THE IMPENETRABLE *PERSONA:* THE ONE THOUSAND FACES OF THE LAST
VALOIS KING, HENRI III OF FRANCE

By

Niklous Charles Koehler

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ABSTRACT

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"*J'aime les natures temperées et moyennes,*" avowed Montaigne in his *essai* on
moderation, and as if he were tutored by this famous moderate, Henri III of France strove
to live his life in that manner, in the middle, ambivalent, but in the end he discovered that
trying to please everyone pleases no one. The middle road was not one to take during the
Wars of Religion. He was a womanizer and an impotent hermaphrodite, a devout
Catholic and an atheist, a debauched *bon vivant* and an ascetic, a unscrupulous spider and
a peacemaker. He was an anointed king, a quasi-divinity, and killed at the hand of a
devout Catholic. Here we will discuss King Henri III of France as a *persona* and the link
between his sexual ambiguity and political ambivalence. I will be discussing him both as
a historical political leader and as an avatar of the transgressive and situating him in
terms of masculinity and gender norms in order to uncover parallels between his political
and sexual *persona*. He is a kaleidoscope personality that inspired heretofore-unseen
vitriolic attacks and embodied the contradictory nature of France during its Wars of
Religion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

King Henri III of France was a man of nuance and of contradiction and thus whose public *persona* is difficult to penetrate. The last Valois king was and is seen as an ambivalent historical figure, both in terms of his politics, his religion, and his sexuality. He was a womanizer and an impotent hermaphrodite[1], a devout Catholic and an atheist, a debauched *bon vivant* and an ascetic, an unscrupulous spider and a peacemaker. He was an anointed king, a quasi-divinity, and killed at the hand of a devout Catholic.

Born into the fervently Catholic Valois family, at the age of ten, he was branded (and even called himself) "*le petit Huguenot*" (Chevallier, 37). Though later as king, he showed himself perfectly and sincerely Catholic (and we should not read too much into the easily influenced caprices of a young boy), this label reflects his pronounced changeability from a young age. It demonstrates his inclination towards non-conformity and the tenuous relationship between the disparate faiths during the middle of the sixteenth century. In terms of politics, after seemingly abjuring the Protestant faith, Henri III supported the Catholics (and may have played an active role) in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, but he was later excommunicated by Pope Sixtus V for supposed tacit support of the Huguenot cause and having ordered the deaths of Cardinal Louis de Guise and his brother, Henri I, Duc de Guise, both leaders of the Catholic opposition to his rule (Chevallier, 37). Henri III was a *politique,* meaning that like his mother, Catherine de Medici, he sought to steer a middle road between the two camps. In the words of Louis Crompton, "…Henry was highly intelligent, charming people with his

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[1] As seen in *L'Isle des hermaprodites*

affable and courteous manners and, in an age of fanaticism, remaining moderate and conciliatory, a trait that drew Montaigne and L'Etoile to his side…" (Crompton, 329). His desire to pacify the Huguenots and placate the ultra-Catholic *Ligueurs* and inability to do so satisfied nobody. Trying to please everyone pleases no one.

Like his politics and religion, Henri III's sexuality has been seen as at least ambiguous. He had many mistresses, though never named one *maîtresse en titre*. He was so infatuated with Marie de Clèves that he even planned to have her forcibly divorce from her Protestant husband, Henri, Prince de Condé. She died before his scheme could be carried out, and the future king contented himself in a marriage to Louise de Lorraine, said to greatly resemble Marie de Clèves. The union produced no children. Ever contradictory, Henri surrounded himself with a group of athletic, handsome, and yet effeminate favorites, who became known as his *mignons*. From a young age, Henri had eschewed the more martial activities of his peers and preferred to spend time reading history and poetry. He broke the codes that governed gendered fashion, appearing at court wearing strings of pearls and "velvet bonnets like the whores in the brothels" (Crompton, 329).

His political ambivalence seems inherently linked to his sexual ambivalence. Did his nonconformity to the standards of masculinity of the period affect his political life, and moreover, how does his sexual ambiguity inform his political ambivalence? What concerns us here is less who he *actually* was but rather who he was in terms of *persona*, meaning his social façade as well as his representation in fictional and nonfictional works. We are looking to investigate the link between his political ambivalence and his sexual ambiguity. We are thus interested in him as both a political figure and as an avatar

of the politically transgressive and situating him in terms of masculinity and gender norms. According to Pierre Chevallier, writer of the seminal work, *Henri III, roi shakesperien*, he was probably the most capable and most intelligent king that France would see during the sixteenth century, so, doubtless, his inability to embody the ideal hegemonic masculine had at least some effect. "*Quand Henri I de Pologne devint Henri III de France, y avait-il déjà quelque chose de pourrie au royaume des fleurs de lys? Cousin germain…d'Henri VI d'Angleterre par sa piété, sa devotion et son inclination pour les religieux, ce furent les circonstances autant que sa personne et les responsabilités propres des ses sujets qui firent de Henri de Valois, sur le théatre politique, un personnage shakespearien*" (Chevallier, 705). He is a kaleidoscope personality that inspired heretofore-unseen vitriolic attacks against a reigning king and embodied the contradictory nature of France during its Wars of Religion. We are therefore looking to analyze the link between his ambivalent *persona* and exactly how this may have contributed to his disastrous reign and sudden death.

There has recently been much scholarship on the subject of Henri III both as a historical figure who existed in reality and as a character constructed by the changing discursive approaches to representation, but it is so far unclear if there has been a true link between Henri III's sexual and political ambivalence and between his private life and his reign. Indeed, some, such as Jacqueline Boucher and Pierre Chevallier, unreservedly reject the notion that Henri III had in any way an ambiguous sexual orientation. Although Chevallier's biography of Henri III is an impressively detailed work and is considered to be the most authoritative on the subject, it is somewhat lacking in taking fully into

consideration the fact that homosexuality as an identity did not yet exist and would not for another four hundred years.

Chevallier contends that Henri III was not in fact homosexual but allows for neither the idea that he may not have been exclusively homosexual (i.e. somewhere on the queer spectrum), nor does he fully take into account Renaissance masculine sexuality. If exclusive homosexuality, or what we would in today's terms call *gay*, did not exist as an articulated identity, it is difficult to assume that Henri III would adhere to today's archetype of the gay male. The thought of living a life of exclusive homosexuality is as impossible for an early modern to conceive as that of the telephone or the internet. The notion did not exist. Therefore, dismissing that possibility that he be homosexual is reductive and misleading. Henri III was not *gay* because *gay*(ness) did not exist, but one could still perform homosexual acts and act in a manner that did not conform to the masculine ideal of the time.

Furthermore, Chevallier contends that due to the fact that Henri III was married, had numerous mistresses, and that he and his entourage (even the *archimignons,* La Joyeuse and d'Epernon) reportedly enjoyed the company of prostitutes, he and his *mignons* did not commit homosexual acts. This approach, however, does not consider the possibility that Henri could have enjoyed sexual acts with both sexes and misunderstands masculine sexuality of the late sixteenth century. According to Joseph Cady, while there may have been some knowledge within the *Zeitgeist* of a tendency towards what was then termed "sodomy," men were still expected to marry and fulfill the societal imperative to procreate. As shown in Crompton's work, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, in the French High Renaissance, the idea existed in society that one could love men, women, or both.

He highlights the poet, Théophile de Viau. Although de Viau was born shortly after Henri III's death, it is probable this notion existed in Henri's time. Crompton notes that de Viau "proposed that men and women should follow their instincts. Théophile endorsed this philosophy in his *First Satire*: 'J'approuve qu'un chacun suive en tout la nature.' For Théophile, the natural included both heterosexual and homosexual desire" (Crompton, 336).

