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The Guisian

by Simon Belyard

Translated, with Introduction and Notes,
by Richard Hillman

Référence électronique

Introduction to *The Guisian*

by Simon Belyard

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Introduction

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There are solid grounds, I believe, for encouraging historians of early modern English drama to make the acquaintance of Simon Belyard's tragedy *The Guisian* (1592)—something this translation aims at facilitating—but these do not necessarily extend to the literary merit of the play (depending, of course, on one's understanding of that criterion). Certainly, viewed in relation to much neo-Senecan French Humanist tragedy of the later sixteenth century, as epitomised by the work of Robert Garnier, it risks appearing clumsy and derivative. Nor, as far as I know, is it suspected of influencing subsequent dramatists.¹ By comparison with *The Guisiade* of Pierre Matthieu (1589)—the only other surviving contemporary tragedy based on the assassination of Henri, Duke of Guise, at Blois on 23 December 1588, and an equally hard-line piece of propaganda for the ultra-Catholic Holy League (*Sainte Ligue*)—it is less sophisticated in both dramatic nuance and poetic expression (if capable at times of remarkable verbal vigour and imagistic vividness).²

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- 1 Nevertheless, certain similarities to turn-of-the-century tragedies of Antoine de Montchrestien are close enough to suggest specific influence; see the translation, nn. 87, 223, 227 and 239. More generally, it seems possible that in *Hector* (1601-1604?), the later playwright recalled his precursor's presentation of Guise and Madame de Nemours in portraying the hero, dauntless and doomed, as defying Andromache's supernaturally founded persuasions.
 - 2 *The Guisiade* (*La Guisiade*), unlike *The Guisian*, has received considerable attention, including an English translation-edition: Pierre Matthieu, *The Guisiade, The Tragedy of the Late Admiral Coligny* [by François de Chantelouve] and *The Guisiade*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Richard Hillman, Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation, 40 (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2005). Subsequent references are to this edition.

Some of the very features by which Belyard's work might be judged defective from a French literary-historical perspective, however, point to its potential interest from an English one. Furthermore, that such interest existed at the time (although not necessarily for aesthetic reasons) can be demonstrated. While Christopher Marlowe's familiarity with Matthieu's tragedy may only be inferred from his treatment of the same episode in *The Massacre at Paris*, there is conclusive evidence of his direct use of Belyard's version of the murder scene itself.³ This evidence collaterally supplies a *terminus a quo* for the English play of 1592, the publication year of *The Guisian*.

The very fact that there exists a murder scene in Belyard's work marks a departure from the French Humanist norm, as sanctioned by Horace in the *Ars Poetica*, and a stark contrast with *The Guisiade*, in which the Duke's killing takes place offstage and is recounted by the ubiquitous Messenger, as with violent action generally in both Seneca's theatre and its French Humanist derivatives.⁴ In Belyard, too, a messenger is provided to transmit the news (V.1545 ff.)—likewise to the bereft mother, Madame de Nemours, and likewise with morally and pathetically charged embellishments. But in Belyard's treatment such embellishments are conveyed with rhetorical and imaginative extremity and culminate in the sympathetic messenger's physical support of the stricken lady. (He is not just a neutral figure, moreover, or even a Guise partisan, but a presumably hardened soldier nonetheless horrified by such immoral barbarity.) The case is interesting not merely for its overkill (as it were) in support of its relentless message—the monstrous tyranny of Henri III (the terms “tyranny” and “tyrant” being repeated *ad infinitum* from the title onwards)—but for this dramaturgical doubling. Indeed, one might speak of a tripling, since we are offered a conspiratorial scene in which the chief assassin (L'Archant, captain of the King's guard⁵), grotesquely imagines and seemingly even mimes (III.917 ff.) the murder he will commit. It is as if Belyard, steeped in the neo-classical conventions though he obviously was (whatever the depth of his scholarship, which sometimes seems dubious⁶), could not resist the temptation to compound his tragic centrepiece by show-

3 This evidence is detailed in Richard Hillman, “Marlowe's Guise: Offending against God and King”, *Notes and Queries* ns 55.2 (2008): 154–59.

4 There are exceptions to the exclusion of violence from the stage. On Seneca's own practice, see A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 133–34. In France, the tragedies and tragicomedies of the post-1600 “*âge baroque*” moved away from such restrictions: thus, e.g., in Alexandre Hardy's *Coriolan* (c. 1607), the hero is murdered, and his mother commits suicide, onstage. Nevertheless, Belyard's play makes a rare early specimen.

5 See the translation, n. 15.

6 For instance, in his citation of the anecdote regarding Plato and Lysander's judgement (see the translation, dedicatory epistle, “To Monsieur le président des trésoriers”, p. 7, n. 13).

ing as well as telling. Contemporary English playwrights and their audiences understood this impulse and procedure very well.

