

The Paris Massacre



The Paris Massacre

drama by Christopher Marlowe

revised and slightly modernised

by Christian Lanciai (2001)

Dramatis personae:

Charles IX, king of France
Henry of Anjou, his brother, later king Henry III
Margaret, their sister
Catherine of Medici, their mother
Henry of Navarre
Prince of Condé, his cousin
Admiral de Coligny
Duke of Guise
Duke of Dumaine, his brother
Cardinal Lorraine, their brother
Gonzago
Montsorrell
Pleshé
Mugeroun, Henrik III:s favourite
Duchess of Guise
Her maid
Epernoun
Three hired murderers
Brother James
a doctor

Attendants
Court people
Soldiers

The action is in France 1572-89.

Copyright © Christian Lanciai 2001-2018

The Paris Massacre

Act I scene 1. Paris, the Court, 1572.

Charles IX This is a golden moment for us in France and for the entire world and a joy without limits, that peace is now secured for an indefinite future by the marriage between Margaret, our sister, and our noble cousin Henry of Navarre. May the union between our families and the destiny of our countries with this marriage be the seal on the welfare of ourselves and our country and on a lasting peace between catholics and protestants.

Navarre Dear cousin, your eloquence and generosity and good will I accept with humility and joy in now subjecting my will to yours and that of your court, your mother's and that of your lovely France.

Catherine Thank you, dear son-in-law. We never doubted your good will, and that you now are one of us and belong to us will only import welfare, protection and safety for your name, your country and all huguenots, whatever they may think of us.

Charles Let's now forget about religion. We have great festivities to celebrate and a royal wedding, which will introduce a new better age of unity, tolerance and freedom, or what do you say, dearest sister?

Margaret I am happy and content as long as I may do what I want.

Charles You always had that licence, and you always will retain it. You are after all royal.

Catherine Will you join us at mass, Margaret?

Margaret I guess I must. After all, I am a catholic.

Catherine (to Margaret) And so all must be. That was the only reason why you were married to that peasant of Navarre. He is the leader of the huguenots, and they will all now become catholics.

Margaret By compulsion, mother? (*leaves with Catherine and Charles*)

Navarre Condé, my prince, my good admiral, now we are safe. That I am now allied with the royal family should leave the huguenots in peace from all evil intrigue. Don't you think we ought to be safe enough now?

Condé Don't be too sure. Perhaps you have been able to give the huguenots a moment's relief, but the catholics are angry underneath and will have no competition. It is not allowed by the pope nor by the king's mother without second thoughts.

Coligny Their instrument is the duke of Guise, our only real dangerous enemy.

Navarre No one would dare to touch a hair on a member of the royal family.

Condé Don't be naïve, my dear Henry. The cardinal, the duke's brother, did all he could to stop the marriage, and even more fierce was the duke of Dumaine in raising storms against all plans to unite the French royal house with the Bourbons.

Coligny I don't think the danger is over. I rather suspect that now begins the time when we really have to be careful at the peril of our lives.

Navarre And what can we do?

Condé Just pray, that sense in time at last will grab the helm of France so hard beset by turbulences, so that peace, growth and good judgement could rather dominate her destiny than vain fanaticism and insane cruelty, which so far has been the case.

Navarre Let's pray, gentlemen, that our sorely divided country soon may be redeemed by evangelization to the benefit of all. Come, let's go to our chapel. *(They leave.)*

Guise (enters stealthily) What falsity and hypocrisy that permeates the entire court, this corrupt damned circus of twisted lies, to this artificial wedding arranged by opportunism on both sides, the fool of a king believing it will provide him with better space for his play, and the vagabond fooled into believing that he has bought himself some security! And Margaret, the most licentious girl in the country, runs wantonly around embracing every man who is more handsome than her latest pastime, and buys the marriage only on condition that it will give her more freedom. What a black mass! It's worse than a mad christmas for fools! A firm hand is needed here to take charge of the helm in bringing the ship out of the whirlpools and shaky ground of turbulence before chaos by the huguenots has driven us down to shipwreck! Something has to be done at once.

Catherine Guise, my good man, you are a man according to my taste. I think we have the same thoughts.

Guise Queen Catherine, in this country you are the only one to keep your head on your shoulders. All the others are rather loose, for they are not properly fixed.

Catherine All catholics in this town who carry weapons are just waiting for the signal.

Guise But who will give the signal? We can't do anything without the king's silent consent.

Catherine The king will do whatever I wish. I think we can start without him.

Guise And with whom? Who shall be our target?

Catherine We should concentrate on the admiral Coligny. If we only can get rid of him, all others will fall easily.

Guise And Henry of Navarre?

Catherine He is just a sheep. He will follow the others later to the slaughterhouse.

Guise So Coligny it is.

Catherine He is the foundation of the protestants. If only he is out of the way, the others will stand without protection, frightened into exposed nakedness.

Guise My queen, trust your duke. The matter will be arranged smoothly with ease. Coligny is dead.

Catherine Thanks in advance.

Guise We shall take care of the country well enough. *(They leave.)*

Scene 2.

Navarre Margaret, we don't love each other, but let's not be enemies.

Margaret You peasant lurch, I despise you, and I only agreed to the marriage because you are so simple and stupid. That would give me a eunuch for a guard and a warrant for my freedom of a life of my own.

Navarre You can have whatever you wish, but please consider decency and our image to the world. We are after all royal.

Margaret But you are a protestant, and I am catholic. That separates us more than any divorce. We can never be one soul together and even less one flesh.

Navarre I accept that. But the more important it then becomes that we leave each others' religions in peace.

Margaret I don't care about your religion, my dear king, like I don't give a damn about my own.

Navarre Your mother should listen to that.

Margaret That old bitch! She only thinks of her sons. All her ambition for power is for her sons. To her religion is just a means for more power.

Navarre So the less we have anything to do with her, the better.

Margaret That's what everybody thinks. Only her sons will have to do with her to their own perdition.

Navarre The king's position isn't easy.

Margaret She doesn't even allow him to rule, even less to live.

Coligny (enters) King Henry of Navarre, unfortunately I bring no good news.

Navarre What has happened?

Coligny Your mother.

Navarre Yes?

Coligny She has been poisoned and is dying.

Navarre Poisoned? Why?

Coligny Why, she is a protestant.

Margaret No, she is just an old bitch. I wish it had been my own mother instead.

Coligny Margaret, you are your own mother's daughter.

Margaret To my own permanent perdition.

Navarre I must hurry to my mother.

Coligny I am afraid it is already too late.

Navarre Too late? It mustn't be!

Coligny Follow me! (*Navarre follows him out*)

Margaret He is his mother's son, and when she is gone that oaf will need another mother, not a queen, not a woman. But so they all are, those men.

Coligny (outside) Navarre! I have been shot!

