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► **To cite this version:**

Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise, Christine Sukic. A Massacre at Paris in French Translation: from Page to Stage. *Journal of Marlowe Studies*, 2024, 4, pp.45-61. 10.7190/jms.4.2024.pp45-61 . hal-04553452

HAL Id: hal-04553452

<https://hal.science/hal-04553452>

Submitted on 4 Sep 2024

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A Massacre at Paris in French Translation: from Page to Stage

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In 2020, when we began working on plans for a special Marlowe Festival and conference to be held in Reims and Paris that would bring together Marlowe specialists and historians of the French wars of religion on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, it very quickly became obvious that we wished not just to discuss Marlowe's last play, but also to stage it. What text, though, would serve for our French staging of *Massacre at Paris*? What was the history of the text in translation and what were the antecedents to our own project? These questions have led us to inquire into the different French translations of the play and gain insight both into Marlowe's French reception as well as into the octavo edition of the English text that has come down to us.

Patrice Chéreau's film *La Reine Margot* (1994) marked a relative increase of interest in France for Christopher Marlowe's play. The film's main source was Alexandre Dumas's eponymous novel, but Chéreau himself had directed a French translation of Marlowe's play in 1972—*Le Massacre à Paris*—at the Théâtre de Villeurbanne near Lyon; so his attention to the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, at the heart of Dumas's novel, partly stemmed from his former work on Marlowe's play. The more recent translations of the play seem to have been related to French current events. Cyrille Zola-Place, in his afterword to Dorothee Zumstein's 2017 translation, draws a parallel between the sixteenth-century French wars of religion and recent massacres (without being precise) and points to Marlowe's topicality in modern-day France, concluding the necessity for an ideological neutrality of the State, according to the French notion of *laïcité* (secularism).¹ Pascal Collin, in the preface to his 2004 translation, also claimed the relevance of the play in the twenty-first century: “the play concerns us and reflects back on our own current affairs.”²

¹ Christopher Marlowe, *Massacre à Paris*, trans. and additional text Dorothee Zumstein (Paris: Nouvelles éditions Place, 2017), 90–95.

² “La pièce nous concerne et nous renvoie à notre propre actualité.” Christopher Marlowe, *Massacre à Paris*, trans. Pascal Collin (Besançon: Les Solitaires intempestifs, 2004), 12.

Given the mid-nineteenth century appeal in France of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, it would have been logical for French stage directors and translators to be interested from an earlier date in a play that dealt with this dark page of French history. However, if the interest in Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* is only fairly recent, it may be due to its particular aesthetics more than its gruesome historical contents. Chéreau's very popular film used a baroque aesthetics with flamboyant use of blacks and reds and very Caravaggesque chiaroscuros. It was, as may be expected, closer to its main source, Dumas's romantic novel than to Marlowe's play. Compared to the film, the play looks or reads more like a documentary, whereas the film is centred on the love life of Marguerite de Valois, who hardly appears in Marlowe's play. The other interesting question from the point of view of translation is that of the text, well-known for being faulty in English, or at least incomplete, since the undated octavo has often been considered to be a "bad" edition, notably because of its briefness and irregular prosody, as well as because of the so-called "Collier Leaf," a manuscript fragment that provides a more developed version of the scene in which a soldier kills Maugiron.³ The first translations of the play in French were in prose and tended to elaborate on the original text. They greatly affected the nature of the work, especially the rhythm of Marlowe's iambic pentameter in this play, much more terse and economic with words than in any of his other works. Those translations turned the French version into a much wordier work, French being already in itself less concise than English.

In this article, we would like to analyse the French translations of Marlowe's plays in order to show the urgency, in our view, of offering a new translation in verse without any additions to the extant English play that might better account for Marlowe's characteristic aesthetics. As we hope to suggest in our analysis of a sample passage in previous translations as well as our own, translating with a more historically-minded view of Elizabethan drama and Marlowe, as well as with greater attention to form and lexical exactness, is in no way antithetical to dramatic efficiency. On the contrary, our experience of translating the text while working closely with the French stage-director Jean-François Auguste and young French actors, shows the relevance of such an approach but also sheds light on the dramatic qualities of the extant octavo text, however faulty it may be as a text.

³ On the text of the play, see Mathew R. Martin's introduction to *The Massacre at Paris* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021), 44–47. This edition serves as our reference text throughout, when quoting the play in English or referring to the numbering of scenes (the latter being absent from the surviving octavo). On the "Collier Leaf" see also Laurie E. Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The 'Bad' Quartos and their Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) for a discussion of the notion of "bad quartos."