Chevallier dismisses the accusations of the Savoyard ambassador, de Lucinge, because he was the only diplomat to report on Henri III's homosexual proclivities and because the ambassador elsewhere showed himself to be less than trustworthy (Chevallier, 434). Crompton dismisses out of hand Chevallier's contention but does not wholly address the entirety of Chevallier's charge of de Lucinge's unreliability. Crompton notes that de Lucinge's evidence "seriously undermines his thesis that Henry's homosexuality remained latent" (Crompton, 331). He continues, saying that de Lucinge's claim that Villequier first introduced Henry to homosexuality is also found in Jacques-Auguste de Thou, a supporter, in his *Historia sui generis.*

While it is unknown definitively whether Henri–anachronistically–was or was not gay, he must on some level been sexually transgressive based on the sheer number of attacks upon him and his entourage for their supposed sexual deviancy. Whether this transgression were his choices in fashion, the manner in which he comported himself, or latent (or indeed active acts of) homosexuality, the fact remains that Henri and his *mignons* were vilified due to their inability to fulfill the roles that society expected of them.

In order to further investigate Henri III as a *persona,* it will be necessary to look at him through the lens of masculinity studies and gender and queer theory, in addition to metafiction. Studies of masculinity are concerned with many different aspects of the male and his relation to society and the world around him, all of which will help to better inform us of Henri III's character and *persona*, specifically the variation within it.

Moreover, the notion of hegemonic and subordinate masculinity is essential to this study of Henri III. Hegemonic masculinity is characterized as the ideal male, or as defined by R.W. Connell as "the dominant form of masculinity which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of the patriarchy," (in Foyster, 4) meaning the idealized male that can combat any and all revolts against the established male order. Subordinate masculinity is understood as those "whose crime is that they undermine the patriarchy from within or discredit it in the eyes of women. Sometimes an entire persona is demonized…sometimes specific forms are singled out," (i.e. the homosexual or the cuckold) according to John Tosh (in Foyster, 5). Henri III occupied the throne, the most powerful powerful in the land and by its very nature/a priori hegemonic, but if Henri III does not fulfill the image of the perfect man, how does this affect his reign? The idea of hegemonic masculinity will help in understanding the nature of his interactions with men that do embody this idealized male, namely Henri, Duc de Guise and Henri, King of Navarre. If Henri III were seen to be a sodomite, an effete, a subordinate male, his perceived weakness in comparison to others in the kingdom surely would affect his reign.

Masculinity studies can be seen as an offshoot of gender studies, so there will be some definite overlaps; however, rather than it being a problem, the overlaps in

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masculinity and gender theory will help in understanding Henri III, namely the notion of performative gender put forward by Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble* she explains that there are certain attributes assigned to each gender and these are maintained by social pressure. Gender is thus "the stylized repetition of acts." One is male because one acts male. Because of gender's essential mutability, gender becomes nothing more than a "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions" (Butler, 178). A person is taught to exhibit certain characteristics based on their supposed gender, which in turn become internalized; gender is not, therefore, a choice. Though mutable and changing, gender is something that is foisted on the individual, and the individual is obliged to continue the performance, as society wants it to.

As previously stated, there are large overlaps when it comes to masculinity and queer theory, but in some important areas, there are distinctions. At the most basic, queer theory holds that gender is not necessarily an essential part of self and that gender is in fact a social construct, rather than an innate attribute. David Halperin describes *queer,* thusly:

> "Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative…It describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be declined in advance" (Sullivan, 43).

Queer as an identity, therefore, could be taken to mean anything that is not normal, or in the case of Henri III, a subordinate masculine. The possibility of characterizing him as something other than normal will help in comprehending his ambivalent *persona*.

In terms of transgression, a notion fundamental to this study, Sullivan notes that "the punishment or stigmatization of so-called 'unnatural' actions and identities is everywhere apparent in our society and functions to reaffirm or naturalize that which is held to be 'normal'" (Sullivan, 84). If, then, there is no dichotomous set of genders, everything one does is performance, which is based on what society expects. Specifically concerning males, in general, they "are perceived as 'normal' when they repetitively perform gestures and displays like athleticism, toughness, emotional stoicism, domination, and heterosexuality. They are perceived as 'not normal' when they repetitively perform gestures and behaviors that are socially constructed as non-normative" (Phillips, 516). In today's terms, a boy that excels at football, refrains from crying when hurt, and pursues girls is celebrated, whereas a boy that transgresses society's expectations and prefers reading to sports and would rather be friends with girls than to pursuing them romantically is derided. What does this mean for Henri III? In Henri IIIs time, what impact would a bookish and by most accounts effeminate man have on his life and reign?

French kings of the sixteenth century occupied a temporal and essential space of transition from feudalism to absolutism. The monarch's role was also evolving. The king's reliance on his lords' fealty and obedience (especially concerning taxation and warfare) of earlier times was much less pronounced even by the dawn of the century and

the reign of Louis XII, but that is in no way to say that any of them were in any way absolute monarchs. According to Howell Lloyd, while the monarch did indeed wield immense power of their subjects, "the monarch acted rather as a patron and arbiter than as would-be autocrat surging towards 'absolutist' forms of rule" (Lloyd, 4). The French Renaissance king was an amalgam of divergent inclinations. He was at once a warrior and a poet, immoderate and temperate, extravagant and frugal. Especially in regards to masculinity, Renaissance kings were the example to follow and the trendsetters for the kingdom, and yet there were limits to his actions. He was to be the paragon of virtue and the quite literal incorporation of both France itself and its Gallic Church. The Renaissance king had to walk the tightrope of endeavoring to augment the power of the crown, while otherwise staying in the bounds set by tradition and the expectations of the gentry.

Because of this transition and evolution, the monarchy and the monarch himself had an ineffable quality, concerning in particular the role of and nature of the king. There was no fixed archetype of kingship. Although there was no static model for kingship, that is not to say that there were no constraints or limitations to his actions and comportment. Each king was obliged to navigate through the ever-changing political landscape in his own way, some with better results than others. François I did this very well; Henri III did not. What did François I do that Henri III did or could not? As ambivalent as Henri III was, the contradictory and uncertain nature of the French monarch should have been the perfect *milieu* for him to step into. What I will show here is that he was both unable to fulfill some expectations of a king and incapable to foresee or to recognize the limitations to his power and to his position as king.

We must first understand the link between Renaissance masculinity and moderation in order to better appreciate Henri III's inability to balance the desires and needs of the court and his own personal desires for personal seclusion. Central to this conversation are the nature of kingship and role of the monarch during the Renaissance period and its relation to masculinity, as well as, the crown's growth in power and the role played by the interplay of the public and private life. We will therefore first discuss Renaissance this interplay and its relation to kingly privacy, followed by a discussion of Henri III's immoderate ways and Henri III's shortcomings in fulfilling what was expected of a Renaissance monarch.

We are looking to investigate the *persona* of Henri III and the effect that it had on his reign. Firstly, we will seek to understand his *de jure* and *de facto* power and the role he was supposed to fill. His inability to fulfill that role may have had implications in his troubled rule and untimely end. Secondly, we seek to understand the role that moderation played in the life of this immoderate king. And thirdly, we will analyze the changing ideal of the hegemonic masculine in the late sixteenth century and the effects that this evolution played.

CHAPTER ONE : *CHRISTOMIMETES* AND THE ALL TOO PRIVATE LIFE OF THE LAST

VALOIS

       The profoundly theocratic nature of the France of the *ancien régime* is perhaps

best described in the simple phrase: "*une foi, une loi, un roi.*" Like the man who is said to

have pronounced them, Guillaume Postel, we will attempt to understand the role and

nature of the king by beginning with an explication of the relationship between the

French state, its religion, and its king. The monarch's very ability to distribute wealth and

power was derived from his divine right to be king. His ascension to the throne and

consecration at Reims is an almost apotheosis. "*Avant les guerres de religion, la sainteté*

des rois est un fait qu'on ne discute pas, non plus que l'existence de Dieu" (Yardeni, 17).