The Guisian in Its Time and Place

It may (or may not) bear on its divergence from *The Guisiade* on this point that Belyard's tragedy is known to have been staged, as the author informs the reader in an introductory epistle. This was presumably in Troyes (in the Guises' fiefdom of Champagne), where he was settled as a schoolmaster,⁷ although we know nothing of the circumstances. (The name of the person he thanks for facilitating the production is otherwise unrecorded.) Of course, Matthieu's work may well also have been mounted, perhaps multiply, as an adjunct to its wide diffusion in printed form: this would fit with the concerted campaign of League propaganda that immediately followed the event. (There were three successive editions of *The Guisiade* within 1589, the third revised in the wake of the King's own assassination on 2 August of that year, and numerous copies of the text survive.) Not only was Matthieu far more prominent as a propagandist for the League and a political figure within it (as a lawyer and municipal councillor in Lyons), but he was an accomplished poet and playwright, and some of his previous dramas had certainly been represented.⁸

By contrast, Belyard's seemingly lone venture into drama was clearly a more isolated, local and personal affair. *The Guisian* exists in a single edition, printed in Troyes in 1592, of which there are four extant copies.⁹ The volume, in which Belyard humbly solicits the patronage of the mayor of Troyes, whom he praises in his dedicatory letter as a militant

7 He speaks of composing *The Guisian* in hours of recreation when not occupied with his young pupils; see the translation, dedicatory epistle, p. 6. Apart from the little he himself discloses in this dedication, virtually nothing is on record concerning Belyard. See Jean-Claude Ternaux, "Simon Belyard, Ronsard et Garnier", *La Poésie de la Pléiade. Héritage, influences, transmission. Mélanges offerts au professeur Isamu Takata par ses collègues et ses amis*, ed. Yvonne Bellenger, Jean Céard and Marie-Claire Thomine-Bichad, *Rencontres 1* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2009), pp. 275–95, esp. pp. 275–76.

8 For a summary of Matthieu's long career, which paradoxically included a position as official historiographer of his erstwhile enemy Henri IV, see *The Guisiade*, ed. and trans. Hillman, Introduction, pp. 57–63.

9 Simon Belyard, *Le Guysien ou perfidie tyrannique commise par Henry de Valois es personnes des illustress. reverdiss. & tresgenereux Princes Loys de Lorraine Cardinal & Archevesque de Rheims, & Henry de Lorraine Duc de Guyse, Grand Maistre de France* (Troyes: Iean Moreau, 1592). According to the Universal Short Title Catalogue (online at <<https://www.ustc.ac.uk/>>; accessed 08/06/2019), the four extant copies are held in the British Library, the Bibliothèque Municipale of Châlons-en-Champagne, the Bibliothèque Méjanes (Aix-en-Provence) and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna). A modernised edition (as *Le Guysien*) is currently in preparation (see the translation, Note on the Translation, p. 4).

League supporter, was obviously produced in very different circumstances, including greater temporal distance from the event and from the “tyrant”’s own death. The distance is not precisely calculable, but ancillary evidence provides some indication. All four surviving copies are bound together with a much slighter companion work, which features a separate dedication (to a distinguished local ecclesiastic) and pagination, but is identically identified as to printer and date; this piece is not a play, however, but a poem, a pastoral dialogue, roughly on the model of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, presenting a political allegory. The title is *Charlot. Eglogve pastorelle sur les miseres de la France, & sur la tresheureuse & miraculeuse deliurance de trespagnanime & tresillustre Prince Monseigneur le Duc de Gvyse*. For composition of this work, at least, a later *terminus a quo* is established by the event memorialised, and this time not deplored but celebrated: 15 August 1591 was the date of the sensational escape of Charles de Guise, the fifteen-year-old son of the murdered duke, from the chateau of Tours, where he had been imprisoned.

Whether they were originally conceived as complementary or not, it is striking to what extent Belyard’s two volumes constitute mirror images converging, and pivoting, on the same ideological focal point. The common impulsion is aggressive mythologising: on the one hand, demonisation of the tyrant, who forfeits not merely royal legitimacy but humanity itself; on the other, near-deification of his chief victim’s son, whose miraculous escape heralds a new Golden Age: “*Sou [sic] Charlot tous-jours regnera / Saturne en cette terre* [Under Charlot Saturn shall forever reign over this land]” (*Charlot*, p. 14).¹⁰ It seems clear that he is envisaged as the heaven-sent future king of France—as indeed briefly seemed a possibility to some partisans. In fact, Belyard’s double publication coincided closely with the “Estates” summoned in League-controlled Paris by Charles, Duke of Mayenne, chief of the League since his brother’s assassination, for the purpose of electing a new king, Henri of Navarre being disqualified *a priori* by his religion, as had been confirmed by papal excommunication. (Belyard’s only allusion to him in either work is in *Charlot*, as the “*Porcher Nauarrin* [swineherd from Navarre]” [p. 20] who welcomes pillaging German mercenaries into France.) Various proposals were advanced involving a marriage with the Spanish *infanta*, Isabelle-Claire-Eugenie, who was of French royal descent (as the grand-daughter of Henri II and Catherine de’ Medici), but the Salic law against female descent of the royal line posed a major obstacle, and the delegates of

