem's theatrical quality is by assigning the narrator lines similar to a chorus, such as "But here the Prologue ends, and here begins the play, / [...] The Mother Queen appears now first upon the Stage" (132). Interestingly, Dowriche's portrayal of Catherine de' Medici in her subsequent speech invites comparisons with Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, as their lines exhibit some striking similarities.

To further her religious and political goals, Dowriche also attributes lengthy speeches to Huguenot martyrs, which seem rather implausible given the desperate circumstances in which some of the elaborate orations are delivered. These passages serve to emphasize the virtues embodied by Dowriche's Huguenot characters such as respectability, wisdom, goodness and bravery, while juxtaposing them with the cruelty and mercilessness of their Catholic attackers. For instance, the Protestant Admiral's repeated declarations of confidence in the French King highlight his innocence, which contrasts sharply with the monarch's betrayal of his trust. In echoes of Marlowe's *Massacre*, Dowriche explores the idea that the extreme violence of leading Catholics can be attributed to their anxieties about the organic growth of the Reformed religion, which is likened to a "springing seed" or a "cankered sore" that must be eradicated (123). As a result of their fears, in both works the godly are pursued like prey animals to be trapped, slaughtered and ultimately annihilated. Dowriche ensures that these killings do not go unpunished in the poem and provides many biblical analogies to the events in France in order to demonstrate that God inevitably exacts retribution on sinners. This message, while serving as a warning to Catholics, could also function as a cautionary

tale to English Protestant clergymen of the risks of persecuting Puritan minorities. More broadly, the poem, like Marlowe's play, could alert the English to the potential for religious violence in Europe to spill over onto English soil.

Dowriche's moral and religious message, though repetitive, is presented in an engaging manner, as outlined above. Paul notes in the introduction that early critics of the poem were dismissive of its overt piety; however, I concur with Paul's assessment that the wider political implications of the text transcend its religious didacticism. Moreover, Dowriche's message is nuanced since some of her Catholic characters are shown to reject the orders of their king and refuse to participate in the killing of their fellow Protestants. For instance, Monsieur de Nance and the hangman of Lyon both refuse to spill the Huguenots' "guiltless blood" (143, 150). These episodes demonstrate the power of individual conscience and could point to the tension between obedience to God and loyalty to a monarch, which is a central idea in Huguenot Monarchomach theory.

Overall, Paul's edition of *The French Historie* is an invaluable resource that will make this rich and captivating poem accessible to a much wider audience. Paul's clear and comprehensive introduction provides an essential framework for situating the work in its literary, political and religious contexts, while her detailed notes on the text define key vocabulary and elaborate on references. This edition will allow more students and scholars of early modern literature, religious history and gender studies to engage deeply with the poem's exploration of themes such as conscience, obedience and resistance within the turbulent landscape of sixteenth-century Europe. It also affords greater prominence to Anne Dowriche's voice, offering readers a rare female perspective on the events of the French Wars of Religion. This well-researched book is therefore certain to inspire renewed critical attention in Dowriche's remarkable and intriguing work.