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**The Massacre at Paris:  
Between English and French  
Perspectives**

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## **The Massacre at Paris: Between English and French Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris was perhaps one of the most famous tragedies which occurred in the 1570s. It involved the conflict between Catholics and Protestants with the massacre of a large number of Protestants. Christopher Marlowe's representation of the massacre is seen in his play, *The Massacre at Paris* (1592?). This play is being compared with two other plays by French playwrights. These are François de Chantelouve's *Gaspard de Coligny* (1575) and Pierre Mathieu's *Le Guisiade* (1589).

This paper conducts a detailed comparison between the English and the French dramatic representations of the event. It is primarily concerned with how each playwright treats the subject of the massacre, and represents it dramatically. The paper endeavors to contextualize each text, while conducting its close reading to demonstrate how the massacre reflects the kind of propaganda of each playwright, through his attempts to represent it. While the French playwrights seem more determined to represent their characters in order to strengthen their propaganda, Marlowe's play implies that he wrote it to focus on one specific character, Guise, more than to present Protestant propaganda.

The comparison between Marlowe's play and Mathieu's is significant in that there is possibility that Marlowe may have read Mathieu's play, which makes his play a counter text, and opens the way to study certain aspects of intertextuality. There are scenes where Marlowe seems to bring the same ideas that Mathieu does, but with some significant alterations, which the papers deconstructs. This could help identify the sources Marlowe may have used when writing about the massacre, and posits certain concepts of text and counter text or counter readings.

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### **Introduction: The Impact of the Massacre in England and France**

Many books and pamphlets were published in Europe discussing the events of the French wars of religion and their perceived cruelty. The massacre was described in terms of the utmost brutality. Versions of the event differed in the telling because of the diverse perspectives of the authors and the diverse forms in which its details were communicated to the people. In England, the sources of information on the massacre were various. Englishmen read about it in documents which reached them from Europe, including France. These were generally written by either Catholics or Protestant Huguenots. Some Protestants witnessed the massacre in France and escaped to other countries to tell the story of what had happened. English translations of French and Latin accounts of the massacre were also a source of news. Many sources in England depicted the massacre in a way which expressed sympathy for the Protestants who, according to many of the English, were victims. There is great diversity among the sources as to their support or condemnation of the massacre. Protestant sources include, for instance, Francois Hotman's *A True and Plaine Report of the Furious Outrages of Fraunce* (1573) and Jean de Serres' *The Three Partes of Commentaries Containing the Whole and Perfect Discourse of the Ciuill Warres of Fraunce* (1574). Reading parts of Serres' work show the Guises as a threat on Protestants and even the King of France himself. In one place Serres says that because of their reputation, the Guises blamed the 'Lutheranes' who are actually planning to 'conspire to destroy him'. Somewhere else Serres also says that the Guises [...] arrogate to themselves the government of the kingdom'. It is not surprising to suggest that Marlowe followed this work when writing about his play. Poole mentions that de Serres' work has been the target for scholars who have consistently sought to identify the source of Marlowe's play. Kocher, on the other hand, states that the first six scenes are known to have had a contemporary pamphlet source in François Hotman's work mentioned above, whereas there is no mention of any influence of De Serres. Furthermore, Kocher also counts Catholic pamphlets as among Marlowe's sources. Bakeless stated that Marlowe depended on De Serres when he wrote the first part of his play. It is clear that many accounts appeared, which reflect the significance of the massacre at that time. Marlowe's sources, according to critics, are varied: he could have taken information on the play from different sources, whether Protestant or Catholic.

In this respect, two plays are to be compared with *The Massacre at Paris*. These are *La Tragédie De Feu Gaspard De Colligny* by Francois De Chantelouve and *La Guisiade* by Pierre Mathieu (1563-1621). These playwrights were Catholics whose works reflect their religious attitudes towards Protestants and their sympathy for Catholic France. Henry, third Duke of Guise, was a very important figure who, along with his Catholic League, played a major role in the events of the massacre. Pierre Mathieu, poet, playwright and supporter of the Catholic League, wrote the *Guisiade* in 1589. Richard Hillman writes of Mathieu that 'in 1589, when he wrote *The Guisiade*, he was secretary to the Duke of Nemours, the half-brother of the Duke of

Guise and governor of Lyons'. Mathieu was, then, at that time, involved in political service in France. As for Chantelouve, Hillman's accounts show that his work is known for its anti-Protestant ferocity. Chantelouve wrote *Coligny* in 1575 and was also a militant in the Catholic cause. Both Chantelouve and Mathieu were Catholics who were supporters of their country but they differ in the way they portray their heroes; in contrast, Marlowe's play describes the massacre led by Guise and his Catholic group against the Protestants, in a series of dramatic and bloody events, and the ultimate political victory of the Protestants.

