

REPRESENTING THE ST BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY MASSACRE IN LITERATURE AND FILM⁴⁶

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My first encounter with a representation of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre was at about the age of eleven in a collection of true stories of "Wonderful Escapes" inherited from my grandfather, who was given it as a Sunday School prize in 1885.¹ This episode told of the miraculous escape of the Huguenot Jacques de Nompar, seigneur de Caumont, who, when his father and brother were stabbed to death in the street, lay under them for hours as if dead himself, covered in their blood. One might suspect a sectarian motive on the part of the Protestant rector who awarded my grandfather this prize, except that this episode was flanked by stories of escapes during the same period by leading Catholics, such as Mary Queen of Scots and Charles de Guise (eldest son of the notorious Duke Henry) and contained many instances of historical escapes, from the seventh century BC to the middle of the nineteenth century, which had no religious context at all. The intention of the prize was simply to provide a young boy with some exciting stories of historical adventures rather than to strengthen his Protestant beliefs. Most representations of the Massacre are very different from this.

The St Bartholomew's Day Massacre was the most notorious episode in the French Wars of Religion which raged between Catholics and Protestants (Huguenots) in the second half of the sixteenth century.² In an attempt to consolidate the temporary peace which had been brought about by the Edict of St Germain in 1570, Catherine de Medici, the mother of Charles IX, and the real power behind the throne, had arranged the marriage of the king's sister, Marguerite de Valois to one of the Huguenot leaders, Henry of Navarre. Most of the principal Huguenots and many of their followers came to Paris for the wedding, which took place on August 18, 1572.

⁴⁶ This essay has been developed from a paper delivered (via Zoom in September 2021) to the ESSE 2020 Conference as part of a seminar on "The Lure of the Renaissance", which I co-convoked with Professor Szónyi. It was then given as a Zoom talk to the Cambridge-Szeged Society on 8 December, 2021.

¹ Richard Whiteing, ed., *Wonderful Escapes* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, n.d. [1870?]), 45–54.

² The summary of events which follows is based primarily on Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629*, 2nd ed. (1995; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

On August 22 there was an attempt to kill the Huguenot leader Admiral Coligny, probably initiated by the Duke of Guise (a leading Catholic), who blamed him for the assassination of his father at Orleans nine years earlier. Although the attempt failed, the royal inner circle feared they might now be in danger from retaliation by the many Huguenots currently in or near Paris. A decision was taken to kill a few dozen of the leading Huguenots, including Coligny himself, and they were dragged from their beds and murdered in the early hours of August 24. However, the limited cull of leading Huguenots which had been planned turned into an uncontrolled massacre of between 3,000 and 6,000 Protestant men, women, and children by their Catholic neighbours which the king was powerless to stop. Similar massacres then took place in the rest of France over the next six weeks. The final death toll will never be known but was somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000, the estimates rising in recent years as a consequence of extensive local archival research.³

The impact on the rest of Europe, and in particular Elizabethan politics and culture, was enormous. "The phrase 'Saint Bartholomew' would suddenly be instated as a chilling, European-wide shorthand at least among Protestants, for gratuitous massacre, religious intolerance, martyrdom of the innocent."⁴ Huguenot writers like François Hotman and Philippe de Mornay promptly developed influential arguments for the right of the nobility to take up arms against monarchs who had become tyrants. Sir Francis Walsingham, who set up Elizabeth's very effective anti-Catholic spy network, was himself in Paris as the English ambassador at the time of the massacre. Sir Philip Sidney was one of the Englishmen who took shelter in the ambassador's lodgings and heard the cries of those being murdered in the street. A year later, in September 1573, Sidney was in Hungary and undoubtedly gave his Hungarian Protestant acquaintances a first-hand account of the Massacre.⁵ Following the Northern Rising of 1569 and the excommunication of Elizabeth by the Pope in 1570, this was the final proof to English Protestants like Sidney of Catholic treachery and brutality. From now on, any means that could be employed to prevent the

³ See, for instance, Jérémie Foa, *Tous ceux qui Tombent: Visages du Massacre de la Saint-Bartholomé* (Paris: La Découverte, 2021).

⁴ Robert White, "The Cultural Impact of the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day," in Jennifer Richards, ed., *Early Modern Civil Discourses* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 184.