Navarre (enters staggering with a badly wounded and bleeding Coligny) An assault in broad daylight in the middle of the street! This is no good portent.

Coligny (*panting*) I'll manage. But the catholics have got started. Now they can't stop. All huguenots must take cover!

Navarre Tell that to all weaponless harmless protestants spread all over the country! Simple people, innocent citizens and good, ordinary, honest human beings!

Coligny Your mother was the first victim. I was the second. The avalanche has started, and it's already booming!

Margaret Henry, my husband, you must escape.

Navarre I refuse. This must not be true. You are exaggerating your paranoia.

Coligny I warned you. And something tells me I will not get away next time.

Navarre I can never take any threat seriously until I am exposed to it.

Coligny I was exposed to it. Take it seriously.

Margaret Henry, it's serious.

Henry Very well. I will blow. (*leaves at once*)

Margaret And I follow him, for I am his wife. (*leaves*)

Coligny (*alone*) Left alone in the middle of Paris bursting with weapons and murderers. What else have you to expect but the most unwelcome visitors?

Charles (*enters with some friends*) My friend and admiral, my good Coligny, I heard you had been wounded!

Coligny Yes, I was viciously attacked from behind, and the man responsible was set to kill me. But this is only the beginning. A catholic league under the leadership of the ruthless duke of Guise is set to cleanse the whole country and especially Paris from all protestants.

Charles What are you saying?

Coligny Wake up to reality, my king!

Charles I promise you solemnly, that the man responsible for the assault against your life shall be hunted down with dogs if needed! I will leave you with a life guard of at least twenty reliable knights, so that no one will dare to approach you except your king.

Coligny Charles, you must take care yourself! There are hired assassins lurking behind the curtains even in your castle!

Charles Yes, I know. We live in troublesome and cruel times. Good Coligny, farewell. I will visit you with regular diligence.

Coligny Farewell, my good king! (*Charles leaves with his attendants.*)

I will probably never see him again. Everything related to religion is but irresponsible and murderous hypocrisy.

(*Murderers break in with Guise and Anjou in the background.*)

Dumaine Kill the admiral!

Gonzago Is that the fellow lying here bleeding in his bed?

Dumaine Yes, that's him. I recognize the damages from the earlier failed attempt.

Montsorrell Die, heretic seducer of the people! (*attacks him*)

Coligny Am I then not even granted a confession?

Gonzago You may kiss the cross here. That's enough for your blessed eternity. (*cuts his throat*)

Montsorrell I just hope we executed the right man.
Guise And is he really dead?
Dumaine He is massacred. We can't do it any better.
Guise Then throw out his body in the street. Let this be the signal and introduction to our crusade. Rid Paris of all protestants! Let no one get away!
Dumaine You heard the signal. Get going.
Montsorrell There are thirty thousand catholics in this city just waiting to send the huguenots directly down to hell.
Gonzago And at least eight thousand protestants.
Guise So we have some work to do! Let's get going!
Dumaine All this must be accomplished this night! They must be taken by surprise!
(Outcries in the streets.)
Montsorrell The massacre has already started.
Guise This will bring joy to queen Catherine.
Dumaine Action, gentlemen! Call on all hangmen! Now is the hour of settlement with the false heresy!
Gonzago More blood, if God is good!
Guise Cut off the bastard's head! Send it to the Vatican, to make the pope happy as well. Your fortune is made, my good admiral. You were finally martyred for the catholic church. Send my love to hell! *(kicks the corpse and leaves. The others follow except certain brutal soldiers, who are left to manhandle the corpse before it is thrown out in the street.)*

Scene 3.

Condé My friend! You must escape! They kill all protestants!
Navarre So it's true. At first I thought I was dreaming. There were grievous outcries throughout the city, it was like a nightmare, and I heard the cries: "Kill! Kill! Kill!" There were the cries of children and hysterical women in horrendous heartrending terror. But, my dear friend, we have nowhere to go. We are like shut up in the city with only murderers around us.
Condé If we survive this we are immensely lucky.
(Guise, Anjou, Gonzago, Montsorrell and soldiers break in.)
Anjou It's Navarre with Condé.
Gonzago They are protestants as well. Kill them!
Condé Anjou, are you yourself behind this?
Anjou Henry, my dear brother-in-law, and Condé, on the contrary, I am only here to save you and bring you to safety. You must run away. Terrible things are occurring here this night, but no one wishes to see any royal blood being spilt. You are therefore both arrested. You have your king to thank for your protection and your lives.

Navarre Is the king in any way responsible for this meaningless rage of mass killing which makes your French capital drown and bleed to death in supreme abominable barbarity and brutality?

Guise No member of our royal family knows anything about it. No one is to blame. It's only the fault of the free-thinkers, who obstinately kept provoking France for years to bitter animosity against their arrogance and haughtiness.

Anjou My mother is innocent, Navarre. She knows nothing and has not commanded a single murder.

Navarre I believe you, Henry of Anjou.

Anjou So follow me at once. Or else you have no chance. Soldiers, take away the prisoners! (*Candé and Navarre are taken away.*)

Guise (to Anjou) They are the head of the dragon. We can't spare them.

Anjou You forget, my good duke, that he is my sister's husband. And you said yourself that the entire royal family has nothing to do with what is going on. So my brother-in-law is above politics and protected against all violence together with our family, even if the initiative would have originated from the throne itself and its intriguing mother.

Guise Henry, don't abuse your mother.

Anjou I will kill anyone who does. Tell her I told you so. (*leaves*)

Guise The queen will not be happy. That Navarre should have been taken out was taken for granted. Now he is free to carry on, and we only succeeded in liquidating a few thousand protestants, perhaps only a fifth. It's just a decimation. Our only success was to strike terror in them all, so that they will stay put in the future and not dare to raise their heads in dangerous pretensions and ambitions any more, and that at least is something.

Scene 4.

Charles Mother, what kind of a human disaster has broken loose in rabid frenzy and madness all over France? Could you have any part in this?

Catherine I don't know what you are talking about. What has happened has come quite spontaneously from the people.

Charles But our admiral was loved by them! He was the most trusted and only wise statesman in our country! There was no one I trusted as much as him!

Catherine Don't you trust your own mother?

Charles Women is another matter! I am now talking about men! And the admiral was my right hand! He was more than like an uncle to me!

Catherine I know nothing about it.

Charles Of course you don't. But don't you see, that the government and our royal house is to the highest degree severely and irrevocably compromised in the eyes of the world? Mine is the responsibility for what has happened, for I am the king! I have

been sullied with blood on my hands without myself having committed as much as an evil thought!

Catherine Then wash your hands. And surely you aren't stupid enough to take up a defence for the huguenots with their dangerous free-thinking and evil doctrine?

Charles Mother, you are going too far. Aren't we all human beings? Is not your own daughter married to the leader of the protestants?

