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Title	'Homicides royaux' : the assassination of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise and the radicalization of French public opinion
Authors(s)	Wilkinson, Alexander S.
Publication date	2004-06
Publication information	Wilkinson, Alexander S. "'Homicides Royaux' : The Assassination of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise and the Radicalization of French Public Opinion" 18, no. 2 (June, 2004).
Publisher	Oxford University Press
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/3716
Publisher's statement	This is a pre-copy-editing, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in French History following peer review. The definitive publisher-authenticated version, Wilkinson, Alexander S. 'HOMICIDES ROYAUX': THE ASSASSINATION OF THE DUC AND CARDINAL DE GUISE AND THE RADICALISATION OF FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION. French History, 18 (2): 129-153 doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/fh/18.2.129 , first published online June 2004 is available online at: http://fh.oxfordjournals.org/content/18/2/129
Publisher's version (DOI)	10.1093/fh/18.2.129

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<http://fh.oxfordjournals.org/content/18/2/129>

‘HOMICIDES ROYAUX’: THE ASSASSINATION OF THE DUC AND CARDINAL DE GUISE AND THE RADICALISATION OF FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION

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The propaganda campaign launched in response to the assassination of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise on the orders of Henri III in December 1588 was the largest waged in the history of sixteenth-century France. Yet, it has never been the subject of systematic investigation. This article aims to fill this historiographical lacuna by presenting a broad survey of the principal arguments and techniques employed both by the Royalists, who sought to justify the act, and the League who exploited the event to radicalise Catholic opinion against Henri III. It finds that while the king was partly unwilling and partly unable to engage in any serious attempt to influence public opinion, the League exploited the media to defend the Guises as Catholic martyrs and to discredit the king as a criminal and irreligious tyrant.

In October 1588, the French Estates General was convened in the Château of Blois. This assembly, which lasted several months, was a desperate attempt to repair the seemingly intractable political divisions which had developed between Henri III and the Catholic League. Existing on two partially interrelated levels, aristocratic and urban, the League stood in radical opposition to the policies pursued by the king. It vehemently opposed the recognition of the Protestant Henri de Navarre as heir presumptive to the French throne, and the pursuance, however pragmatic, of a religiously moderate domestic and foreign policy.¹ This friction had reached dramatic and revolutionary heights in May 1588 when a popular insurrection spearheaded by the radical wing of the League in Paris, the Sixteen, seized the major organs of municipal government and forcibly expelled the king from his capital. In July 1588, out of necessity rather than conviction, the king signed the Edict of Union, in which he asserted his commitment to the

* I would like to thank Professor Andrew Pettegree and Professor Mark Greengrass for their comments on the first draft of this article.

¹ Regrettably, there is no general history of the League available in English. In French, see J.M. Constant, *La Ligue* (1996), especially his short historiographical overview, pp. 467-475. A fine recent contribution to the literature, not included in this survey, is Stuart Carroll, ‘The revolt of Paris, 1588: Aristocratic insurgency and the mobilization of popular support’, *French Historical Studies*, 23/2 (2000), 301-337.

eradication of heresy. Charles, Cardinal de Bourbon was named Henri's heir apparent, while Henri I de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, the most influential leader of the aristocratic arm of the League, was appointed lieutenant-general.

As support for the League continued to grow at the expense of monarchical authority, the meeting of the Estates General in October became a moment of critical importance for the king. Henri had to regain the initiative and convince the nation's leaders to embrace his deeply held conviction that civil war would bankrupt France. However, the Estates, dominated by Leaguer deputies, remained hostile. The king suffered a series of bruising humiliations.² Then, two months after the opening of the Estates, the king received intelligence of a conspiracy against his life, masterminded by the Duc de Guise.³ As much a desperate attempt to regain authority over his kingdom as a response to credible evidence of an impending plot against him, the king decided to take an extraordinarily audacious course of action. Early on 23 December, Henri III sent word to the Duc that he wished to see him in his chambers. When the Duc entered the room, he was stabbed and killed by members of the king's elite guard. Following a carefully pre-arranged plan, the gates of the château were secured. The Duc's brother, Louis II de Lorraine, Cardinal de Guise, who had heard the fracas in the king's chambers, was then arrested along with other prominent supporters of the League. The following day, on Christmas Eve, the king gave the order to assassinate the Cardinal. He was strangled and stabbed.

Henri, along with several generally astute foreign observers, believed that by this one act, the leadership of the League had been decapitated and that the movement would collapse. In a letter intercepted by the English intelligence network, Alessandro Farnese Duke of Parma reported to Philip II his 'regret at this alteration, which will ruin the League, free the King of France from trouble, and encourage him to profit by the King of Spain's war with England'.⁴ In fact, as we know, this was not what happened. The League quickly rallied and established themselves in virtually permanent opposition to the king. Leaguer governments were installed in over half of France's principal cities including Agen, Amiens, Bourges, Dijon, Le Mans, Lyon, Nantes, Poitiers, Rouen and Toulouse. The last months of Henri's life, before his own assassination in August 1589, would be consumed by a bitter and ultimately unsuccessful conflict.

Because events moved so rapidly, historians have seldom stopped to ask why Henri's gamble did not succeed. There were good reasons why

² N. M. Sutherland, *Henri IV and the Politics of Religion, 1572-1596* (Bristol, 2002), chapter vi.

³ See below.

⁴ The letter was dated 25 December (= 4 January 4 N.S.), reported in the *Calendars of State Papers Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1588* (1936), pp. 391-3. See also the attitude of the Italian princes, reported in a letter from J. Worthe to Walsingham, dated Venice 5 January 1590, *ibid.*, pp. 393-394.

foreign princes believed that Henri might with this brutal act have been able to re-establish control. With the collapse of the Armada only months before, a seemingly inexorable momentum appeared to have been set for the militant Catholic cause. In this respect, Henri timed his strike well. And of course the recent precedent of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre offered a salutary example of how such extra-judicial killing could radically alter the balance of power.

Yet for Henri, the murders at Blois were to prove disastrous. That this was so had much to do with the success of the League in rallying public opinion behind the memory of their dead leaders. The revitalisation of the League following the events of December 1588 is an early yet striking example of a popular propaganda campaign that succeeded in shaping the political argument. Surprisingly, however, the response to the assassinations in the various parts of the media has never been the focus of systematic investigation.⁵

Evidence for non-print media such as sermons and rumours and their impact on opinion formation is at best fragmentary. Nevertheless, by exploiting a range of sources including diary and ambassadorial evidence, it is possible to demonstrate the ways in which the different components of the media functioned together to communicate the Royalist and Leaguer message. Our best indicator of the ideas which were circulating in the public domain, however, is undoubtedly the placards, pamphlets and books.⁶ The revolutions of 1589 produced an enormous surge of printed materials. Indeed, by a significant margin, 1589 witnessed the largest outpouring of publications in sixteenth-century French history.⁷ We will therefore concentrate in particular on the way in which the assassinations were

⁵ The only survey of the material relating to the assassinations is an exhibition catalogue, *La Tragédie de Blois. Quatre siècles de polémique autour de l'assassinat du duc de Guise* (Château de Blois, 17 Décembre – 19 Février 1589). Several aspects of the media in this period have, however, received attention. On the role of the Leaguer clergy, see Charles Labitte, *De la Démocratie chez les prédicateurs de la Ligue* (Geneva, 1841, 1971) and Arlette Lebigre, *La Révolution des curés. Paris 1588-1594* (Paris, 1980). On the physical production of Leaguer texts, Denis Pallier offers a useful introduction in his *Recherches sur l'Imprimerie à Paris pendant la Ligue, 1585-1594* (Geneva, 1976). Frederic Baumgartner in *Radical Reactionaries. The political thought of the French Catholic League* (Geneva, 1975) has trawled the printed materials for evidence of a systematic framework of ideas. On the portrait of Henri III, David Bell has explored the theme of disguise and dissimulation, 'Unmasking a King: The political uses of popular literature under the French Catholic League, 1588-1589' *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20/3 (1989), pp. 371-386. Keith Cameron is responsible for several overlapping studies of the negative depiction of the king, *Henri III. A Malignant or Malignant King? Aspects of the Satirical Iconography of Henri de Valois* (Exeter, 1978); 'La Polémique, la mort de Marie Stuart et l'assassinat de Henri III', in Robert Sauzet (ed.), *Henri III et son Temps* (Paris, 1992), pp. 185-194; and 'Satire, dramatic stereotyping and the demonizing of Henry III', in A. Pettegree, P. Nelles & P. Conner (eds.), *The Sixteenth-Century French Religious Book* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 157-176.

⁶ Information from the St. Andrews French Vernacular Book Project (FVB) based on a sample of books published between 1540 and 1559 suggests that only around 10% of books, which we know to have existed from reliable bibliographical references, have no surviving copy in any public library.

⁷ Statistics from FVB.

portrayed in print. Such an overview has benefited enormously from the advent of a major bibliographic project, based at the University of St. Andrews, which is now seven years into the task of cataloguing all French vernacular books published before 1601.⁸ Before Andrew Pettegree established this ambitious project in 1997, scholars were forced to deal with disparate and, in truth, very incomplete bibliographies of local printing centres, authors or printers. With access to this unique resource, it is now possible to establish with some accuracy a comprehensive picture of the contours of the printed polemical campaigns, Royalist and Leaguer, relating to the assassination of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise.

