**Chénier’s *Charles IX*: Paving the way to Revolution?**

Marie-Joseph Chénier’s *Charles IX* (1788) has gained emblematic status in French Revolutionary theatre, principally because of what it dared to dramatize and how its theatricalization occurred. Written by Chénier under the ancien régime from 1786-88 and first performed after the ‘October Days’ of the French Revolution on 6th November 1789, *Charles IX* is a *tragédie nationale* portraying courtesans’ influence on the young king, Charles IX, in his decision to order the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre on 24th August 1572. *Charles IX* is a product of its environment: this is not the creation of a full political or theatrical revolution, but it clearly rejects a past inheritance and welcomes the novelty of a new era, demonstrated by both its substance and its references. Ever since *Charles IX*’s first performance, scholars have focused on its reception and performance over what is traditionally considered a mundane text. *Charles IX* is undoubtedly important in revolutionising the roles of performance promotion, censorship, the freedom of theatres, the parterre, politicians and even the actors themselves. However, this heralded reaction is based entirely around a text which has been frequently overlooked. The French Revolution is a key period of development: tragic production before the Revolution was highly regulated by the State following the French classical model whilst during the Revolution tragedy of this nature diminished. Likewise, the French Revolution saw the political change from a monarchy to a republic. Although the politically revolutionary nature of *Charles IX* has been much written about many critics have omitted to appreciate the relationship between *Charles IX* and the future works of the Revolutionary period as well as the earlier classical model. This relationship underlines how theatrical and political revolutions are intimately linked here. In order to establish the evolution towards a new form within the Revolution, the overhaul of the old system, it is necessary to firstly establish the classical model of tragedy as it reigned in contemporary eighteenth-century France. Having established this standard, it will then be crucial to analyse how and if Chénier alters this inheritance, before examining the revolutionary novelty introduced by Chénier’s adoption of *tragédie nationale*, whence the truly revolutionary characteristic of *Charles IX* may be demonstrated. These novelties will then require cross-referencing against later specimens of Revolutionary tragedy, in order to establish the great extent to which *Charles IX* is preparing for an even greater revolution.

In order for there to be a revolution, a previous standard must have existed. For Chénier, this was the established French classical tragedy model, which was a compulsory reference point for any French tragedian. This classical model was founded during the seventeenth-century largely around Aristotle’s *Poetics*. For Aristotle, tragedy is ‘the imitation of an action’[[1]](#footnote-1) fulfilled by superior persons[[2]](#footnote-2) in lyric[[3]](#footnote-3). The plot follows a singular action caused by hamartia, a fatal flaw or error, which becomes irreversible at the turning point, the peripeteia[[4]](#footnote-4). The plot is tripartite, compromising reversal, recognition and suffering[[5]](#footnote-5). Throughout the poetics, there is the sense that tragedy has to be something which *could* happen to the audience[[6]](#footnote-6): in recognising the characters’ errors, they are terrified and fear for themselves[[7]](#footnote-7). The purging of emotions through catharsis is also essential. This understanding of tragedy is fundamental as a standard because it formed the foundation of the seventeenth-century classical model. However, Aristotle’s theories were subject to great French theorising, as both Brereton and Steiner illustrate[[8]](#footnote-8). This is essential because French theoretical manipulation introduced concepts such as the compulsory three unities of time, place and action, the requirement of five acts, for alexandrine verse, for the characters to fulfil the requirements of vraisemblance and bienséance, for the plot to be limited to certain temporal, geographic and thematic areas, as well as a set dramatic chronology. Furthermore, these concepts were not just abstract, they were legal rules, as Richelieu’s ‘Edit sur le Théâtre’ of 1641 demonstrates. Thus, the classical model constitutes a bastardised model of the Greek original, manipulated for the benefit of royalty and aristocracy, as its enshrinement in law illustrates, rather than dramatic production. This is crucial because when Chénier refuses certain elements of this model, he is refusing such a system imposed by the ancien régime, thus making his action even more revolutionary in both the dramatic and the political sense, which would consequently be amplified in the Revolution’s climate. Moreover, in his ‘Discours Préliminaire’ to *Charles IX*, Chénier constantly references the Greeks, establishing the case for a return to the Greek model, referring to how Greek tragedy allowed for characters to still be alive and then stating ‘voilà ce qu’était la tragédie dans Athènes’[[9]](#footnote-9). This is essential because it is clear that Chénier views himself as not only breaking ancien régime aesthetical and legal rules, but additionally reviving and freeing the true free spirit of Greek tragedy as a political revolution should restore freedom.