¹⁰ Cited is Simon Belyard, *Charlot. Eglogve pastorelle sur les miseres de la France, & sur la tresheureuse & miraculeuse deliurance de trespagnanime & tresillustre Prince Monseigneur le Duc de Gvyse* (Troyes: Jean Moreau, 1592), from the copy in the British Library.

Troyes, in fact, were notable for insisting on a king “*de la nation françoise* [belonging to the French nation]”.¹¹

All in all, it seems probable that *Charlot* did not merely issue from a general engagement in the quasi-apocalyptic fantasies associated with the League in its spiritual aspect but constituted a pointed political intervention at a moment fraught with tension and in a place menaced with turmoil.¹² Such a perspective may in turn shed further light on *The Guisian*, to which *Charlot* makes a pointed supplement and counterpart—not only in its references to the larger-than-life Henri de Guise who will be reincarnated in his son, but in a distinctive paratextual feature. As the message of *The Guisian* is bolstered in Belyard’s volume by a selection of anagrammes exposing (as was the pervasive fiction) the “true” identity, villainous and diabolical, lurking within the name “Henri de Valois”, so corresponding anagrammes are deployed illustrating the divine virtues and destinies of two “Charlot”s—both Charles, Duke of Guise, and Charles, Duke of Mayenne.

There may be particular contextual reasons, therefore, why Belyard, in harking back to Guise’s assassination, simply effaces Henri of Navarre, who had been actively excoriated as a heretic in *The Guisiade*,¹³ while reviving and amplifying the most extreme League accusations against Henri III, such as mutilation of his victims’ bodies, even cannibalism, in a way that far exceeds Matthieu. For the author of *The Guisiade*, Henri is a psychological weakling on the jealous defensive, hence subject to manipulation by diabolical forces, especially as transmitted by his most notorious *mignon*, the Duke of Épernon, who avowedly serves as Navarre’s agent.¹⁴ The King cannot resist, despite the contrary influence of his mother (Catherine de’ Medici). For Belyard, Henri is a perverted and sadistic monster, established from the first as possessed by the Fury Alecto. Not even the Queen Mother is present to offer interference. Hence, his reflexive recourse to fitting

¹¹ Cited by Arlette Jouanna, “Le temps des Guerres de religion en France (1559-1598)”, *Histoire et dictionnaire des Guerres de religion*, ed. Arlette Jouanna, Jacqueline Boucher, Dominique Biloghi and Guy Le Thiec (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1998), pp. 3-445, p. 379, who provides a highly useful summary of the events and issues (pp. 378-84). See also, in this volume, the article, “Guise”, by Jacqueline Boucher, who adds the information (p. 961) that Charles (1571-1640), failing to live up to his heroic-romantic promise, was shunted aside from any royal prospects by his jealous uncle, the Duke of Mayenne. In 1594, as governor of Reims (the capital of Champagne), he came to terms with the newly Catholic Henri IV (as did almost all Leaguers), who with his usual finesse prudently put him out of the way as governor of Provence.

¹² The dedicatory letter to *The Guisian*, with its comparison of Troyes to Corinth under siege and reference to subversive Huguenot machinations (see the translation, p. 6), suggests that even in this region, long dominated by the Guises, the hold of the League was far from secure, as events would shortly confirm.

¹³ See Matthieu, III.ii[b].1151-60

¹⁴ See Matthieu, III.i.807-8, 861-66. There is no hint of such an alliance in Belyard.

instruments, not just to serve his ends, but to goad his resolution when mere cowardice (hardly conscientious misgivings) makes it falter—Épernon, of course, but also the literally blood-thirsty L'Archant, with his fantasies of drinking Guise's blood and tearing off his victim's head with his teeth (III.921 ff.). The King's deliberations with himself and with them in Act Three, which sometimes border on the hysterical, have nothing to do with morality or justice but turn only on the questions of resolution and practical means: "I have sufficient will but do not see the way [*J'ai bien la volonté, mais je ne vois comment*]" (III.997). And the ultimate challenge for him is to conceive a vengeance adequate to his obsessive hatred:

Let the timid tyrant cause suddenly to die
Those he hates; for my part I prefer to apply
To my foes cruelties and tortures truly dire.