The Royalist Campaign

Almost as soon as the assassination of the Duc de Guise had taken place, the Royalist diplomatic campaign to influence political opinion swung into action. On 23 and 24 December, Henri III engaged in intensive letter writing designed to justify the action taken by the Crown and limit as far as possible any potential backlash.⁹ Letters were sent to the king's key noble supporters, such as Louis de Gonzague, Duc de Nevers, together with his favourites such as Jean Louis de Nogaret, Duc d'Épernon. Henri also wrote to officials in the municipal councils and parlements in the principal towns, including Rouen, and to his foreign ambassadors, including Guillaume de L'Aubespine ambassador to England and Jean de Vivonne Marquis de Pisani, the French ambassador to Rome. The letters reveal a very sensitive diplomacy, not least in the attempt to coax certain pro-Guise supporters back into the fold. But perhaps most delicate of all was the correspondence surrounding Charles Duc de Mayenne, brother of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise. There is compelling evidence to suggest that Mayenne had provided at least some of the intelligence to the king of a conspiracy hatched by the

⁸ Originally conceived as a survey of religious works, the project has now been broadened to include all vernacular publications. For an overview of the ongoing work of this survey, see A. Pettegree, 'The Sixteenth-Century French Religious Book Project', in A. Pettegree, *The Sixteenth-Century French Religious Book*, pp. 1-17. A published short title catalogue is envisaged for 2007.

⁹ It is possible to reconstruct the information campaign from extant correspondence. The letter from Henri III to the Duc de Nevers, dated Blois 23 December 1588, is conserved in MS BNF Béthune 8866, fol. 193. The other letters can be found in MS BNF Dupuy 245. Both the letter to Nevers and a selection of the other correspondence have been partially reprinted in 'Documents historiques sur l'assassinat des Duc et Cardinal de Guise', in *Revue Retrospective ou Bibliothèque Historique contenant des mémoires et documents authentiques, inédits et originaux* (1834), t. iii-iv, pp. 193-242. Many of the Dupuy letters can also be found in a nineteenth-century compilation, dated 8 September 1869, MS BNF Fonds Français 6549 'Informations faictes pour raison de la mort du Duc et du Cardinal de Guise et autres pieces et actes concernant cette matière, 1588 et 1590'.

Duc de Guise against his life.¹⁰ Whether Mayenne had offered this information for reward, to insulate himself should any conspiracy backfire, or whether a more sinister attempt to manipulate the king into carrying out a coup within the Leaguer leadership, is open to debate. In his letter to Mayenne following the assassination, Henri III thanked him discretely for the information. While taking the obvious precautionary step of relieving Mayenne of his military command and appointing instead Alphonse d'Ornano, the king took great pains both in this letter and in other correspondence to avoid causing Mayenne any unnecessary embarrassment, distancing him from any culpability in the conspiratorial designs of his brother.

With the exception of the letter to the Marquis de Pisani, ambassador to Rome, the Royalist campaign focused almost entirely on justifying the execution of the Duc de Guise. The assassination of a Cardinal was an altogether more thorny issue and was consequently ignored by the Crown in its public statements. This emphasis is most clearly evident from the *Mémoire Sommaire*, which was appended to the correspondence. The *Mémoire*, again in manuscript, was essentially a dossier against the Duc de Guise, which for the most part contained allegations of a general rather than specific nature.¹¹ Guise was alleged to have taken part in a number of conspiracies against the king, aimed at eroding his authority and rendering him odious in the eyes of his subjects. The entire population of France had suffered by his pursuit of selfish ambition. During the meeting of the Estates General, the Duc had placed the king in an impossible position, presenting unrealistic demands in the hope that if they were accepted, royal power would be abased, or that if they were refused, he would be able to abandon the Estates and throw the blame on the king. According to this *Mémoire*, the king had taken the decision to assassinate the Duc only after having solicited advice from various quarters, including individuals who in other matters had held the Duc in great affection. The assassination was required to preserve

¹⁰ See the dispatches of Giovanni Mocenigo, transcribed in Horatio Brown, 'The assassination of the Guises as described by the Venetian ambassador', in *The English Historical Review*, x (1895), p. 304 and Cardinal Giovanni-Francesco Morosini to Rome, dated 23 December 1588, Segr. di Stato, 27, fol. 314r-v, cited in C. Tempesti, *Storia della vita e geste di Sisto Quinto* (Rome, 1754), II, p. 109, quoted by R. Cooper, 'The Blois assassinations; Sources in the Vatican', in Keith Cameron (ed.), *From Valois to Bourbon. Dynasty, State and Society in Early Modern France* (Exeter, 1989), pp. 55-56. Cooper takes a different attitude to this evidence. Sceptical of whether such information was ever sent to the king, Cooper emphasises Henri III's vested interest in discrediting Mayenne. The chronology of the king's attitude to Mayenne as described above weakens such a thesis. It was only after Mayenne's decision in January to commit himself to the League that the king openly used his intelligence against him. See also H. Drouot, 'Le Duc de Mayenne au lendemain des assassinats de Blois', in *Mémoires de l'Académie de Dijon* (1927-1933), p. 3, cited in Sutherland, *Henry IV*, p. 227. Sutherland believes that Mayenne's warning was genuine. Moreover, she notes that such information would have been well informed, given that Mayenne's secretary at Blois, Rossieux, was in contact with Péricard, secretary to the Duc de Guise.

¹¹ MS BNF 6549, ff. 7v-11v. The contents of the *Mémoire Sommaire* were reported by Buzanal in his letter to Burghley, dated London 2 January 1589 (o.s.), in *CSPF 1589*, pp. 6-7.

the personal safety of the Crown and the security of the state.¹² The *Mémoire*, while stressing Henri's absolute commitment to Catholicism, called for an end to all leagues and associations.

These manuscript letters together with the *Mémoire* were targeted at the nation's political élite. To be sure, the king's letters did find their way into the public domain. In Grenoble, for example, following the arrival of the king's letter, a general assembly was summoned at the crossroads of the city.¹³ Nevertheless, it was not until February 1589 that the king and his supporters consciously decided to target the broader population by exploiting the resources of the printing press. They did so not to bolster the case against the Duc de Guise, but to discredit the Duc de Mayenne and the Duc d'Aumale, the new leaders of the League. If Henri had hoped that Mayenne's information against Guise was a portent of a new alignment with the king, he was to be gravely mistaken. While there is evidence to suggest that Mayenne weighed up his position carefully at the beginning of January, by 12 February he rode into Leaguer controlled Paris as the new leader of the aristocratic branch of the movement. The king now turned the full weight of his disapproval upon the surviving Guise brother. In February 1589, the *Déclaration du Roy sur l'attentat, félonnie et rébellion du Duc du Mayne, Duc & Chevalier d'Aumale, & ceux qui leur assisterent* appeared in no fewer than thirteen bibliographically distinct editions.¹⁴ The *Déclaration* argued that there was neither divine commandment nor any human law which excused a subject who took up arms against his king. The rebels were causing confusion, disloyalty, riots and felonies.¹⁵ The king, it argued, had shown clemency and good will, but rather than embracing reconciliation, the League had grown bolder in its ambitions and had begun seizing towns. The text did not dwell heavily on the issue of the Blois assassinations, except to say that Aumale had sent a warning to the king, stating that a secret meeting had been held in Paris, where a plot had been drawn up by Guise to seize the king and bring him back to the capital.¹⁶ The king, it alleged, would not have acted on this information alone, but Mayenne had also sent urgent word to the king via Alphonse d'Ornano to the same effect, relating that it was not enough for his brother to wear [rosary] beads around his neck but that it was also necessary that he should possess a conscience.¹⁷ At the close of the

¹² A fact repeated in the letters which accompanied the *Mémoire*, see for instance Henri III's letter to 'ceux de Rouen', dated from Blois 24 December 1588, MS BNF Colbert no. 16, fol. 267, cited in 'Documens historiques', pp. 442-443

¹³ Letter from Henri III to the *Parlement* of Dauphiné dated 24 December 1588, Archives Municipales de Grenoble MS. BB 41 fol. 4-5v conseil du 4 janvier 1589, cited in Stéphane Gal, *Grenoble au temps de la Ligue* (Grenoble, 2000), p. 278.

¹⁴ *Déclaration du Roy sur l'attentat, félonnie et rébellion du Duc du Mayne, Duc & Chevalier d'Aumale, & ceux qui leur assisterent* (s.l., s.n., 1589).

¹⁵ Ibid, A2r.

¹⁶ Ibid, B1r.

¹⁷ Ibid, A3r.

declaration, the king called for the loyalty of his subjects, a theme that was to be developed further in a second declaration often appended to the tract against Mayenne on the subject of the rebellions of Paris, Orléans, Amiens & Abbeville.¹⁸ In full conciliatory mode, Henri III recognised that the majority of the people in these towns had taken no part at all in the rebellion, and offered general clemency for a return to the Royalist fold – as long as this was accomplished by 15 March.

The manuscript letters together with the two publications described above broadly represent the full extent of the Royalist engagement with public opinion over the issue of the assassinations.¹⁹ However, in support of the Crown, there were also a small number of pro-Royalist Protestant defences of the assassination. It is worthwhile pausing at this point to consider the difficult situation in which the Huguenots found themselves at the beginning of 1589. Initially, it may have been expected that with the Guises removed from power, the League would collapse. At this point, the Protestants could only hope that Henri III would work towards achieving toleration between France's Catholic and Huguenot populations, and not embark on any anti-heresy campaign to appease Catholics wary of the king's religious loyalties. Exacerbating confessional tensions at this moment by gloating at the defeat of Catholic heroes, therefore, would have been politically unwise. When news of the assassinations reached La Rochelle, Henri de Navarre forbade the release of celebratory fireworks.²⁰ Then, when the League began to secure many of France's principal cities, there was a firm expectation that Henri would conclude an alliance with Navarre. Indeed, such an alliance was formed in April 1589. In these circumstances, excessive celebration of the death of the Guises would have grated against the Crown's policy of simply ignoring the incident. To a large extent, it is the continued demand for tact which explains the lack of any sustained Protestant response to the assassinations.