### **The Plays as Propaganda**

In the introduction to his 1998 edition of Marlowe's works, Edward Esche refers to the confusion over the treatment of the Catholics that Marlowe shows in his play, a confusion which is seen in the ambivalence manifested when the Duke of Guise is killed. Esche mentions that the play's events take place over more than a decade, 'but Marlowe's design seems to suggest equivalence between the massacre of the Protestants, which occupies the first part of the play, and the murder Guise in the second'.<sup>1</sup> Esche adds that 'more unsettling is the play's apparent sympathy for the murdered Guise'.<sup>2</sup> Esche thus suggests that Marlowe's treatment of Guise is sometimes similar to his treatment of the Protestants. It is even possible to add that Guise has actually dominated the first part of the play because he is responsible for the massacre and the practice of villainy is conducted by him. On the other hand, the feeling of sadness and sympathy that Esche identifies can be seen after Guise is killed, in the dialogue between Catherine and her son King Henry:

Catherine: I cannot speak for grief- when thou wast born,  
                   I would that I had murder'd thee, my son!  
 My son! Thou art a changeling, not my son.  
                   I curse thee, and exclaim thee miscreant,  
                   Traitor to God and to the realm of France!  
                   (*MP*, XXI, 142-146)

Catherine states that Henry is a 'changeling son' to demonstrate that he is no longer her son because he let her down and that his mistakes are unforgivable. Catherine is extremely angry, to the point of cursing her son, to show that she thinks that he committed a great mistake by killing Guise. She sees him as a traitor, since Marlowe depicts Guise as representing the state since the act of murdering him makes King Henry a 'traitor to God and to the realm of France', so that by killing Guise the King also kills France and the hope of a flourishing Catholicism. When her son disregards what she says, she

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<sup>1</sup>Edward J Esche, *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 310.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 310.

expresses remorse in a way that reminds the reader of the fear of the Protestants' dominance, which Guise himself expressed before his death:

[...] Leave me alone to meditate.  
Sweet Guise, would he had died, so thou wert here...  
[...] who will help to build religion?  
The Protestants will glory and insult;  
Wicked Navarre will get the crown of France;  
The Popedom cannot stand, all goes to wrack...  
[...] sorrow seize upon my toiling soul!  
For, since the Guise is dead, I will not live  
(*MP*, XXI, 151-152, 154-157, 159-160)

Catherine demonstrates the danger posed by the Protestants: they will become strong because Guise is not there to stop them, and, by Guise's death, there will be no equal power to face the Protestant tide. Not even the Pope can do anything about it, because Guise is the only one who knew how to deal with Protestants. After Guise's death, she expresses the fear that there is no life for her, reflecting the great influence of Guise upon her. Marlowe's protestant propaganda is poorly constructed according to Esche's argument, since there is room for sympathy for Guise in such supposed Protestant propaganda. Some critics like Briggs argues that calling the play Protestant propaganda 'ought to arouse suspicion, for in Marlowe's dramaturgy things are so seldom exactly what they seem'.<sup>1</sup> Marlowe is far from unequivocal in his support for the Protestants as there is the sympathetic feeling for Guise he evokes towards the end of the play. Esche hits the target when he suggests that the section of the play which generates sympathy for Guise puts the audience in a dilemma. This is why Marlowe's work seems to carry a double meaning, as opposed to that of Mathieu and Chantelouve. Commenting on the role of Navarre given by Marlowe, Kocher suggests that 'if Marlowe intended only to reassure and flatter a Protestant audience, he would surely have made Navarre a stronger figure'. By this, Marlowe belittles the importance of the Protestants by not, for example, giving more importance to Coligny or Navarre, and making Guise the dominant figure.