With holy oil dating from the reign of Clovis upon his brow, crown on his head, and

scepter in his hand, he represents the fusion of church and state.[2] This *Rex*

Christianissmus had the power to heal wounds and to render justice. "*C'est au nom de*

Dieu que se rend la justice…En son nom se font les lois, inspirées par sa justice…En son

nom, se dressent les bûchers, les gibets, les fourches patibulaires" (Miquel, 8). As an

agent of God, the king was charged, moreover, with the protection of the (Gallican)

Church and, as sworn at his coronation, that he will "be diligent to expel from my land

and also from the jurisdictions subject to me all heretics designated by the Church" (Holt,

8). He becomes God's representative on Earth, and every action of the king and of the

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[2] In a ceremony imbued with symbolism, the unhappy symbolism in Henri III's
coronation did not go unremarked. L'Estoile notes in his journal: "*Quand on vint à lui*
mettre la courronne sur la tête, il dit assez haut qu'elle le blessait; et lui coula par deux
fois, comme si elle eût voulu tomber: ce qui fut remarqué, et interprété à mauvaise
présage"(L'Estoile, 67).

state were *a priori* the actions of God. His power is that of Christ's. "The Christian ruler became the *cristomimētēs*–literally the 'actor' or 'impersonator of Christ'–who one the terrestrial stage presented the living image of the two-natured God" (Kantorowicz, 47). The king had in effect two bodies, one temporal (*corpus politicum* or body politic) and the other spiritual (*corpus mysticum*); he was human by nature and divine by God's grace. He was the physical embodiment of his kingdom (*patria*) and as *cristomimētēs*, the incarnation of the Church. This was perhaps more pronounced in the French monarchy in regards to its relationship with the Holy See of Rome than in others.

The Gallican Church is a concept that disassociates France and its king from other contemporary monarchies and is in many ways an antecedent of the Anglican Church. Although the former acknowledges papal supremacy in some ecclesiastical matters, the French king was in fact the head of the French church. The idea that the French crown was more powerful than the See of Rome in religious matters had existed since the early days of the French monarchy under Pepin and the Carolingians, who fought the Popes in order to restrict their activities to the ecclesiastical and spiritual and to leave the temporal to the king. Later, a series of guarantees was borne out of the struggle between Philippe the Fair and Boniface VIII and set down in the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438) (Holt, 16). The Concordat of Bologna of 1516 under François I later superseded this, but these two agreements established and reaffirmed the rights of the French crown over Papal power within the *patria* of France. At the most basic, these agreements declared the Church of France administratively independent from Rome, most notably in the determination of the appointment of high Church offices. "By thus leveling the Gallican clerics to the status of French nationals the author [of *Antequam essent clerici*] succeeded

in transcending, at least politically, the dualism of the clergy and the laity" (Kantorowicz, 258). In this way, the body politic of France, and the *corpus mysticum* of the *patria*, was set above the will and *corpus mysticum* of Rome. The Gallican liberties guaranteed in these two agreements were more of a separation than the divorce seen in the establishment of the Anglican Church under Henry VIII of England.

The antiultramontanism of the Gallican Church informs how the French monarch (and thus Henri III) and his subjects comprehended their power. The French king was beholden to no one. He was the amalgamated incarnation of the body politic and of the *cristomimētēs*, and thus his power was *a priori* limitless. Other monarchs had to contend with the will of the Holy See, whereas the French monarch could act within his realm as he saw fit. In this way, the king's power was *de jure* without restraints. If he is enforcing the will of an unquestionable god, he too is irreproachable. This, however, was the ideal. There were social, legal, and to some extent, ecclesiastical checks on the king's power. Indeed, for example, in regards to the ontological concept of the king as the combination of the *corpus mysticum* and the *corpus politicum*, "constitutional forces remained alive which limited the royal absolutism" (Kantorowicz, 220). French Parlement, because it was headed by the king, was an agent or proxy for the king that could act in his stead, or rather an extension of himself. The king in principle, therefore, could not interfere with the will Parlement "…because this 'mystical body' [i.e. Parlement] was representative of, or even identical with, the person of the king" (Kantorowicz, 221). Despite the checks upon the king's power, the notion of ruling through God's grace alone informs the way in which French Renaissance kings ruled and their desire for an augmentation to the authority of the crown at the expense of the nobility.

Furthermore, the king served as a symbol, a cultural touchstone, for a people identified as being from one's region rather than from France. The whole of France was incarnated in him. "*L'attachement au sol natal est aussi forme d'expression de l'appartenance à ce Royaume*" (Yardeni, 16). The king, as a symbol for the whole kingdom, was a unifying force for everyday people. A farmer from the Loire valley may be very different than a shepherd from the Alps, but they shared the same king.

In practical terms, the king's power was in the bestowing of honors and offices, salaries and pensions. Since at least the demographic collapse caused by the Black Death, the power of individual nobles had ebbed in favor of the crown. Due to a massive labor shortage brought about by a plague that killed upwards of one third of the European population from 1347 to 1351, landed nobles were driven to attract peasants to demesne land, which provided an income to the former serfs, rather than simply exploiting their labor as before. Without the income that they had previously enjoyed, they were attracted to participation in the royal government, which provided pensions and salaries. These, importantly, were bestowed by the king, which made staying in his good graces all the more important. Furthermore, with the king as the center of power, it was important to be near him in order to have any opportunity for advancement. Those who lacked the standing or were in some way unwilling to attend the king at court were excluded from such opportunities. Nobles increasingly flocked to court in order to reap the rewards due to proximity to the king.

The dichotomy of the public and private life in sixteenth-century France is additionally central to the role of the sixteenth-century king. In general, this dichotomy is best explained in terms of "spheres," the *public* and the *private*. The *public* sphere refers

to what happens outside the house, work and socializing; *private* refers to everything that happens within the house. The *public* sphere was therefore inherently masculine and the *private* intrinsically feminine. In principle, men were able to move through both, but women were relegated to and confined in the *private* sphere. These spheres were intimately linked, as the *private* sphere could greatly affect the *public* sphere. As the ideal marriage was one of complete domination of one's wife, and as an extension the household, the inability to do so was seen as weakness and these men were condemned. In terms of sexuality, this meant guaranteeing the sexual exclusivity of one's wife (and ideally oneself). This is one way that the private sphere could invade the public. Adultery by one's wife caused one to be labeled as a reviled "cuckold." Moreover, stepping too far out from one's expected roles, led to problems. Focusing too much time and energy on the *private* sphere strongly implied femininity when exhibited by a man. Likewise, a woman that enters too much into the world outside of the hearth and home could be seen as loose and wanton.

In relation to kingship, the monarch was expected to be open and accessible to the court. He was the font from which all power and prestige (and of course, money) was drawn, and therefore, royal favor was the foundation of the Renaissance court. However, as Nicholas Le Roux shows, the king had to act as the head of a "*économie familiale de l'Etat,*" meaning that his favor had to be harmoniously meted out amongst his subjects in order to avoid dangerously provoking the ire of his lords (Le Roux, 17). For this reason, the Renaissance monarch stood on the edge of a knife, struggling to balance of his public and private life and the desire for intimacy in a sea of hungry, desirous faces.

Moreover, before the reign of Henri III and Charles IX before him, the French court was largely unsettled; it was an iterant court, meaning that it travelled from place to place, following the king, and he held court wherever he may be. The court was essentially a mobile city of as many as 10,000 people, "a nebula with evanescent edges," that moved slowly across the whole of France (Knecht, 39). Although the court of François I travelled perhaps more than with any other monarch, the trajectory of the general mobility of the court tracked downwards, and by 1560, with the death of Henri II and regency of Catherine de Medici, the court settled increasingly around Paris by 1560 (Knecht, 292).

The court's itinerant nature allowed a great deal of access to the king and the courtly etiquette that would reach its apogee under Louis XIV was only in its nascent stages. One had to have access to the king in order to be able to interact with and receive favor from the king. "…*L'harmonie du corps politique et la fidélité des Français à leur prince dépendent de cette ouverture des faveurs et de la relation directe et familière avec un souverain qui n'exclut personne de sa présence*" (Le Roux, 68). Due to its "evanescent edges" it was likewise impossible to stop the flow of people; any one that seemed decently dressed was allowed to enter (Knecht, 37). This allowed anyone from a *prince du sang* to a lowly, though rich burgher the ability to interact with the king and his court. With no fixed place, it was difficult to have fixed rules. It is no surprise that the rise of courtly etiquette coincided with the nadir of the court's itinerancy under Charles IX and Henri III. The courts increasingly fixedness would allow the creation of rules and regulations at court. In creating these rules, the king becomes less accessible and thus more enigmatic and mysterious. This adds to his power. In an economic system reliant on

access to the king, the more inaccessible the king, the more eager one is to seek his approval and follow the rules set down. There were, however, the ceremonies of the king's *lever* and *coucher* since the reign of Charles V in the middle of the fourteenth century. François I, Henri III's grandfather, created the honorary positions of the *gentilhommes de la chambre* to which he named his favorites. This was not a *de jure* honor like the admission to a chivalric order like the *Ordre de Saint-Michel* (created in 1469) or the *Chevaliers du Saint-Esprit* created by Henri III. It was rather both more and less honorable; it occupied a middle place: One had ready and easy access to the king's person, but it did not include an invested title. A *gentillhomme de la chambre* did, however, receive a sometimes-handsome pension.