The only official Protestant response in print to the unfolding events was a letter dated 4 March 1589 from Henri de Navarre, just before negotiations for an alliance with Henri III had begun. It was one of at least eight editions published in 1589.²¹ In this letter, Navarre presented himself and the Huguenot movement as faithful servants of the king. Now that the Guise had been eliminated, there was a real opportunity for peace. Not all

¹⁸ This *Déclaration du Roy sur l'attentat, félonnie et rebellion des villes de Paris, Orléans, Amiens, Abbeville, et autres leurs adhérens* (s.l., s.n., 1589) was appended to several editions of the *Déclaration du Roy sur l'attentat, félonnie et rébellion du Duc du Mayne*

¹⁹ There are a few other Royalist criticisms of Guise, though these tended to appear only in mid to late 1589, probably after the assassination of Henri III himself on 1 August - for instance *Conseil salutaire d'un François contenant les impostures et monopoes des faux prédicateurs* (s.l., s.n., 1589).

²⁰ Sutherland, *Henri IV*, p. 247.

²¹ *Lettre du Roy de Navarre aux trois estats de ce royaume, contenant la déclaration dudit Seigneur sur les choses advenues en France depuis le 23. jour de Decembre, 1588* (s.l., s.n., 1589). It is dated 4 March 1589.

Protestant writers followed the official line, however. There were also three unofficial Protestant responses which emanated from presses in La Rochelle, although with their place of origin disguised.²² Praising the restoration of royal authority, they gloated at the removal of the Guise tyranny. They associated the Guise family with violent excess and bald ambition which had led to unrest and had 'torn the entrails' from France.²³ Assassination was a punishment sanctioned by God, and the League was now a 'serpent without a head'. Interestingly, there is only one known edition of each of these three pamphlets, and they survive in single copies only in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Even taking into account the ephemeral nature of such material, such a low survival rate might well suggest that there was some form of official clampdown on these works.

The lack of any real engagement with popular opinion by Henri or his supporters can be gauged most graphically from the following statistics. There were around 1479 bibliographically distinct items published during the course of 1589, of which 1294 were polemical editions and edicts. Of these polemical items, 1035 can be classified as Leaguer, 129 as Royalist and 18 as Protestant. There were 81 edicts published under Henry III and 31 under Henry IV.²⁴ The Crown's exile from Paris, the centre of the French printing industry, was obviously crippling to the Royalist cause. It not only prevented the propagation of the Royalist message, but it permitted the League to exploit the presses for its own purposes. However, in truth, the king did have several printers at his disposal. Tours became a place of refuge for royal government. Henri was followed there by loyal printers, most notably Jamet Mettayer, Pierre L'Huillier and Barthélemy Gomet.²⁵ Two other former Parisian printers, Claude de Monstroeil and Jean Richer remained at Blois and printed for the king. In addition, there were also a scattering of Royalist printers in places such as Angers and Caen. While these presses were dominated by the business of government, it is not unfair to suggest that a king more conscious of the value of public opinion in early-modern France might have more actively employed these presses in a campaign to win over the hearts and minds of his people.

²² *Gayeté en forme de responce à la complainte des liguez Toulouzains sur la mort des deux frères Guisars* ([La Rochelle], s.n., 1589), *Le Tripe enfer des Ligueurs contre le faux enfer de Blois* ([La Rochelle], s.n., 1589), *Responce à la complainte qu'un Ligueur a fait sur la mort des Guisars frères* ([La Rochelle], s.n., 1589).

²³ *Gayeté en forme*, A4v.

²⁴ FVB.

²⁵ On this, see E. Giraudet, *Une association d'imprimeurs et de libraires de Paris réfugiés à Tours au XVI^e siècle* (Tours, 1877).

The Leaguer Campaign

Before we examine in detail the Leaguer image of the martyred brothers as revealed in the wealth of surviving printed placards, pamphlets and books, it is important to address the issue of how the League communicated its message in what was overwhelmingly an oral culture. There are a number of sources at our disposal to help us understand how Leaguer ideas were spread in this period. Not least, we have the extraordinary diary of a Paris magistrate named Pierre de L'Estoile.²⁶ Trained in law, L'Estoile had been the chief notary and secretary to the chancellor.²⁷ In addition to recording unfolding events, L'Estoile also paid particular attention to the circulation of ideas in the capital. He even transcribed and collected a substantial number of Leaguer placards and pamphlets.²⁸ Taken together with other sources, not least the work of historians on the League in France's provincial cities, it is possible to reconstruct many of the ways in which public opinion was harnessed, articulated and shaped using the various components of the media.

Preachers and curates played a fundamental role in shaping initial reaction to the assassinations. Preachers were able to respond rapidly to unfolding events and adapt their message to suit their local audience. In Paris, the League dominated the pulpits. Indeed, there was hardly a single church in the Paris area where a Leaguer preacher did not preach several times a day. L'Estoile recorded the extraordinary degree to which the League directed the activities of Paris's curates and preachers, even pointing to the existence of a virtual minister for propaganda - Catherine Marie de Lorraine, Duchesse de Montpensier and sister of the Duc de Guise.²⁹ Montpensier harnessed the power of charismatic preachers, combining an appeal to ideology with incentives such as wages, bishoprics, abbeys and other great benefices.³⁰ As early as July 1587, when Henri III arrested several radical Leaguer preachers following the riot at St. Séverin, the extent of the League's control over the media was breathtaking. During discussions with the authorities, the preachers revealed that they had 'preached nothing other than the news contained in the bulletins sent by Madame de Montpensier'.³¹ One can only imagine how much more finely tuned this system of co-ordination had become by late 1588.

²⁶ P. de L'Estoile, *Mémoires Journaux* (1982, facsimile of the 1876 Paris edition).

²⁷ In his capacity as chief notary, L'Estoile may well have been involved in the process of privilege granting. Several publications include the name 'de L'Estoile' in their privilege statement, including [Loys Lasseré], *La Vie de Monseigneur Saint Hierosme* (Paris, chez Sébastien Molin, 1588), ã1v. The privilege was awarded for ten years and dated 15 August 1587.

²⁸ P. de L'Estoile (ed.), *Les Belles Figures et Drolleries de la Ligue (1589-1600)* (Paris, 1877).

²⁹ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, t. III, p. 66.

³⁰ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, pp. 118-119, 278.

³¹ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 63.

In the wake of the assassinations, the full weight of the Parisian Leaguer propaganda apparatus swung into action. On Thursday 29 December 1588, the congregation who had come to hear one of the preachers on Montpensier's payroll, Dr. Guincestre, left the church following the sermon and began to engage in acts of symbolic violence. Most pertinently, they trampled on the royal arms which had adorned the door of the church.³² The same preacher, during a sermon on 1 January, invited his congregation to take a communal oath, signified by holding up their hands, that they would avenge the deaths of the brothers 'with the last taste of their blood'.³³ On 2 January, in an action undoubtedly co-coordinated as well as fuelled by their curates and preachers, a group destroyed sepulchres and marble figures that the king had erected for his late favourites close to the great altar of the church of Saint Pol. Popular opinion believed that these favourites were no more than evil atheists, their bodies unfit to rest anywhere except a gibet.³⁴ 'The people', reported L'Estoile, 'never left a sermon without having fire in their heads'.³⁵ The heated behaviour of the preachers and their congregations received important validation on 7 January 1589 when the foremost centre of Catholic orthodoxy in the country, the Faculty of Theology in Paris, issued an astonishing decree which released Frenchmen and women from their obedience to their 'king'.³⁶ In the days and even months that followed, services for the brothers were conducted in all of the churches, parishes and monasteries of Paris and its suburbs.

While evidence for the provincial cities is fragmentary, it appears that local authorities reacted promptly in an attempt to contain initial reaction to the events at Blois and avoid civil disturbance. In many cities, however, they found themselves largely powerless to stem the widespread and genuine outrage at Henri's bloody deed. In Rouen, the governor Taneguy Le Veneur, Seigneur de Carrouge responded to the spontaneous 'crying and lamentation among the people' that followed the arrival of news from Blois,³⁷ by issuing an order which forbade preachers to mention the recent assassinations and ordered the cathedral chapter to cancel a procession organised to pray for the release of its archbishop.³⁸ Nevertheless, this order was soon disobeyed by

³² He was also called Lincestre or Wincestre. A Gascon Doctor of Theology, he served as curate of Saint Gervais from September 1588. L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 204.

³³ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 203. Oath-swearing was a common feature of the League. In Rouen, for instance, an oath was sworn to the League during a mass meeting, Archives Communales de Rouen MS A20 fol. 406, cited in Philip Benedict, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 187. For Toulouse, see Bibliothèque Municipale MS 696, cited in Mark Greengrass, 'The *Sainte Union* in the Provinces: The Case of Toulouse' in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, xiv, 4 (1983), p. 487, n. 92.

³⁴ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 231.

³⁵ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 243.

³⁶ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 242. For the text of the Faculty of Theology's decision, see 'Advis et résolution de la faculté de théologie de Paris' in L. Cimber and F. Danjou (eds.), *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France*, 1st series (Paris, 1834-1847), vol. 12, pp. 349-353.