The first known translation of a Marlowe play in French, *Doctor Faustus*, was the work of Jean-Pierre-Antoine Bazy. It was first published in 1850, therefore later than Wilhelm Müller's first German translation in 1818.⁴ There were several other translations of *Doctor Faustus* in the course of the nineteenth century in France, including one by François-Victor Hugo, also well-known for being one of Shakespeare's translators: it was published in 1858 as *Le Faust de Marlowe*.

To our knowledge, there have been seven translations of *The Massacre at Paris* into French, two in the nineteenth century, two in the twentieth century, and three in the twenty-first century, including ours. There is also a translation by Denis Marion of the Duke of Guise's monologue from scene 2, which was published in his 1955 book about Marlowe.⁵ The first element that we would like to point out about these translations is that the nineteenth-century French "Massacres" were never performed, as far as we know. That was not their purpose. All the ensuing translations were performed, and most of them made for a specific stage production. The only exception is Jean Paris's, the first twentieth-century one, which was initially translated to be published and was only performed later. This is relevant to our study as these first two translations were not meant to enhance the scenographic quality of the play, but had literary and historical purposes, and so were less concerned with the dramatic dimension of the play. As a consequence, and in keeping with French translation practices in the nineteenth-century, Marlowe's work was translated in prose.⁶

The first translation, by Gustave Masson (1819–88) was published in the *Bulletin historique et littéraire/ Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* between 1876 and 1879 as *Le Massacre à Paris*.⁷ It is not very well-known as it does not appear in the usual databases of French translations of plays.⁸ Masson was a historian and literary critic who

⁴ On the European translations of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, see Zoran Stamenkovic, "The Translation History of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in Europe. Chronology of Italian Translations," in *Horizons de Recherche. Research Horizons II*, ed. Anna Paola Soncini Fratta in collaboration with Fulvia Balestrieri and Gemma Prandoni (Bologna: Il Libri di Emil, 2016), 37–54.

⁵ Denis Marion, *Les Grands Dramaturges: Marlowe* (Paris: L'Arche éditeur, 1955).

⁶ On the reasons for the use of prose in the French translations of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, see Line Cottagnies, "Les traductions de Shakespeare en Europe. Du 'sauvage ivre' à 'notre Shakespeare'," in *Les Routes de la traduction. De Babel à Genève*, ed. Barbara Cassin and Nicolas Ducimetière (Paris: Gallimard / Fondation Martin Bodmer, 2018), 259–77.

⁷ "*Le Massacre à Paris* 1572 : Tragédie en trois actes," translated by Gustave Masson, was published in three parts, representing the three acts used by Masson in his division of the play. The first part was published in *Bulletin historique et littéraire. Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 25, no. 8 (1876): 367–79. The second part was published in the same journal in 26, no. 7 (1877): 320–32. The third part was published in the same journal in 28, no. 12 (1879): 548–58.

⁸ For example, it was not included in Madeleine Horn-Monval's *Répertoire bibliographique des traductions et adaptations françaises du théâtre étranger du XVI^e siècle à nos jours*, vol. 5: Théâtre anglais (Paris: CNRS, 1963).

lived in England and wrote for the *Athenaeum* and the *Saturday Review*. He also taught French language and literature at Harrow School. He translated both from English into French and French into English. In the very short foreword that introduces his translation, he stressed the horrors of the play and stated that “it does not have much artistic value,” adding “the playwright did not even take the time to divide it into acts.”⁹ Masson was obviously not a specialist in early modern English drama, nor was he familiar with early editions of Elizabethan drama. His main interest in the play was not literary, but rather to document the Saint-Bartholomew’s massacre and presumably to provide for an English perspective on it for French readers interested in the History of French Protestants. He added in his short preface that he also intended to translate John Dryden’s *Duke of Guise* (1687) and Nathaniel Lee’s *The Massacre of Paris* (1689). His translation of Marlowe’s play must thus be read in the context of his work on the history of French Protestantism for which he wrote several articles in the same journal devoted to the history of French Protestantism, the *Bulletin historique et littéraire. Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français*.¹⁰

The second nineteenth-century French translation of the *Massacre at Paris* was done by Félix Rabbe. He translated Marlowe’s complete plays in two volumes. Contrary to Masson, he devoted himself to this project for what he saw as Marlowe’s literary worth. He repeatedly defined Marlowe as a Renaissance man in his introduction while opposing François-Victor Hugo’s Romantic vision of the playwright. F.-V. Hugo had said in his introduction (“Le Faust anglais”) that Marlowe was incapable of understanding Faust’s passions because he did not live at the right time, contrary to Goethe.¹¹ Rabbe might appear to be quite hyperbolic in his praise of Marlowe but he was at least able to recognize Marlowe’s dramatic worth, regardless of ideology, saying for instance that the poet was “not an atheist nor a visionary, not a Diderot nor a Goethe, but a great dramatic innovator, a soul violently taken with poetry, eloquence and harmony.”¹² In the preface to the two volumes, Jean Richepin, a well-known and controversial poet of the time, claimed that Marlowe was

⁹ “La pièce dont j’ai essayé de donner une traduction n’a comme œuvre d’art que peu de mérite ; l’auteur n’avait pas même pris la peine de la diviser en actes.” See Masson, “*Le Massacre a Paris, 1572*,” part 1, 367.