⁵ These acquaintances may have included Boldizsár Batthyány, an aristocrat with a strong interest in alchemy who, despite being a Protestant, had spent time in France in the service of the Guise family. See György E. Szőnyi, "Layers of Meaning in Alchemy in John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* and its Relevance in a Central European Context," in Tomáš Nejeschleba and Jiří Michalek, eds., *Latin Alchemical Literature of Czech Provenance* (Olomouc: Palacky University, 2015), 114.

return of Catholicism to England, including the torture and execution of Catholic priests simply for being present in England, were thought to be justifiable. Pope Gregory vindicated this reaction by issuing a special medal celebrating the massacre, commissioning frescoes by Vasari, and instituting an annual commemoration of the Massacre, pairing it with the naval victory over the Turks at Lepanto the previous year as two successful defences of Catholic Europe.

The main written responses to the massacre in France initially took the form of polemical pamphlets either celebrating God's punishment of heretics or lamenting the Huguenot suffering and denouncing Catholic treachery.⁶ However, the desire to give literary or dramatic form to these terrible events also emerged quite early on, raising interesting questions of representation.⁷ What kinds of decorum should be observed? What kinds of framing would make sense of such events? As Kurt Vonnegut tells a friend at the beginning of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, his very idiosyncratic novel about the bombing of Dresden: "It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre."⁸ In the case of theatrical representations there are additional practical problems about how you stage acts of extreme violence committed against thousands of people.

An early major literary response to the French Wars of Religion which includes a substantial section (Book V "The Swords") on St Bartholomew's Day and other similar massacres was the epic poem *Les Tragiques*, written by Agrippa d'Aubigné, one of the Huguenot military leaders, between 1577 and 1616 and later revised around 1630. Like *Paradise Lost*, it is a "loser's epic", written out of defeat and disappointment. It made almost no impact at the time but is now recognised within French literary culture as an important example of the most admired of Renaissance literary genres, the epic or "heroic poem."

⁶ There were surprisingly few English pamphlets published in the immediate aftermath of the Massacre. This was probably because Elizabeth and her government were anxious to repair relations with France and were still open to the possibility of a marriage between her and the Duke of Alençon (the younger brother of the French King). Popular hostility to such a marriage, articulated by John Stubbs in *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* (1579), was partly fuelled by vivid recollections of the part played by the House of Valois in the Massacre. See Arthur Geoffrey Dickens, "The Elizabethans and St. Bartholomew," in *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 52–70.

⁷ When Stubbs recalled the Massacre in *The Discoverie*, he framed it as a theatrical tragedy which had been scripted by Catherine de Medici: "all thys whyle the mother as setter forth of thys earnest game, stode holding the booke (as it were) upon the stage and told her children and every other player what he should say" (John Stubbs, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* [London: W. Page, 1579], B4v).

⁸ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969; London: Panther, 1972), 20.

However, until now it has been largely unknown to Anglophone scholars since it was only fully translated into English in 2020.⁹

It places the horrors of the Wars of Religion within a Biblical framework of history, from the Creation to the Second Coming. There is a dialogue in Heaven between God and Satan, in which Satan is given permission to test the faithful, as once he tested Job. The poem combines elaborate mythological material with graphic details of the acts of violence which took place, such as the woman whose body was left hanging by her hair from a bridge for two days until her husband was also killed and thrown into the Seine, taking her down with him into the river, united again in death.¹⁰ It employs a massive repertoire of literary devices but is not trying to achieve an aesthetic distance from the events it describes. It is a passionate and angry attempt to rouse its readers to keep on fighting for the Protestant cause. In form it has some resemblances to *Paradise Lost* but in tone it is often nearer to Milton's sonnet "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints."¹¹ An anonymous source is quoted in the Preface as saying, "We are tired of books that teach; give us ones that will stir our hearts." And much of the poem *is* very moving in its depiction of Huguenot suffering but its calls for appropriate punishment for the perpetrators are as extreme as anything in the Old Testament, as in the following lines which echo the ferocious conclusion to Psalm 137:

Just will be the black horseman, flying to snatch
Your children that cling to your unclean breast,
To dash them to pieces against the hard stone.¹²

⁹ Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, trans. Valerie Worth-Stylianou (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2020). This edition has a substantial introduction, full scholarly notes, and a number of other features designed to make this lengthy and complex work accessible to Anglophone students.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, V, 901–16.

¹¹ An English text with a few similarities to *Les Tragiques*, though much inferior poetically, is a long poem by Anne Dowriche, *The French Historie, that is, A Lamentable Discourse of Three of the Chiefe, and Most Famous Bloodie Broiles that Have Happened in France for the Gospell of Jesus Christ* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1589). Like d'Aubigné, she uses Biblical history to place examples of the persecution of French Huguenots, including the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, within a Protestant Providential framework which will ensure that blood will be repaid with blood. See Randall Martin, "Anne Dowriche, *The French History*, Christopher Marlowe, and Machiavellian Agency," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 39 (1999): 69–87.