³⁷ Benedict, *Rouen*, p. 177.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Jacques Commolet, a Jesuit who had been sent to the city in August 1588 on the orders of the Paris League. On 29 December, St. Thomas of Canterbury's Day, Commolet was the first of many preachers who would defy the governor's order. The impact that Commolet's sermon had on an already emotionally charged congregation was recounted by an English nun.

when he came into the pulpytt, all eyeis and mowthes gapyng upon hym, the good man was in such a passyion that he seemyd lyke to burst and could scars bryng out hys words for weepyng, the passyion of that tyme had so alteryd hys voyce. Hys matter was of blessyd St. Thomas, declaryng to the people the cause of hys martirdome in the behalfe of Chrystes church, and of the quarrel betwyxt hym and the kyng, and how hys braynes were stroke out uppon the pavement before ye alter. Thys thyng was so apt for hys purpose that the people could by and by apply ytt that the preacher had no soner named the slaughter of theyr 2 prynces but thatt all fell out into weepyng, and the preacher ther sobyng allowde could saye no more. Butt after a preatty space, stryving with himself to speake, he clapyng of hys hands cryde aloud, o pover eglese gallicane, and so came downe, the people and all so movyd as we never have seene nor shall see ye lyke'.³⁹

In Paris⁴⁰ and in cities such as Toulouse⁴¹ and Rouen,⁴² funeral ceremonies and processions were also carefully managed by the preachers. Staged in late January and February, these processions adopted a highly unconventional form - not least the extent to which ordinary men and women became participants rather than simply spectators in the ritual.⁴³ The first processions in Paris involved small children, both girls and boys. They walked two by two, proceeding from church to church. They carried candles, recited public prayers and sang litanies, psalms and hymns which had been prepared for them by the curates of their parishes. Other public prayers and processions soon followed in every Parisian parish. Strikingly, these events involved all members of the public, of every quality, of both sexes and of all ages. Despite the bitter cold, the majority of those who took part walked

³⁹ Archives of the English College of Valladolid, Series 2, L 5, 13, cited in Benedict, *Rouen*, p. 178.

⁴⁰ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, pp. 243-244.

⁴¹ In Toulouse, a lavish funeral procession was organised, AM Toulouse, BB16 fol. 263, cited in Greengrass, 'The *Sainte Union* in the Provinces', p. 487, n. 92. Two priests were rewarded for organising regular processions in the city during this period, Archives Départementales de la Haute Garonne 1G 184 [19], *ibid*.

⁴² Benedict, *Rouen*, pp. 187-188.

⁴³ On processions, see Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross. Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 38-48 et *passim*.

barefoot, two by two, wearing only a chemise and clasping a candle in their hand. They sang with passionate devotion. On 14 February, instead of the usual dissolute mardi-gras celebrations, a number of processions passed through the streets and churches of Paris. One such procession involved 600 scholars, the majority of whom were no more than ten or twelve years old. This particular display of religious devotion by the students so moved public sentiment that many rose from their beds, summoned their curates and priests and took part in a nighttime procession.⁴⁴ During these events, the arms of the Duc and Cardinal were prominently displayed – a focal point for public penitence, grief and anger.

Rouen undoubtedly took the events in Paris as its model when, at the end of February, a procession was organised to herald the arrival of the Duc de Mayenne into the city. The majority of Rouen's population filed barefoot through the streets of the city carrying burning tapers.⁴⁵ At St. Ouen, the consecrated Host was displayed with great splendour on the high altar. The recently formed companies of Penitents, wearing cagoules of red, white and black, took pride of place at the ceremony and bore banners depicting the murders of the Duc and Cardinal, with the face of Charles, Cardinal of Bourbon peering forlornly out of the window of his prison cell. Such visual devices served to concentrate the mind of the reader and audience on the human tragedy of Henri's action. In addition to being carried as banners, icons of the martyrs and images of their martyrdom were frequently posted in churches as a reminder to the community of the enormity of their loss. In January and February 1589, for example, images were hung in the cathedral at Toulouse. Alongside were placed pyramids of white candles.⁴⁶

The printed word interfaced with every other component of the media. Paris produced the overwhelming majority of the printed materials relating to the assassinations, either with 'A Paris' stated clearly on the title page, or with its place of origin thinly disguised to protect printers from reprisals should Henri III eventually triumph.⁴⁷ As with other elements of the Paris media, the printing industry was closely regulated by the League. All books

⁴⁴ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 247. This unorthodox nocturnal procession was by no means welcomed by all of the clergy.

⁴⁵ See Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime (Rouen), MS. G 2176, entry of February 22 1589 and the letter printed in the appendix to Eugène Saulnier, *Le rôle politique du Cardinal de Bourbon* (Charles X), 1523-1590 (Paris, 1912), pp. 300-301. These sources are both cited in Benedict, *Rouen*, p. 188.

⁴⁶ *Advertissement particulier et véritable de tout ce qui s'est passé en la ville de Tholose* (Paris, Robert Le Fizelier, 1589), C4v. See also Devic and Vaissète, *Histoire générale de Languedoc* (Toulouse, 1872-1904), vol. 12, pp. 1459-1460, cited in Greengrass, 'The Sainte-Union in the Provinces', p. 487.

⁴⁷ Anonymity may also have been employed by printers to maintain a veneer of sensitivity to provincial anti-Parisian concerns. For provincial fears of the centralising influence of the Sixteen, see E. Barnavi, 'Centralisation ou fédéralisme? Les relations entre Paris et les villes à l'époque de la Ligue (1585-1594)', in *Revue Historique*, CCLIX/2 (1978), p. 336, and *Le Parti de Dieu: étude sociale et politique des chefs de la Ligue Parisienne 1585-1594* (Louvain, 1980), p. 265.

printed in the capital had to apply for a Leaguer privilege.⁴⁸ The relative scarcity of publications relating to the assassinations produced on the provincial presses may at first seem surprising. Yet, this was not the result of any lack of demand for these works outside the capital but rather the pressures of market forces. Paris simply dominated the market in these texts. In fact, while some provincial presses, especially Lyon, would increasingly share this market for Leaguer texts over the coming years, Paris remained the pre-eminent publication centre for the movement. This fact is crucial to our understanding of the nature of the League. Local particularities and parochialism inevitably influenced its character and organisation at a local level. Yet through various mechanisms, not least print, Paris was hugely influential in forging a nationwide identity for the movement.

The printed materials which emerged from Paris found eager consumers in the provincial cities. Other media such as sermons and processions may have been vitally important conduits for fashioning opinion in a predominantly oral society, but the printed book was by no means the preserve of the literate. While it is estimated that only around 30% of the adult urban population could read - although a disproportionately influential segment of society - the ideas contained within books were circulated through sermons, discussions and meetings.⁴⁹ Printed works repeated ideas that could first be heard on the street and vice versa. One of the most remarkable findings of recent studies on communication in the early-modern period has been the highly porous nature of the boundary between oral and literate cultures.⁵⁰ This porosity is certainly borne out in the evidence for Leaguer France. L'Estoile, for example, records that in Paris pamphlets were read aloud in the streets by the basket-carriers (book sellers) of Madame de Montpensier.⁵¹ Even those who did not read or buy these pamphlets could easily pass on the ideas they contained. One of the most interesting features of the printed placards, pamphlets and books of this period is the widespread use of verse. L'Estoile noted derisively in one section of his diary that there was not a pedant yob who had not composed a couple of sonnets on the subject of the murders at Blois.⁵² Verse was a natural medium for Leaguer

⁴⁸ Pierre Senault, the influential secretary of the League, appears to have been heavily involved in this process. His signature is on the vast majority of privileges granted by the League in Paris in 1589.

⁴⁹ For an introduction to the question of literacy in this period, see R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800* (1988).

⁵⁰ See in particular Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000). See also Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Oxford, 1981, 1994), Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991) and Andrew Pettegree, *Huguenot Voices: The Book and the Communication Process during the Protestant Reformation* (Greenville, November 1999).

⁵¹ L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 242, 279.

⁵² L'Estoile, *Mémoires*, p. 279. See also the verse transcribed by L'Estoile around December 1588 which was not printed, p. 277.

authors to employ. Mnemonic, it only had to be read out once and it could be repeated endlessly, no doubt adopting variant forms.

Woodcuts formed another important bridge between the oral and literate divide. Images were frequently employed to heighten the emotional drama of the assassinations.⁵³ Images were far less commonly used in France than they were in Germany; very few editions were illustrated during the sixteenth century, with the exception of expensive publications such as books of Hours, Bibles and technical works.⁵⁴ Yet, during the period of the League, this situation changed dramatically. Numerous simple woodcuts appeared in placards, pamphlets and books. Unlike the more complex images which we associate with the early German Reformation, these required little decoding. They were often very repetitive in their designs. Sometimes they were quite shocking, depicting gruesome scenes from the murder of the Guises, their bodies riddled with injuries or the alleged mistreatment of their corpses by a gleeful Henri III.⁵⁵ However, the most ubiquitous images were simply portraits of the Duc and Cardinal themselves. The images contained in printed publications were often deployed in other mediums and vice versa. For example, the banner used in the Rouen procession which we have examined above was undoubtedly a variation on the scene depicted to the right of the woodcut which we can see below.

⁵³ It is interesting to note that four fifths of the placards and pamphlets contained in L'Estoile's collection are illustrated. See C. Jouhaud, 'Readability and Persuasion: Political Handbills', in R. Chartier & L. G. Cochrane (eds.), *The Culture of Print. Power and uses of print in early-modern Europe* (Oxford, 1989), p. 241.

⁵⁴ Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*.