[*Que le tyran craintif fasse soudain mourir
Ses haineux ; quant à moi je veux faire souffrir
Aux miens des cruautés et gênes misérables.*] (III.1013-15)

On this basis, one might take a further conjectural step and understand Belyard's "excesses", including the murder scene itself and the climactic violent confrontation between Henri and Madame de Nemours, as compensating for a perceived reticence, indirectness and understatement in *The Guisiade*, where those two key opposing figures never meet. (In structural terms, Belyard's tragedy might be taken to arrive at a corresponding closure with the Chorus's lament at V.1707-34, before being given, in effect, a second wind with that confrontation, which contributes nothing further to the action.) Certainly, Matthieu's play, while no less militant, is complex in ways that might appear to mitigate its message. That Belyard was actually, in part, reacting to *The Guisiade* receives backhanded support when he implies, in his dedicatory epistle, that he knows of no other such dramatic exaltation of the Guises and invites critics of his own, which he presents with due modesty as a clumsy beginner's effort, to do better themselves in that noble cause.¹⁵ Given the demonstrably wide diffusion of Matthieu's prior tragedy, certainly within League circles, this sounds more like than disingenuous diversion than modesty, whether true or false.

At the same time, the fact that Belyard opens his address to the reader by deploring accusations that he endorsed the very crimes he was condemning might suggest that his dramaturgical excess paradoxically backfired in some quarters. Such charges came, he maintains, from "some ignorant persons (or, rather, slyly feigning to be so) [*quelques*

¹⁵ See the translation, p. 7.

ignorants, ou plutôt qui malicieusement le feignent être].¹⁶ Even if one allows for the defensive sensitivities of an aspiring poet (which are also plentifully evident in his dedicatory epistle), the printed text effectively acknowledges the potential for misunderstanding in performance, if only on the part of those “ignorant” of theatrical conventions and, especially, of Senecan models. (One might expect such to be more numerous in a provincial centre such as Troyes.) For Belyard supplements the dialogue as printed, especially that of the evil characters, with extensive marginal notes making the moral explicit and registering condemnation of the vices displayed—sometimes to the point of addressing principal villains directly.¹⁷ It is not so much, perhaps, that he fears his own sentiments might be identified with those expressed on stage, as that he has dared to enter sensational theatrical territory where the moral frame may seem inadequate to hold in place a simple distinction between hero and villain. The culmination undoubtedly comes with the fifth-act entrance of Henri, after the murder, in a delirium of triumph, ventriloquising the boasting Atreus of Seneca’s *Thyestes*: “As high as are the stars triumphantly I stride / And, head raised to the top of heaven’s vault in pride [*Aux astres clairs égal je marche triomphant, / Et d’un chef élevé aux pôles hauts touchant*]” (V.1783-84).

Seneca’s notorious lines had also been adapted, as Jean-Claude Ternaux points out, by Garnier in *Les Juifves*,¹⁸ but there they come attached to a tyrant—Nabuchodonosor—already formally identified as such on divine authority and circumscribed within it. The tyrannical status of the nominally “most Christian” King Henri must be established by the dramatist, and shown to extend to extremes of cruelty and usurpation of divine authority that are grotesquely diabolical. The process begins with his unwitting inspiration by the Fury Alecto, who revels in anticipated evil over her monologue of nearly three hundred lines, which comprises (with the Chorus) the entire first act.¹⁹ Perhaps most tellingly, in sharp contrast with the concluding portrait of the absent Henri evoked in the curse of Madame de Nemours in Matthieu’s tragedy—for she imagines him as plagued by conscience in the form of her son’s ghost—Belyard’s tyrant is wholly without conscience. On the contrary, he is left at the end sadistically thriving on the prospect of the bereft mother’s further suffering; hence, he refuses her plea to be killed like her son:

¹⁶ See the translation, “To the Reader”, p. 5.

¹⁷ See, most remarkably, the translation, IV.1468-69, n. 208.

¹⁸ Ternaux, “Simon Belyard, Ronsard et Garnier”, pp. 292-95.

¹⁹ The ultimate inspiration for the Fury’s initial influence is doubtless the opening of the *Thyestes*—preparation for its echoing at later points. Insofar as the curse extends to the ruin of France through bloody civil discord, however, Belyard’s immediate model is the adaptation of the convention by Garnier in *Porcie* (1568), which opens with the Fury Mégère’s similar curse on Rome for its pride, itself an evident allusion to France’s situation.

In that way I would put an end to your tormenting:
 My aim is to prolong your sorrow and lamenting,
 So that, while you maintain your wretched life in anguish,
 You die a thousand times each day.