Henri III conceived of his power as absolute. He was convinced of his limitless power and just as limitless ability to exercise it as he saw fit. Quoting the *Mémoires de Claude Haton*, Knecht shows that Henri felt that God had chosen him to become the ruler of France so that he could be "the instrument of His glory, the dispenser of His grace and blessing on the infinite number of creatures he had entrusted to his care and protection" (Knecht, 149). With the gradual settling and the institutionalization of royal favor, one can see the growing authoritarianism of the French monarchy. By regulating the location of the gentry and making them increasingly reliant on royal favor, the monarch could more easily exert his power and curb political any machinations against him. What we see during the reign of Henri III is a continuation of this augmentation of the power of the crown. As previously stated, the French king had traditionally been reasonably accessible to the public. Under Henri III, however, this changed. He disliked crowds and was ever fearful of assassination, so throughout his reign he worked to reform the court more to his

own character. As said by Knecht, "Secretiveness was meat and drink to Henry" (Knecht, 284), and this was anathema to the nobility. To them, Henri III's secrecy constituted a breach in the understood practice of an accessible king. For Jean de la Madeleyne, it designated an "*acte d'un tyrant, et non d'un vray Roy, de se monstrer estrange et inaccessible envers ses subjectz*" (Le Roux, 180). Before, under Charles IX, the king worked hard to avoid being monopolized by one group or another; Henri did not. He preferred the company of a hand-selected group of men whose power depended totally on him, the *mignons.*

Moreover, in the same vein, Henri III attempted to solemnize his meals and further separate himself from court, though to less success. Earlier French kings enjoyed no privacy, even at meal times. Courtiers milled about the hall as he ate and could easily approach the king. This allowed the courtiers the illusion of personal intimacy with the king. "As Frenchmen watched him eat, they could imagine themselves sharing his private life" (Knecht, 193). Under Henri III, this changed. As stated earlier, he grew increasingly concerned for his personal safety. The late sixteenth century was a dangerous time both in terms of disease and of assassination. He thus changed the way in which he ate his meals. From 1574, he shared a table with very few people and had a barrier erected to physically separate him from the rest of court. One could neither speak to nor approach the king without first being granted his assent. The prior arrangement had inspired loyalty and devotion to the king, but the erection of the barrier dampened these feelings and baffled the courtiers. This underlined the monarch's superiority to his subjects, even those from families as old as his own, the Valois and broke down the social role that

meals play in everyday life. The barrier caused uproar and eventually had to be removed because of the court's general enmity towards it, though it was later replaced in 1585.

Furthermore, in contrast to earlier kings, Henry III instituted a series of reforms around his personal *chambre* and the ceremonies of the *lever* and *coucher*. Henri III declared in 1574 that his *lever* would be private and could only be attended by at most three or four men. His apartments were reorganized. They were to be made up of a *salon*, an antechamber, an audience chamber, a *chambre d'Etat*, all of which were placed before the king's room, which contained to his *cabinet* and dressing room (Le Roux, 184). This further compartmentalization of his apartments shows that Henri was creating in effect a courtly solar system with himself at the center as the sun. The more Henri favored a person the closer he was allowed. In this manner, access to the king was increasingly restricted to those that he had personally invited. This was designed to further isolate the king from the gentry and to augment his power. By creating an allure of mystery around the person of the king, the monarch became more prestigious and enigmatic. Something that is not easily attainable is naturally something that will cause a person to covet all the more. This was wholly contrary to contemporary French thought. "*Sa majesté…se rendit plus sévère et moins communicative que les rois ses prédécesseurs, ce que la noblesse, n'étant accoutumée à telles façons, trouva fort étrange*" (L'Estoile, 47). The king was doubtlessly more than *primer inter pares*, but it was still unseemly to present oneself as so high above others. If Henri III saw himself as the *cristomimētēs*, something divine, in his eyes it would only be correct that he be removed from the nobles and that their access be limited. If he were Christ's actor or mediator on Earth, then his favor was Christ's favor.

He further isolated himself from the gentry and fixed the court in Paris, but he did this to his own peril. Henri III's new system of increased privacy in the person of the king essentially effeminized him. He entered too far into the *private*, fundamentally feminine sphere and neglected the one he was supposed to inhabit. To his contemporaries, he was not masculine enough to inhabit the *public* sphere and took comfort the warmth and security of a place he was supposed to rule, not rule him. Had he lived in another, less-troubled time, had he been a different man, he may have succeeded. Louis XIV is an interesting analogue. His early reign was too punctuated by sectarian strife, and yet he was able to create a system in which he became the font of all power, the center of France. Indeed as noted by Gary Ferguson, "the majority of the measures that caused so much resentment and were the source of so many problems for Henri III would be accepted at the court of Louis XIV…as proper signs of the king's majesty" (Ferguson, 182).

CHAPTER TWO : EXTRAVAGANT KING, ASCETIC KING: THE IMMODERATE HENRI III OF FRANCE

As stated before, the king, ideally, would be the embodiment of the hegemonic masculine. There is, however, no universal masculinity; like all societal norms, it changes from place to place and evolves with the passage of time, as well as being linked to race, social class, physical (dis)ability, among other distinctions. The masculinity of today's United States is doubtlessly different from that of sixteenth-century France. Masculinity as a construct should thus (as gender is) be considered both spatially and temporally. Just as there is no general, universal masculinity, there is not a universal masculinity for a given space or time; there is a multiplicity of masculinities. According to R.W. Connell, at the most basic, there are four: the hegemonic, the complicit, the marginalized, and the subordinate.[3] In any case, while there is no universal masculinity for any given time or place, we will be focusing here on noble masculinity of the sixteenth century, that is the hegemonic masculine. As king, Henri III should have been its incarnation, but while he was the most powerful person in the country, he did not fit the clearly defined mold.

It should be noted, furthermore, that although relational, femininity and masculinity are not binaries of one another, nor are they altogether hierarchical. To use Cox's phrase, masculinity is not "generic and undefined foil for femininity" (Cox, 11). Manhood is more than just not being a woman. There are rules and expectations that one has to fulfill beyond not acting womanly. Although women were certainly subordinate to

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[3] The hegemonic represents the idealized male, the complicit, which does not share the characteristics of the hegemonic masculine, but often admires it, the marginalized is a man that cannot fully fit the characteristics of the hegemonic due to his race or disability, though can still subscribe to the hegemonic ideal, and the subordinate that undermine the hegemonic masculine archetype

men, certain women were surely superior to certain men depending on their social class, status, or wealth for example. Queen Margot, Henri IV's first wife and Henri III's sister, was thus superior to a peasant farmer.