⁵⁵ For instance L'Estoile, *Les Belles Figures*, 'Comme Henry faict mettre en pièces le corps des deux Princes martyrs, puis les fait jeter au feu pour les consommer en cendre', placard XVII, pp. 44-45.

Figure 1: 'THE FALSE PERSONA OF THE GREAT HYPOCRIT OF FRANCE UNCOVERED' April 1589.⁵⁶

Clearly, the League exploited every component of the media available to communicate its message to the general population. But what were the principal elements of the Leaguer message? For this, we have to turn to the surviving printed placards, pamphlets and books.

The Royalist accusations against the Guise came under intense scrutiny in the Leaguer press. Whilst the position of the Crown and its supporters was, for the most part, represented accurately, it was undermined with impressive skill.⁵⁷ One aspect of this process of discrediting the Royalist position involved the depiction of the king's justifications as a conscious manipulation of the truth – 'propaganda' in its most pejorative sense. In *Contre les fausses allegations*, for instance, the 'politiques' and atheists, that is to say Royalists, were accused of never being short of 'spiteful inventions', manipulating rhetoric to render their opponents odious through 'false words and concocted facts'.⁵⁸ In *Response aux justifications*, the author observed

⁵⁶ *Le Faux mufle decouvert du grand hypocrite de la France* ([Paris, 1589]), placard. L'Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux* (Paris, 1876), t. III, illustration contained between pp. 235-236, referred to pp. 279-280. The scene depicted here will be discussed in more detail below.

⁵⁷ *De L'Excommunication, & censures ecclésiastiques, encourues par Henry de Valois* (Paris, Guillaume Bichon, 1589), for example, reprinted the Royalist position on D3r-v before proceeding to refute it.

⁵⁸ *Contre les fausses allegations que les plus qu'Achitofels, conseillers cabinalistes, proposent pour excuser Henry le meurtrier de l'assassinat par luy perfidement commis en la personne du tres-illustre Duc de Guise* (s.l., s.n., 1589), A2r-v.

that many people in France believed that the king had found a smoking gun among the memoirs and papers of Péricard, secretary to the Duc de Guise. However, having seen the king's declaration against Mayenne and Aumale, and the obscurity of the arguments contained therein, the author concluded that the possession of any real evidence against the Duc and Cardinal was unlikely.⁵⁹

Countering the allegations put forward by the Crown, the League formulated a well developed defence of the character and behaviour of the Guises. A useful snapshot of the way in which these brothers were represented can be gained from the following table which appeared at the beginning of the pamphlet *Epitaphes des deux frères martyrs*.⁶⁰ It encapsulates the Leaguer image of the Guises as true models of princely behaviour and innocent martyrs who were champions of church and state.

Des Princes,	Des Prelats, Des soldats,	Des martyrs
Le miroir,	L'ornement Le pere,	L'Innocence
Plus clair,	Plus saint, Plus pleine d'amour	(O pauvre France)

The drama of the assassinations was carefully constructed to fit the Leaguer political agenda, but required little embellishment. Both the Duc and Cardinal were innocent and pious martyrs, victims of a bloody tragedy.⁶¹ For instance, it was frequently mentioned in accounts of the Duc's final moments that he suspected nothing of the crime that was about to befall him.⁶² This naivety was strengthened in later, more developed treatments of the martyr narratives. In *Le Martire des deux frères*, when the Duc was warned by Monsieur d'Alboeuf on 22 December of the plot against his life, he replied that the king was a good prince, humane and full of piety. They had, after all, taken the sacrament together.⁶³ The Duc was fully convinced of the 'joyeux de la bonne volonté du Roy'.⁶⁴

The imprisonment of the Cardinal, the fact that he fully expected his own death and had, therefore, time to make preparations, granted the

⁵⁹ *Response aux justifications prétendues par Henry de Valoys sur les meurtres de feu Cardinal & Duc de Guyse* (Paris, s.n., 1589), A2r-v.

⁶⁰ *Epitaphes des deux frères martyrs* (Paris, chez Didier Millot, 1589), A2r.

⁶¹ This use of the phrase 'tragédie' to describe the events at Blois was employed frequently, for instance in *Oraison funèbre sur la mort de monseigneur le Duc de Guyse* (s.l., s.n., 1589), B3r.

⁶² [Charles Pinselet], *Le Martire des deux frères contenant au vray toutes les particularitez les plus notables des massacres* ([Paris], 1589), C4v.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, D1r.

⁶⁴ *Histoire au vray du meurtre et assassinat proditoirement commis au cabinet d'un Roy perfide & barbare* (s.l., s.n., 1589), L1r.

Leaguer writers the opportunity to narrate the martyrdom along more conventional lines.⁶⁵ Several polemicists capitalised on the dramatic story of how the Cardinal heard the assassination of his brother, the fact that he had been mishandled and imprisoned, and had then been locked away in the bitter winter's cold. It is narrated that during this evening, the Cardinal spent the night in prayer, confessing his faults to Pierre d'Épinac, Archbishop of Lyon until around 9 or 10 in the morning, Christmas Eve. When the time came for his execution, those sent to carry out the bloody deed, finding the Cardinal on his knees in prayer, expressed great reluctance. He then got up, embraced the Primate of Lyon, and asked that he remember him in his prayers. Kneeling down again, he recommended his soul to God. At this moment, the assassins struck. Taking a cord, they partly strangled him, before stabbing him with daggers and *hallebardes*. This narrative possessed an extremely strong didactic function; the Cardinal's confession and religious fervour were a model of how one ought to die well.⁶⁶ Despite being more amenable to the conventional model of martyrdom, however, it is noteworthy that the Cardinal received significantly less attention in the Leaguer press than his brother, the Duc de Guise.

A key element in the defence of the innocence of the Guises lay in the attention paid to the virtues of their family, most particularly the fact that they were the sons of François de Lorraine. While the limited Royalist campaign portrayed the Duc de Guise as a man who was so corrupted by ambition that he sought foreign assistance from Spain to realise his goal, no aspersions were cast on the wider Guise family. Yet the League saw good reasons for paying attention, often at considerable length, to the virtues of François de Lorraine, father of the Duc and Cardinal. François, who died at Orléans in 1563, remained a highly popular figure for French Catholics. He was a respected military man who had done much not only to protect the security of France against external threat but also to stem the advance of the Huguenot cancer. While both sons, the Duc and Cardinal, were seen as the shining lights of France, 'deux Phares, ces deux transparents soleils de toute la Chrestienté',⁶⁷ the Duc de Guise, as the Catholic warrior, received most attention in the Leaguer press.⁶⁸ As a son who very closely resembled his father, the Duc's military prowess dominated the discussion, most especially his victory against German mercenary troops at Auneau in 1587.⁶⁹ This emphasis is very revealing of the Leaguer mood. At this moment, the League

⁶⁵ *Lamentation où petit sermon funèbre prononcé en l'église nostre dame de Rheims, aux funérailles de feu Mosneigneur Loys Cardinal de Guyse, Archevesque de ladite église* ([Rheims], s.n., 1589), D1v-D2v.

⁶⁶ Ibid. For a discussion of martyrdom in Early Modern Europe, see Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake. Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999).

⁶⁷ *Les Impostures et calomnies des Huguenots, politiques & atheistes pour colorer le massacre commis és personnes de Messeigneurs le Cardinal & Duc de Guyse par Henry de Valois* ([Paris], s.n., 1589), B3v.

⁶⁸ *Oraison funèbre*, B1r-v.

⁶⁹ *Lettres d'union pour estre envoyés par toute la chrestienté* (s.l., s.n., 1589).

expressed a clear preference for the idealisation of the Catholic warrior rather than a more passive spiritual figure.

There was another reason for burnishing the image of François de Lorraine. Like his son, François was accused, both during and after his lifetime, of having ambitions to secure the French Crown for himself. By raising and defending the career of François de Lorraine in their pamphlets, the League wished to stress the constancy of the family, focusing on their continued service and devotion to successive kings of France. The Guise family were portrayed as the guardians of the Catholic conscience, who never wavered in their responsibility to France – even if the Crown sometimes lost its direction.⁷⁰ They also wished to highlight that such stalwart defenders of the faith were inevitably criticised by their enemies: Protestants who were fearful of the power of the Guises, or nobles jealous of their heroic successes.⁷¹ Of course, another important fact also linked the careers of father and sons – they met their end through the ignoble means of assassination. François de Lorraine's assassination at the hands of Jean de Poltrot was recalled when describing the fate of the Duc and Cardinal, a 'poltronne execution'.⁷²

The attention paid to promoting the image of the Guise family was also carefully designed to strengthen the image of the League as a whole, and its new 'leader' - the surviving brother, the Duc de Mayenne. Mayenne attracted frequent mentions in the corpus of works dealing with the assassinations. He was the focus of various dedicatory epistles and verses.⁷³ Interestingly, the allegation made against him by the Crown that he had informed the king of a conspiracy orchestrated by the Duc, was rarely raised. When this accusation was mentioned, it was simply refuted without much further comment.⁷⁴ What does come across very clearly from the pamphlets, however, was not only that Mayenne firmly condemned the murders, but also that he was determined to exact vengeance in the name of his martyred brothers.⁷⁵ When he entered Paris in February, he did so to the popular cries of 'Vive le Duc de Maine! Vivent les Princes Catholiques!'.⁷⁶ His mandate was firmly connected with the public affection for his Guises relations. As with the emphasis placed on the Duc de Guise's military accomplishments,

⁷⁰ *Contre les fausses*, A3r.

⁷¹ *Histoire au vray*, E3r & G4v

⁷² For instance, [Pinselet], *Le Martire des deux frères*, C2r.