### **Henry, Duke of Guise and Machiavellian Villainy**

The sharp contrast between how both Marlowe and Mathieu depict Guise is a reflection of how influential Guise is. Marlowe makes his Guise ready to pronounce evil against the Protestants. His role in the play is to exploit the marriage and he expresses his plans to kill the Protestants through the marriage:

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<sup>1</sup>Briggs, 'Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*', pp. 258-259.



If ever Hymen lowered at marriage rites,  
And had his alters decks with dusky lights:  
If ever sun stained heaven with bloody clouds,  
And made it look with terror on the world;  
If ever day were turned to ugly night,  
And night made semblance of the hue of hell;  
This day, this hour, this fatal night,  
Shall fully show the fury of them all.  
(*MP*, II, 1-8)

The words Guise uses are gloomy and brutal. Marlowe hints at Guise's preparation for the massacre by using the expression 'hue of hell' which may suggest what is to come in later events. The anticipation of something horrible is inevitable because the marriage and the massacre are closely related to Guise's scheming, in which he would make the marriage a starting point for his massacre. By contrast, Mathieu presents, in the personality of Guise, a uniquely religious man. This Guise, unlike Marlowe's, does not exploit religion, but is actually religious himself. Mathieu is very careful to show his Guise as caring for his religion and reputation in order to eliminate any kind of suspicion concerning his character. An in-depth look at Guise's opening lines in Mathieu's *Guisiade* reveals exactly what type of man he is:

A lofty and a Christian heart never gives way  
To worldly vanities that would lead it astray  
It never listens to the siren-song advice  
Of those who, seeking for honours at any price,  
Ambition-driven, with doses of lethal brew,  
By crooked ways their fortunates purchase and pursue,  
Open the door to vice, and without fear or shame,  
Cloak what they do beneath religion's holy name,  
(*The Guisiade*, I, i, 1-8)

The difference between the two Guises is clear and noteworthy. Whereas Guise's opening speech in Marlowe's play is dark and threatening, it is his religious belief which Mathieu stresses here. Guise honours the true 'Christian heart', and despises those who seek ambition by any means. Thus, Mathieu may well have been aware of the accusations against Guise and so attempts to show that such accusations are devoid of truth: his religious inclination is governed by love for his country. The striking difference between the two Guises is obvious when Mathieu's Guise despises those who are 'ambitious' and those who cloak themselves 'beneath religion's holy name'.

Mathieu concentrates on Guise's holiness, almost as if to make him seem like a monk and so to put aside any notion of his being interested in the crown. Mathieu makes sure that Guise is tainted with no Machiavellian traits. Although Marlowe's position is ideologically ambivalent, here, he represents the Protestant view that Guise seeks power and the crown, so that he is

associated with Machiavelli. It is worth presenting a comparison between Marlowe and Mathieu regarding how each one of them approaches the aftermath of Guise's death scene. In Mathieu's play, the lines in the mourning scene are uttered by Guise's mother:

You leave France to languish without your watchful eye.  
 You have left everywhere your name's memorial;  
 But always in my heart I'll keep your funeral.  
 (*The Guisade*, V, 2122-2124)

Guise's mother says that life has ended for her: 'have you then murdered him? Then also murder me' (*The Guisade*, V, 2103). Mathieu makes it obvious that France without Guise is dead; Mathieu may have been aware of what Protestants might do following Guise's death, thus he asserts that France will remain Catholic through a sense of sympathy for Guise that has to be remembered for ever. The similarity between this speech in Mathieu's final act and Marlowe's scene is remarkable, since Marlowe allows mourning for Guise. This occurs when Catherine, the King's mother, expresses deep sorrow for Guise's death. First she tells her son that he is not her son. Marlowe makes Guise closer to Catherine than her son simply because her son is a traitor to God and to the realm of France (*MP*, XXI, 146), in an indication that her care for France is stronger than her son's. The feeling of sorrow that Marlowe creates highlights the potential threat which has ended with Guise's death. Mathieu also stresses the fact that Catherine's love for Guise is related to Guise's love for the kingdom.