¹⁰ Masson wrote several articles entitled “L’histoire du protestantisme français étudiée au Record Office.” See *Bulletin historique et littéraire. Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 17, no. 11 (1868): 542–55; and 24, no. 5 (1875): 221–34.

¹¹ Hugo writes, about Faustus’s love for Helen, “Marlowe’s error was not that he failed to recognize this passion, but that he expressed in too light a way.” *Le Faust de Marlowe*, trans. François-Victor Hugo (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1858), 35. Further down, Hugo justifies his criticism of the play by stating that Marlowe did not live in the right time, and that humanity had not discovered itself yet then, stating that “Goethe was able to do what Marlowe could not” (50).

¹² Christopher Marlowe, *Théâtre*, trans. Félix Rabbe, vol. 1 (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Parisienne, Albert Savine, éditeur, 1889), 19.

well-suited to the fin-de-siècle atmosphere of the 1880s, characterised, like Marlowe's time, by "intellectual anarchy," "revolt," "curiosity," "unbridled individualism," "thirst for novelty," all of this in the midst of a "universal collapse."¹³ So, on top of the literary dimension of the works, both Rabbe and Richepin stressed the subversive reputation of Marlowe and his works. This trait still appears in some of the more recent translations. Rabbe even suggested that Marlowe was Shakespeare's precursor and a superior poet, justifying this view by referring to the 1883 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in which Swinburne described Marlowe guiding Shakespeare "into the right way of work."¹⁴

Even though Rabbe was more interested in the literary aspect of *The Massacre at Paris*, Masson, maybe because he did not invest too much literary passion in his translation, managed to create an efficient text, with a very direct style quite in keeping with the English text that has come down to us, as in the beginning of Guise's monologue in scene 2:

Maintenant, Guise, laisse tes profondes pensées faire éclater au dehors ces flammes que le sang seul peut éteindre. J'ai souvent cherché un but digne de moi, et j'ai trouvé enfin que le péril est le moyen le plus sûr d'être heureux; c'est à force de hardiesse qu'on arrive à l'honneur. Quel mérite y a-t-il à poursuivre un objet ordinaire qui est à la portée du premier venu? Ce que je préfère, c'est ce qui semble impossible à atteindre. Placez la couronne de France au sommet de la pyramide la plus élevée, puis dites-moi de la saisir; j'y userai mes forces, ou je parviendrai à la conquérir, dussé-je, dans ma chute, tomber jusqu'au plus profond des enfers. C'est pour arriver là que je veille, tandis que chacun me croit endormi...¹⁵

Masson seems to have simplified the text: for instance in the first sentence, he translated "those never dying flames" as "ces flammes" ("those flames"), getting rid of "never dying"

¹³ Marlowe, *Théâtre*, trans. Rabbe, x.

¹⁴ A[Igemon] C[harles] S[winburne], *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ninth edition, vol. 15: Loo-Memphis (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1883), 558.

¹⁵ Gustave Masson, *Le Massacre à Paris 1572*, part 1, 370. Marlowe's English text reads as follows:

Now, Guise, begin those deep-engendered thoughts,
To burst abroad those never-dying flames
Which cannot be extinguished but by blood.
Oft have I levelled and at last have learned
That peril is the chiefest way to happiness
And resolution honour's fairest aim.
What glory is there in a common good
That hangs for every peasant to achieve?
That like I best that flies beyond my reach.
Set me to scale the high pyramidès,
And thereon set the diadem of France;
I'll either rend it with my nails to naught
Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,
Although my downfall be the deepest hell.
For this, I wake, when others think I sleep. (2.33–47).

which he probably thought was implied in the next line, “Which cannot be extinguished but by blood.” Rabbe, on the contrary, was wordier and often over-explained his meaning as is obvious in the same passage:

Maintenant, Guise, commence à mettre au jour les pensées engendrées dans les profondeurs de ton âme: qu’elles allument ces flammes immortelles qui ne peuvent s’éteindre que dans le sang. Après bien des efforts, j’ai appris enfin que le péril est le plus sûr chemin du bonheur, et la résolution le plus noble but de l’honneur. Qu’est-ce que la gloire qui n’aboutit qu’à un bien vulgaire, et que le premier manant venu peut atteindre? Ce qui me plaît avant tout, c’est ce qui échappe à mon atteinte! Ce qu’il me faut, c’est d’escalader les sublimes pyramides, et d’y planter le diadème de France: ou je le déchirerai de mes ongles et le réduirai en poudre, ou j’atteindrai le sommet de mes ailes ambitieuses, dussé-je retomber au plus profond des enfers! Voilà pourquoi je veille, quand on s’imagine que je dors...¹⁶

He notably explains the phrase “deep engendered”, adding the idea of the soul (“de ton âme”) that is only implied but not present in the English text. Another example is in the question “What glory is there in a common good, / That hangs for every peasant to achieve?” (l. 39-40), which Rabbe also lengthened by using an idiomatic French phrase (“le premier paysan venu”, literally “the first peasant to show up”) but which slows down the rhythm by adding an extra word, especially as, at the end of the sentence, he also changed the infinitive “to achieve” into a present with an added modal (“peut atteindre”, literally “can achieve”). As in the preceding example, Masson simplified the same line by changing the idea of a “peasant” to that of an ordinary person (“le premier venu”, literally “the first person to show up”), while replacing “to achieve” by “à la portée de” (“within the reach of”). It is almost ironic that the translator who is the least interested in Marlowe’s literary worth manages to be closer to the pithy style of Marlowe’s lines than Rabbe’s generally slower and wordier version.

However, both Masson and Rabbe translated in prose which was a common choice for French translators of early modern English verse in the nineteenth century, but also well into the twentieth century, as is the case of Jean Paris’s translation, published in 1954 in *Théâtre Populaire*, a journal that was then only one year old but which later became famous for its militant approach to the theatre and its interest in history.¹⁷ To our knowledge, Paris’s translation was not performed that year, but in 1954, Roger Planchon, a prominent stage director who was well-known for his political approach to the theatre, directed Marlowe’s *Edward II* in French at the Fourvières theatre festival near Lyon, and he may have intended to

¹⁶ *Le Massacre de Paris*, trans. Félix Rabbe, in Christopher Marlowe, *Théâtre*, vol. 2, 180.

¹⁷ Jean Paris, trans., *Le Massacre à Paris*, in *Théâtre populaire. Revue bimestrielle d’information sur le théâtre* 7 (May–June 1954): 41–80.

produce it later because he quoted from Paris's preface to the translation in his production notes on *Edward II*. Paris's translation must be understood within this political context that was greatly indebted to Bertold Brecht's ideas. It is therefore, not surprising that the same translation was used in May 1968 for a performance of *Massacre at Paris* at a festival in Villejuif, near Paris, by a company that called themselves "Le théâtre de guérilla" (Guerrilla Theatre), which was very appropriate for the spirit of the May 1968 revolts in France. Jean Paris was very political in his preface, talking of Marlowe as an author who exacerbated conflicts and who was the first real atheist poet of the modern era. From a literary point of view, Paris stressed the near-absence of psychology in Marlowe's characters, defined by their acts more than by their thoughts, he said, which is in keeping with the original text. Finally, he admitted to having removed a few lines from the play that he considered to be "ridiculous or incongruous."¹⁸

The second twentieth-century translation of Marlowe's play, by Jean Vauthier, was probably the most famous one because it was used for Patrice Chéreau's ground-breaking production in 1972. It is partly in verse, partly in prose and does not try to stick to the original text, sometimes rearranging the order of the plot into what Vauthier called "sequences", which are in turn divided into scenes. As an example, the play in its published version starts with Guise calling the apothecary, though not in the production version that we were able to consult at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.¹⁹ There are great differences between the two twentieth-century translations. Paris's prose translation is fairly close to the original and relatively unadorned, even less so than Masson's, as in this excerpt from the same passage as above, the first lines of Guise's monologue in scene 2:

Maintenant mes pensées profondément cachées, qu'elles jaillissent en flammes que le sang seul pourra noyer ! Après tant d'efforts, j'ai découvert enfin que le péril est le plus sûr chemin de la félicité, comme la résolution le but le plus noble de l'honneur. Quelle gloire y a-t-il à jouir d'une victoire que le premier vilain peut remporter ? Ce qui m'échappe, voilà ce qui m'attire. Qu'on me donne à escalader les Pyramides et qu'on les coiffe du diadème de France, et de mes ongles je les mettrai en poudre ou je les gravirai de mes ailes ambitieuses, dût ma chute m'entraîner au plus profond enfer ! Voilà pourquoi je veille quand on croit que je dors...²⁰

Many of the ideas are condensed, as is obvious in the first sentence, supposed to translate the first three lines of Marlowe's text: "Now, Guise, begins those deep-engendered thoughts, / To

¹⁸ Jean Paris, *Le Massacre à Paris*, 46.