⁷³ For instance, *Epitaphes des deux frères martyrs, par un Gentil-homme Angevin* (Paris, Didier Millot, 1589) is dedicated to the Duc de Mayenne.

⁷⁴ For example, [Pinselet], *Le Martire des deux frères*, F3v and *Response aux justifications*, A2v.

⁷⁵ *Discours sur le département de Monsieur de Mayenne* (Paris, Didier Millot, 1589), B1r.

⁷⁶ L'Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux*, t. III, p. 246. The Duc de Mayenne was frequently referred to by his other title, Comte de Maine.

Mayenne's own military successes were repeatedly mentioned, especially his role in securing the towns of Beauvais, Saint Quentin and La Meure.⁷⁷

Central to the defence of the Duc de Guise and of the League, was a rebuttal of claims that the movement had set out to overthrow the king. The most common arguments employed by pamphleteers included the assertion that the League had been formed not against the person of the king but against heretics.⁷⁸ Religious associations were entirely legitimate. Besides, the king himself had supported this Catholic League,⁷⁹ as had the Pope.⁸⁰ But one of the most crucial obstacles in the construction of this defence, lay in justifying the Day of the Barricades in May 1588, which had resulted in the ousting of the king from Paris. For Royalists, this event was the ultimate example of the treasonous activities of the Guise and the League. In response, the League presented the event as a vital initiative undertaken to defend the Catholic faith. In a few critical texts, a more systematic defence was undertaken, alleging that the king, in consultation with Epernon, had given orders for 4000 Swiss and other troops to enter Paris, with the aim of executing 120 key Catholic figures under the pretext that they were 'perturbateurs du repos'.⁸¹ Responding to the broader allegation of conspiracy against the person of the king, one pamphlet alleged that if the Guise had wished to kill the king then he had plenty of opportunity to do so during the Day of the Barricades.⁸²

A more emotional technique employed by the League in their defence of the Guises lay in the way in which they exploited the image of bereaved family members, most especially the widow of the Duc de Guise, Catherine de Clèves, and the mother of the Duc and Cardinal, Anne d'Este, Duchesse de Nemours.⁸³ These vulnerable female figures elicited public empathy as well as sympathy, and their image was employed in all media from sermons to placards and pamphlets. The diarist, L'Estoile, reported for instance, the remarks of one preacher in his sermon on 8 January 1589, 'happy is the stomach that carried you [the Duc de Guise] and the breasts that gave you

⁷⁷ *Histoire au vray*, T3r.

⁷⁸ *Les Considerations sur le meurtre commis en la personne de feu Monsieur le Duc de Guyse* (Paris, Guillaume Bichon, 1589), F1r.

⁷⁹ For instance, *De L'Excommunication & censures ecclésiastiques, encourues par Henry de Valois, pour l'assassinat commis és personnes de messieurs le Cardinal & Duc de Guyse* (Paris, Guillaume Bichon, 1589), E2v.

⁸⁰ *Lamentation où petit sermon*, B2v-B4r.

⁸¹ For instance, *Histoire au vray*, p. 86 & *Discours en forme d'oraison funèbre, sur le massacre & parricide de Messeigneurs le Duc & Cardinal de Guyse* (Paris, pour Jacques Varangues, [1589]), B4v. The first half of this work also exists under the title *Histoire des déportemens de Henry de Valois* (s.l., s.n., 1589). On the historical record of this event, see Sutherland, *Henry IV*, p. 183.

⁸² *Contre les fausses*, A4r.

⁸³ The imprisoned Prince de Joinville, son of the Duc de Guise, was evoked in some texts including, *Les Plaintes et doleances du Prince de Joinville fils de tres-haut, & tres-puissant feu Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guyse. Envoyees aux villes Catholiques de la France. Avec le tombeau de Monsieur le Cardinal, & de son frere monsieur le Duc de Guyse* (s.l., 1589).

milk!’⁸⁴ One pamphlet, *Histoire au vray*, told of how Nemours threw herself at the feet of the king and of the Queen mother, begging that she might be permitted to bury the bodies of her children. This request was refused.⁸⁵

The Guise women also took a far more active part in harnessing their grief for use in the Leaguer campaign. The sister of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise, Madame de Montpensier had famously taken a leading role in co-ordinating propaganda efforts in Paris.⁸⁶ Now, in 1589, her female relations embarked on a sustained propaganda campaign of their own. Nemours was responsible for two texts, *Remonstrance faicte par Madame de Nemours à Henri de Valloys avec la Response de Henri de Valloys*⁸⁷ and *Les Regrets de Madame de Nemours*.⁸⁸ These texts were an extraordinarily moving and evocative record of the personal grief of a mother desirous of vengeance for the death of her sons. But this private grief was at once transformed into public mourning. ‘I have lost my children’, she wrote in *Les Regrets*, ‘France has lost its infants, I have lost the consolation of my life, France has lost its support. In the end we have all lost those who were the most zealous in the Catholic faith’.⁸⁹ In these texts, the Duchesse struggled to comprehend the villainous soul that could have killed her two innocent children, whom she had carried in her womb for nine months.⁹⁰ She pleaded for her own martyrdom, saying that it would be better to die than to live with such grief and misery. Catherine de Clèves expressed similar sentiments in *Les Regrets et lamentations faites par Madame de Guyse*, which appeared in no fewer than fifteen separate editions.⁹¹ She wished that she was dead, so that she might once again be united with her husband. ‘O espoux, O espoux’ she lamented. However, she believed that God had a plan for her and would

⁸⁴ L’Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux*, t. III, p. 234.

⁸⁵ *Histoire au vray*, p. 105. The king burned the bodies to prevent their use as relics. This process was not entirely successful. In his dispatch of 2 January, Moncenigo reported that an urn said to contain their ashes became an object of veneration in Paris, Brown, ‘The Assassination of the Guises’, p. 319.

⁸⁶ *CSPF 1588-1589*, passim, L’Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux*, passim.

⁸⁷ *Remonstrance faicte par Madame de Nemours à Henri de Valloys ensemble les Regrets et Lamentations de Madame de Guise* (Paris, Jean des Nois, 1589). This existed in at least ten editions, as a distinct work, appended to other texts and as a placard.

⁸⁸ Anne d’Este, *Les Regrets de Madame de Nemours sur la mort de Messeigneurs de Guyse ses enfans* (Paris, Nicolas Givry, 1589).

⁸⁹ *Les Regrets de Nemours*, A2v.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, B1r-B2r. In a similar vein, Nemours also alleged that Henri III had been guilty of killing his own mother, Catherine de Medici, A3v-A4r. Catherine had died, undoubtedly from natural causes on 5 January 1589.

⁹¹ *Les Regrets et lamentations faites par Madame de Guyse, sur le trespas de feu Monsieur de Guyse son espoux* (s.l., s.n., 1589). It was also reprinted under a separate title, and with other works. Another work also appeared in 1589 under the name of Madame de Guise, *Le Chant douloureux de Madame la Duchesse de Guyse, sur la mort & trespas du feu Monseigneur le Duc de Guyse son espoux* ([Paris], Hubert Velu, [1589]).

not allow her to die before avenging the cruel and traitorous murder of her husband.⁹²

In January 1589, Catherine appealed in a more formal fashion to the Parlement of Paris to investigate the actions of the king.⁹³ Catherine's formal request for a commission was published in at least six editions, all brief octavo pamphlets.⁹⁴ Once again, it stressed her role as the aggrieved widow, and 'tutrice naturelle de ses enfans mineurs'.⁹⁵ Moreover, as with Duchesse Anne's *Regrets*, Catherine also emphasised that the murder of her husband was not only a crime against her but also a crime against the Catholic world; 'toutes nations Catholiques, & toutes les provinces de France', she wrote, 'se sont justement esmeues, comme d'une injure publique, digne aussi d'estre vengée par la force publique'.⁹⁶

The *Requete* was reprinted in the *Arrest de la Court souveraine des Pairs de France*.⁹⁷ It reprinted Catherine's request for the establishment of an inquest into the deaths of the Duc and Cardinal, and included an extract from the register of the Parlement dated 31 January 1589 which established this commission. Two commissioners were appointed to undertake the investigation: Pierre Michon and Jean Courtin. This extract was followed by another, dated 1 February 1589, which spoke of the cruel massacres and the imprisonment of several leading deputies at Blois against all rights of natural liberty. Intriguingly, it also mentioned the establishment of a rival commission set up by the 'murderers' themselves.⁹⁸ All that is known about this alleged royal commission comes from Leaguer propaganda. Two investigations appear to have been established concurrently; one organised by the Leaguer Paris Parlement, the other by Henri III. An expanded edition of the Leaguer *Arrest*, published by Sébastien Nivelles, offers more detailed information. The *Arrest* sought to ensure that the public were aware of the

⁹² *Remonstrance faite par Madame de Nemours à Henri de Valloys ensemble les Regrets et Lamentations de Madame de Guise* (Paris, Jean des Nois, 1589), A4v

⁹³ The registers of the court contain many of the depositions of witnesses. See MS BNF Dupuy 582, ff. 34-45, much of which is contained in 'Documens historiques' t. iii-iv, pp. 193-242. Clèves also appealed to Rome, enlisting the support of Mayenne, the Sorbonne and Paris city officials, who wrote to Sixtus V on her behalf. She even appointed an ambassador, Lazard Coquelay, conseiller in the parlement, to pursue her case. See Richard Cooper, 'The Aftermath of the Blois assassinations of 1588: Documents in the Vatican', in *French History* (1989), vol. 3, no. 4, p. 411.