Having established the pre-existing model, there is a clear necessity to question Rodmell’s dismissive argument that ‘in form, there is nothing terribly revolutionary about *Charles IX*’[[10]](#footnote-10). Chénier questions the set model with revolutionary fervour throughout his ‘Discours préliminaire’, yet he omits several fundamental elements. Firstly, Chénier remains faithful to the Aristotelian rules. The *dramatis personæ* encompassing the premier families of France clearly illustrates that he retains the requirement of characters of high rank. Additionally, phenomena such as hamartia are clearly present in Charles IX’s malleability whilst catharsis, pathos, reversal and recognition are unmistakeably still evoked. Moreover, Henri de Navarre’s monologue opening Act V is essential in demonstrating Chénier’s conformity. This sole monologue was a later addition; therefore it is clear that Chénier is actively reworking his text to fit tradition. Secondly, with regards to the French classical rules, Chénier is subjective in his paring down to return to Greek tragedy. Unlike La Motte far earlier in 1721[[11]](#footnote-11), Chénier never questions the need for verse which is not necessarily lyric, and even if verse were to be necessary, he does not question the use of the alexandrine, which is not the original iambic trimester often employed by the Greeks. This is also of significance since the Revolution would produce tragedy written in prose. Likewise, the unities remain uncontested[[12]](#footnote-12): the action occurs over one day, as the striking of Church bells confirms, ‘la scène est dans Paris, au château du Louvre’[[13]](#footnote-13) and the action revolves around Charles IX’s decision regarding the massacre. Additionally, Chénier’s use of historical characters to represent the modern day is traditional at best, since it had been practiced even at the epitome of classicism by playwrights such as Corneille and Racine. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the plot over five acts remains undisputed: non-biblical three act tragedies remained rare. Furthermore, as a detailed study of Kennedy and Netter’s findings of Revolutionary theatre demonstrate, there was an abundance of three act tragedies between 1792-1795, during which Chénier himself resorts to three acts for his tragedy *Timoléon* (1794). It is therefore of note that although Chénier boasts of his originality he refuses other choices which could have been adopted, several of which characterised tragedy at the height of the Revolution and were even later adopted by Chénier himself. Thus, by remaining partly grounded in the classical model, it is clear that there is an evolution rather than a revolution occurring here.

However, Chénier is writing under the ancien régime: the Revolution is not a reality and thus he is restrained to a greater extent than attributed by many critics by his environment. ‘Le temps nous a permis d’oser beaucoup plus, et nos descendants oseront plus que nous’: this is crucial since just as Chénier recognises how seventeenth-century tragedians were not able to write freely owing to Richelieu’s orders, he too is also constrained by his society in a manner that future generations shall not be[[14]](#footnote-14). Given this relativism, the apparent novelties which Chénier introduces acquire an even greater importance in situating *Charles IX* in the evolution of tragedy.