As central to the conversation of masculinity in the early modern era as the paradigmatic shift from chivalry to erudition is that of the Renaissance notions of moderation and virtue. As shown in Todd Reeser's authoritative work *Moderating Masculinity*, moderation and virtue are intimately linked. The French word *vertu* being an etymological descendent of the Latin word for man (*vir*), and moderation consistently ranked as a cardinal virtue since at least the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, moderation is therefore something that is inherently male.[4] Moderation to the Renaissance man denoted a middle way between excess and deficiency; it was to remain self-disciplined but only to the point that one avoided becoming austere. Be neither the Buddha nor the Marquis de Sade. In short, "*Il n'est en somme aucune si juste volupté, en laquelle l'excez et l'intemperance ne nous soit reprochable*" (Montaigne, I: 30, 248). To be immoderate, then, was to lose oneself in debauchery or in excess. In order to illustrate the prevailing wisdom within the late French Renaissance *Zeitgeist,* we will look to the thought of the time, found in Montaigne's *essais,* and in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron.*

Montaigne's *De la moderation* in large part is concerned with the governance of male sexuality especially within the marriage. In general, however, Montaigne advocated moderation in all things. In the opening paragraphs, he notes that even excess in virtue and even "*vers le bien mesme*" (Montaigne, I: 30, 245) is dangerous. He gives the example of two parents, Pausanias and Posthumius, who oversaw the deaths of their own

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[4] Although moderation is, as stated, inherently male, that is not to say that it was not also an ideal of the gentler sex. Moderation was something for all to strive for.

sons due to their virtuous fanaticism. He notes that "*l'archer qui outrepasse faut, comme celui qui n'arrive pas*" (Montaigne, I: 30, 245). This is Renaissance moderation at its most basic. Immoderation or excess in anything can precipitate frightful consequences. "…*Il s'en voit plusieurs que la passion pousse hors les bornes de la raison, et leur faict par fois prendre des conseils injustes, violents, et encore temeraires*" (Montaigne, II: 19, 330). In *L'histoire de Spurina,* Montaigne gives the tale of Ladislaus, king of Naples, who was so enraptured with lust and ambition after having besieged Florence "*si à destroit*" (Montaigne, II: 33, 391) that they were willing to give him anything, he demanded the most beautiful woman of the city. He was killed by his lusts, by his passions, with a poisoned handkerchief, prepared by the woman's doctor father.

In the same essay, Montaigne spends a long passage lauding Julius Caesar for his justice, his kindness, and his clemency, only to condemn him for his unbound passion for his ambitions. All of Caesar's good and moderate qualities were destroyed by his intemperate passions. "*Mais toutes ces belles inclinations furent alterées et estouffées par cette furieuse passion ambitieuse, à laquelle il se laissa si fort emporter qu'on peut aisément maintenir qu'elle tenoit le timon et le gouverail de toutes ses actions*" (Montaigne, II: 33, 395). In Montaigne's view, had he been able to rein them in, Caesar would not have been turned from one of the most gifted men who ever lived into the abominable megalomaniac that brought about the death of the Roman Republic. When man does not live a moderate life, he risks becoming the slave of his passions and losing his freedom. For Montaigne, life was about movement, be it physical or intellectual, and giving oneself over to unbridled passion was allowing oneself to be bound to those same

passions. Man must, therefore, strive for the *juste milieu*, to be content with himself and his lot.

Moderation and constancy were the ideal for Montaigne, but he did not believe them to be attainable. "*Sauf l'ordre, la moderation, et la constance, j'estime que toutes choses sont faisables un homme bien manque et defaillant en gros*" (Montaigne, II: 29, 367). The mere act of striving for these virtues was a virtuous act in itself. The attempt to live neither excessively nor austerely is an end in and of itself. The endeavor to live moderately is more difficult for some than for others, as Montaigne readily admits, though he is somewhat lucky in that he was naturally a moderate person. Nor was moderation a fixed ideal; it could not be defined in a concrete way; rather, it was abstract, one for each person to find his own *milieu*.

In several pamphlets written toward the end of his reign, Henri III is portrayed as a man that is completely unable to control himself. In *Discours veritable de l'estrange et subite mort de Henry de Valois*, the author, a Dominican monk, describes Henri III as someone susceptible to extreme rages that provoke boundless cruelty. Writing of the siege of La Rochelle of 1572-73, the monk asserts that even Huguenots do not deserve such barbaric treatment. "*Nul aussi ne peut ignorer le vomissement de sa rage exercée sur les villes qu'il a prises de forces*" (Pillehotte, 13), where the city's inhabitants were exposed to the worst cruelties. "*Ou les hommes, les femmes et enfans, nommément les hommes de l'Eglise ont souffert mort cruelle et ignominieuse. Les filles encore en bas aage, et les Religieuses ont esté violees…*" (Pillehotte, 2). The poet André Rossant,

author of a fifty-five quatrain poem,[5] *Histoire memorable recitant la vie de Henry de Valois,* echoes the Dominican's disgust for the king's cruelty during the siege of La Rochelle. This "Henry de Valois" showed no clemency after La Rochelle's capture, because it was not in his character to act moderately. "*Il n'avoit point aucun autre plaisir que de fureur, que de sang, que de rage*" (Rossant, 6). Unlike the ideal, moderate man, Henri allowed himself to be controlled by his emotions, rather than by reason and temperance, and by not being able to govern them, it demonstrated his shortcomings in relation to ruling. An ideal king, (Rossant appears to admire Charles IX) could have curbed his passions and his fury, thereby sparing the people of La Rochelle such torment. "*Les Rochelois estoient du tout vaincuz,/ et ja[6] desia s'apprestoient pour se rendre,/ Mais il ayma beaucoup mieux leurs escuz,/ que les dompter, les ranger, & les prendre*" (Rossant, 7). Because of Henri III's lack of ability to act moderately, the city was subjected to his unrestrained "*furie enragee*" (Rossant, 10).

In these pamphlets, which represent just two examples among hundreds, Henri III of France becomes a distorted, caricaturized version of himself; he becomes Henry de Valois. He is no longer allowed his regnal name; the author is, in effect, denying the fact that Henry III was the rightful ruler of France. What is more is that Henri III is no longer a real person; he is disembodied and refigured into representation of himself that is colored and altered in order to present the more detestable version of him. For Rossant, he is a tyrant, barbarous, and inhuman, and is compared to infamous despots of the past, Nero, Tiberius, and even Pontius Pilate. "*Dés le momement, & l'infortuné iour/ que ce*

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[5] Which he describes as "*pleins de belles sentences, très utiles, & tres-propres à tout le peuple François*" (Rossant, 5)
[6] cf. "*déjà*"

tyran prit au monde naissance/...Il a esté esleué & nourry/ en tous pechez, & voire en heresie,/ que lui avoit son meschant coeur pourry/ & quant & quant son orde ame moisie" (Rossant, 6). He enjoyed "*[se] regorgeãt en vices autant qu'il est possible*" (Pillehotte, 16). Henri III's lack of control and immoderation are at issue and are the main justification for the authors' hate for him. An immoderate man, or worse an immoderate king, is dangerous. Even if he were none of these things, it is telling that the Dominican monk and Rossant described him in this manner. Showing Henri III's supposed intemperate ways, which are contrary to the Renaissance's ideal of moderation, is a means of further shocking their readers and of attracting more people to his way of thinking.

He seemed to alternate from one extreme to the other, great excess followed by extraordinary deprivation. This lack of equilibrium, of moderation, of the *juste milieu* was the foundation of the myriad denunciations of both his character and his fitness to rule. "Henry alternated between bouts of hard work and fits of indolence…Loving fine clothes and extravagant display, and frequently indulging in wild debauches, he did penance so extreme he was accused of living *en capucin*" (Crompton, 328). This juxtaposition seemed odd at best and hypocritical at worst. It raised the question: Was he truly beseeching God's favor to heal the ills of the kingdom or was he atoning for some horrible sin that he had committed? What had he done for which he had to be so remorseful?

This brings to mind *Novel XXV* of the *Third Day* of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*. The issues at the heart of all of the novels of the *Third Day* are principally deceit and hypocrisy (and specifically to the twenty-fifth, that of the prince). The novels

address the daily negotiation of the problem of both detecting disingenuous people and how they should be treated thereafter. In some, there is a clear distinction between the moral and immoral characters, while in others, (such as in *Novel XXV*) there is no easily apparent right or wrong.

The prince (Marguerite's brother, the future François I of France), who was "*le plus beau et de la meilleure grâce qui ait été devant, ni qui, je crois, sera après lui en ce royaume*" (Heptaméron, III, XXV, 253), seduced and regularly slept with a lawyer's young wife. Despite the prince's nightly sinful transgressions, he was still "*craignant et aimant Dieu*" (Heptaméron, III, XXV, 255); accordingly, after his liaisons with the lawyer's young wife, he spent his mornings at prayer to the astonishment of both the monks of the abbey and his sister, who knew that her brother was "*bien mondain*" (Heptaméron, III, XXV, 256). His sister eventually discovered his secret, even though the prince's trickery was so artful that he even managed to deceive a lawyer and the monks of the church who are in her words "*coutumiers de tromper tous autres*" (Heptaméron, III, XXV, 257).