¹² Aubigné, *Tragiques*, VII, 262–64.

Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*, first performed in 1593, and surviving only in an abbreviated and mutilated text (probably printed around 1602), also seems to be an attempt to stir up anti-Catholic feelings in its audiences and readers. Catherine de Medici and the Duke of Guise are presented as monsters of Machiavellian villainy while Henry III is shown, like Edward II, as a weak, effeminate king who dotes on his male "minions", but also, quite unhistorically, as becoming a Protestant sympathiser who, in his dying words, professes eternal love to the Queen of England "Whom God hath bless'd for hating papistry."¹³ In a devastating critique of the play, Wilbur Sanders asked, "how did Marlowe come to write this nasty piece of journalistic bombast?"¹⁴ The three main answers, which are not mutually exclusive, are: that he wished to make some money quickly by pandering to the crudest tastes of a mainly Protestant public-theatre audience; that he wanted to give a cool and unillusioned analysis of the politic use of religion in the service of Machiavellian power struggles; and that he was drawn to the events he dramatized by his personal sexual psychology, which has been plausibly conjectured to be both homoerotic and sadomasochistic. It is certainly true that he takes an especial relish in the murders of scholars and tutors. Peter Ramus the famous rhetorician is murdered by the Guise because he had scoffed at Aristotle's logic. Two Protestant schoolmasters are likewise stabbed, with the Guise exclaiming "Come sirs, / I'll whip you to death with my poniard's point."¹⁵ It is not hard to see in this Marlowe's fantasised revenge for the school punishments he must have suffered.

Marlowe's play was very popular and was revived several times (in 1594, 1598, and 1601). It presumably encouraged Thomas Dekker and Michael Drayton to write their trilogy about *The Civil Wars in France* (1598–9) covering events from the Massacre to the

¹³ Christopher Marlowe, "The Massacre at Paris," in Harold James Oliver, ed., *Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris* (London: Methuen, 1968), XXIV, 69.

¹⁴ Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 22. Sanders' relentlessly negative view of the play has frequently been challenged by subsequent critics. One of the most effective of these challenges was by Julia Briggs in "Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration," *Review of English Studies* n. s. 34, no. 135 (1983): 257–78. Briggs was able to show that Marlowe makes use of Catholic as well as Protestant pamphlet sources to construct a play that is more ironic and thought-provoking than Sanders claimed. Marlowe's play is examined in great detail by Andrew M. Kirk in *The Mirror of Confusion: The Representation of French History in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Garland, 1996), 77–106, and Richard Hillman in *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 72–111. Hillman has a particularly interesting discussion of the relation of Marlowe's play to two early French Catholic closet dramas dealing with some of the same historical events: François de Chantelouve, *La Tragedie de feu Gaspar de Colligny* (1575) and Pierre Matthieu, *La Guisade* (1589).

¹⁵ Marlowe, *Massacre*, IX, 78–9.

Edict of Nantes in 1598. Dekker then added a prequel, *The First Introduction to the Civil Wars in France* (1599), dealing with the earlier massacre of Huguenots at Vassy in 1562.¹⁶ Marlowe may also have influenced George Chapman to embark on his own series of tragedies about recent French history. In one of them, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (c.1610), Chapman does something extraordinary by making his noble protagonist, Clermont D'Ambois, a devoted friend of the Duke of Guise. When challenged about the Guise's part in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Clermont replies:

The Massacre? I thought twas some such blemish.
 [...]

 Had Faith and true Religion been prefer'd
 Religious Guise had never massacred.¹⁷

Clermont's devotion to the Guise is such that, on hearing of his assassination, he resolves to kill himself too, since there is now no one left to defend goodness, piety, or manhood. This astonishing challenge to the prejudices of a mainly Protestant English theatre audience may be one of the reasons why the play seems to have been much less successful than Chapman's earlier *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604).¹⁸

Marlowe, d'Aubigné, and Chapman were close enough in time to the events they wrote about to count as active participants in the war of words which followed the Massacre. In later centuries St Bartholomew's Day remained a benchmark for religiously motivated atrocities involving mob violence. Unlike the violence of set-piece battles between organised militias, or the cruelties of Tudor England, which were the burnings and hang-

¹⁶ All these plays are now lost but their existence is known about from entries in Henslowe's Diary.

¹⁷ George Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, ed. Robert J. Lordi, in *The Plays of George Chapman: The Tragedies*, gen. ed. Allan Holaday (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), II, 1.205, 233–34.