[*Ainsi je mettrai fin à tes graves douleurs;
 Je te veux prolonger tes regrets, et tes pleurs,
 Afin que, retenant ta misérable vie,
 Tu meures mille fois le jour.*] (V.1851-54)

Implicitly, the only resolution possible is the intervention of divine justice, which, in 1591, would have been understood as having duly taken place, in the double form of the tyrant's assassination and the redemptive liberation of Charles de Guise. The latter virtually reincarnates Henri's chief victim for the sake at once of that victim's actual mother and, symbolically, of France itself, which had been left likewise weeping and desolate. It takes the supplement of *Charlot*, however, to move that message of *The Guisian* beyond the implicit, whereas, left on its own, the tragedy might well have threatened to escape its ideological bounds and take on independent theatrical life. As his letter to the reader maintains—with some anxiety showing through—Belyard may well, before publication, have consulted “three, indeed four, highly learned men and three doctors in sacred theology so as to avoid committing, out of ignorance, any offence contrary to the faith and the holy Union [*trois, voire quatre très doctes et très fameux docteurs en la sainte théologie pour ne commettre par ignorance quelque chose contre la foi et la sainte Union*].”²⁰ This does not preclude the work's potential on stage for setting in motion, as extreme theatre has a tendency to do, meanings beyond the author's control.

It seems possible that some sense of the potential for ideological instability through character portrayal, however positive or negative in moral terms, led Belyard to limit the self-expositions of his hero and villain. It is to Guise himself, and not to a Fury, that Matthieu assigns his own play's extensive opening soliloquy, and the character actually rehearses the allegations against him, if only to refute them with evident sincerity. Shortly afterwards (in Act Two, Scene Two), he is shown urging firm action against heresy upon the hesitant and duplicitous King, and while his moral credentials have been established beyond doubt, their exchanges could suggest (with good historical reason) a struggle for power. By contrast, anything that might resemble political manoeuvring or ambiguity

²⁰ See the translation, p. 5. The Edict of Union, imposed on Henri III by the League after his expulsion from Paris in 1588, amounted to a virtual theocratic constitution, centred on the eradication of heresy. (See Jouanna *et al.*, eds, *s.v.*). As Belyard's attitude shows, it came to take on quasi-mystical status as a metonymy for “pure” Catholicism.

is kept out of Belyard's presentation. His Guise is never shown together with the King. As Belyard's Henri is allowed cowardly hesitation but not the slightest misgivings or motivational complexity, the heroic stature of his Duke is insisted on—by himself and by others—in straightforward terms: a warrior's heroism on behalf of France and the true faith; a strong man's resistance to a feeble woman's admonitions and premonitions; an unswerving commitment to honour and reputation at any personal cost. Matthieu's King wavers at length in soliloquy right up until the decisive moment, both agonising over the political pros and cons and struggling with an active conscience (IV.iii.1911-92). He is not seen afterwards. When Belyard's Henri soliloquises in the final act, having proceeded to action after thoroughly assimilating the goading encouragements of Épernon and L'Archant, who have thereby been rendered theatrically redundant, it is merely to ventriloquise a Senecan discourse of extreme monstrosity. All in all, one gets the impression that, for Belyard, to show characters unfolding from within, however slightly, might have threatened to blur a dramatic picture that must remain indelibly clear and sharp.

The Guisian across the Channel

When *The Guisian* arrived in England shortly after publication, as Marlowe's use of it confirms that it did, it probably did so for most readers—Marlowe presumably excepted—without its full ideological baggage. Still, the political application of flagrant and sensational neo-Senecan dramaturgy, enhanced by key moments of action and confrontation, would have made for a much closer fit with Elizabethan dramatic practices than did most contemporary French theatre, certainly including the work of Garnier. Among the surviving English specimens of such a mélange, the most extreme is perhaps John Marston's Antonio plays, which actually deploy (in Latin) some of the same Senecan tags to embellish brutal revenge.²¹ But whatever their precise dates, these are products of the turn of the sixteenth century, and whatever their precise tone (there is no scholarly consensus as to the degree of parody involved), they are clearly self-conscious and mannered. By contrast, Belyard's earnest medley of neo-Senecan rhetoric, mythologised recent history and spectacular action arrived on the English scene at a moment when similar kinds of generic bending and stretching, thanks largely to the innovations of Marlowe and Thomas Kyd, were in active exercise and ferment there.

From this perspective, the closest affinity of *The Guisian* as a study of monstrous tyranny is perhaps with Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which likewise combines a tendentious historical picture (already skewed in the English chronicles) with a heavy over-

21 See the translation, V.1783-84, n. 249, and 1791-94, n. 251.

lay of Seneca-inspired emotion and rhetoric, especially in scenes of confrontation. Shakespeare's intertwined sources for all these elements have naturally been explored at length; they include (almost certainly) one heavily Senecan play in Latin (*Ricardus Tertius*, by Thomas Legge), probably dating from 1579, and another anonymous one in English (*The True Tragedy of Richard III*), whose composition has been conjecturally placed between 1590 and 1592.²² No definitive date has been established for Shakespeare's own play, but majority scholarly opinion opts for 1592-93, probably 1592.