Catherine He must convert to the only safe church. Or else the entire French royal house can not be responsible for his life.

Charles Is that an ultimatum?

Catherine No, a statement of facts. Regard it as an order.

Charles You are a realist, mother. That can not be denied, and I respect you for always seeing things straight as they are. But I will never get over this meaningless terrible massacre at Paris.

Catherine Please yourself. But Charles, my son, you must realize that as a king you must be strong and firm. You must not show any weakness. If you do you will no longer be able to be king.

Charles Is compassion then a weakness? Is it a weakness to from responsibility feel regret for the crimes of others? Is it a weakness in a king to feel disgust, abhorrence and woe when faced with senseless cruelty? Is it a weakness to be human when all the world has gone mad and inhuman? Is it weakness to show that you are upset at the worst crime committed in French history?

Catherine Yes, it is. A king must not show his feelings.

Charles And a woman? What is then a woman without feelings? Is she a woman at all, or has she turned into something that is no longer human?

Catherine Don't go too far, my son.

Charles And were we not christians before this night? But in the name of christianity we have now committed a worse crime than was ever committed in the name of any religion. Thereby we have murdered our christianity and completely robbed it of its moral ground of existence.

Catherine Charles, you begin more and more to sound like a protestant. Do you wish to go off the same way as the cursed heretics?

Charles Mother, are you threatening your son?

Catherine We get nowhere like this. What is done cannot be made undone, and the sting is removed from the poisonous arse of the protestantic insects. They can't sting us any more, and for that we should be grateful.

Charles By celebrating masses and Te Deum?

Catherine Why not? Nothing could be more appropriate. (*leaves*)

Charles She keeps us all in her power, for she is the mother, but I am stifled by the pressing regime of her skirts. I wish I could abdicate, but she would never allow it. I will die as a king for the macabre massacre disaster of my reign, and the sooner, the better.



Act II scene 1.

Margaret I have never seen anyone so ill. He is sweating blood and is in constant anguish, like a Jesus in Getsemane who never reaches the end of his night. And he is constantly tortured by nightmares and ghastly visions, as if all the terrors of Saint Bartholomew's Eve had befallen only him.

Navarre So he must be dying?

Margaret But he wishes to see you before he dies. He never wished what happened to happen, and he thinks that only you could accept and understand that.

Navarre And after him your brother Anjou will be king, who is now king of Poland and will be Henry III as king of France.

Margaret And mother Catherine is longing for that day and looking forward to it as some kind of delivery.

Navarre Even though it means her son's death?

Margaret She hasn't looked kindly on him ever since the massacre on the huguenots. She hasn't forgiven him for getting a bad conscience. And many tongues suggest that she must have poisoned him.

Navarre Could she really?

Margaret Not willingly. But she has definitely poisoned him from the start by her mother's milk.

Pleshé Henry, the king is on his way.

Navarre In what condition?

Pleshé He can't walk but stagger, he can't breathe but pant, he can't do anything without starting to bleed.

(enter Charles staggering with support, sweating blood)

Margaret (rushing up to him) My brother, I told you not to exert yourself!

Charles My sister, even if I don't, it's a more than exhausting effort.

Navarre My brother-in-law, Margaret is right. You should have allowed me to visit you instead.

Charles I beg your pardon that I anticipated you, but I could die at any moment.

Navarre (cautiously) Have you been poisoned?

Charles Only by nature. All my cursed life was hopelessly poisoned from the very beginning, for I was ordained to be a king. All mother's sons were destined to be kings, and we shall all die cursed as kings, poisoned by the womb of our origin. But she will receive her punishment. None of us will give her any grandchild. You will be king one day, Henry. Then you can bandage our country and atone for all the crimes committed by my family.

Navarre It can't be that bad. You are painting the devil on wall. Your brother Henry is a healthy nature with some detachment from Catherine.

Charles If he tries to manage without her at all, she will kill him, like she poisoned me.

Navarre You exaggerate. You are sick.

Charles I know that I am sick. I am not exaggerating, since a dying man sees things more clearly than anyone living. I know Catherine, this horrifying monstrous mother, who will sacrifice anyone for the power of being able to decide the destiny of the world herself.

Margaret Someone told me that you by mistake was poisoned by a book about falconry intended for my husband.

Navarre But I am a catholic! I converted to the state religion for the sake of the family and peace! I bought my life by becoming a catholic!

Margaret That makes no difference to her. If she has conceived the idea that someone is a threat to her purposes and position, he is dead even if he converts to the devil's own catholic church and becomes a hired murderer at the service of the queen in the pope's own name.

Charles I regret to say that my sister is right. You must leave France directly when I am dead and protect your Navarre, for there are rumours about a dangerous alliance between the duke of Guise and the king of Spain.

Navarre Will they never stop? Why are protestants so dangerous? How are we threatening our own country? How does our own free conscience concern the catholics?

Charles Henry, if you return to Navarre you can resume your protestantism and be a protestant as much as you please, and then you can forget all about the religious hubbub of France.

Navarre For once you are ahead of me in your good sense.

Charles I am dying, dear sister. After me France will have a better king who had no responsibility for Saint Bartholomew's Eve although he took part in it himself, since he had no official responsibility. That was all mine, who never took part and never wanted it.

Margaret It's all the fault of our cruel mother.

Charles I don't think it's that simple. Mother probably did not want it herself, although she was the one who started it.

Margaret If she did not want it, why did she start it?

Charles No one can understand the capriciousness of women. They don't want to but still will do anything, they only wish the best for all but cause the greater harm for that, they only seek love but use it to tangle life so hopelessly into a mess driving all men to impotency, especially all her sons. Ask her about it. I can never understand her, although I tried hard all my life. Perhaps that's why my life turned into such a complete royal fiasco of disastrous awkwardness. I must go. My mother is expecting me. *(staggering out with the help of many)*

Margaret He will not survive the night.

Pleshé Henry, it's advisable for you to immediately abandon Paris and go home.

Navarre I know. We'll start immediately.

Margaret I will remain here to watch your interests.

Navarre Margaret, I sold all my shares in Paris, which isn't even worth as much as a mass any more.

Margaret I know. But one day you will start afresh from a new beginning.

Navarre Not as long as the duke of Guise is alive.

Margaret We should be able to get rid of him. My brother Henry will probably take care of the matter.

Navarre Let him try without me. I resign.

Margaret All the best to you and your Navarre.

Navarre Perhaps we'll see each other again one day when the huguenots at least will be granted so much freedom in our world so as to be able to breathe. *(leaves)*

Margaret My elder brother is dead. My husband lives. My brother Henry also lives and will be king, but for how long? No one will live long around here, as long as mother lives.

Scene 2.

Catherine Welcome, my favourite son, back to your own France, back to your throne and kingdom! You are now the lord of all of us and will rule the destiny and progress of the world.