¹⁸ Shakespeare's engagement with the French Wars of Religion in *Love's Labour's Lost*, which features a "King of Navarre" who breaks his vows, as Henry did when, in 1593, he converted to Catholicism in order to enter Paris, is (predictably) much more oblique and cryptic. See Richard Wilson, "Too Long for a Play: Shakespeare and the Wars of Religion," in *Worldly Shakespeare: The Theatre of Our Good Will* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 53–72. Shakespeare, who lodged with Huguenots for a time in the early seventeenth century, was almost certainly much more interested in the French Wars of Religion than appears from a superficial inspection of his plays. After Henrietta Maria had visited Stratford in 1643, Shakespeare's daughter Susanna presented her with *A Mervaylous Discourse upon the Lyfe of Katherine de Medicis* (a 1575 English translation of a French work) which had probably belonged to her father and was "a tirade against Catherine de Medici, queen and regent, for her political involvement after the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre." Lachlan Mackinnon, "His Daughter Susanna Hall," in Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, eds., *The Shakespeare Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 81.

ings carried out by the state, St Bartholomew's Day and the massacres which both preceded and followed it were largely carried out by ordinary citizens, turning on their neighbours and inflicting the most appalling cruelties on the old, the infirm, women, and children.

In certain political and historical circumstances, novelists, dramatists, and film directors find a new relevance in these sixteenth-century horrors but there is not a uniform and predictable way of framing them. The anti-Catholic hysteria of the alleged Popish Plot of 1678 and the Exclusion Crisis which followed, as Parliament attempted to prevent the Catholic James from succeeding Charles II, prompted Nathaniel Lee to write *The Massacre of Paris* in 1681, though it wasn't performed or printed till after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Anticipating some later treatments, the play foregrounds Marguerite's erotic relationship with the Duke of Guise and is certainly anti-Catholic and anti-French but its political position is actually Tory rather than Whig. In other words, instead of showing Catholic cruelty and treachery as a way of strengthening opposition to the succession of the Catholic James, it uses them to tell opponents of Charles and James to shut up. They ought to be happy with the status quo in England as it's so much better over here than in France.

*With Rome's Religion and French Government,
What Slave so abject as to be content?
Now, idle Malecontent, what is't you'd have?
Would you be an Idolater or Slave?
What d'you murmur for, because you're free,
And this bless'd Isle enjoys its Liberty?*¹⁹

This rather perverse "Tory" use of the Massacre was confirmed when Lee then collaborated with Dryden on another play, *The Duke of Guise* (1682), which tried to argue that what was bad about the Guise was not his Catholic extremism but his unlawful attempt to block the legitimate succession to the throne. Just as the Guise and the Holy League had tried to stop Henry of Navarre succeeding Henry III, so the Whigs with their "Covenant" were trying to stop James succeeding Charles.

*Our Play's a Parallel: The Holy League
Begot our Cov'nant: Guisards got the Whigg.*²⁰

¹⁹ Nathaniel Lee, *The Massacre of Paris: A Tragedy* (London: R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1690), prologue, A2r.

²⁰ John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee, *The Duke of Guise: A Tragedy* (London: R. Bentley and J. Tonson, 1683), prologue, A3v.

This was such a contorted application of French history that Dryden was forced to publish a separate *Vindication* of the play, explaining exactly what he had been trying to do.

The French Revolution of 1789 and the Terror which succeeded it caused both sides to look back at St Bartholomew's Day, either as a previous example of an uncontrollable and bloodthirsty mob of French citizens or, on the contrary, of the lengths an unprincipled and degenerate monarchy and aristocracy would go to in their efforts to cling on to power. The English looked across the Channel with both horror and fascination at the unfolding events in France but very strict political censorship and theatre licensing laws meant that they could not put these events directly on the stage.²¹ Hence Elizabeth Inchbald, a commercially successful dramatist, went back to St Bartholomew's Day to express her reaction to Robespierre's Terror, which was still continuing when she wrote *The Massacre* in September 1792. Even with this deliberate historical distancing, she did not have Marlowe's confidence that the stage can represent a massacre effectively and the events of St Bartholomew's Day are narrated retrospectively by a character who has survived them. Moreover, the whole play was conceived as a closet drama and never performed in her lifetime. Its first professional performance in England was not till 2009, at the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds. As someone who was both a Catholic and a political radical, Inchbald might be presumed to have a complicated attitude to the events of both 1792 and 1572 but her stance is in fact straightforwardly humane and compassionate as she tries to imagine what it would be like to be pursued by a violent mob or dragged before a "people's court." Her purpose in writing the play, which was to persuade people that such things should never again happen, was (in the absence of either performance or print publication) partially implemented by circulating it in manuscript to a number of influential figures such as Edmund Burke, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