Unlike Marlowe who brings an image of Guise void of purity, Mathieu shows Guise's purity to be more powerful than the King's ungrateful suspicions. This purity is reflected in his intentions to bear no grudge against the King, no matter what the King intends:

[...] It is told me that the favour of the King,  
 His faith and oath, are aimed at me, part of his plotting-  
 That they wish to root out the whole race of Lorraine,  
 Intend my own murder; that a death inhumane  
 Awaits me in the private study of the King, where  
 He summons me this morning to close some affairs  
 All that is mere wind, a frivolous misconception  
 I am not daunted, for I suspect no deception  
 The other day he balked at doubts he was sincere,  
 Saying, "Good Cousin, for God's sake, who is more dear  
 To me than you [...]"  
 (*The Guisade*, IV, ii, 1821-1831)

Unlike Marlowe who is not interested in the relationship between Guise and King Henry, Mathieu gives great credit to Guise to make him innocent of any accusations. He makes him trust a King who happens to be a traitor. Guise

here is aware of the King's intentions, which he has heard from others, but still trusts him. It is not even a usual murder, but one which Guise describes from what he has heard as 'inhumane', yet he trusts what the King says to him when he greets him. Guise hears the rumours but pays no attention to them; although everybody knows about the scheme, he himself refuses to suspect his King. Guise declares that the King will not hurt him because the King assured him of his love and called him 'good cousin'. That emotional moment shows the King to be honest in his treatment of Guise, until the sudden breaking of his oath makes him abhorrent.

The conflict in Marlowe's play is primarily one between Protestants and Catholics, which later becomes a clash among the Catholics. Meanwhile, Mathieu's play concerns essentially a conflict between Catholics themselves and an elevation of one character over another. The significance of this can be seen in Mathieu's endeavours to show the evil of King Henry III and how he abuses his authority as King by targeting another Catholic figure, whom Mathieu depicts as a martyr. His concentration is on the person who murders Guise, Henry III, and that is why he makes it a purely Catholic conflict, to allow his reader to see the difference between a true Catholic (Guise) and a false one (Henry III). Marlowe's play depicts the decline of the Catholic League in two ways: the death of Guise and the submission of the Catholic royalists, represented by Henry, to the Protestants. Marlowe makes the Protestants victorious by showing that the Catholics themselves fight each other, and this is an emphasis on the unity of the former in comparison to the latter. This is why the conflict in his play occurs between Catholics and Protestants, then becomes a confrontation among Catholics. For Marlowe, Guise seems more important than the Protestants, because their leader becomes King only after Guise is murdered, not during his lifetime, which suggests that Guise is more powerful than the Protestants.

### **Coligny and King Charles(The Massacre at Paris and Coligny)**

Each of the three plays celebrates its own protagonist. In *The Guisade*, Mathieu takes as his main character and protagonist Henry Duke of Guise, while Chantelouve has Charles IX as his main character. Chantelouve presents the King as a meek person who is being exploited by the villainous Coligny. His depiction is that of a King for whom people feel sorry, while Coligny is shown to be a treacherous person who seeks to kill the King. Coligny was a very important figure in the history of the Protestants. His family came from a city called La Bresse and was one of the oldest in the French nobility.<sup>1</sup> Partisan attitudes towards Coligny can be summarized from accounts given by certain Catholics. White recounts how a certain Le Laboureur, a Catholic priest, says of Coligny that 'he was one of the greatest men in France ever produced, and I

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<sup>1</sup>Eugène Bersier, *Coligny: The Earlier Life of the Great Huguenot*, trans. by A.H. Holden (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1884), p. 1.

venture to say further, one of the most attached to his country'.<sup>1</sup> The papal legate Santa Croce describes Coligny as 'remarkable for his prudence and coolness. His manners were severe; he always appeared serious and absorbed in his meditations'.<sup>2</sup> These are examples of Catholics expressing opinions of the Protestant Coligny free of hatred, but the attitudes represented by Chantelouve in this play is different: Chantelouve did not favour him and he expressed extreme hatred for him to underline Protestant troubles to King Charles.