¹⁹ Recueil sur « Massacre à Paris » de Christopher Marlowe [Document d'archives], 1972, Richelieu—Arts du spectacle (Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

²⁰ Jean Paris, *Le Massacre à Paris*, 51.

burst abroad those never-dying flames, / Which cannot be extinguished but by blood.” Literally, Paris’s French text means: “Now my deeply hidden thoughts, let them burst into flames that only blood can quench.” This telescoping technique also allowed him, wittingly or not, to sometimes recreate the English decasyllable in the midst of the prose text, as in “Ce qui m’échappe, voilà ce qui m’attire” (“That like I best that flies beyond my reach”),²¹ which shows that he was probably aware of, or at least sensed, the importance of rhythm in translation.

On the other hand, Vauthier’s work is not exactly a translation; it is not even an adaptation, but rather a re-rewriting of the play, to the point of being sometimes difficult to understand. Looking at the same passage, we realise that Vauthier’s poetic licence complexifies the text:

Flammes, mes flammes / qui désormais ne reconnaissent qu’au sang pouvoir de les éteindre, en mes pensées profondes je vous ai longuement regardées pour apprendre de vous, enfin ! que j’ai épousé le danger ——— ô joie !! et que seul l’homme résolu peut embrasser l’honneur !!
Je repousse la gloire des hommes ordinaires.
J’ai besoin de dompter l’impossible,
Je viens pour caresser l’inaccessible,
pour gravir les pyramides /
et c’est de mes ongles que je les détruirai si je n’en coiffe pas une avec le diadème de France.
— ou bien mon dos verra pousser des ailes pour m’emporter à ces sommets et j’irai de par les nues même si menacé de chuter en l’enfer profond... !²²

The combination of prose and verse is obvious here and difficult to understand or justify compared to the English original. Some passages are obscured by Vauthier’s choices, as in the second line, when, describing the flames, he writes “qui désormais ne reconnaissent qu’au sang pouvoir de les éteindre” (“that now acknowledge only blood’s power to extinguish them”). Indeed, the word “pouvoir” (power) is a noun, used without an article, which is unusual in French. The absence of the article—which makes for an exceptionally lofty register—may confuse the common reader/auditor, who is naturally led to think that it is a verb (can, be able to), which does not make sense. Looking through the translation at large, we noticed that Vauthier frequently changes the order of lines, or ideas, or scenes, or that he adds new lines that bring in new ideas or new elements that were not present in the original

²¹ According to strict rules of classical French prosody, the sentence should be read as eleven, rather than ten syllables (“Ce / qui / m’é / chap / **pe**, / voi / là / ce / qui / m’at / tire.” However, in contemporary French the final “e” of “échappe” is elided, making for a decasyllable.

²² Christopher Marlowe, *Le Massacre à Paris*, adaptation et transposition scénique de Jean Vauthier, Théâtre du monde entier (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 13.

text. For example, in scene 4 (which for him is scene 5 because he divides scene 2 into two parts), Vauthier adds several lines to Catherine's opening speech. She is scolding her son for being melancholy: these lines that do not appear in the English text. The added lines could have seemed necessary to Vauthier as the play is often very direct and prevents any real psychological portrait of the characters—a facet of Marlowe's theatre we will come back to and which, doubtless, may upset the 20th or 21st century reader, translator, or stage director.

Vauthier's obscuring of the text is not systematic but he loves words and is very lyrical. Sometimes he seems to add words because they “sound” good to his ears. He is not interested in versification, as the organisation of the text on the page is quite random. Sometimes it looks like poetic prose, as when he begins a new paragraph for no apparent reason and chooses his own layout on the page, not using that of the original English text. The example given above is quite telling: the specific layout is combined with unusual punctuation, such as dashes of different length, the use of double exclamation marks as well as slashes in the middle of a sentence or at the end of a line as if to build what he saw as an absence of emotion or “psychology” in the text.

The first two twenty-first century translations were created for specific productions. They are both in verse, but with no particular choice as to the type of verse in French. The translators simply more or less followed the order of Marlowe's lines but did not try to create a sense of regularity by using the same number of syllables per line²³. Pascal Collin's translation was performed twice, the first time in 2004, for a production directed by Christian Esnay, and in 2007 for Guillaume Delaveau. As for Dorothee Zumstein, she translated for the stage-director Laurent Brethome in 2017. Even though Zumstein's translation is entitled *Massacre à Paris*, Brethome's production was called *Margot*, a change that confirms the influence of Chéreau's film on recent productions of the play. Both Collin and Zumstein follow the order of Marlowe's verse line by line, but Collin over-explains the original text and sometimes brings on a colloquial tone:

Maintenant Guise, fais éclore au grand jour
ces pensées engendrées dans les profondeurs de
l'âme
pour enflammer ces brasiers éternels
qui ne peuvent être éteints que dans le sang.
J'ai souvent eu l'intuition, et maintenant je sais
que le péril est la voie royale du bonheur
et la volonté sans faille la plus belle fin de l'hon-
neur.