The further upheavals of French history in the first part of the nineteenth century encouraged a major upsurge in historical novels and plays, as France tried to decide what sort of a nation it was and where it had come from. The Wars of Religion and the eventual defeat of the Huguenots were a major part of the national story and one which attracted a number of writers. Examples include Prosper Mérimée's *Chronicle of the Reign of Charles IX* (1829) and Honoré de Balzac's *About Catherine de Medici* (1843). Despite the strong appetite for historical novels, these particular events were highly problematic,

²¹ John Robbins, "Documenting Terror in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre*," *Studies in English Literature* 57, no. 3 (2017): 608–9.

whether you were a Royalist or a Republican, and the best way of dealing with them from a commercial point of view might be to do what Alexandre Dumas did in *La Reine Margot* (1845), which was to use the Massacre as a backdrop to a romantic melodrama, starring the beautiful Marguerite de Valois. I will look more closely at this novel in connection with the 1994 film version of it with which I conclude my essay. However, before I get on to it, I would like to give a couple of further examples of how particular political circumstances prompt artists to look back again at St Bartholomew's Day.

D.W.Griffith's epic silent film *Intolerance* (1916), subtitled "Love's Struggle throughout the Ages" used the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre as one of its four storylines, which are intercut in a bravura masterpiece of editing at the film's climax to make the continued relevance of the Massacre starkly apparent. The other three stories are "The Mother and the Law" (set in modern America), "The Fall of Babylon", and the gospel story. The St Bartholomew's Day strand concerns a doomed love affair between a Catholic man and Protestant woman, both of whom perish in the massacre. It has attracted much less critical attention than the politically radical modern American story or the spectacular Fall of Babylon sequences. It is surprisingly graphic for an American film of that period, being unafraid to show women and children being murdered. Also, perhaps anxious about coming across as anti-Catholic and upsetting Italian American or Hispanic American audiences, it attempts to achieve a certain "balance" (which is not attempted in the modern American strand). There is a flashback scene to an earlier Huguenot massacre of Catholics, which is unusual in most representations of the Massacre. There is also a glimpse of a Catholic priest saving a little girl by hiding her under his robes.²²

The date of 1916 means that the film is contemporary with the Armenian genocide which was then going on in Turkey but I don't think there is anything to suggest the film makers had this in mind. The implicit connection seems to be with D. W. Griffith's previous silent epic film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) which had reproduced uncritically the viewpoint of its source novel, *The Clansman*. This was that after the American Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan had played a noble role in protecting white people, especially white women, from the violence of the newly liberated blacks. This was such a grotesque distortion of what actually happened, which was the systematic suppression of black rights in the South by the white majority, that even in 1915 there was a storm of protest. It is

²² Such individual acts of mercy were not unknown. Even the Duke of Guise sheltered several Protestants in his house, though his enemies interpreted this as a calculated and cynical attempt to leave Charles IX and the royal circle looking wholly responsible for the general massacre which had followed from his desire for revenge on Admiral Coligny. See Henri Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, trans. Claire Eliane Engel (1959; London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), 123.

sometimes said to be one of the “easily disprovable myths” about *Intolerance* that it was in any sense an apology for his previous film, since Griffith never made any public apology for the way he presented the Ku Klux Klan.²³ However, it is hard not to see a connection. An editorial in the African-American newspaper *California Eagle*, a paper which had objected strongly to *The Birth of a Nation*, said “As a race we believe that *Intolerance* will do much to abate the prejudicial feeling” created by the previous film.²⁴

One of the many *Doctor Who* adventures whose tapes were notoriously and short-sightedly erased by the BBC when they became short of storage space was “The Massacre of St Bartholomew’s Eve”, a four-part adventure screened in February 1966. No footage of these episodes survives. There are a few still photographs, a fan’s audio recording of the transmitted episodes, the original scripts, and a later novelization by one of the original script writers, John Lucarotti, which differs considerably from what was actually shown on television. The advanced nature of *Doctor Who* scholarship means that there is actually a whole scholarly book, by James Cooray Smith, devoted to these missing episodes.