In this comparison, we shall analyze Coligny and determine his position in the plays. In Marlowe's play, Coligny is involved in the play from the beginning. If we consider how the massacre began with his murder, then an understanding of his significance for Marlowe can be seen. Although Marlowe does not give Coligny a significant role in terms of participating in the play as he is killed early, Marlowe still demonstrates Coligny's political speculations about the danger of the Guises. Marlowe attributes political cleverness to Coligny when he anticipates Guise's responsibility for the problems which followed the marriage ceremony. Regarding Marlowe's depiction of Coligny, Kocher states that 'Marlowe has stripped him of all force, and left him querulous and naïve'.<sup>3</sup> This is not fully true because despite his short role, Coligny still gives political advice. For Marlowe, as for the Protestants, Coligny represents one pillar of the Protestant forces. Coligny represents inspiration for the Protestants in the play, apart from Navarre, but Marlowe also makes him a religious man to stress his Protestantism. In *The Massacre at Paris*, Coligny's role begins with a conversation with Navarre; they discuss Guise, following the controversial marriage between Navarre and the King's sister, Marguerite. Coligny tells Navarre: 'I marvel that th'aspiring Guise / dares once adventure, without the King's consent / to meddle or attempt such dangerous things' (*MP*, I, 35-37). Coligny is aware of Guise's schemes, which indicates his political alertness. Although the discussion is about the marriage because the ceremonies have just ended, Coligny reveals his political consciousness by concentrating on the Guises and their danger.

Marlowe demonstrates Coligny's piety and martyrdom through the last moments of his life before he is killed. Coligny asks his killer to give him time to pray before he dies and asks God for forgiveness (*MP*, I, 28, 30.). Marlowe, by doing this, presents a picture of a pious Protestant in comparison to the wicked, merciless Catholics, who are shown as heartless and, above all, as having no respect for religion. The emphasis on Coligny's martyrdom and piety endorses Marlowe's picture of Protestants as godly and exemplary.

The difference between the depictions of Coligny by Marlowe and by Chantelouve is huge. So far we have demonstrated Marlowe's depiction of Coligny in which he is depicted as respectful. In Chantelouve's play, Coligny is a villain whose character is similar to Guise in Marlowe's *Massacre*.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry White, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1868), p. 420.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>3</sup>Kocher, 'Hotman and the Massacre', p. 367.

Hillman demonstrates the resemblance of Marlowe's Guise with Chantelouve's Coligny: 'Coligny there strangely resembles Marlowe's version of his arch-enemy – a power-mad Machiavel aiming at the throne, an invoker of demons who cloaks his atheism in religion and an incorrigible schemer against the noble Charles IX and the heroic Duke of Guise'.<sup>1</sup> Hillman's argument accurately analyses Coligny's characterization, and reflects how Chantelouve imputes scheming to Coligny in order to show the evil of the Protestants and their role in exploiting the King.

Many aspects of Marlowe's Guise are similar to Chantelouve's Coligny. First, Coligny, in Chantelouve's play, argues about the existence of God:

And if there is any God upon whom to call  
(For in my foul heart I believe in none at all),  
Let him show his power, and pour upon my pate  
(*Coligny*, I, i, 15-17)

Coligny clearly states that if there were a God, He would have helped him to overcome the King, after which he [Coligny] would relinquish all religion. This reminds us of how Guise talks about religion in Marlowe's play. Guise states that his policy 'framed religion' and Coligny here affirms his belief in none of the religions, as a sign of his wickedness which cannot be suppressed. The atheistic sense in both Chantelouve's Coligny and Marlowe's Guise is indicative of the writers' desire to represent the enemy of his own religion as devoid of all religious belief and/or an exploiter of religion.

Chantelouve successfully creates the picture of a wicked Protestant who considers religion as a tool which he can exploit. Chantelouve might have in mind that Protestants are associated with Machiavellianism, of which the exploitation of religion is one feature. Here is what Coligny says first:

Except that I must use the shadow of piety  
To mask my machinations aimed against royalty  
And since I well know it's a filthy enterprise,  
I've picked up in Geneva a vile pack of lies,  
Which, because on the outside it shows itself white,  
Though black as black within, fools the most erudite  
(*Coligny*, I, i, 33-38)

Chantelouve and Marlowe use the same technique. Coligny shows his evil characteristics by pretending to believe something but acting differently, by using 'piety' as a cover to secure his 'machinations' against royalty.