If *The Guisian* and *Richard III* were virtually contemporary, and given Marlowe's evident familiarity with the French tragedy, it is impossible to resist sifting through the familiar multiple heritage of Shakespeare's play, including its panoply of Senecan effects, to judge whether any "unaccounted-for" elements point to a specific knowledge of Belyard. Finally, conclusive evidence is lacking, but the French and English plays distinctively concur in deploying their rhetorical and theatrical devices to portray larger-than-life tyrants at recent dynastic junctures in the respective national histories (the advent of the Tudor line lending nearly equal contemporaneity to the English events). In Shakespeare's case, such extreme treatment stems, as is well known, from Thomas More's *Life of Richard III*, as incorporated in Edward Hall's *Chronicle*;²³ Belyard draws on the more lurid fabrications of League propaganda. But both playwrights develop the "unnatural" dimension of their villains beyond the "historical" sources and Senecan precedents. They also agree in presenting the villainy not just directly but also by proxy, through the tyrant's actions and agents.

There is particular overlap in this respect between the same murder sequence that Marlowe drew on in *Massacre* (Belyard, *Guisian*, IV.1454 ff.) and that of the murder of George, Duke of Clarence (Shakespeare, *R3*, IV.iv), where mockery and the waiting reward are also featured and the question of the victim's "offending" is likewise introduced. Indeed, on the last point the resonance is so strong as to suggest the French play as a model, whether directly or indirectly. For when Clarence demands of the murderers, "Wherein, my friends, have I offended you?", he receives a reply that distinctly recalls L'Archant in Marlowe's *Massacre*, as mediated by Belyard's commentary: "Offended us you have not, but the King" (*R3*, IV.iv.166-67).²⁴

²² For an astute overview of the probable sources for various elements, see Geoffrey Bullough, "Introduction to *Richard III*", *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols., vol. 3: *Earlier English History Plays: Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 221-48, esp. pp. 233-40.

²³ Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble... Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), excerpted in Bullough, ed., pp. 249-301.

²⁴ See Hillman, "Marlowe's Guise", p. 158. Cf. the translation, n. 204, as well as V.1884 and n. 275.

The most notable unhistorical innovations linking Belyard's play with Shakespeare's, however, involve the female characters. The only substantial one in *The Guisian* is Madame de Nemours (born Anne d'Este), the victims' mother, but she is placed at the centre of a nexus of suffering femininity, thanks both to the usual neo-Senecan confidante-figure identified as her Nurse ("*La Nourrice de Madame*") and to her attendant Young Women ("*ses demoiselles*"), who intervene as a Chorus and also through a single voice ("*La Demoiselle*"). It is they who get the last choric word, as fits with other contemporary feminine figurations of "*la France*" in lamentation. The effect is compounded by having Madame de Nemours's fears and losses concentrated and mythologised—she notably assimilates herself to Hecuba and Niobe²⁵—in the cause of inflating the tragic doom of the House of Lorraine.

In fact, not only were "all" of Madame de Nemours's children not massacred, as the character half-fears, half-affirms deliriously,²⁶ but since 1566 she had had a second husband (from whom she derived her current title) in the place of François, Duke of Guise, whose Senecan ghost haunts her in Belyard and whom she longs to rejoin in the afterlife.²⁷ Despite the anticipations of her own death, the real Madame de Nemours was merely imprisoned briefly by Henri III and, at the time of *The Guisian*'s performance, was alive and well (as the saying goes) and living in Paris.²⁸ The presentation of the character by Matthieu, although impressively pathetic (even without mention of the Cardinal's fate), is thus more judiciously non-committal: he reserves her single appearance for a concluding lament and a solemn curse upon Henri, whom she never encounters.

The Guisian presents a closer parallel, however, with the employment of suffering female victims by Shakespeare, and particularly with his evocation of Queen Margaret, whose role in *Richard III* has no historical warrant whatever. In effect, the English playwright unhistorically brings Marguerite d'Anjou back to England from France, where she had lived in exile after being ransomed following the Lancastrian defeat at Tewkesbury and the death of Henry VI, specifically to renew her grief and grievances and to preside over the virtual vengeance visited upon England under Richard's tyranny. The text insists

Cited is William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. Antony Hammond, The Arden Shakespeare, 2nd ser. (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1981).