This was a phase in the evolution of *Doctor Who* when “future” adventures involving monsters such as the Daleks or Cybermen alternated with “past” adventures set in recognizable historical periods and dealing with actual events. According to James Cooray Smith, “This is the *Doctor Who* serial which attempts to be the most responsive and responsible to the historical record, the one that takes most seriously its nature as a piece of drama set during real events and portraying people who actually lived.”²⁵

Despite being relatively accurate historically (the plot turns on an overheard reference to the earlier massacre of Huguenots at Vassy in 1562), it mysteriously omits the Duke of Guise from its cast of major historical figures implicated in the Massacre. Its boldest artistic manoeuvre is to create a fictional Abbot of Amboise, who has been tasked with organizing the assassination of Coligny, and to make him apparently identical in appearance to the Doctor, both characters being played by William Hartnell. One motive for this was simply to give William Hartnell more scope to display his acting abilities. He had been playing the Doctor for more than three years and had been starting to feel constrained by the role. But like all uses of twins and doubles it might also suggest various kinds of symbolic meaning. The Abbot is not only a ruthless persecutor of Protestants, he is also a

²³ Richard Porton, “Coming to Terms with *Intolerance*,” in Booklet accompanying *Intolerance: Love’s Struggle throughout the Ages*, directed by D. W. Griffith (1916; Cohen Media Group, 2013, Blu-ray), 22.

²⁴ Quoted by William M. Drew in “D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance*: Evolution of a Masterpiece”, in Booklet accompanying *Intolerance*, 6.

²⁵ James Cooray Smith, *The Massacre*, The Black Archive #2 (London: Obverse Books, 2016), 26.

persecutor of freethinkers like the apothecary Preslin, who has been conducting proto-scientific experiments in germinology. So we have yet another example of how science fiction tends to construct Catholicism as the superstitious "other" of science, whereas within Anglo-American culture Protestantism is sometimes seen as closer to proto-rationality.²⁶

However, by making the Abbot identical with the Doctor, there might be an implication that *both* Catholicism and science are ruthless and amoral ideologies. When the Doctor refuses to try to save a Protestant girl because he doesn't want to risk altering the course of history, his companion Steven decides to abandon him when they return to the present: "If your researches have so little regard for human life then I want no part of it."²⁷ This triggers a tragic monologue from the Doctor, as he reflects on how all his companions eventually leave him, returning to their own times, whereas he himself can never go home.

This was the last of these "straight" historical adventures, as a sharp decline in viewing figures after the first episode indicated that audiences preferred futuristic monsters like the Daleks. In his otherwise very detailed book, James Cooray Smith doesn't ask why this particular piece of history was chosen but I don't think it is irrelevant that *Doctor Who* was first broadcast in 1963, the year after the Eichmann trial when knowledge of the full extent of the Holocaust became much more widely available. Why else is the constant refrain of the series' most iconic monsters "Exterminate! Exterminate!?" "The Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve" was attempting to address the same issues by other means. The acting was apparently very good, the script was intelligent, and the costumes were lavish but, in the end, there wasn't enough violent action or spectacle to keep enough viewers engaged (The Doctor and Steven escape in the Tardis before the Massacre gets fully underway). The producer John Wiles said disappointedly: "The more depth you give to a thing [...] the more seriousness with which you view it [...] the more impossible it becomes on the screen, and the more unviewable."²⁸

I return now to a consideration of Dumas' 1845 novel, which follows the direction already evident in Nathaniel Lee's play by making Marguerite de Valois its central romantic focus. It covers events from the marriage of Marguerite and Henry, the assassination of Coligny, the Massacre itself, Marguerite's saving of a wounded Protestant called La Mole

²⁶ Jim Clarke, *Science Fiction and Catholicism: The Rise and Fall of the Robot Papacy* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2019).

²⁷ "The *Doctor Who* Transcripts," The Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve, Episode 4: "Bell of Doom", accessed February 12, 2022, www.chakoteya.net/DoctorWho/3-4.htm.

²⁸ Quoted in Smith, *Massacre*, 166.

from death on the night of the Massacre, her love affair with La Mole, the various attempts against her husband's life, and the deaths of both her lover and Charles IX two years later.²⁹

It was an enormously successful book, has never been out of print, and, according to the present-day French historian Jérémie Foa, continues to influence French fictional representations of the Massacre: "on est toujours prisonnier de la lecture d'Alexandre Dumas dans *La Reine Margot*, qui a figé le récit qu'on en donne" ["we are still prisoners of the reading of Alexandre Dumas in *La Reine Margot*, who has fixed the account we give of it."³⁰ Despite its immense readability (its serial form of publication generating repeated surges of anticipation and suspense), it is difficult to take it fully seriously at times. There is a considerable amount of authentic and heavily researched historical detail, including a very strong sense of the sixteenth-century urban locations, but the Massacre is being used as a colourful backdrop to a romantic melodrama which is often highly artificial and theatrical in the worst sense. Every conversation between the main characters is overheard by someone lurking behind the arras or in an adjoining room. Catherine de Medici is, once again, a monster of Machiavellian villainy with a key to every chamber in the Louvre and access to a range of poisons.