Although the gathering initially applauds the prince for having avoided a scandal, their approval quickly turns to reproach. "*Pensez…que les prières qu'il faisait au monastère où il passait étaient bien fondées!*"[7] (Heptaméron, III, XXV, 257) declared one of the listeners. One of the others responds that if the prince had adequately repented, then God would have forgiven him. However, it is difficult to truly repent for something that gives such pleasure; it can be confessed, but repentance is not an easy feat. Hircan, one of the male listeners, declares that "*le péché me déplaît bien, et suis marri d'offenser*

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[7] In the sense of "Imagine if…!"

Dieu, mais le plaisir me plait toujours…Je vous confesse….que je voudrais que Dieu prît aussi grand plaisir à mes plaisirs comme je fais, car je lui donnerais souvent matière de se réjouir!" (Heptaméron, III, XXV, 257). Géburon remarks that the only way that God would do so is if there were a new God, it would seem; it is, therefore, best to strive to please the one that we have.

If the prince were truly repentant of his acts, his sins would be absolved. The listeners make a distinction between the act of confession and of repentance. Confession, for them, is the simple declaration of one's sins, whereas repentance differentiates itself in that it is the active analysis of one's sins and the feeling of contrition for having committed them. However, the persistent inability to cease committing the same sin brings his devotion into question. If the prince cannot or will not discontinue his liaisons, he is not truly repentant. In this way, Henri III is analogous to the prince in Marguerite de Navarre's story (his grandfather, François I). He was sometimes all too fond of extravagance and other times penitent to the point of self-flagellation.

As an indicative example of his exuberance, we should look to Henri III's love of dancing and ballet and specifically, those he produced, what came to be known as the "*magnificences du roi*." He was a prolific dancer, loving it from a young age, when he was taught by Italian dancing masters. Throughout his life and during his reign, he so delighted in dancing and playing in court performances that one ambassador quipped that he seemed to care more for dancing than for war (Knecht, 132). From the beginning of his reign, in accordance to his orders, ballets were performed at court twice per week, every Monday and Thursday. One of these, organized in honor of the arrival of an English ambassador, cost the huge amount of 30,000 *écus,* not that the crown bore this

enormous price; the cost was paid by the courtiers (Knecht, 212). This pales in comparison to the "*magnificence*" that followed the marriage of his *mignon*, Anne, duc de Joyeuse. Henri appeared as the Sun, the center of the universe and from which all life was possible, appropriating and expanding on the symbology of his older brother, Charles IX, who had appeared as the Sun during the Carnival of 1571 (Knecht, 213). He rode into court on a chariot to bring order to the realm and free a group of men from the enchantress Circe. The symbolic use of the Sun by the French monarchy would continue and reach its zenith under Louis XIV, *le roi soleil*. Le Roux calls the "Magnificence" a "*splendeur inégalée à la cour des Valois*" that cost an estimated "*3 600 000 l.t.*[8] *Destinés à ce que L'Estoile appelle les 'momeries, habillements, danses, musique, mascarades, tournois, et semblables folies et superfluitiés'*" (Le Roux, 487).

This extravagance was coupled with extremes of penitence. Despite his love for secular and worldly pleasures, Henri III was a very religious man. His devotion is evident throughout his life and reign. He gave generously to various Catholic charities, endowed monastic houses, and formed new religious confraternities. This form of religious devotion was expected of a king, but it is where devotion meets fanaticism that problems arise. Additionally, if the character of this devotion implies a lack of sincerity, like the prince in the *Heptaméron*, the king risks engendering real hostility in his subjects. "*Et l'assiette d'un homme, meslant à une vie execrable la devotion, semble estre aucunement plus condemnable que celle d'un homme conforme à soi, et dissolu par tout*" (Montaigne, I: 56, 378).

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[8] cf. *livres*

Henri III's seeming need for extremes of penitence are best exemplified in relation to his physical health. Henri was never hale and rarely hardy. From a young age, he was afflicted with frequent maladies, such as hemorrhoids, kidney stones and digestive problems. Some contemporaries thought his illness was related to the *mal francese*, or syphilis, but because of the illness's recurrent nature, Chevallier contends that it was an extrapulmonary form of tuberculosis, the disease whose pulmonary form had killed his brothers, Charles IX and the Duc d'Alençon (Chevallier, 370). "He seems to have identified his own body with the body politic and believed that its purification would bring about the moral reformation of his subjects" (Knecht, 215). The king was the intermediary, the link, a "two-natured Mediator," at once temporal and divine, between Heaven and Earth (Kantorowicz, 92). Upon his anointment, he became both *rex imago Dei* and *rex vicarius Dei,* the image and vicar of God. The former is related to the king's essence, whereas the latter "referred primarily to his Doing" (Katorowicz, 89). Any action of the king for the betterment of the realm was an act of mediation between Earth and Heaven. Therefore, through his intercession, Henri III could beseech God for mercy and blessings upon both his person and his realm. As such, and coupled with the sterility of his marriage to Louis de Lorraine, from 1579 to 1586, the king sought out nonmedical remedies from God and through the intercession of the saints (especially from the Virgin Mary) by going on pilgrimages to various holy sites and participating in religious processions. The principal reason for doing so "*venait du désir passioné du couple royal d'avoir des enfants et avant tout un dauphin*" (Chevallier, 373), especially after the death of the Duc d'Alençon. In February 1579, they walked from Olainville to Chartres to implore the intercession of the Virgin in hopes of having a child, for example, and in

October 1575, the king walked in a ceremonial procession that carried the relics of Sainte-Chappelle (Knecht, 215).

At the beginning of his reign, these demonstrations of piety seemed appropriate and respectable to members of the court, but this feeling soon changed, as they saw Henri III and his *mignons* waver from foppery to austerity. The change from respectful indifference by his subjects to outright derision is best illustrated after the establishment of the Congregation of the White Penitents of Our Lady's Annunciation in the March of 1583. With the help of a Jesuit priest, Fr. Edmond Auger, Henri III founded the confraternity with the aim of the "spiritual enhancement of the brethren" and to seek God's assistance in the governing of the kingdom (Knecht, 216). At the following Holy Thursday, Henri III and the *mignons* went in procession from the Church of the Grands Augustins to Notre Dame Cathedral, walking bare-foot under white hoods, holding torches, and singing psalms and hymns; their backs showed signs of self-flagellation (Knecht, 216). This was highly criticized. One critic was said to have quipped that Henri and the *mignons* would have found more pleasure if they had aimed their flails lower (Crompton, 331).

Henri III's immoderate character and inability to live a moderate life was a main catalyst for the rampant hate for him. He was unable to fulfill this masculine Renaissance ideal and in doing so caused him to seem womanly and capricious. This was not the whole reason for him to end his life so hated, but the hatred for him was in large part due in some way to his immoderate nature. Henri's inability to maintain equilibrium provoked problems, likewise, in satisfying his role as king, namely in terms of balancing

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out the public life of the king and his desire for privacy which we will explore in the next

section.

CHAPTER THREE : FROM WARRIOR TO DANDY : FAVORITISM AND FOPPERY IN THE COURT OF HENRI III OF FRANCE

As important to penetrating the *persona* of Henri III as Renaissance moderation and the role the king played at court and in French society is the favoritism and foppery of Henri III. Throughout his reign, the king's *mignons* were the subject of just as much (if not more) derision, scorn, and contempt. These men had usurped the expected and due power of some of the most powerful families in France (and we shall see later the reasons as to why a king would desire this). They were not warriors from old families; they were new money, *nouveaux riches*, upstarts that had won position not through masculine pursuits, but through erudition and wittiness, in short, through being able to please the king. The choice of relatively minor nobles in the place of more well established families struck at the heart of the French court and is in large part related to the paradigmatic shift in French nobility, from warrior to courtier.

In the previous section, we described the changing role of the French monarch in respect to his public and private lives and Henri III's problematic relationship with moderation. Related to each is the question of the ineffable quality of Renaissance masculinity. A man was supposed to be virtuous and moderate, never giving himself over to emotion. Here we aim to analyze the dichotomous distinction of the warrior and the courtier and the role this split played in the French court of the late sixteenth century. The sixteenth century is in many ways the middle step between the warrior and the courtier, the gallant knight and the sycophantic fop. In order to do so, we must first understand the traditional warrior and the transition to and ultimate supplanting by the courtier. This will

allow us to better apprehend the implications that this paradigmatic shift had on the reign of Henri III of France. The *essais* of Michel de Montaigne will again be essential.