Henry III Thanks, mother, but I never desired the throne, since I already had Poland, which actually was a much greater realm. But since you have now given me my French throne, I will be obliged to keep it. But why has my brother-in-law and your husband, dear sister, left Paris, returned to the wild Navarre and relapsed to become a protestant anew? Didn't you make him convert to your church by threatening his life during the Bartholomew night?

Catherine We will soon get even with the few huguenots that still remain, among which Henry of Navarre was the most foolish and obstinate. We have formed an

unholy alliance between ourselves and Guise on one side and the Spanish king on the other. Against us together, Navarre will be but an easily quashed fly.

Henry We have no quarrel with Navarre. Leave me in peace from your murderous intrigues, mother. Keep them to yourself. I want my France to be lovely and gay and filled with happy games and plays, tournaments, healthy sports, hunts and easy pleasures. Forget your fanaticism, if you want to keep any influence at all in my reign.

Catherine My son, what is your meaning? Can't you see the necessity for France to become as perfectly catholic as Spain?

Henry With inquisitions and heretics' piles as a gloomy terror all the way from Normandy to the Mediterranean? Forget it, mother. We don't want any more Bartholomew nights, and if my conjecture is correct, that disaster ruined Charles' life and killed him, your son, who wanted nothing to do with it and only died with a worse conscience for that.

Catherine A heretic seduces the people and dissolves the religion and world order!

Henry No, that's due to the papal follies that dig the grave of the church by excommunications and useless intolerance for nothing against progressive thinkers who only want to cherish common sense! But you desire the opposite. Therefore you are not fit to have any part in our government.

Catherine But this is outrageous, my son! You engaged yourself in the Bartholomew massacre with heart and soul!

Henry Because I was young and naughty and reckless and allowed myself to be governed by you and the duke of Guise. I regret that now exactly as bitterly as your son king Charles himself regretted it unto his death.

Catherine Has Poland made you so dangerously liberal?

Henry Poland is a great power and very significant. Why? Because it has opened all doors to all Jewish enterprise, just like the great power of Turkey, which is even greater.

Catherine Jews! Protestants! Scum! What will you turn our France into? A cesspool to all the illegal immigrants and refugees of the world?

Henry Rather that than a stifling and gloomy hell of superstitious bigotry like Spain, where no one ever will be free again, since the church is strangling everything that doesn't automatically repeat everything what the church says.

Catherine Beware, my son, of making myself and the church your enemy!

Henry Mother, you are retired and redundant. You have nothing more to do with the state.

Catherine And this I have to listen to from my own son!

Henry No, from the king of France, to whom you gave the title yourself.

Catherine Don't count with any support from me in your liberal politics. There are still more serious politicians and elements of power in the country.

Henry Like the duke of Guise?

Catherine He alone carried through the Bartholomew massacre.

Henry Was it indeed? I thought it was you.

Catherine You are impossible, you monster of monomaniacal conceit! (*leaves*)

Henry She is furiously delusional.

Mugeroun But it wasn't one day too early to have that bitch put into place. You will not have her puffing down your neck in the government.

Henry I sincerely hope so. But could she still be dangerous?

Mugeroun Not she, but the duke of Guise.

Henry I know. He will be the problem to our state and government. Entertain contacts with Henry of Navarre, and ensure him about my friendship.

Mugeroun That will please him.

Henry We shall need each other as free kings. And he is next to my throne, if I like my brother was to suddenly die for some reason or another, since I have no children.

Mugeroun You will have, I am sure.

Henry Probably not, as long as my mother lives.

Scene 3.

Duchess Give me some papers and a pen.

Maid Yes, my lady.

Duchess I must write love letters to the one I love, since I may not meet him.

Maid Here you are, my lady.

Duchess Thank you. – Dear friend, how shall I approach you? As a girl I was cheated of your love as they married me to the duke of Guise, but I have never forgotten you or ceased to love you. Perhaps we could meet just for once, so we at least could love each other only for once even if but with our eyes...

Guise (*has entered*) What are you writing, my friend?

Duchess Nothing.

Guise Then it must be interesting. May I see?

Duchess No. It's nothing but nonsense.

Guise Nothing is more interesting than womanly nonsense. (*tears the paper from her*)
 What is this? Love letters! Treason! My own wife! This is terrible! How could you do something like that behind my back? Are you not honourable? No, obviously you aren't any longer. You are just a cursed whore! And that devil with whom you have been together is done for!

Duchess Alas, don't let him come to any harm!

Guise Why not? He deserves it! He will top my black list for the next Bartholomew massacre! He has no chance, just because you have mentioned his name! I swear to that by all the devils of Satan and his catholics! (*leaves furious*)

Duchess What have I done? I must warn him – but how?

Act III scene 1.

Guise Your majesty, I bring bad news.

Catherine All news these days seems to be bad.

Guise We have lost the war.

Catherine That's all we needed.

Guise Navarre and his protestants are triumphant, and your son king Henry leers at my defeat and gives me donkey's ears.

Catherine Is then the whole world gone crazy? Doesn't anyone any more see the obvious necessity for the triumphant church to manage the world order alone? And that unhang'd lurch of Navarre! For every advancing step he makes the world becomes a constantly more uninhabitable place. How can he be so lucky?

Guise He is regrettably popular, and that is our misfortune.

Catherine Yes, and that of France, since he will be king one day, as my son Henry is as unfit as any of the stillborn sons of my miserable life. They will be kings, but they will never be men.

Guise Still you have me, my queen.

Catherine Yes, but you have fallen out of grace, and the whole country is laughing at you for your horns, the long ridiculous horns of a deceived husband.

Guise It is not my fault.

Catherine Isn't it? No wife deceives her husband unless something is lacking in his love.

Guise She never loved me.

Catherine So you blame her?

Guise No, the rogue who stole her heart.

Catherine Do you know who it is?

Guise Yes, the king's own favourite.

Catherine You will never be a man again until you are revenged.

Guise Shall I dispose of the king?

Catherine Not yet. He is after all my son.

Guise But later?

Catherine Only if necessary.

Guise It's always safer to act in advance.

Catherine He holds nothing against you. He just finds you amusingly ridiculous.

Guise He is like a child who lives only for his games and pleasures.

Catherine And as a child he is innocent.

Guise Well, for your sake I will leave that innocence in peace for the time being.

Catherine But don't give up against Henry of Navarre!

Guise He is after all your son-in-law.

Catherine Yes, but a protestant, which makes me constantly furious!

Guise I have the honour of completely sharing your fury with you, Madame.

(bows and kisses her hand)

Catherine I thank you, my only friend. (*Guise leaves.*)

He will go at any length, and he is all I have to put up against the foolish wantonness of my royal son.

Scene 2.

Navarra Margaret! What news from court?

Margaret The king congratulates you to your victory against him. That serves the duke of Guise right, he argues, and shows him his horns, while Guise is consumed by his ignominy as a deceived husband.