Chénier renounces the classical formula of plot through the climax of dramatic tension. The classical model demanded Act I as the exposition, Act III as the peripeteia and Act V as the dénouement. Chénier abides to Act I’s formula, but as Catherine de Médicis recounts:

J’ai fait semer par-tout que le chef des rebelles,

Pour d’utiles forfaits renonçant aux combats,

De Charle et de moi-même a juré le trépas ;

[…] je réponds du succès.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Therefore, not only has Chénier removed the peripeteia offstage and between acts III and IV; moreover, it is recounted in Act IV by the king’s mother. This peripeteia is formed of description, the passivity of which is emphasised by the fact it occurs offstage. Thus, Chénier is clearly differing himself from the classical model. Furthermore, as Frantz observes, the massacre remains preventable until Act IV[[16]](#footnote-16), which is unusual since destiny would have been fixed earlier if Chénier had followed the classical tradition. Additionally, Boileau, the apostle of classical rules, esteems that dramatic tension must continually ascend[[17]](#footnote-17). In contrast to this, Chénier’s dramatic climax is clearly Act IV, thus reiterating how Chénier is disregarding traditional rules to evolve his theatre.

With the aid of hindsight, it is clear that Chénier is not merely flouting the rules here: there is a clear progression towards the formulation of tragedy as it would be known during Romanticism. As Steiner observed from his multi-national approach, Romantic drama is structured by ‘four acts… followed by a fifth act of redemption and innocence regained’[[18]](#footnote-18). Although *Charles IX* does not completely conform to this model, it is evident how Chénier’s climax over four acts followed by the final act where the condemnation of Charles IX and the presence of the future great French king Henri de Navarre can be understood as innocence regained. Therefore, tragedy is evidently evolving from its classical model to resonate with this future form. This transition is supported by the great theorist Diderot himself who states ‘une pièce ne se renferme jamais à la rigueur dans un genre’[[19]](#footnote-19). This is crucial since being an eighteenth-century theorist, Diderot extensively analysed the evolution of drama as the rigidity of classical genres started to crumble. Subsequently, this lends great weight to Blanc’s argument that ‘quarante ans plus tard, sa pièce aurait été un drame romantique’[[20]](#footnote-20). Therefore, it is unmistakable both from Chénier’s contemporary disregard of the established model and posterior analyses that *Charles IX* is part of an evolution between the revolution from one model to another.

For the classically grounded audience, as it would have been in 1789, the most striking omission in the cast is that of the confidants, an omission which subsequently had a profound effect upon it. Chénier proudly states that ‘j’ai banni de ma pièce ces confidens froids et parasites qui n’entrent jamais dans l’action’[[21]](#footnote-21). Confidants had previously been a key dramatic technique allowing the characters to express their emotions and drive the action. However, Chénier’s eradication of the confidants is important on several levels. Firstly, it reconfirms his liberation of Greek tragedy from the chains of French classicism since in Greek tragedy it was the chorus who listened, not a specific role. Secondly, this role was now fulfilled by the audience. The necessity for the audience to react in place of the confidants is essential. It increased both catharsis and their involvement in the play, which is vital since ‘le plaisir amène le spectateur à l’instruction’[[22]](#footnote-22): the content of *Charles IX* was overtly didactic. Moreover, as Ault demonstrates, this instruction was a reintroduction on Chénier’s part, the success of which can be established by statements such as Desmoulins’s: ‘cette pièce avance plus nos affaires que les journées d’octobre’[[23]](#footnote-23). This neatly demonstrates how audience involvement in the play which Chénier’s exclusion of confidants creates, combined with such a intense moment in history, led to a revolution in theatre performance. This is confirmed by Friedland and Ravel’s analyses that the parterre became a veritable force to contend with, much more so than under the ancien régime[[24]](#footnote-24). Furthermore, the revisionist Friedland aligns this increased involvement with the parterre as the equivalent of the people, who can now dictate, as the rowdy audience did, what happens onstage which in turn represented what was happening politically[[25]](#footnote-25). Although such a thesis is perhaps too tentative to be wholly applicable to the situation of *Charles IX* and 1789, it is nonetheless noteworthy since it demonstrates increased audience participation in other sectors of life, and how this involvement is in part triggered theatrically by Chénier’s changes to the classical model in the Revolutionary period.