⁹⁴ *Requete présentée à messieurs de la court de parlement de Paris, par Madame la Duchesse de Guyse* (Troyes, Jean Moreau, 1589).

⁹⁵ Ibid., A1v.

⁹⁶ Ibid., A4r.

⁹⁷ There were at least three editions of this text, emanating from the Court Souveraine des Pairs de France, which was responsible for trying high ranking officials. One, published under the title, *Trois arrests de la Cour de Parlement intervenes sur les requestes présentées par madame de Guise pour avoir justice de l'assassinat commis en la personne de feu monseigneur de Guise* has no known copy, cited in Pallier, *Recherches*, no. 388. The other two, *Arrest de la Court souveraine des Pairs de France, donnez contre les meurtriers & assassinateurs de Messieurs les Cardinal & Duc de Guyse* ([Troyes, Moreau, 1589) and the (Paris, Nivelles, 1589) edition contain variant texts.

⁹⁸ *Arrest de la Court Souveraine* (s.l., s.n.), B3r

‘murderous’ Royalist investigation set up to vent their own ‘furieuse jalousie’, and that the Paris Parlement considered it illegal.⁹⁹ It accused the Royalists of having established this commission only when they realised that the deaths of the Guises were received with such an overwhelming outpouring of public grief. By constructing ‘un forme de proces’, it alleged, the Royalists hoped through ‘procedures manifestement nulls, & faictes par juges notoirement incompetans’ to defame the memory of the martyred brothers.¹⁰⁰ It warned that anyone found aiding the Royalist investigation would be severely punished.

This text leads us very neatly into our discussion of the second critical element in the Leaguer response to the assassinations – the discrediting of Henri III. As the Duchesse de Nemours remarked in her *Regrets* ‘je ne te recognois plus pour mon Roy, ains pour meurtrier’.¹⁰¹ One of the most striking aspects of the Leaguer literature was the criminalisation of the Crown-sanctioned assassinations, with attention paid to the psychological portrait of the criminal, Henri III, who was almost always referred to after December 1588 as Henri de Valois. Great emphasis was placed on the very significant fact that there were no formalities of justice employed in the killings at Blois. The charges of conspiracy against the Guises were brought only after their deaths, there was no trial and no public execution. The act was committed in the privacy of the king’s chamber. It was not the king’s place, noted one pamphlet, to usurp the privileges of Jean Rousseau, the Paris executioner.¹⁰² The language of crime, with phrases such as ‘homicides royaux’¹⁰³ and ‘cruelle fellonnie’,¹⁰⁴ is abundant in this literature.

The events at Blois were considered by the League as the most serious of all crimes – treason.¹⁰⁵ While it was alleged that Guise had conspired against the king, the Leaguer pamphleteers replied with a series of allegations against the royal accuser. The history of Henri’s reign was narrated, particularly his support of Protestantism at home and abroad. His secret treaties with foreign Protestant powers were recalled to his disadvantage, most especially his pro-English foreign policy and close relationship with the ‘Jezabel’ of England, Elizabeth I, ‘ennemie mortelle, & fléau des Catholiques’.¹⁰⁶ This emphasis on Henri’s tarnished loyalties built upon one of the most significant and radical themes of pre-Blois Leaguer literature: the tragic example of England as a state ruled by Protestants where Catholics lived in fear of their lives, a state which had imprisoned and

⁹⁹ *Arrest de la Court Souveraine* (Paris, Nivelles, 1589), C2r.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Les Regrets de Nemours*, B3r.

¹⁰² *Discours en forme d’oraison funèbre*, A2v.

¹⁰³ For instance, *Les Cruautez sanguinaires*, A3v.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, L’Estoile, *Les Belles figures*, Placard XVII, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance, *ibid.*, placard XVI, pp. 39-44.

¹⁰⁶ *Les Considerations sur le meurtre*, B1v.

then executed a legitimate Catholic monarch, Mary Queen of Scots.¹⁰⁷ The Leaguer literature before Blois had been reasonably subtle, or covert, in its accusations against the king. However, following the murder of the Duc and Cardinal, allegations of Henri's complicity in the murder of Mary were made openly.¹⁰⁸ One text even went so far as to point out that Henri's killing of the Duc and Cardinal was worse than Elizabeth's execution of Mary Queen of Scots. At least Elizabeth, it suggested, had proceeded by law in her treatment of the Scottish Queen, which is more than could be said for Henri's criminal act.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, those who carried out the assassinations were held to be as culpable as the king. They too were traitors.

The motivations of the king in ordering these assassinations came under close scrutiny, in an attempt to discredit and vilify him. The behaviour of the king was understood in terms of uncontrolled furious passions, a frenzied madness. The king had lost control of himself. Descriptions frequently employed against Henri included 'furieuse', 'enragé', 'plein de rage' and 'plein de furie'. Such vicious rage was perhaps most notable in the depiction of Henri's treatment of the corpses. For instance, several placards depicted the two princes lying on the table after their assassination, upon which Henri gleefully feasted his eyes and his angry heart.¹¹⁰ The often repeated story of Henri declaring after the deed had been accomplished, 'je suis seul Roy' was also an important depiction of his descent into madness.¹¹¹ It was such tyrannical excess with wilful disregard for the perceived theoretical limits upon monarchy, that earned Henri the very frequently employed anagram 'O L'Herodes Vilain'.¹¹² At least as frequently, Henri was also compared to Nero, 'sans foy, sans loy'.¹¹³

It is difficult to establish an exact month by month chronology of the circulation of printed publications in 1589. Nevertheless, from the evidence provided by Pierre de L'Estoile in his journal, one critical turning point in their evolution at least is clear.¹¹⁴ Following the decision of Henri de Valois to ally with the Protestant Henri de Navarre in April 1589, Leaguer literature became even further radicalised and venomous. It was at this point that another facet to the depiction of Henri's uncontrolled passions entered into the polemic – allegations of his diabolical activity.

¹⁰⁷ On the treatment and use of the image of Mary Queen of Scots in the Leaguer press, see Alexander Wilkinson, *Mary Queen of Scots and French Public Opinion, 1542-1600* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2004), ch. 4.

¹⁰⁸ For instance, *Contre les fausses*, C2v, [Pinselet], *Le Martire des deux frères*, G3r.

¹⁰⁹ *Response des Catholiques zelés & unis pour la conservation de la religion catholique* (s.l., s.n., 1589), F1r-v.

¹¹⁰ L'Estoile, *Les Belles figures*, placard XIV, pp. 35-36, placard XVII pp. 44-45.

¹¹¹ *Histoire au vray*, M1r and *La Detestation des cruautés sanguinaires et abominables de Henry Devalé en forme de regrets sur la mort* ([Paris], Denis Binet, 1589), B1v.

¹¹² For instance, in *Epitaphes des deux frères*, A3v.

¹¹³ For instance, *Contre les fausses*, B1r.

¹¹⁴ L'Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux*, t. III, from p. 278.

Accusations of devilish conduct had several advantages for Leaguer writers. They neatly connected with the theme of Henri's lack of restraint and strengthened Leaguer attempts to overcome the sanctity of his kingship, building on allegations of Henri's pro-Protestant persuasions. Such accusations manipulated well worn Catholic stereotypes of the Huguenots which associated 'la nouvelle religion' with atheism, sorcery and sexual deviance.¹¹⁵ Phrases employed by authors included 'damnable', 'diabolique' and 'malefices'. It was suggested in one pamphlet that Henri was the new Herod, forewarned not by Mages but by magicians.¹¹⁶ This diabolical theme often had a sexual dimension. In a few texts, Henri was accused of having raped nuns.¹¹⁷ For the most part, however, it was his feminine side which grabbed the attention of polemicists. Henri was frequently referred to as the 'last of the Valois'; he was portrayed as impotent and effeminate.¹¹⁸ There were also coy allegations of his homosexual relationship with his mignons, especially the Duc d'Epemnon. In most texts, this behaviour was referred to fairly discretely. For instance, the *Discours en forme d'oraison funèbre* noted very simply that Henri enjoyed spending time with his favourites.¹¹⁹

One of the principal obstacles to the League's vilification of Henri de Valois was his image of religiosity – not only the sacral nature of kingship, but his intense public devotion epitomised in his participation in processions and the founding of the blue and white penitents.¹²⁰ One of the most frequently employed methods of undermining this image was the exploitation of the theme of deception.¹²¹ In short, Henri's faith was presented as nothing but outward display, faith manipulated for political ends as promoted by Aristotle and Machiavelli. It was an accusation that had been commonly employed in Catholic literature since the 1560s against 'politiques', those who had advocated the pragmatic toleration of Protestantism. Henri, then, was a chimera, a wolf disguised as a sheep,¹²² wearing the mask of a saintly and catholic life to conceal his duplicitous soul.¹²³ The woodcut (figure 1) brings out this theme extremely well. Henri, represented as a devil, can be seen with a stick rather than staff of office in hand. Still clutching images of his feigned devotion, he has turned his back on the penitents, while he presides over the assassination of the Duc and Cardinal. To the right can be seen the

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of these stereotypes in the polemic of the 1560s, see Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print. Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot, 2002).

¹¹⁶ *Contre les fausses*, D4r.

¹¹⁷ L'Estoile, *Les Belles figures*, placard XVI, pp. 39-44

¹¹⁸ On Henri's effeminacy, see for instance L'Estoile, *Les Belles figures*, placard XV pp. 36-38, and [Pinselet], *Le martire des deux frères*, B2r & F1r.

¹¹⁹ *Discours en forme d'oraison funèbre*, B1r.