Navarre Is he and the queen still at it with their intrigues?

Margaret Yes, all they dream about is renewing the golden age of their dreams with the bloodbaths and massacres of Saint Bartholomew.

Navarre The old lady is sick. She can't be normal.

Margaret Neither is Guise. But Guise is dangerous, for he is always particular about taking out vengeance.

Navarre Has he ever poisoned anyone?

Margaret No, but the king's favourite Mugeroun was the other week knifed to death. The murderer naturally got away, so it could only have been an intrigue by the duke of Guise.

Navarre What does the king say about it?

Margaret He is sane enough not to want anything more to do with mother, but he fears the duke of Guise.

Navarre Is he that powerful?

Margaret The pope, the Spanish king, the church, all the fanatics of France and, worst of all, mother are supporting him.

Navarre But no one else. The people hate him.

Margaret By all rights.

Navarre There will probably be some settlement by and by.

Margaret I think so too, perhaps also between us.

Navarre Do you wish to dissolve our marriage?

Margaret It was just a formality and a farce from the beginning. We hardly did anything as a married couple except deceive each other.

Navarre How many did you have?

Margaret At least as many as you.

Navarre So we are rather even.

Margaret Yes, so far. And until you become king, I will remain your agent.

Navarre What about your brother? Can't he have children?

Margaret You know how he works. He doesn't work.

Navarre Well, I suppose you are right. Your mother only had impotent sons, but her one daughter compensated them all.

Margaret I have nothing against it.
Navarre Neither have I, as long as you remain loyal.
Margaret My friendship, Henry, is far more precious and safer than ever my love.
Navarre I thank you for it. A kiss?
Margaret The seal of our friendship. *(They kiss.)*

Scene 3.

Catherine This can't go on, my dear Guise. You must do something about it.
Guise Why don't you do something about it yourself, queen Catherine, who alone holds all the power?
Catherine My son refuses to work with me. He doesn't even want to see me.
Guise Then kill him, like you killed your other royal son.
Catherine I never wanted the death of Charles.
Guise Why then did you arrange it?
Catherine It wasn't me. It was an accident.
Guise But you organized it.
Catherine It was intended for Henry of Navarre. The wrong book was read by the wrong royalty.
Guise But your son was the one who died, and you caused his death. Confess.
Catherine No, it was Navarre who caused his death, for if he had only read the book himself, my son would never have obtained it.
Guise And Henry of Navarre is still alive.
Catherine I don't know how many attempts he has escaped already.
Guise Perhaps it would be easier to murder your son the king.
Catherine Don't ask me for the impossible.
Guise Remember, he has no issue. If he dies Henry of Navarre will be king.
Catherine That's exactly what we must evade at any cost! Navarre must never be king! France must remain catholic!
Guise Tell that to Navarre, and he will only laugh at you.
Catherine There is a way to solve the problem.
Guise You can't kill Navarre. He knows all your methods.
Catherine Both must die.
Guise Both kings? Your son and son-in-law?
Catherine We have no choice. I hereby give you the commission. All means will be at your service. I give you carte blanche myself. As a reward I offer you the French crown.
Guise That will introduce an entirely new royal family called Guise.
Catherine That's what France needs: fresh blood, new masters, and a catholic totalitarian monopoly of faith and creed, like in Spain.
Guise It will be my pleasure to oblige and obey you, Madame. The question is only if it is feasible.

Catherine It must be feasible! What the pope can do, you can do.
Guise The pope controls only Italy. There he can poison and have anyone murdered. In Spain the king manages all settlements at the smallest wink of the pope. But for the rest of the world the pope is rather powerless.
Catherine So you shall be his closest agent.
Guise It could be dangerous. Your son is on guard.
Catherine May the best part survive, and may he be a catholic, so that all will follow him.
Guise I regard it as a mission of honour.
Catherine You must succeed, my good duke! It's an order!
Guise (with a bow) Madame, I obey you, for the sake of the welfare of the world.

Act IV scene 1.

Henry To murder or be murdered – that's the law of the age. To be kind in these times as the same as to be killed. Goodness has no chance. You have to murder the murderers before they murder you, or else there will be no end to the murders. (*to the three murderers*) Are you fit?
1st murderer We couldn't be fitter.
Henry I mean, are you ready to go for it?
2nd murderer With every harlot in Paris, Monsieur, who just is willing enough.
Henry I mean, dumbbells, if you are ready with what you are about to do?
3rd murderer How can we be ready before we have finished the job?
Henry Epernoun, they don't get what I say. Talk to them to set them right.
Epernoun Do you get it, comrades, that as soon as the duke enters the room you attack him from behind, slit his throat, cut up his belly to make all his bowels fall out, so that he doesn't produce any more shit in this life, and then you castrate him with a vengeance. Is that clear?
1st murderer Everything at once?
Epernoun Of course!
2nd murderer But if the king resists?
Epernoun It's not the king you must kill, you fools, it's the duke!
3rd murderer But if the duke doesn't want to?
Epernoun Then hang him, or shoot him in his head, or cut his neck, whatever, as long as he dies!
3rd murderer A duke's neck can be extremely tough. Some hangmen haven't succeeded in cutting off heads until the third stroke.
Epernoun Don't protest, just do it!
All three killers Do what?
Epernoun (crying) Kill the king!
(*The murderers get confused, the king gets desperate.*)
1st murderer Wasn't it the duke we were supposed to murder?

2nd murderer What duke?

Henry Epernoun, your hired killers seem a bit uncertain about their mission.

Epernoun Of course they must be, with you yourself standing here watching! Get lost, your majesty, or else we'll never get the king slaughtered!

1st murderer Wasn't it the duke we were supposed to murder?

Epernoun Just murder whoever you wish, as long as you get it done!

3rd murderer Pardon us, but it's a bit difficult to act on such ambiguous orders. Was it the cardinal or the admiral we were supposed to kill?

Epernoun (suddenly on his guard) Quiet! I hear him coming! Scram, all three of you! Hide! Here he comes! *(The murderers and the king disappear.)*

Guise (enters) Epernoun, my dear friend, I am looking for the king.

Epernoun He is not here.

Guise I had an appointment with him here.

Epernoun But he isn't here.

Guise You seem on edge. Are you hiding something?

Epernoun Not at all.

Guise Are you at a loss for a toilet? Don't hold it back for my sake.

Epernoun I am not holding anything back.

Guise Are you ill?

Epernoun Even less.

Guise How can you be so sure? I am not so sure.

Epernoun But I am. I have never been healthier.

Guise Thus speaks only the mortally ill. No one imagines himself healthier than the man who is right about to die. It's a well known phenomenon.

Epernoun I am sorry, but I am not dying at all.

Guise Have you been too long in the sun then?

Epernoun Even less.