Masculinity in sixteenth-century France was a time of transition, flux, and paradox, of adoption, resistance, and integration of a new kind of masculinity. What was at odds was nothing less than the whole notion of aristocratic masculinity. "The transmutation of knight into courtier or gentleman is one of the central problems for the…Renaissance" (Cox, 8). With the growth in interest in Italian humanism, French knights were increasingly pressured to eschew wholly martial pursuits, across the sixteenth century but increasingly as the seventeenth neared. They were to become less of a warrior and more of a courtier. Hunting, tournaments, and warfare were indeed never far during the turbulent sixteenth century, but increasingly, the behavioral paradigm of chivalry gave way to a new refined way of knightly comportment. Hunting and warfare never really fell by the wayside, but after the death of young, healthy Henri II in 1560 of a jousting accident, tournaments increasingly disappeared. Bellicosity was recast by many (among them, Sir Thomas More and Erasmus) as provincial and rustic, whereas education and refinement were the true signs of nobility. But only to a point. Even Montaigne, a man famed for his erudition stated "…*ce que je ne croy pas, ny ce que d'autres ont dict, que la science est mere de toute vertu, et que tout vice est produit par l'ignorance. Si cela est vray, il est subject à une longe interpretation*"[9] (Montaigne, II: 26 105).

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[9] "That which I don't believe, nor what others have said: that knowledge is mother of all virtue, and that all vice is product of ignorance. If that is true, it is subject to a long study."

To say that masculinity was in flux in the sixteenth century is not to say that there were not norms to which men were to adhere. At the most basic, men were to be the head of the household, managing their wives, children, and servants. To Elizabeth Foyster, writing about early-modern England, gender roles during the early modern period were wholly founded on dominance and subordination. The privileged man had complete power over his household, but if he was seen as powerless to do so, this hurt him immensely in social standing.

The Renaissance notion of honor and reputation are closely linked to masculinity. Foyster notes that the gentry "saw public office as a way to gain honor" (Foyster, 37) and that the "concept of honor remained a useful political tool for the gentry to enforce and explain the social order" (Foyster, 33). They conceived of honor in the form of a pyramid, with the king, from whom all honor flowed, at the top, the nobility and clergy just below, and the rest further below. Those of inferior status were expected to honor those above (Foyster, 33). Foyster shows that honor, credit, or good name "could be earned if men exercised these male qualities of reason and strength in an approved way" (Foyster, 31). Like masculinity and gender, honor and reputation are a construct based upon the approval of others and is related to later discussions of moderation. Through a man's self-control, he could demonstrate his moderation and build his reputation.

The growth in importance of the court and of cities, and thus of an early form of capitalism, aided in the construction of this concept. The expansion of the rich artisanal bourgeois class brought about an expansion of an explicitly masculine notion of honor, credit. In a world before the likes of Experian and Transunion, one's reputation was of the utmost importance, for, as shown by Craig Muldrew, "most buying and selling in

early modern society was done on credit…although the literate and wealthier wrote down these transactions, the majority relied on oral promises" (Foyster, 7). Because of the increased interaction with others inherent to living and working in cities, the notion of male honor became ever more critical. A man's word had to be his bond, and therefore, becoming known as dishonest could be devastating; his ability to buy or sell anything valuable would be greatly diminished, as would his ability to interact in society in a meaningful way writ large.

Henri III was in many ways perfectly erudite. He was intellectually curious and read widely. He spoke several languages, including Latin and Italian. From 1576, he began listening to lectures twice a week in what became known as the *Académie du palais*. The *Académie* attracted such luminaries as Ronsard, Guy du Faur de Pibrac, Claude Dorron, and Agrippa d'Aubigné (Knecht, 125). There, he enjoyed arguing over the subtle nuance of canon law and discussing the ancient classics. The *Académie du palais* was not uncontroversial, however. Some felt that it was unseemly for a king to argue in public, and others attended the *Académie* only to curry royal favor not because they relished this form of open discussion. Moreover, the *Académie* was not Socrates' Athens reborn; the king's interlocutors were doubtlessly reticent to publicly disagree with the king. "…The discussions from which Henry hoped to derive so much benefit tended to be artificial. The debates elicited quickness of thought rather than sincerity" (Knecht, 126). They also feared the kings acerbic wit and sharp tongue. He referred to his perpetually deficient younger brother, the Duc d'Alençon, as "my brother the Conqueror," in reference to the duc's failed attempt to take the city of Antwerp in which

nearly his entire army was wiped out (and from which he barely escaped with his life), in a debacle that came to be known as the "*Francese furie,*" or the "French Fury."

Furthermore, Henri III's love of intellectual work spilled out into other areas of his life, namely his in his work ethic. He was an extraordinarily hard worker from a young age, which caused several to remark on the difference between he and his brother, Charles IX (Knecht, 129), who was ever reluctant to attend council meetings, for example. He was hardworking, but it was the manner in which he did his work that was bothersome to his contemporaries. To his detractors, he worked too much which caused him to eschew other responsibilities. He wrote his own personal correspondence and answered huge amounts of petitions and memoranda. Knecht quotes Duplessis-Mornay who reports that "to-day the king, as from 3 a.m. did nothing but write and no one entered his room" (129).

Much of this flew in the face of the traditional class of nobles. The older *noblesse d'épée* was comprised of old warrior families. Warfare, tournaments, and hunting are naturally more appropriate activities for brave and therefore, more masculine men. "These issues struck at the very heart of what it meant to be a masculine knight – in effect, at the aristocratic *man*" (Cox, 4). This older, better-established nobility were of the *noblesse d'épée* and they reviled these changes. The shift from the idealization of the warrior to the erudite courtier was seen as an effeminization of the all of the nobles due to the latter group's pursuit of letters and refinement. These courtiers were chiefly members of the *noblesse de la robe*, which was a relatively new form of nobility, made up by lawyers and court clerks. Real men fought, rather than locking one's self away to ruin one's eyes by reading long-dead Roman poets. Cox finds a pertinent quotation from

Michel de Montaigne in *Du pédantisme*, written in the time of Henri III: "*Les exemples nous apprennent, et en cette martiale police et en toutes ses semblables, que l'estude des sciences amollit et effemine les courages, plus qu'il ne fermit et aguerrit*" (Montaigne, I: 24, 191). Therefore, though the preference for bellicosity was waning, it still held major power in terms of the developing masculinity. It seemed to the *noblesse d'épée* that the humanist courtier was challenging their status and position within the traditional hierarchy of the French court. The courtier had not "won" favor and position in court through heroic, usually martial, deeds; the courtier had gained favor through sycophancy and artificiality. Moreover, the courtier was often a man of relatively low birth, "usurping" the birthright of the traditional noble. Meritocracy is rarely in the interest of those already in power. This usurpation was troublesome even to those who were of low birth and thusly not directly affected. In Rossant's "very wise" and "very useful" quatrains, he reproves Henri III for having "*mesprisé*" and "*dedaigné*" the lords and princes and because he had "*poulsé à ses plus grands honneurs/ Ie ne sçay quels conquineaux & belistres*" (Rossant, 8).

In many ways, Henri III was perfectly masculine, though less so than his contemporaries may have liked. Like other nobles of the time period, he hunted and excelled at sports, like tennis and horsemanship, and especially prior to his accession to the throne, he was an accomplished commander of troops. He seemed to enjoy hunting to a point, when he was in good health. He was a great lover of dogs and hunted with them and falcons, though never for more than a few days. He did not much like being away from the comforts that the Louvre offered him. Henri enjoyed tennis and had learned from an early age the art of fencing. He excelled at it to the point that a visiting

Englishman praised his ability after having seen him fight with three different kinds of weapons during the wedding festivities of one of his *mignons* (Knecht, 130).