The intrigue of *Charles IX* is of the upmost importance when considering its place in the theatrical revolution between the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Before addressing the application of national history, it is important to note Chénier’s refusal of the theme of love. The action of *Charles IX* is centred on power not love. Despite the Duc de Guise’s abhorrence of Henri de Navarre as ‘celui qui m’a ravi la main de Marguerite’[[26]](#footnote-26), it is power and religion at stake in *Charles IX* not love. Chénier’s refusal to enter into a love intrigue, which would have been effortless given the triangle of Henri de Navarre, the Duc de Guise and Marguerite, and the timing of the massacre with Navarre and Marguerite’s wedding, is significant. Vial and Denise state that in the eighteenth-century only ten tragedies out of four hundred were not founded upon a love plot[[27]](#footnote-27). This is crucial, since although love could potentially play a secondary role in these tragedies Chénier has refused it completely, thus underlining the revolutionary nature of his stance. Moreover, this revolutionary character is reiterated by Kennedy and Netter’s analysis: from their statistics, it is clear that although the theme of love remained predominant, its supremacy did decrease during the Revolution[[28]](#footnote-28). This revolutionary nature is increased further since *Charles IX* dates from 1788: whilst still under the ancien régime Chénier is once again pre-empting the trends of the Revolution. Therefore, the absence of love in *Charles IX* firmly established Chénier’s originality, further increased since he was writing in 1786-1788.

The rejection of love is also of revolutionary consequence since it introduces new social dynamics which mark the change from the ancien régime to the Revolution. The theme of love requires the presence of both sexes on stage: *Charles IX*’s cast is decidedly male. Furthermore, the only woman, Catherine de Médicis, could today be comprehended as masculine in gender, thus increasing the masculinity of the play. Chénier’s statement in the ‘Discours Préliminaire’ that ‘un théâtre de femmelettes et d’esclaves n’est plus pour des hommes et des citoyens’ is fundamental[[29]](#footnote-29). As Maslan observes, Chénier is restoring the masculinity of theatre[[30]](#footnote-30), which had been effeminised by the use of love intrigues. These were considered to be in the State’s interest, promoting emotions over action, thereby threatening the monarchy to a lesser extent. Therefore, this is not only revolutionary in terms of theme, but additionally in its clear rejection of the ancien régime. Moreover, this elimination of the feminine is crucial since it echoes the political reality: although the women of the ancien régime were not the most liberated, some did hold significant power. However, during the Revolution this power was taken away both by society which excluded women, and by the legislative, which confined women to non-citizenship in 1795. This projection of future events in *Charles IX* continues since in rejecting love, one is also rejecting the family. Family is entirely political in *Charles IX* as Catherine de Médicis relationship with her son demonstrates. She is ‘reine et mère coupable’[[31]](#footnote-31), with the position of ‘reine’ over ‘mère’ emphasising the supremacy of power over family, which Catherine herself recognises when assuring the Cardinal of her ability to guarantee his success through her maternity. With the demise of family comes the advancing of the social contract. This is important since this occurred in reality in the ‘Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen’, which like Chénier’s play was very masculine and omitted the role of the family. Therefore, Chénier’s theatrical exclusion of love and its consequences is revolutionary and mirrors what would later occur during the Revolution, thus demonstrating how his play is paving the way for future events.

The above section has outlined what Chénier altered in the tragic model of his own accord. However, it is the genre *tragédie nationale*, the use of France’s history and historical figures in tragedy, that renders *Charles IX* the most revolutionary for its time, the most influential for Revolutionary theatre, and arguably the most important for the dramatic transition into the nineteenth-century.