Guise What then are you doing here?

Epernoun Nothing.

Guise So go for God's sake and make yourself useful! Find the king and tell him that I am here!

Epernoun As you wish, your grace. *(bows and leaves)*

Guise What's the matter with that fellow? He looked at me as if I had been some ghost. *(enter the king)* Well, at last a man you can speak with! Good morning, your majesty!

Henry Good morning, cousin. How is it?

Guise I understand that my extensive and expensive court has raised your eyebrows.

Henry Not only that. You murdered my friend Mugeroun.

Guise He made love to my wife!

Henry No, cousin, he didn't. He knew your wife long before she was known to you. They were just childhood friends.

Guise But she loved him! He gave me horns!

Henry And did you never deceive your wife yourself? Come on, duke! Here in France everybody loves everybody without anyone being so stupid as to protest, for the general love game is beneficial to all.

Guise But my own wife!

Henry Do you then own her?

Guise Yes, at least her body!

Henry Property is something you control. If you can't control it you must lose it.

Guise I am sorry about your favourite's sudden violent death.

Henry So am I, but the worst thing is that no one has avenged him.

Guise Was that all you wanted? Blunt moralising?

Henry Wait here. I'll just have a word with Epernoun. (*leaves*)

Guise What does he mean? Will he drive the matter to some point? (*pulls his sword*) Well, I have my sword. Perhaps it would be best to kill him right here and now.

(*enter 3rd murderer*)

3rd murderer Pardon me, your grace, but I don't want to murder you.

Guise And why on earth by all the saints should I murder you? Have we any unfinished business? Do I know who you are? Should I know?

3rd murderer No, you don't know who I am, and that's just as well, because I leave now. I am pulling out.

Guise Out of what?

3rd murderer (*cautiously*) In the next room there are two hired murderers waiting for you.

Guise Is it my hired murderers who are here to murder the king?

3rd murderer No, it's the king's hired murderers who are here to murder you.

Guise Are you sure?

3rd murderer Unless I got it all wrong.

Guise My friend, you had better leave. Obviously you are confused.

3rd murderer Thanks for that. Then I'll get lost for good. (*disappears quickly*)

Guise What was that all about? Some joker out of a black comedy? Maybe one of my hired killers who got confused about the whole thing. Such things happen. Well, he is absolved. He doesn't have to be on.

1st murderer (*outside*) Listen, buddy, Quasimodo tried to spoil the whole thing.

2nd murderer Who is left in there?

1st murderer I've no idea.

2nd murderer Good, let's then go in and kill him straight and get it over with. We have free hands, and then we can blame it all on both the duke and the king.

1st murderer Yes, let's do it. (*they go in to the duke*)

Guise More hired killers! Weren't you the ones I hired to kill off the king?

2nd murderer Yes, and you must be the king.

Guise No, I am the duke of Guise. You are mistaken.

1st murderer If we say you are the king you are the king, and that's that!

(*They both cut him down.*)

2nd murderer One fly missing out of the crazy nobility.

1st murderer The devil will hardly miss him.

2nd Come! Let's now get our reward!

1st By the duke or the king?

2nd It doesn't matter. By the one whom we didn't kill, for the other one has hardly anything left to give. Come! *(They leave.)*

Guise What infernal blunderers! Sixtus, now strike the world with your inquisition for my sake! Parma, Philip of Spain, vengeance on the house of Valois! My queen, I have failed you, and may your entire royal house be damned for that matter! *(dies)*

(enter the king and Epernoun)

Epernoun They made it!

Henry Be damned, deceitful duke, the instigator of all the massacres and persecutions in France! At last we have extracted those adder's teeth out of my mother! You can try now, mother, to force France into your compulsory inquisition! At last we can in peace and quiet forget about the papal church and just let it be damned!

Epernoun Sire, I hear your mother coming.

Henry Let that bitch behold the perfect sum of all her intrigues and twisted ambitions herself!

Catherine (enters) Alas! What do I see? The duke of Guise! Murdered!

Henry Yes, mother, and we did it ourselves. Here is the root of all evil, of the French civil wars, of the division between Valois and Navarre and of the school of professional hired murderers who were sent from here by you and him to all the world, even to the queen of England! Here is the waster of the funds of state, who ruined our France only to equip an armada against England to let it founder!

Catherine My son, you are mad.

Henry No, mother, at last I have found myself! I was no king until now! It's your own evil work you are beholding, not mine! I never wanted anything of all you did, as little as my brother wanted it, who died of guilt because of your actions! Behold your innocent children, who are dying for you, for your bloodstained hands! Behold your instrument, who passed all bounds of lunacy by his fanaticism, the duke of Guise! He is now dead. Have you understood? He is now dead!

Catherine (terrified) And you murdered him!

Henry With a vengeance, because it was right!

Catherine My son, you are a monster! If only I had killed you already in your cradle! You are not my son. You are a changeling, a bastard, a cuckoo, a gipsy orphan, that some devil gave to me to deprive me of my life!

Henry Then cry for Guise, who maybe was your true son? In that case, be comforted by his body, for he is now dead and yours forever. Come, Epernoun. Leave the vulture alone with that corpse. *(leaves with Epernoun)*

Catherine (throws herself on the body) My Guise, my dear Guise, what will now become of your world? We only wished it well, and we did only well, for all we wanted was the world to come to its senses and become uniformly catholic! Now everything falls apart,

for the world is confirmed in its madness, and only we, who were sensible, are blameless for its ruin! Now there will never be any French inquisition, now there will be no more invincible armada against the mad and heretic England, which now will remain hopelessly established in its irreligiousness and shut up in its own voluntary mental asylum named Tolerance; now the pope himself will lose his zest when his right hand is gone, and now there will be no more wars against the arch villain Henry of Navarre, the only origin of all evil and the very incarnation of its hopeless madness! All I have left to do now in life is for my country is to see to it that both he and the king dies, for although he is my son, it's far better than no one at all may be king than that such monsters are allowed to govern! You, my Guise, was the world's only hope. Now there is nothing left in the world when you are gone, except raving antichristian lunacy!

Scene 2.

Cardinal Lorraine (in prayer) What did I do wrong? I only did what I thought was right. I served my church, and for the sake of the church I sanctioned the Saint Bartholomew Eve's massacre. Queen Catherine was right: the free-thinkers and huguenots were the greatest threat against the state. We had no choice but to try to eliminate the growing tumour by drastic surgery. Still I have a bad conscience, and I can't understand why.

1st murderer Cardinal Lorraine?

Lorraine Yes? Who are you? I don't know you.

1st murderer You are an old crook.

Lorraine So what? Aren't we all, when we reach a certain age of maturity?

1st murderer But you are an old murderer.

Lorraine No, I am not guilty of murder.

1st murderer What about St. Bartholomew's Eve, then?