25 See the translation, II.453-58 and IV.1699-1702.

26 See the translation, IV.1693-94.

27 See the translation, V.1539.

28 She would live until 1607, when she was almost eighty-years-old, closely associated with the court and active in both political and family affairs. Moreover, she would be thoroughly reconciled with Henri IV and attend his marriage with Marie de' Medici in 1600. See Jacqueline Boucher, "Este, famille de", Jouanna *et al.*, eds, pp. 893-95, esp. p. 894.

on this French connection, beginning with Richard's reminder of her banishment, to which she retorts,

I do find more pain in banishment
Than death can yield me here by my abode.
A husband and a son thou ow'st to me. (*R*₃, I.iii.168-70)

And in the end, her farewell to the grieving women whose losses enact fulfilment of her curse sets the seal on the cross-Channel transference: "These English woes shall make me smile in France" (IV.iv.115).

The essence of this Frenchwoman's curse, which Richard turns back on her—more neatly but no more effectively than the mocking Henri does that of Madame de Nemours—is, of course, his monstrosity, inward as well as outward:

Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog,
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity
The slave of Nature, and the son of hell.
Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb,
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins,
Thou rag of honour, thou detested—(I.iii.228-33)

The tone and the terms, *mutatis mutandis*, certainly bear comparison with those employed by Guise's mother, whose moral condemnation of Henri takes on a physical aspect:

You tyrant unnatural, contemptible creature,
Who when you were born struck fear into Mother Nature!
Hypocrite and atheist, villain and murderer,
Full of impiety, of ill-repute the sewer,
Fen of all filthiness, gulf of iniquity,
Cruelty's dwelling-place, abode of tyranny.

[*Tyran dénaturé, infâme créature,
Qui fis peur, en naissant, à la mère Nature !
Hypocrite, meurtrier, athéiste, vilain,
Cloaque d'infamie, et d'impiété plein,
Gouffre d'iniquité, borbier de vilenie,
Séjour de cruauté, manoir de tyrannie!*] (Belyard, *Guisian*,
V.1829-34)

If there is less physical repulsiveness to start with in Henri's case, his outward appearance changes to match his inward nature. So the Young Woman conveys on seeing him enter, just prior to the confrontation with Madame de Nemours:

O murderer—see him savour his wrathful deeds!
 Cruel man. Anyone can see that his heart feeds
 On nothing but blood. Menaces teem from his eyes;
 His gait, as he stalks puffed with pride, all shame defies.

[*Ô meurtrier, je le vois, qui remâche son ire,
 Le cruel. L'on voit bien que son cœur ne respire
 Rien sinon que le sang. Il a l'œil menaçant,
 Et marche, enflé d'orgueil, d'un pas tout indécent.*] (V.1777-80)

Margaret's broad projection of her grief is most immediately grounded in the murder of her son Edward (the future Queen Anne's husband), as represented in 3 *Henry VI*, where Richard first emerges as a monstrous villain and her special anathema, although his brothers follow his lead in stabbing the Prince at Tewkesbury. Restrained by the future King Edward from killing Margaret as well, Richard rides off in haste to "root... out" (3*H6*, V.v.48)²⁹ the Lancastrian line by murdering King Henry in the Tower—a match with Henri's obsessive desire to eradicate the House of Lorraine.

The scene of Prince Edward's slaughter is also notable for the neo-Senecan device of a grief-stricken victim begging for death, and here there is a specific parallel with *The Guisian*, where Madame de Nemours, gesturing towards (or perhaps even seizing) Henri's sword, similarly exhorts him and is gloatingly denied:

Here, maddened murderer, for me take this sword—take it!³⁰
 And then in my blood also a thousand times slake it.
Henri. In that way I would put an end to your tormenting.

[*Tiens, meurtrier enragé, tiens, prends-moi cette épée,
 Qu'elle soit mille fois dans mon sang retrempée.
 Henri. Ainsi je mettrai fin à tes graves douleurs.*]
 (V.1849-51)

For her part, in 3 *Henry VI*, Margaret addresses herself first to King Edward, then to George, Duke of Clarence, who likewise denies her such a refuge from her pain:

²⁹ Cited is William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part III*, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross, The Arden Shakespeare, 2nd ser. (London: Methuen, 1964).

³⁰ "[F]or me take this sword—take it": orig. "tiens, prends-moi cette épée". Several stagings seem possible: Henri could have entered with the sword in his hand; he could draw it to threaten her; she could gesture towards it still in its scabbard; she could even draw it and present it to him.