Furthermore, Henri III was an able warrior, though this waned after the start of his reign. During the reign of his brother, Charles IX, Henri had commanded the forces besieging La Rochelle and had fought in the victorious battles of La Jarnac and Montcontour (Knecht, 35). He was also implicated in participating in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572. As we have seen, Henri III was maligned for his command of the besiegement and ultimate assault of the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle for its ferocity and deadliness. The problems that arose were due to his withdrawal from military life after his return from Poland. Knecht highlights three possible motives for this: (1) Worrisome about succession, it was ill-advised to risk his life, (2) Henri came to see that further fighting was futile and the only way to heal France's wounds was through sustained peace, and (3) "he was fastidious by nature" (Knecht, 130). Whatever the cause, this withdrawal was perceived as a sign of the king's effeminacy and caused one courtier to quip that the king enjoyed ballet more than war.

From the start of his reign, Henri III had consorted with a group of men that later became known as the *mignons*. These men had primarily accompanied him to Poland in 1573 and upon his return and ascendance to the throne rose quickly to power. Chief among them were Henri de Saint-Sulpice, François d'O, Jacques de Lévis-Caylus, Charles de Balsac, René de Villequier, and François de Saint Luc. The *mignons* served four essential purposes: First, (1) to act as friends and confidants to the king in an ever-growing and fractious court, (2) to demonstrate to the rest of the nobility the "*valeur*

créatrice de la faveur…[10]" (Le Roux, 211), (3) to supplant powerful nobles and the leaders of dominant factions in positions of authority (the Guise), and (4) to create a group of men who were totally loyal to and whose power was wholly dependent upon the king.

His contemporaries saw Henri III as effeminate, especially when his *mignons* are taken into account. He was a fop, and the *mignons*, who were ever quick to curry kingly favor, imitated him in dress and comportment. He was prone to sartorial excess, dressing in brightly colored doublets and wearing large ruffs around his neck. Bright, contrasting colors were in fashion at the time, but Henri seems to have pushed the envelope. Henri III, for example, shocked the court by wearing two earrings rather than the more acceptable *one.* It was common from the middle of the sixteenth century that a man wore jewelry, but like everything it had to be done in moderation. Henri III overstepped the line in this instance and continued to do so elsewhere. He and the *mignons* did follow the fashions of the time, but they were always a step ahead of the rest of court and appeared too *soucieux* of their appearance. They wore powder on their faces, heavily perfumed their bodies, and plucked their eyebrows to a more pleasing shape (Brown, 103). Even Castiglione, the champion of the courtier, reproached this. It was fine that men be pleasant to behold and take a certain care for their appearance but only to a point, after which they are become womanish. At a certain degree the courtier becomes not only womanish, he is reduced to a whore.

From 1576, the *mignons* were beginning to be hated, as shown in Pierre de L'Estoile's journal, and they were already being reproved for their effeminate nature.

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[10] "…*plus le mignon est jeune et de condition moyenne, plus son ascension démontre la puissance royale*" (Le Roux, 211).

They were attacked for their "*accouterments efféminés et impudiques*" and also for the "*ruine*" they precipitated in the realm, from the king to the commoner, "*qu'est l'eau par un conduit*" (L'Estoile, 122). They were further maligned for exactly what Castiglione had cautioned against in a poem that was disseminated throughout Paris in July. The *mignons* "*portaient leurs cheveux onguets, frisés et refrisés par artifices*" (L'Estoile, 122) and wore fur hats like those worn by whores in a brothel, with one becoming an "*impudique Ganimède*" (L'Estoile, 134). Even at this early date, the *mignons* are no longer men; they have been disembodied from their true selves and reconstructed in a manner that they are no longer real. They are in essence mimetic of the king and a symbol for the perceived failure in Henri III's rule.

The effeminacy of Henri III and the *mignons* soon engendered correlation with sodomy. In cases of courtiers that had overstepped their natural roles, it was common for them to be described as having gained their position through the "unnatural," Italian vice of sodomy. How else could they have been raised so high without having resorted to sexual favors? In a sonnet written in 1577, Caylus, a *mignon*, is portrayed in this manner. "*Mais Caylus,…/ Ne trouve qu'en son cul tout son avancement*" (L'Estoile, 154).

In accepting these changes and embodying this new form of courtier, Henri III, even before his reign, is essentially effeminized in comparison to the more traditional nobles. And his chosen favorites, his *mignons,* only aggravated this perception. Favoritism was nothing novel to royalty. David loved Jonathan, Augustus had a favorite in Agrippa, and Henry II of England had Thomas à Becket. What was different for Henri III was both his *persona* and his choice in favorites. The problem was two-fold: first, it

was troublesome that the *mignons* were from relatively lowly noble stock, and secondly,

their "effeminacy" only served to undermine Henri III's already ambivalent masculinity.

CONCLUSION

Henri III occupied a central temporal space between feudalism of his ancestors and the absolutism of the last three Bourbon kings. Much of his reign was marred by internecine religious war, and though he worked diligently to heal his wounded kingdom, his inability to do so ended in his assassination in 1589, the first regicide of a French monarch. It was not for a lack of intelligence that his short life ended in this manner. He was eminently smart and quick-witted. Chevallier and Crompton both consider him to be one of France's best-equipped kings. We contend that it was Henri III's ambivalent *persona* that contributed to his doomed reign. This is in no way an exhaustive analysis, but it has hopefully explained some of the hostility and loathing that he and his administration engendered and endured.

Firstly, Henri III did not adhere to the traditional role of the king. Previous kings had always remained relatively accessible to their courts and subjects. Their courts were largely nomadic, however, and this allowed for few set rules. Under Charles IX before him and continued by Henri, the court focalized on Paris, which allowed for the increasingly stringent etiquette that Henri III pursued with gusto. His reign saw the king become more and more distant and unavailable, as seen with his reorganization of the royal apartments and the solemnizing of his meals. This flew in the face of established tradition and caused much resentment towards him. Moreover, again in contravention of deeply rooted norms, Henri III showed a distinct lack of moderation. He vacillated between ardent fervor and fits of indolence. He relished in carnal pleasures and temporal delights, only to be taken over by a piety so extreme that he flagellated himself to the

point of bleeding. This immoderation was so well known that in several pamphlets written at the end of his reign, Henri III becomes Henri de Valois, a monster of wanton death and destruction, incapable of controlling himself. Already an effeminate man that was prone to sartorial excess and who eschewed more manly activities in favor of comfort, his chosen favorites, the *mignons*, exacerbated this.

As previously stated, this study is by no means exhaustive. Other veins should be explored. An understanding of how other sovereigns were treated, those who were seen to have transgressed in the same way, would prove to be interesting, in that it would help to shed light on the gender roles, monarchy and political environment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. James I and IV of England and Scotland and Christina of Sweden spring first to mind. Although Christina of Sweden lived after Henri III's death, there should be some compelling analogues. She too was seen as transgressing the social norms of the time period. She preferred to comport herself as a "man" and even went as far as to wear men's clothes. This may have been due to the fact that she was ruling a country in a time when women were relegated to the sidelines, as it were, but she was nevertheless a controversial character and merits discussion, for she too was a transgressor. Additionally, James I and IV was similarly seen to not be wholly heterosexual, both to his contemporaries and later historians. For example, he was a man that at the age of thirteen fell madly in love with a visiting French courtier; similar infatuations continued throughout his life. In addition to the analysis of Christina of Sweden, James IV and I should serve as a good analogue of how rulers who did not conform to hegemonic gender roles were treated in the early modern period. Furthermore, a study of the rise of etiquette under Louis XIV would be compelling. Henri III lived in a temporal space in which the

etiquette that he desired was not possible. Both kings lived in a time of internecine civil war, but Louis XIV succeeded in creating a system in which all power derived from him. It would be fascinating to understand how Louis XIV was able to do this, whereas Henri III was unable.

Finally, by the end of his reign, in August of 1589, Henri III of France was a king without a capital, and he had an heir that was a detestable heretic, Henri of Navarre.[11] A king of enormous gifts, he died at the hand of a fanatic Dominican monk, Jacques Clément, due to his inability to govern himself, to conform to tradition, and to embody the ideal masculinity, in short to manage his *persona*.

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[11] Rossant addresses Henri de Navarre directly: "*Tu es matté, tu es foible, et perclus,/ quant est de Roy, tu ne seras onque./ Car le François ne peut et ne veut pas…/Auoir un Roy qui s'est dit aux Estats/ Le Protecteur de la bande heretique*" (Rossant, 14).

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