Chénier proudly professes that *Charles IX* ‘est la seule tragédie vraiment nationale qui ait encore paru en France’[[32]](#footnote-32). Chénier writing in 1788 is correct in his statement; however it must be contextualised. As Chénier’s use of the subjunctive infers there were other such strains in eighteenth-century tragedy, both in practice and in theory, as Brenner attests[[33]](#footnote-33). In his ‘Discours Préliminaire’, Chénier licences his use of *tragédie nationale* by reference to Voltaire and Du Belloy. The former is traditionally attributed with the introduction of a hint of France in *Zaïre* (1732), having been inspired by the Shakespearian use of history[[34]](#footnote-34), whilst the latter’s *Siège du Calais* (1765) was received as the first use of French history in tragedy, although its plot and characters are principally English. As Maslan observes, ‘Chénier needed the imprimatur of Voltaire’s authority because *Charles IX* so flagrantly violated rules that had been established for well over a century – indeed since the administration of Richelieu’[[35]](#footnote-35). This is crucial because it reiterates that there is a simultaneous evolution and revolution occurring here. It is an evolution permitted by time: thus, under Louis XV’s absolutism Du Belloy dedicated his ‘national’, if principally English, tragedy to the king, whereas in 1789 Chénier could dedicate his fully French work to the Nation due to the change in the political climate. Thus, Chénier statement ‘il était impossible de traiter dignement des sujets nationaux sous le règne absolu du cardinal de Richelieu,’[[36]](#footnote-36) and therefore the ancien régime, is central because it demonstrates that the change in dramatic form and content is enabled by political changes. Although the Revolution had not yet occurred, *Charles IX* was composed as the monarchical crisis led to the calling of the États-Généraux in 1787 when the national conscious was awoken from the swathe of absolutism by the redaction of cahiers de doléances. Therefore, although traces of *tragédie nationale* existed prior to *Charles IX,* none had established such a tragedy where plot, characters and setting were entirely French until Chénier, thus highlighting *Charles IX’* revolution.

However, *Charles IX* was not simply revolutionary in its use of France’s history, but additionally in how others would use history thereafter. *Charles IX,* as the title indicates, features the premier families of the France on the tragic stage as little as two centuries ago: no playwright had ever gone this far. The Bourbon and Valois dynasties had never been implicated in tragedy; to do so when the Bourbons were still ruling demonstrates the fully revolutionary nature of this novelty. Moreover, subjects of tragedy had had to be distant, to such an extent that when a recent event was evoked in the classical tragedy *Bajazet* (1672)*,* Racine felt the need to extend the notion of ‘distance’ to geography[[37]](#footnote-37). The fact that there is a distinct lack of either temporal or geographical distance here fully illustrates how revolutionary *Charles IX* was. However, this revolution is also morphed into an evolution: as Tissier ascertains, ‘après *Charles IX*, on découvre que l’histoire de France est fertile en leçons’[[38]](#footnote-38). This is fundamental in terms of *Charles IX* paving the way to a revolution because Louis XVI was the subject of tragedies during the Revolution[[39]](#footnote-39). Therefore, it is clear that Chénier is operating a revolution in his own inheritance, but that his work also becomes the inheritance of others who continue the innovations that he has already achieved.

It is in analysing the three common contemporary criticisms from the performance of the play in the climate of 1789 that the theatrical and political revolutionary nature of *Charles IX* is underlined to the greatest extent. Firstly, Chénier notes the primary objection as the representation of ‘un roi de France tout à la fois homicide et parjure’[[40]](#footnote-40). To feature a recent French king on the stage was tragic blasphemy enough, but this is radicalised by statements from Charles such as ‘je suis un assassin’[[41]](#footnote-41), the final line of ‘Le ciel, en me frappant, donne un exemple aux rois’[[42]](#footnote-42), and ‘Versez le sang, frappez. Ciel! Qu’entends-je? Ah Madame.’[[43]](#footnote-43), with the instability of character rendered even more emphatic through the use of caesurae, opposition and exclamation. These lines demonstrate the full power of the performance of *Charles IX* in the political climate of Louis XVI being forced to return to Paris in October 1789. Furthermore, this is confirmed by statements such as Danton that ‘si Figaro a tué la noblesse, Charles IX tuera la royauté’[[44]](#footnote-44). This evidently highlights the anti-monarchical feeling which from 1793 would forever be associated with the French Revolution.