²³ In French, prosody is syllable-based rather than accentual.

Quelle gloire y a-t-il à obtenir un bien vulgaire à la portée du premier paysan ?
Ce que j'aime plus que tout, c'est ce qui vole hors d'atteinte.
Faites-moi grimper les Pyramides pour planter là-haut le diadème de la France ;
ou bien de mes ongles, je le réduis en poussière,
ou bien, de mon aile ambitieuse, je monte au sommet,
même si ma chute doit m'entraîner au plus profond des enfers.
C'est pour ça que je veille, quand les autres croient que je dors.²⁴

We have kept the original layout. Collin's vocabulary is simple, which helps and allows for some great passages. The use of colloquial language can be efficient for some characters, but in the case of Guise, it can be surprising and can add another layer of meaning that was not present in the original, in this monologue in particular. Guise can be crude and cruel, but not necessarily colloquial. In this passage, the last line "c'est pour ça que je veille" (with the "ça" which is a very common colloquialism in contemporary French) flattens the line instead of giving it all its force. Collin justifies his translation choices in his foreword by invoking Marlowe's status as a thug, an argument that he uses in a political as well as a literary way: "Marlowe the thug had been around powerful people and had seen that history was a business of thugs."²⁵ This, by the way, is almost constantly put to the fore by French translators, from the nineteenth century onwards, except for Masson: Marlowe is found interesting because of his subversive dimension, be it in his writings or in his biography. It seems that the interest in *The Massacre at Paris* is enhanced by certain historical contexts, such as post-war France, May 1968, or more recently the January and November 2015 terrorist attacks in France.

As for Zumstein, she tried to get to a streamlined version which is often efficient:

Voici, Guise, que les pensées conçues au tréfonds de ton être
Commencent à en jaillir—flammes perpétuelles
Que seul le sang pourra éteindre.
J'ai souvent soupçonné ce que j'ai fini par apprendre :
Le risque est le plus sûr moyen de parvenir au bonheur.
Et l'accomplissement le plus noble des buts.
Quelle gloire peut-on tirer d'un bien commun,
A la portée du premier paysan venu ?
Je n'aime rien tant que ce qui semble hors d'atteinte.
Demandez-moi de gravir d'imposantes pyramides

²⁴ *Massacre à Paris*, trans. Pascal Collin, 27–28.

²⁵ "Le voyou Marlowe avait eu à fréquenter des puissants, et pu constater que l'Histoire était une affaire de voyous." *Massacre à Paris*, trans. Pascal Collin, 13.

Où vous aurez placé la couronne de France ;
Soit je les broierai de mes ongles,
Soit j'en atteindrai le sommet—avec les ailes de l'ambition,
Quitte à chuter au plus profond de l'enfer.
Pour cela je veille quand on me croit endormi...²⁶

From the point of view of meaning, the translation is very direct, with no ornaments or lyricism, but the lack of metrical choice does not give it any specific rhythm: it is random. Zumstein also adds lines and sometimes whole passages to the text. In an interview, the director Brethome said that since the play was “unfinished,” Zumstein, together with him and the cast of the play, wrote those “missing parts.”²⁷ In their introductions, both Collin and Zumstein stressed the fact that the text was faulty and incomplete. Zumstein even added two characters, “the nameless character” that starts the play with a prologue and that serves as a kind of narrator, as well as Margot, (Marguerite de Valois) who is given prominence in the play. In his interview, the director explains that he wanted the spectators to see the play through her perspective in an otherwise male-dominated world.²⁸

Zumstein's translation is probably the best of the two, but like Collin's, her text lacks a consistent perspective on the verse in French. That was one of the reasons why we wanted to pursue a new version, one that would be in keeping with the original text, even though we do know that this text could be faulty: there are shorter or longer lines of verse, repetitions of lines, sometimes in the same scene, and some parts in prose. Therefore, we translated English iambic pentameters with French decasyllables as much as we could, and as close to a decasyllable as we could, having to go against the rhythm of the alexandrine, which is very tempting for French translators of early modern English drama as it was the dominant metrical form in French drama of the period. Culturally, it acts as the equivalent of the iambic pentameter: it functions as an auditory icon that is immediately recognized by any auditor. However, going against this temptation, and keeping the lines as short as in English, actually helped us to keep alive the tension of the original play and language. The fact that earlier French theatre, in the first half of the sixteenth century, had experimented with the decasyllable before it was driven off stage by the dominant alexandrine, furnished us with some useful French antecedents,²⁹ though we did not want our translation to sound more

²⁶ *Massacre à Paris*, trans. Dorothee Zumstein, 16.