Chantelouve accentuates Coligny's evil in comparison with the King's kindness to inspire hatred among his audience towards the Protestants for their exploitation of the King's kindness. Before Coligny is shot in the arm, the King had hopes of making peace and knew he was being kind to Coligny despite Coligny's attitude:

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<sup>1</sup>Hillman, *Shakespeare and Marlowe*, p. 84.

O treasonous Admiral, O you mutinous band,  
Would God that you could read my heart and understand  
That you were might expect just harshness and cruelty,  
You would encounter nothing but mildness and mercy  
(*Coligny*, II, i, 75-87)

Weak as he is, the King stresses his role as a person who meets hatred with love and aggression with peace. This role serves also to express Coligny's character. The more the King talks about Coligny and his behaviour, the more his audience is aware of the dangers posed by Coligny. Chantelouve wants to emphasize Coligny's mean role to his audience repeatedly. King Charles knows that Coligny is 'treasonous', but still offers peace. Even after the Council meets with the King, he is ready to sit with Coligny to 'exhort and come and meet him at court' (*Coligny*, II, ii, 479-480), instead of declaring war against him and the Protestants.

It is clear that Marlowe and Chantelouve adopt contrasting perspectives in the description of their characters. Marlowe treats his Coligny as being deceived by the King, while for Chantelouve it is the reverse. In either case, the one who deceives is the true villain and it is remarkable how the two evildoers follow the same pattern, whereby religious hatred seems to be dominant in their treatment of each other. The representation of a double attitude is important in directing and implementing Machiavellian duplicity in both plays, as each writer seeks to reveal the evil of his enemy based on his religion.

It is worth mentioning that in Marlowe's plays and apparently in the French plays, policy has many meanings. Bob provides one definition, 'in its alternate sense, policy designates the servicing of one's private ends by cunning or deceit: the normal Elizabethan version of Machiavellianism'.<sup>1</sup> But if policy implies cunning, it also means political acumen. In the context of this chapter, Machiavelli is depicted in many forms related to policy, scheming, pretence and other features. Marlowe's representation of Machiavellianism is certainly a chance for him to explore the different ways in which Machiavellianism was interpreted.

## Conclusion

Both Marlowe and Mathieu emphasize Guise's importance to reinforce their political arguments in these plays. It becomes obvious that in terms of developing their individual themes, the emphasis on Guise's importance in the plays of Marlowe and Mathieu serves their political approach in these works. In *The Massacre*, Marlowe's Guise advances his own ends by means of political scheming throughout the play; he implements his plans by exploiting religion and acts villainously against the Protestants in a highly Machiavellian manner. The other characters in the play cannot keep pace with Guise; no one

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Babb, 'Policy in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*', *EnglishLiterary History*, 24, no. 2 (1957), p. 86.

else can reach the levels of his villainy and Machiavellianism, except for Catherine. The development of Guise's Machiavellianism progresses when others fail to prove a match for him. Guise in *The Guisiade* has a very different role: Mathieu makes him a zealot who is religious to the utmost but in a more positive way. As Kocher suggests, 'Marlowe kept close to the facts of French history as the Protestants understood them in many parts of his play'.<sup>1</sup> Kocher is right in his description of Marlowe's depiction of Guise, in that Marlowe follows the Protestant understanding of the man and his deeds. Marlowe depicts Guise as a powerful villain, regardless of the sorrow following his death, while for Mathieu, Guise represents honesty and purity. Throughout the chapter, we noticed the common use of attributes such as "deceiving", "duplicity", and "hypocrisy", all of which are used to construct a villainous character that suits each writer's propaganda. The representation of Machiavelli is also evident in the other characters who act villainously and show some kind of political awareness. Each writer depicts his character according to the purposes of his propaganda, although Marlowe's propaganda has been shown to be unequalled by that of the two French writers. Marlowe's play seems to open doors for possible sources from these two French playwrights and their works due to the resemblance of his work with theirs.

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<sup>1</sup>Kocher, 'Contemporary Background I', p. 151.