Lorraine It wasn't me. It was king Charles and the duke of Guise and the king ruling now, then the duke of Anjou.

2nd murderer Don't try to get away with it!

Lorraine What do you mean? Who are you?

1st murderer The duke of Guise is dead. And king Charles IX is dead.

2nd Only you remain of the murderers, you old knave, and your brother Dumaine, but we will settle with him as well.

Lorraine What do you mean? Why are you here?

1st We have come for confession.

Lorraine Both at the same time? It can't be done. I have to take one at a time.

1st Start with me, then. It was I who murdered the duke of Guise.

2nd No, it was I.

1st It was both of us. And now it's your turn, fake cardinal.

Lorraine But consider what you are doing! I am a true cardinal!

2nd That's just it, mean villain! (*puts the rope around his neck*) Pull it tight! You will avoid dying like your victims of Bartholomew's Eve, reverend cardinal! You let your soldiers massacre ordinary people and cut out their bowels, but you will only be hanged. Be happy and thankful for that privilege.

2nd (strangles him thoroughly) I think he has planted his last potato.

1st Let's proceed then to the next one.

2nd Is the list still long?

1st There are still many dukes and barons.

2 How many?

1 I never could count, you know. I could only act. Others will do the thinking for me.

2 All right then. The point is we get paid.

1 And not all professional murderers are paid directly by the king. (*butts him with the elbow, blinking*)

2 So we sent the cardinal on his way by his order straight to hell. And who is next? The sow that survived herself who is his mother?

1 Don't ask unnecessary questions. We are to kill, not to ask questions.

2 But shouldn't we kill the right person at least?

1 Yes, but we shouldn't know who it is.

2 It doesn't matter. The point is that they are killed.

1 Exactly! Next one in the row!

Scene 3.

Dumaine My brother the duke of Guise is dead, and murdered! I am still living – by what right? With the right of vengeance, my most sacred duty, on all his damned murderers and their followers the huguenots. It's time for someone to at last do something about it and liberate the country from free-thinking and get its greatest threat that peasant of Navarre out of the vicinity of politics and out of our lives for good! He is a phantom who still dares to live when so many others for his sake have died! Yes, what is it, brother James?

James Your grace, bad news.

Dumaine Not again!

James Your brother cardinal Lorraine has been murdered.

Dumaine Not him as well!

James Strangled by order of the king, no doubt.

Dumaine Then we have only one thing to do. This means war! We must gather new armies against the king and his brother-in-law, that incorrigible heretic Henry of Navarre!

James There are no armies left for you to gather. All have been wasted. I have a better suggestion.

Dumaine Well?

James Leave the king to me.

Dumaine You mean... (*makes a sign across his throat*)

James I have sinned much in my life and have much to atone for.

Dumaine But how will you get at him?

James I am a catholic and a trusted Jacobin. I am a personal confidant of the queen.

Dumaine Well then! That opens all possibilities! You will surely succeed with the impossible. But do it at once! You must not be anticipated!

James I have nothing to fear. I am a Jacobin, remember.

Dumaine But what about me, you jackass! Both my brothers have been assassinated, and no head is more loose on his shoulders than mine!

James Trust me. I know my duty.

Dumaine A man's primary duty towards himself is to survive, but it's becoming increasingly difficult in these days. Just get on with it! My life depends on the king's death!

James He is dead already, for his mother has already sacrificed him in her heart.

Dumaine So it's just to plant the knife and wring it around?

James A mere formality.

Dumaine Good luck then.

James Thank you. (*leaves*)

Dumaine But Henry of Navarre is still there. When will we at last get rid of this dragon called free thinking? Perhaps never, since the more we kill, the more there are survivors, who remain, with those who avenge themselves.

Act V scene 1.

Henry III Welcome, dear sister, home to hell and the court of Paris! How is my dear brother-in-law? (*Catherine moves among the curtains in the background.*)

Margaret Henry of Navarre sends his greetings that he prefers keeping where he is for the sake of general peace and wants absolutely nothing to do with the intrigues and plots in Paris.

Henry That's the greeting of a wise man. Lucky for us that there is one man more than I who has his head correctly screwed on.

Catherine (aside) On the contrary. You alone are both screwed in your brains, but it is not your fault but the consequence of power.

Margaret Is our mother well?

Henry She lives. That's all I can say.

Margaret The duke of Guise and cardinal Lorraine have been murdered, and I assume that she is the only one to mourn for them.

Catherine (aside) More than for her own children.

Henry I know nothing about that. The less I learn about my mother, the better. No news are the only good news I ever hear of her.

A servant Your majesty, a monk is here with a letter for you.

Henry What kind of a monk?

Servant A Jacobin. (*James appears.*)

Epernoun I don't like his looks. He can't have anything good to bring.

Henry Still he is a monk and holy as such. Am I not a catholic? Of course the monk is welcome, if he brings me any message.

James (*appearing*) Your majesty, I only bring a simple petition.

Henry It is our duty to receive it.

James The president of Paris asks for a quick answer to these lines. (*delivers a letter*)

Henry Then I must read the letter at once.

James Read it carefully, and consider well its contents. (*The king reads. James pulls a dagger.*) May the only God of the only beatific church now stand me by! (*strikes the king from behind*)

Epernoun An assault! Lock the doors!

Henry You insidious villain! And did you imagine that you could kill me and get away with it? (*strikes the monk*)

James Yes, with beatitude for my reward! (*dies*)

Henry You stupid, imbecile, infantile, ridiculous and ignorant villain! Who paid you for your folly?

Epernoun He is dead. How is it with you, my liege?

Henry Bad. I am dead and will not last for long.

Catherine (*coming out*) My son!

Henry Out of my way, you atrocious witch! Leave me alone from your touch, which in France by your hands has spread death like a plague, you vile swinish whore! Drive out the hag! I don't ever want to see that infective crone again, especially not if I am to die!

Catherine My son! I never wanted anyone's death among my sons!

Henry Still you alone caused the death of them all. And how do you explain it?

Margaret Mother, you had better leave.

Catherine Yes, I will take my leave, my children, now that you all are dead. (*leaves, upset in despair*)

Henry She is far worse than an ordinary hangman.

Margaret Brother, you must not die. France needs you.

Henry I must die, for France to at last get a sensible king.

Margaret Who?

Henry Your husband, Henry of Navarre.

Margaret But he is a protestant?

Henry Yes, and that serves the whole damned world right. What it needs is a real king who can give the pope a necessary kick in the arse that he will never forget. And concerning France the role of the church seems now to reach an end. It can never

regain the people's respect after the career of the duke of Guise and his night of Saint Bartholomew, in which all catholics took part including myself. The cruel fanaticism has deprived christianity of all credibility.

Epernoun Here is the physician.

Henry What is your verdict, doctor? Have I any chance left for any sort of life, or have I been paid off?