²⁷ “L'interview de Laurent Brethome,” *Les Emancipées*, <https://www.festival-lesemancepees.bzh/linterview-de-laurent-brethome/a34.html>, accessed 6 October 2022.

²⁸ “L'interview de Laurent Brethome.”

²⁹ See notably Frank Lestringant, “Le vers de théâtre au XVI^e siècle,” *Cahiers de l'AIEF* 52 (2000): 267–78. In a recent chapter, Brice Denoyer also interestingly suggests that the rise of the alexandrine over the decasyllable

archaic to a French ear than *The Massacre* to an English one. We were also careful to change the order of the English lines only very occasionally, when we found it impossible to translate them in any other way. This, however, was never done with the idea of smoothing out Marlowe's text and adding fluidity to the French rendition, but only in response to the constraints of French syntax and to our commitment to keep the lines short and incisive.

Our own translation of Guise's first soliloquy reads as follows:

Guise, descends en tes pensées profondes
Et fais jaillir ces flammes immortelles
Que seul le sang a le pouvoir d'éteindre.
J'ai longtemps cherché et enfin le sais:
Le péril assure un bonheur suprême,
Et l'audace, le plus parfait honneur.
Quelle gloire à faire le bien commun,
Si le moindre rustre peut le servir?
Moi, il me faut un but hors de portée.
Donnez-moi la plus haute pyramide,
Et placez-y le diadème de France.
Mes griffes la réduiront à néant,
Si mes ailes au sommet ne me portent,
Dussé-je tomber au fond de l'enfer.
Voilà pourquoi secrètement je veille ...

The self-imposed constraint of the decasyllable was very useful in avoiding the tendency to lyrical outpouring found in most of the previous translations, Collin and Masson excepted. This tendency is particularly conspicuous in the other three translations of the opening lines to Guise's soliloquy, when he apostrophizes himself. Rabbe, Zumstein, and Vauthier most prominently, all indulge here in forms of poetic license and elaboration that skew Guise's original voice and imbue it with the sound of Romantic apostrophe. At the same time our translation seeks to maintain the energy of the original text, which is flattened by Collin's and Masson's more neutral approaches—whether in prose or in free verse. This, we felt, could only be achieved through the liveliness of a strong rhythmic pattern. In Masson's translation it is incidentally hard to determine to what point his lines can really be considered as verse: the breakdown seems simply to signal where the original lines began and ended. It is not conducive of any sort of obvious patterning. The decasyllable in our translation offered a

was also due to translation practices: while the decasyllable stemmed largely from translations from Latin to the vernacular and attempted to retain the epigrammatic quality of the original, the more pathetic alexandrine came in fashion with the increasing number of translations from Italian into French. See "De la lecture du latin et du grec à la généralisation de l'alexandrin de théâtre au XVI^e siècle," in *Lire le théâtre. Pratiques et théories de la lecture du théâtre français des XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, ed. Sandrine Berrégard (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2024), 205–14.

two-fold advantage: as a strong and short unit, it allowed us to be truthful to the succinctness of the original text, but the various distribution of syllables it allows for (primarily 4-6—considered as the purer form—and 5-5) also gave us the flexibility we needed to render a text in which the iambic pentameter was far from regular.

Working on the translation while the two companies that were to perform it for the 2022 Marlowe Festival had already started practising actually helped to confirm our choice. As we have seen, all twentieth- and twenty-first-century translations prior to ours were obviously done for special productions of the play that all seemed to want to make specific social claims or political statements. Ours, on the other hand, sought above all to be exact, both in sense and poetically. It was also part of a pedagogical project, as we initially invited Master's students from our seminars on Elizabethan drama at the Sorbonne Nouvelle and at the Université de Reims to reflect on the translation and to prepare presentations on the play and its context for the actors. Our text was to serve as the basis for two entirely different performances: Jean-François Auguste was to work over a couple months with students from the drama school Le Studio Asnières in the Paris region for a staging at the Oratoire du Louvre³⁰ as well as one with professional actors in ongoing training at the Comédie de Reims (i.e. The Reims National Theatre) that were following a short two-week programme leading up to their performance there. Though we initially feared that opting for the decasyllable might make for slightly archaic-sounding, dense and obscure text that would be difficult to pronounce, especially for the company of student actors in Paris, discussions with the student actors, the director and the rehearsals soon proved that our fears were ungrounded. The young actors embraced the text with enthusiasm, driven by the quick pace and violent energy of Marlowe's play, safeguarded in our translation. One of their initial tendencies was to overact what appeared to them, quite expectedly in a play that has been described by some as a piece of "propaganda,"³¹ as stereotypical characters. Yet Jean-François Auguste very astutely used the conciseness and rhythm of our translation to concentrate their diction on single, significant words, and tone down their interpretations. This focus on the effectiveness of a bare yet rhythmic text enabled the students to offer more subdued, introverted and ambiguous renderings of the characters. Somewhat like Guise's own movement, this dive within, into