¹²⁰ [Procession of Penitents Blancs 25 March 1583 – woodcut see Blois cat. p. 111. [21 march]

¹²¹ On this theme of duplicity, see Bell, 'Unmasking a King'.

¹²² *Response faicte à la déclaration de Henry de Valois sur l'innocence par luy prétendue de la mort de Messieurs de Guyse* (s.l., s.n., 1589), B2r.

¹²³ *Les Considerations sur le meurdre*, A3v.

imprisonment of two leading Leaguers, undoubtedly Charles, Cardinal de Bourbon and Pierre d'Épinac, the Archbishop of Lyon. Henri, the League maintained, wore his mask so well that it was not surprising that so many were taken in by his appearance. The most developed expression of this argument was contained in a pamphlet entitled *De l'Excommunication* which pointed out how only some well advised people were aware of his duplicitous behaviour from the beginning.¹²⁴

The most potent example of Henri's duplicity was the assassinations at Blois. Many Leaguer texts felt that the whole event was a stage on which Henri had long intended to carry out the removal of the Guises, and that all appearance of an attempted reconciliation during the Estates was simply an underhand ploy, a pretext.¹²⁵ The Estates met with public assurances that notables could come together 'en toute liberté, & sans peril'.¹²⁶ Moreover, in open session, Henri had made every show of embracing the policies of the League. Henri had promised that he would pursue the heretics, declaring Henri de Navarre guilty of Lèse-majesté.¹²⁷ He had, moreover, recognised the legitimacy of the League, even pardoning its alleged 'faults', including the resistance at Paris on the Day of the Barricades.¹²⁸ But nowhere was the king's duplicitous behaviour and cold premeditated calculation clearer than in his dealings toward the Guises. The king's attitude towards the Guise, the pretence of friendship, was emphasised in many of the pamphlets. When Guise, for instance, had been warned that the king intended to take his life, he confronted Henri directly. The king, so it was alleged, replied, 'My cousin – do you think that I have a soul as evil as to wish you ill?'¹²⁹ Assuming the disguise of a friend, the king had lulled the Duc and his brother to their deaths.

Given the League's focus on discrediting the king as a criminal and overturning his image as a man of deep and genuine religious convictions, we might have casually imagined that the assassination of a Cardinal of the Church would have assumed prominence in the Leaguer attack on the king. In fact, the Cardinal received little attention in comparison to his brother. We have already pointed to an important explanation for this; that the image of the Duc as Catholic warrior would have been more appealing to the League at this moment of its history. Another explanation can be found in Rome's reaction to the assassinations.

¹²⁴ *De L'Excommunication*, passim.

¹²⁵ *Particularitez notables concernant l'assassinat & massacre de Monseigneur le Duc de Guyse* (Châlons pour Pierre de Boys = [Troyes, Jean Moreau], 1589), A2v.

¹²⁶ *Contre les fausses*, B2v.

¹²⁷ *L'Histoire au vray*, pp. 92-94.

¹²⁸ *De L'Excommunication*, D2r.

¹²⁹ *L'Histoire au vray*, p. 94. See also *Particularitez notables*, B4v.

Both sides, Royalist and Leaguer, engaged in energetic diplomacy in a determined effort to persuade the Pope Sixtus V to support their cause.¹³⁰ This debate gave prominence to Louis, Cardinal of Lorraine, and the scandal that had occurred when the king raised his hand against an ecclesiastic without the sanction of the papacy. Initially, it must have seemed to the League that the Pope would almost certainly take their side.¹³¹ A few early publications testify to this. Two letters were published, probably in late January or early February 1589, reporting the sadness with which the Pope received news of the death of the Duc and Cardinal and of the imprisonment of the French ambassador to Rome in the Castel Sant' Angelo. The second letter reported the fact that the Pope had called for a meeting of the Congregation of Cardinals so that he could come to a decision about how to respond to this 'accident si horrible & pernicieux'.¹³² The pamphlet urged that the only fitting punishment for Henri III was excommunication. The Bull 'Coena Domini' proscribed excommunication as the penalty for any man who killed, mutilated or imprisoned a Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, or who gave council or favour for such action.¹³³ This same firm expectation that the Pope would excommunicate the king was echoed in other pamphlets, including the *Ordonnance de L'Eglise Romaine*.¹³⁴ Moreover, there was also a strong reaction against those ecclesiastics who had foreknowledge of the Blois murders and yet had done nothing, and against those who had subsequently stood by Henri.¹³⁵

Sixtus V, however, was to be rather more restrained in his attitude towards Henri III than the League might have hoped. The excommunication of a king was not a decision to be taken lightly; intricate politics required careful consideration. Uncertain that the king would not quickly triumph over his opponents, Rome was cautious. To be sure, Rome strenuously denied rumours that Sixtus had condoned the assassinations – tacitly or otherwise. Sixtus V's *Plainte sur la mort* stressed the sanctity of the office of Cardinal and that Lorraine's life had been taken without trial, without any 'judgement', and without the authority of the Pope.¹³⁶ No-one was exempt

¹³⁰ Richard Cooper, 'The Aftermath of the Blois assassinations'. See also Sutherland, *Henry IV*, pp. 239-246.

¹³¹ Henri III may also have had strong reason to expect Rome's support. He may have been aware of the Pope's incredulous reaction to the Day of the Barricades when Henri failed to dispatch the Duc de Guise when he had the opportunity. See Sutherland, *Henry IV*, p. 181.

¹³² *Extraict de deux lettres, l'une du neufiesme, l'autre du dixiesme jour du mois de janvier, envoyées de Rome par ce dernier ordinaire* (s.l., s.n., 1589), A3r.

¹³³ Ibid. In *Coena Domini* was 'a famous bull of uncertain origin', see Sutherland, *Henry IV*, p. 240, fn. 32.

¹³⁴ *Ordonnance de l'Eglise Romaine, extraicte du Sisiesme des Decretalles de Boniface huitiesme* (Paris, s.n., 1589), A4r-v.

¹³⁵ [Gilbert Genebrard], *Excommunication des ecclésiastiques principalement des evesques, abbez et docteurs, qui ont assisté au divin service, sciemment & volontairement avec Henri de Vallois, apres le massacre du Cardinal de Guyse* (Paris, Gilles Gourbin, 1589), A3r-v & B3r.

¹³⁶ Sixtus V, *Plainte sur la mort de l'Illustrissime Cardinal de Guise, faite à Rome au Consistoire des Cardinaux, par nostre saint Pere le Pape Sixte V* (s.l., 1589).

from divine law.¹³⁷ However, whilst robust in its criticisms and strongly worded, the response was measured. For instance, while mentioning that such a crime could not be left unpunished, it did not specify what this punishment should be. As with the *Extraict de deux lettres*, Sixtus' *Plainte* left a path open for reconciliation. The Papacy attempted to tread a difficult diplomatic path which favoured the League but did not completely burn its bridges with the French Crown. This diplomatic caution of the Papacy was displayed most keenly in May 1589 when Sixtus V issued his famous *Moritorium*. While robust in its criticisms of Henri, the *Moritorium* focused on the ecclesiastical prisoners, Charles, Cardinal de Bourbon and the Archbishop of Lyon.¹³⁸ The *Moritorium* gave the king thirty days to release the prisoners, otherwise excommunication would result. The prisoners were not released, but no official Bull of excommunication was ever issued. The *Moritorium* may have been published by the League under the provocative title *Bulle de Sixtus V contre Henri de Valois*. Nevertheless, its moderate and cautious tone stands in marked contrast to the virulence of the rest of the Leaguer literature. If the Papacy had taken a more consistently harsh line against Henri III, far greater attention would have been paid to the martyrdom of the Cardinal in Leaguer polemic and greater use employed of the image of the Pope in any justification for the rebellion.

Conclusion

Henri III had launched a very limited information campaign following the assassinations of the Duc and Cardinal de Guise, targeted specifically at the nation's political leaders. Yet, for many of these notables, the events at Blois were simply final proof of Henri's inabilities as a ruler. The rebellions of 1588 and 1589 attracted widespread support from all sections of the population, with the League exploiting every medium at its disposal to articulate and channel this dissatisfaction with the unorthodox policies of Henri III. The king was to pay dearly for his failure to take sufficient account of public sentiment. With almost all of France's major cities in Leaguer hands, Henri III and Royalist forces besieged Paris in an attempt to regain control of the situation. They quite rightly identified Paris as the critical pivot in the Leaguer structure. All Leaguer cities looked to the Seize in Paris for advice and leadership, while the Parisian presses played a pre-eminent role in the promotion of a unified identity for the movement. The

¹³⁷ Ibid., A2v.

¹³⁸ Sixtus V, *Bulle de N.S.P. Pape Sixte V. contre Henri de Valois* (Troyes, Jean Moreau, 1589), B1r.

Royalists, however, were not to realise their goal of overcoming and securing the capital. On 1 August 1589 at Saint Cloud, just west of the capital, a 23 year old Dominican monk named Jacques Clément, convinced of the righteousness of the Leaguer cause, stabbed and killed the king. In the capital, where Leaguer propaganda had emboldened the public resolve to hold out against the Royalist siege, news of the king's assassination was greeted with general celebration. Whereas the Duc and Cardinal de Guise were the people's princes, honoured and mourned following their deaths, Henri's assassination would be marked in an altogether different fashion. The Duchesse de Montpensier and the Duchesse de Nemours toured the city proclaiming the good news - 'Le tiran est mort!'¹³⁹

¹³⁹ L'Estoile, *Mémoires Journaux*, t. IV, p. 4.