There is a continued adherence to codes of chivalry and romance which seem completely misplaced in the context of the numerous atrocities. Marguerite is disappointed when her Protestant lover seems reluctant to fight a duel with one of the Catholic perpetrators of the Massacre, Coconnas. In the Dumas universe beautiful women expect their lovers to be brave and are contemptuous if they are not. But the full context is that both men have recently been severely wounded and the location of their new confrontation is in front of the gibbet on which hangs the mutilated body of Admiral Coligny (missing his head, hands, and genitals) which the royal court has come out to inspect. What does "noble" behaviour mean in such a context? Does Dumas want us to think that Marguerite is being absurd? Since, for him, she is a full-blown romantic heroine, I don't think he does. I think it is rather that there is something slightly absurd about the novel, despite its great readability.³¹

²⁹ The Protestant whom Marguerite saved on the night of the Massacre was actually the Vicomte de Lérac. Dumas conflates him with Marguerite's later lover La Mole, who was in fact a fervent Catholic.

³⁰ Matthieu Roger-Lacan and Baptiste Roger-Lacan, "Le massacre par en bas: Une conversation avec Jérémie Foa," *Le Grand Continent*, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2021/10/08/le-massacre-par-en-bas-conversation-avec-jeremie-foa/>.

³¹ According to Jérémie Foa, "On attend encore le grand romancier sur la Saint-Barthélémy" (One is still waiting for the great novelist on the Saint-Bartholomew) (Lacan and Lacan, "Le massacre"). Foa was thinking primarily of French novelists but, in any case, two popular recent English novels would have

What is genuinely interesting and effective about it is that Dumas has used the historical facts about the arranged marriage of Marguerite and Henry to combine two normally incompatible forms of romantic idealism. Since aristocratic marriages were made for dynastic reasons rather than personal ones, the courtly love convention dictated that intense erotic and romantic feelings could only be fulfilled outside marriage. The true love affair was always adulterous, as in Marguerite's tragic passion for La Mole. But the novel also invests a great deal of emotion in the loyalty and care for each other shown by Marguerite and Henry. They may both be serially unfaithful but they will never betray each other and this forced marriage acquires great emotional and ethical significance. Amid all the carnage, Dumas gives his readers something very positive to which they can cling on. The other positively developed relationship is of course between the Protestant La Mole and the Catholic Coconnas, who make several attempts to kill each other before becoming literally "blood brothers", an image of France's continuing deep divisions being reconciled at last.

There have been several film versions of *La Reine Margot*. The 1954 one, directed by Jean Dréville, kept fairly closely to the conventions of historical costume drama and was something of a star vehicle for Jeanne Moreau. The one I am going to discuss in detail is the spectacular 1994 version, directed by Patrice Chéreau, who in 1972 had directed a famous theatre production of Marlowe's play. Since the film is reasonably faithful to the Dumas novel and potentially liable to a similar critique, why does it seem so viscerally powerful, "the blood, sweat and dirt far removed from the niceties of heritage convention"?³² Is it the confident, dynamic, fluid camera work and editing or the power of the acting? Certainly, Daniel Auteuil and Isabelle Adjani give tremendous performances as the two leads and all the main roles are very strongly cast. Some of the early scenes come as close as anything yet on film to capturing the highly charged atmosphere of Jacobean tragedy, as great men realize they might be minutes away from death.

If one asks why was the film made, there is more than one answer. It was partly, it seems, to provide a strong role for Isabelle Adjani, whom the director had been trying to interest in working with him for some time. More significantly, the screen writer Danièle Thompson said she wanted to plunge into "une époque raffinée et monstrueuse qui est aussi notre époque" ["a period refined and monstrous which is also our period."³³ While the film was

been unlikely to lead him to change his mind, despite their page-turning qualities. See Tim Willocks, *The Twelve Children of Paris* (2013; London: Vintage, 2014); Ken Follett, *A Column of Fire* (2017; London: Pan Books, 2018).

³² Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 168.

³³ Patrice Chéreau, "Notes sur la réalisation du film," in Booklet accompanying *La Reine Margot*, directed by Patrice Chéreau (1994; Pathé, 2013, Blu-ray), 14.

in production, the Yugoslav wars were going on, with outbreaks of genocidal ethnic cleansing when neighbours turned on their neighbours. The film's composer, Goran Bregovic, was a Bosnian. The year the film was released, the Rwanda genocide took place.