³⁰ Originally a Jesuit Oratory and Royal Chapel built under Louis XIII and in which Maria De' Medici inaugurated worship, the Oratoire du Louvre was offered to the Reformed church for use from 1811 onwards, and serves for Reformed worship to this day. Situated in the area where the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre began, it has become a highly symbolical place for Protestants in France.

³¹ Paulina Kewes, "Marlowe, History, and Politics," in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. Emily C. Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 138–54.

“deep-engendered thoughts” and words, imposed by a text that did not say too much, enabled what shone out to gain, in turn, in force and “burst out” more persuasively. In his indications to the actors, Jean-François Auguste in fact never insisted on the characters’ psychology. His suggestions were always about how one might say this or that word, what pause might be used before or after, and what gesture might accompany each one.

This helped us further appreciate to what point the characters in the play, as brought down to us by the octavo, were in fact not truly characters (in the post-Romantic understanding that still shapes our own conceptions of character today) but rather were each a rhetorical colour or shade of their own. Much of the vigour of the play derives from the antagonisms between Guise’s more contrived and polyphonic speeches, Navarre’s rational balance and heroic clarity, Charles’ hesitant prudence, Catherine’s threat and cold-blooded irony, Bartus’ scholarly pedagogism, etc. The fact that the play stages rhetorics rather than characters was evidenced also by Jean-François Auguste’s choice to have several actors play the same character. People and bodies were shown to be interchangeable, where speeches were not. The longer tirades of the octavo, which give hearing to this variety of rhetorics in more regular lines, are pieced together by shorter and often irregular lines that serve as cues to the actions, entrances and exits of the actors, setting speech in motion. What matters, dramatically speaking, is the interactions between these various embodiments of speech and action, how they respond to each other, what dynamics they materialize on stage through enunciation and movement. Looking at the octavo text with an eye to translation and another to theatrics, confirmed to our minds that it was a remnant of past performance, as Laurie Maguire has argued.³² But where Maguire considers the octavo text as a poor memorial reconstruction, full of “banal and stereotyped exit lines” among other defects, we began to see it more and more as a worthy testimony of past dramatic practices and, as a score of sorts that could come and support future performance thought of in terms of a spectacular piece of clockwork. This, again, determined our way of translating the text and the special attention given to rhythm that was to sustain the whole piece.

It was fascinating for us as translators to see with what apparent ease the text was appropriated in two very different contexts and setups. The actors in ongoing training in Rheims performed in a proper theatre but with a minimal stage set: a long line of tables and chairs set up as for a banquet could just as soon be mounted by the actors and turned into a modular stage within the stage. Having had very little time to rehearse, the Rheims actors

³² Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts*, 178.

read part of the play from papers that they simultaneously used as props—here again showing that it was speech rather than character psychology that was crucial to the dynamics of the play. Visually, the tables, chairs, papers and abundance of crowns worked a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. The effect was redoubled aurally thanks to the short and incisive decasyllables emanating from the different actors across the stage and table. In the Paris performance, the young actors had to fill a huge edifice: the high vaults of the church, which measures about 40 metres long by 20, had made it a privileged space for special royal services and ceremonies from the start. Striding down the central aisle with spectators seated facing them on both sides, mounting the pulpit, or speaking in turn from the various echoing balconies, enabled the actors to build up a sense of swift danger and alarm. Here too, though in a very different way, a rhythmic yet minimal text, gave actors and audience the pointers they needed to make sense of the disorderly action of a massacre and helped give the performance its pace and tension.

No translation is, of course, timeless, and ours as others will inevitably seem outdated to future generations, even though we have sought to avoid contemporary colloquialisms as much as obscure archaisms. But the experience of translating in French the octavo text of the *Massacre at Paris* anew and using our knowledge both of Elizabethan drama and theatre practices, and of French prosody, while testing the effects of our translation choices directly on young actors who had no preconceived ideas about what the play was to do or to say, was truly illuminating. Not only did it confirm the aptness of verse for performance, but it also enabled us to reassess the value of the octavo text, which we hope to flesh out more fully in our forthcoming bilingual edition of the play.

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