However, as Charles’s last quote illustrates, his hamartia is to ‘entendre’ rather than rule, a remarkable similarity with the contemporary king Louis XVI. The power games which dominated Versailles were well known, and thus lines such as ‘ils ont d’un jeune Roi maîtrisé la faiblesse’[[45]](#footnote-45) are steeped in poignancy, ultimately underlining the good nature of the king and the corruption of the nobility. This was of particular contention given the rise of anti-noble feeling, witnessed in pamphlets such as those of Sièyes, the abolition of feudalism on the 4th August 1789 and Chénier’s own rejection of his aristocratic arms in 1787[[46]](#footnote-46). All these events have come to symbolise the Revolution and thus from hindsight the revolutionary nature of *Charles IX* is evident. Moreover, the royal allegory is continued by Catherine de Médicis, who through multiple references, especially ‘Des femmes gouvernant des princes trop faciles’ encompasses the current foreign queen Marie Antoinette[[47]](#footnote-47). Indeed, the hatred of these women can be understood by ‘mon fils, n’en doutez pas, ce meurtre est nécessaire’, which is rendered even more emphatic as the Queen Mother’s first line[[48]](#footnote-48). Just as Catherine de Médicis was organising the murder of her son’s people, Marie Antoinette is seen to be threatening the contemporary people’s death with foreign intervention.

Chénier but thinly veils the above allegories and they must be appreciated in terms of 1789. As Hunt and Censer determine, until July 1791 ‘the king remained generally and genuinely popular’[[49]](#footnote-49): good kingship was still a convincing solution. Consequently, Chénier’s choice of seven political characters is important because this emphasises, despite the power games, the perfect possible balance around a central point of goodness, as the biblical associations of seven would imply[[50]](#footnote-50). Furthermore, this balance is reiterated by the duality of the ‘roi de France’ and the ‘roi de Navarre’ as they are continually referred to in the text. Following the adopted subtitle, this really is an ‘École des rois’. Therefore, it is justifiably so that Chénier can cry ‘O Louis XVI! Roi plein de justice et de bonté, vous êtes digne d’être chef des Français’ in December 1789[[51]](#footnote-51). The first reference to Henri de Navarre, later the most popular king of France as Henri IV, is ‘Bourbon’[[52]](#footnote-52) and he talks extensively of ‘patrie’, the land of the fathers, therefore crucially increasing the genealogical link to Louis XVI. Moreover, ‘au lieu de serviteurs à mes ordres soumis| Je voyais près de moi des égaux, des amis’[[53]](#footnote-53) essentially underlines that this is not the portrayal of kingship at the end of the Revolution which would have been absent or negative, it is the portrayal of the king required by the Revolution as it stood during the performance of *Charles IX* in 1789*,* thus underlining the continuous nature of revolution.

The second contemporary criticism was the portrayal of the Church on stage, the reaction of which is demonstrated by the declaration in Palissot’s quickly produced *Critique de la tragédie de ‘Charles IX’* (1790) ‘un cardinal! Il faut avouer que cela passe la mesure’[[54]](#footnote-54). Although the performance of Fontanelle’s *Ericie* (1768) in summer 1789 meant that *Charles IX* was not the first staging of religion, *Ericie* used a classical setting to address the issue as was demanded by Fontanelle’s environment. As Rodmell crucially confirms ‘no playwright in France had previously gone so far as this in an open attack on the Church’[[55]](#footnote-55). The Chancelier denounces that ‘les crimes du Saint-Siège ont produit l’hérésie’ which is rendered even more dramatic by its position in a perfectly balanced hundred-line tirade at the centre of the play[[56]](#footnote-56). Indeed, this direct attack on a foreign influence is confirmed by the Pope’s representative, the Cardinal, overtly boasting that ‘tout le pouvoir du trône est fondé sur l’autel’[[57]](#footnote-57), and therefore Chénier is attacking the very heart of ‘la France, heureuse et catholique’ as it had been under the ancien régime[[58]](#footnote-58). The revolutionary weight of this portrayal is increased by the fact freedom of religion had been restored in 1787 prior to the play’s completion and the ‘Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen’ had just confirmed this freedom as an inalienable right. Moreover, the Cardinal de Lorraine orchestrates the dramatic climax of *Charles IX* in **IV, 6.,** thus clearly demonstrating the anti-clerical attack occurring here. In keeping with his environment, Ault notes how Chénier uses the in vogue ‘tableau’ to increase the dramatic tension when portraying the three strikes of the bells before blessing the arms of the massacre and ordering ‘couvrez-vous saintement du sang des criminels’[[59]](#footnote-59). This is essential because it not only portrays the Church as murderous, but the use of the high-ranking Cardinal shows the murder as inherent to the Church. Likewise, the imagery of ‘saintement’ and the biblical references of three, both of the trinity and the imagery of the denial of Christ, intensify this murder. The contextualisation of this portrayal is rendered truly revolutionary since it was first performed four days after the Assemblée Nationale’s confiscation of the Church’s assets on 2nd November 1789, and would run again for the Fête de la Fédération just before the polemical Civil Constitution of the Clergy on 12th July 1790. Therefore, *Charles IX* as a dramatic work is revolutionising the subject matter available to not only tragedy, but the French stage, and is extremely revolutionary in the sense that it is following in spirit the events that occurred during the Revolution.