Despite having the overall form of a romantic melodrama, the film is unsparing in its filming of the Massacre and its aftermath. A scene of virtually naked bodies being tipped into a large pit filled with scores more bodies closely parallels the terrible newsreel footage of the liberation of Belsen. The intention of making a wider point about genocidal violence is also supported by a scene in Amsterdam where the Huguenot exiles get help from a Jewish financier who had been expelled from Spain. If the film is intended as a critical reappraisal of specifically *French* history and the role which ethnic and religious violence has played in it, then it would also allude to the Vichy government's complicity with the Holocaust. More certainly, it alludes to the most recent occasion on which large numbers of people were murdered in Paris and their bodies thrown into the Seine. This was 17 October 1961 when pro-Algerian demonstrators were attacked by the police and between 100 and 300 killed. Just as in 1572, the full extent of the killings only gradually became apparent when the bodies started to wash up on the river banks. This recent massacre was covered up for decades and only recently have the French government acknowledged properly what happened. On 17 October 2021 President Macron laid flowers at one of the bridges over the Seine and called the killings sixty years before "unforgivable for the republic."³⁴

The jarring juxtaposition of romantic melodrama with genocide, which the film inherits from Dumas, is made more artistically coherent by a couple of significant moves. Firstly, Marguerite is rather more than the romantic heroine of the novel and becomes the moral centre of the film, allying herself explicitly with the Protestant victims rather than the killers in her own family. Secondly, the proximity of sexual love to violent death is given the extreme, positively charged aura found in writers like Georges Bataille. What we see in the film is not just romantic love, it is the *amour fou* celebrated by the surrealists. Marguerite tells her lover the Guise, "I want to see the image of my death amidst my pleasure" and when protecting La Mole from his murderous pursuers, alludes again to *la petite mort* of sexual climax: "He'll die in my arms, not yours." The last shot of the film is of Marguerite, with blood on her dress, cradling the severed head of La Mole in the coach which is taking her to safety in Navarre.

³⁴ Kim Willsher, "Macron condemns 1961 massacre of Algerians in Paris as 'unforgivable'," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2021, accessed September 17, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/17/macron-crackdown-on-1961-algerian-antiwar-protest-unforgivable>.

When one looks back at all these representations of the Massacre and its aftermath, some things seem to change over time while others stay the same. The contemporary historical context is always changing, so of course the political and moral points that writers and film makers are trying to make also change with it. Is it Catholicism, mob violence, monarchic tyranny, or any form of religious or ethnic hatred with which the artist is mainly concerned? Or is it the complicated sex life of the French court and the beautiful promiscuous Marguerite which is of the greatest interest? The major characters often appear in very different lights. The Duke of Guise is an arch-villain in Marlowe, an unlikely noble hero in Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, and has disappeared entirely from *Doctor Who*. The Duke of Anjou, the future Henry III, is a degenerate "painted whore" in d'Aubigné, becomes a Protestant sympathizer in Marlowe, is camp and limp-wristed in *Intolerance*, and a dangerously handsome bisexual brute in the 1994 film.

One thing which hardly ever changes is the extremely negative portrayal of Catherine de Medici, the main features of which were established in the *Discours merveilleux de la vie, actions et deportemens de Catherine de Médicis* (1575), probably written by Henri Estienne, and quickly translated into English.³⁵ She is usually shown as ordering the assassination of Coligny and encouraging the mass slaughter which followed. Sometimes she is also accused of poisoning Charles IX as well, so that her favourite son, the Duke of Anjou, can inherit the throne. For d'Aubigné (and many others) she is a witch, a sorceress, a poisoner, as well as a persecutor of true Christians:

And Nero's fires were not fires compared with
Those spewed forth by this monstrous viper.³⁶

There is more than the usual misogyny involved in this. It seems that the French are reluctant to believe that they did these things to themselves without a foreigner being behind it all. It is the Italian Catherine de Medici who ends up bearing the greatest burden of guilt for what was a shameful episode of French history, and one which always seems to be newly relevant. In this way, even well-intentioned films like *La Reine Margot* are perpetuating a form of "othering" which elsewhere they seem to be protesting about. Let's blame it all on a foreign woman, one from the same city as the notorious Machiavelli.

³⁵ This was the book given by Shakespeare's daughter Susanna to Henrietta Maria in 1643 (see note 18). Balzac claimed that "In France, and at the most important period of our history, Catherine de' Medici has suffered more from popular error than any other woman" (Honoré de Balzac, *About Catherine de Medici*, trans. Clara Bell [1842; London: J. M. Dent, 1910], 5).

³⁶ Aubigné, *Tragiques*, I, 252–53.