Doctor (examining) It's a very serious wound. It's not deep, but its damages inside are considerable. The murderer has not cut deep, but still he has cut off your life's thread, for that knife, which I can now conclude from the reaction of the blood, was viciously prepared and poisoned.

Henry So I am done for.

Doctor Unfortunately the poison has reached circulation.

Henry Margaret, my Epernoun, I die after a sordid failure of a government, which I am now refused the possibility to amend. But there will be someone coming after me. He will have a considerable job cleaning up the mess after all our ravings.

Margaret My brother, Henry is on his way. There is still time for you to meet him.

Henry That was good news. Don't tell mother, for she would only block my last opportunity.

Margaret She wouldn't dare.

Navarre (enters) Brother-in-law, royal cousin, my dearest friend, yet again is France then beset by an apocalyptic tragedy, and that's one too much!

Henry But it's the last one, for you will now be king after me.

Navarre How can I? I am a protestant.

Henry That's why, stupid! That's what our country needs: at last a human being who is not a catholic.

Margaret I hear our mother approaching.

Henry That's all we wanted.

Catherine My son! My last most beloved son!

Henry Behold your handiwork, dear mother. Behold the end result of your intrigues. Here lies your last son dying as a victim of your intrigues. Now you have succeeded in killing off your entire family.

Catherine Don't be so cruel. I never wanted this. The monk was under the order of the duke Dumaine, who avenged his brother the duke of Guise.

Henry And who was the duke of Guise if not a dearer cousin and more trusted as such than any of your sons?

Catherine He was a moral support with a backbone.

Henry While your sons were just spineless animals indulging in immorality. But who broke their backs? Who taught them all the vices of the world, strategies of assassination, insidiousness, cruelty, bloodthirst and consistently furtive deception? No one but you.

Catherine Don't be so cruel. Try to repent your sins now instead as you are facing your departure.

Henry I have nothing to repent which I did not repent already, except the one thing for which I was not to blame: that I had you for a mother. That crime, the only astronomical one, was not my fault.

Catherine You renegade son, can't you be reconciled with your mother even at the moment of death?

Henry Never! And I will give you some heritage. After me you will have for a king your beloved Navarre, the protestant.

Catherine This is too much!

Henry I thought so. That was intended. One last blessing for my holy catholic mother, and something to laugh at for the rest of eternity. (*tries to laugh but dies*)

Margaret Now I have no brother left in life except you, my husband, and you are now the king.

Navarre And I fear for that part. Why me? Can't you be a queen without me?

Margaret Ladies are not involved in the French succession. We always had to content ourselves with manoeuvring back stage at all times.

Navarre And you did so with the more energy.

Catherine King Henry of Navarre, I have now lost all my sons, and it is up to you now to form a government. You can't do that unless you cooperate with the old one. First of all I therefore beg of you a favourable introduction. I ask for reconciliation.

Navarre I never had anything against you. You were hated and loved by your sons, but I was always careful not to take part in anything.

Catherine You have won, and I must admit that I always respected your sound peasant common sense. That is perhaps what France is most needing now. I want to give the chance to raise France on her feet. But you can't be a protestant. You must convert to papacy. Or else you can never have that freedom to govern which is so vital for an enlightened king like you.

Margaret She is right, my husband. As a protestant your hands are politically pinioned behind your back.

Navarre (*takes his place between the ladies, taking care of both*) Two women urge me to fall. Who can resist any of them? That man is an idiot who turns any woman down, especially if that woman herself makes the offer. But there is a third woman, which it is my greatest duty unfortunately, no matter how revolting it is, to take care of, and that is the deepest fallen woman of them all, which is our France. I accept your invitation, my ladies, and will become a catholic for the sake of this fallen woman.

Catherine Then you also have my support, Henry of Navarre.

Margaret She considers it her life's greatest victory that a leader of the protestants finally becomes king of the country and a catholic.

But here our destinies separate, Henry. You don't need me any more. I have protected you through the troublesome years with my royalty and status, which has given you power, the crown and the nation. Now find yourself a real wife, for a Valois is not good enough for you any more.

Navarre Margaret, I sincerely hope we will remain the best of friends nonetheless?

Margaret Of course. We always were, although we were married.

Navarre So, my ladies, friendship and reconciliation, love without limits, peace and welfare, reconstruction of our country and an end to fanaticism shall mark my government. Nothing is more unnecessary in life than inconvenient enmity, and I only want the whole world to be my friends. So let's be positive in view of the future; since the least thing we can do, in view of how the recent past has destroyed all human values, is to piously concentrate on giving France a future.

Epernoun Long live Henry of Navarre! Long live the king of France, king Henry the Fourth! *(All join in with cheers.)*

All Long live the king of France!

Epernoun So let us carry out our dead king and give him the worthiest possible funeral, so that we then can celebrate a new era with a still better king.

Navarre Thanks, my good Epernoun. We will start at once.

(Henry leads with both ladies, the others follow carrying the body of Henry III.)

The End

Comment

The subject of this play is the most revolting imaginable: the greatest moral fall in history of the catholic church by the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve with 6000 protestant victims in Paris August 1572. At the centre of this human disaster stands Catherine de'Medici, one of the most debatable women in history. To visualize this as a drama is practically impossible, as the event is so utterly offensive. Still there has been a number of successful attempts, like by Alexandre Dumas *père*, whose novel "Queen Margot" although historically grossly incorrect and exaggerated, was filmed with great success with Virna Lisi as an unforgettable Caterina de'Medici.

But the best dramatization of the event is still Christopher Marlowe's, who almost was in it himself. When it happened he was a pupil eight and a half years old at the Canterbury Cathedral School, and his future employer Sir Francis Walsingham, the founder of England's secret intelligence service, was frequently in Paris in those years and could have been an eyewitness. Marlowe's play "Massacre at Paris", probably the last one he wrote under his own name, is his most condensed, wild and sensational production: it is almost like a modern evening press report. Its almost journalistic

briefing and accentuation of the atrocities has brought many to believe it's just a fragment, that the real original play has been lost and that the version preserved is just a rough bad copy, a hasty edition for a secondary theatre after many cuts. Still this mutilated play has preserved an important characteristic of cold detachment and objectivity, which attitude to the problem complexities of the Bartholomew Eve is much more efficient and fair than the passionate exaggerations of Alexandre Dumas.

The version presented here has followed up and tried to fulfil Marlowe's ideas. The structure of his play is a devastating analysis of the untenability of the catholic church in theory and practice, completely ignored by Dumas, while here instead we have tried to confirm it. This version is founded completely on Marlowe, while the characters Margaret and Catherine have been given wider space. Perhaps we also to some degree have tried to patch together Marlowe's punctured fragment and approach something of how the real, more extensive original could have been.

*Verona, 11.4.2001, in Swedish,
translation completed 21.11.2018.*