The final criticism that Chénier highlights is his choice of St Bartholomew’s Day, 24th August 1572. This was a massacre during the civil French Wars of Religion and bears remarkable similarities with what was to occur later in the Revolution, not only in the Vendée but throughout France. The choice of subject is key for Chénier, as his repetition of ‘le sujet le plus tragique de l’histoire moderne’ indicates[[60]](#footnote-60). The use of national history has already been addressed, yet it is interesting to note that Chénier chose perhaps the darkest moment of French history which even the polemical Beaumarchais criticised[[61]](#footnote-61). The fact that such history was being recalled at a moment of crisis was incredibly dangerous, either in 1788 or in the Revolution of 1789. However, the choice of St Bartholomew’s Day per se is of significance here: it is a historical event known to the vast majority of the population. This is vital since following an idea deeply in tune with the emancipatory Revolution, Chénier is evidently moving away from the classical plots which would have restricted his play to the educated classes. As Docherty argues, the Enlightenment maintained the need to move away from the use of myth[[62]](#footnote-62), which is realised by Chénier and confirmed by his avowal to ‘chasser de la tragédie ce fatras d’idées mythologiques’[[63]](#footnote-63). Consequently, as Bailbe details, it is ironic that Chénier popularised St Bartholomew’s Day and advanced its mythological status[[64]](#footnote-64). However, when analysing Chénier’s role in a revolution, it is clear that he is not only transforming the use of French history in theatre, but, moreover, its reception.

Therefore, Chénier’s *Charles IX* paved the way to Revolution to a great extent, both theatrically and politically. This paving is founded in both the text and the moment at which is was produced and theatricalised. This essay has examined how with regard to a dramatic revolution, Chénier does retain certain elements of the classical model, thus is not entirely original. However, this is overshadowed immeasurably by what he both alters and introduces. Just as traces of *tragédie nationale* can be found in Voltaire and Du Belloy, the foundations of Revolutionary theatre and the traces of Romanticism have been established in *Charles IX.* In terms of a political revolution, *Charles IX* is categorically revolutionary in what Chénier dares to compose and thus stage. The purpose of this essay has not been to morph the reception of *Charles IX* to the reality of the Revolution with the gift of hindsight. What has been examined and established is that this tragedy, composed on the eve of the Revolution and performed in 1789, is inextricably linked to its context and thus it is revolutionary in the moment, which in turn, can become a smaller part of the greater occurring revolution. Therefore, it is the occurrence of these novelties at a time when all established structures crumbled which evolved the precedent and paved the way to the great revolutions of Romanticism and France as a Republic. Just as the Revolution was not complete in 1789, so Chénier’s *Charles IX* is only at one stage of the theatrical and political revolution. It is in its progress from the past and its acceleration towards the future that *Charles IX* can truly be said to be paving the way to Revolution.

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