Here sheath thy sword; I'll pardon thee my death.
 What, wilt thou not? Then, Clarence, do it thou.
Geo. By heaven, I will not do thee so much ease. (V.v.68-70)

The onstage action and emotional dynamic here make effective preparation for that which Richard will instigate, and turn to his psychological advantage, in wooing the doubly bereft Anne:

If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive,
 Lo here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,
 Which if thou please to hide in this true breast,
 And let the soul forth that adareth thee,
 I lay it naked to the deadly stroke,
 And humbly beg the death upon my knee. (*R3*, I.ii.177-82)

Indeed, the precedent involving Margaret makes it easier to see to what extent, in the later encounter, Richard is artificially inverting the roles of murderer and victim as an expression of his own “revengeful mind” at work.³¹

A progression from grieving to abhorrence of unnatural monstrosity is also outlined in 3 *Henry VI* by the doomed king himself on the point of his murder. Like his Queen, Henry would rather die at once than live with his losses (“Ah, kill me with thy weapon, not with words!” [*3H6*, V.vi.26]), but he knows he will shortly be getting his wish and utters a prophecy of England’s desolation under Richard’s tyranny as foretold by his unnatural birth. Thus provoked, the tyrant acts his part self-consciously (“For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain’d” [58]) and with a sadistic humour that recalls the exulting of Belyard’s Henri over the extermination of the Guises—“How many Hydras did I just decapitate? [*Combien ai-je en un coup pu d’hydres tronçonner?*]” (V.1808)—his superfluous stabbing of the duke’s dead body, even L’Archant’s thirsty and laughing dagger (III.921-24):

What, will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
 Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted.
 See how my sword weeps for the poor King’s death.
 O, may such purple tears by alway [*sic*] shed
 From those that which the downfall of our house!
 If any spark of life be yet remaining,

31 Boyle, p. 149, points out the parallel between the wooing scene, unprecedented in Shakespeare’s sources, and the (failed) wooing of Megara by Lycus in Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*. Boyle is surely over-hasty, however, in identifying the “threatened sword-thrust” as simply “borrowed” from that tragedy’s final act, where the despairing hero prevents his father Amphytrion from committing suicide.

Down, down to hell; and say I sent thee thither.
(3*H6*, V.vi.61-67)

Richard's "purple" glances at royal pretension, of course, and parallels Henri's punning taunt of Madame de Nemours, when she reminds him of the blood-tie between the Guises and the Valois, with the "favour [*faveur*]" he will show her "blood and race [*le sang, et race*]" (Belyard, *Guisian*, V.1889) by having her "purpled cardinal [*cardinal pour-pré*]" (1892) bloodily cut to pieces.

The question of whether *The Guisian* could have been accessible when these scenes in 3 *Henry VI* were written leads into murky territory entailing the date, the original form and title of the play, and indeed its authorship. Marlowe, long proposed (among others) as a collaborator with Shakespeare on parts of the so-called First Tetralogy, has recently been accorded "official" co-authorial status by the editors of the Oxford Shakespeare—a claim by no means accepted universally and ultimately unprovable, as tempting as it might be as support for influence of *The Guisian*.³² The dates of the original and of its possible revision are also grey areas, although most scholars would be happy with a *terminus ad quem* of early 1592,³³ which would probably leave room for Belyard's work to enter into the picture. Cumulatively most convincing, perhaps, remains the multiple echoing of Madame de Nemours in *Richard III* by women lamenting the slaughter of their children and decrying monstrous royal tyranny in a chorus of voices led by one that resounds across the Channel.

It is hardly surprising that some specific resemblances can be traced between Belyard's tragedy and English theatrical productions of the early 1590s, even without the encouragement offered by its single clear point of contact with *The Massacre at Paris*. We are dealing fundamentally with neo-Senecan modes like those that were then feeding into the mainstream of English historical and quasi-historical drama. (Indeed, "quasi-historical" would allow for most of the tragedy produced in early modern England, including Shakespeare's.) I have elsewhere proposed that the major French influence on this evolutionary process entailed the application of such conventions, directly or (more usually) indirectly, to political subjects.³⁴ *The Guisian* goes further by grafting onto a per-

³² For a balanced overview of the issue, see Lois Potter, review essay, *The New Oxford Shakespeare, The Complete Works: Modern Critical Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ed. Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus and Gabriel Egan, *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 94.1 (2017): 148–56, esp. p. 154, who points out the difficulty of identifying instances of Marlowe's authorship amid material composed in a "Marlovian" manner.

³³ See, e.g., Geoffrey Bullough, Introduction to 3 *Henry VI*, Bullough, ed., pp. 157–71, p. 158, and Cairncross, ed., pp. xliii–xliv.

³⁴ Richard Hillman, *French Origins of English Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), esp. pp. 33–61.

ceived contemporary act of tyranny, intensively evoked through Senecan conventions in extreme form, the supplement of scenes of sinister conspiracy, onstage violence and bitter confrontation. That combination, innovative in French theatrical terms, seems ample reason for historians of the English theatre to take notice.