



The Lords of Montplaisir



HUNTER STEELE

“Human nature does not change. The screen it plays upon merely grows narrower. This sobering view of today, and a key to understanding the bloody extremes of history, is an underlying tenet in the philosophy of a Scots author who offers his readers a mixture of thought, violence, sex, and historical adventure, underpinned by irrepressible humour . . .

“[Here is] a monstrous historical epic of sixteenth-century France with a truly remarkable sweep set amid the conflict between Catholics and Huguenots, it leaps from the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572 through the defeat of the Spanish Armada to the brink of the Thirty Years War. It is a stunning read but beware, should your stomach be weak or sensibilities too refined, human nature is not idealised. Here it is, in turn, brave and bloody, noble and treacherous, lecherous, smelly, and occasionally beautiful. Its hero and heroine lovers are innocents travelling through a dangerous sea of violence, lust and corruption. Even they, however, are truly aware of their bodies.

“[The novel] is erotic, but not pornographic. The man merely tells it as it was and almost certainly still is. The book is a parable. The machinations of sixteenth-century Europe are still with us in the intrigues of the Kremlin, the White House and Whitehall.

“The Lords of Montplaisir is a masterpiece of storytelling, setting the overall historic scene then galloping along chronologically as its hero and heroine defy death and fates worse than. It teems with incident and detail, is almost cinematic in its cliffhanging end to chapters. No pastry cake characters are evident, all are sometimes discomfortingly real, displaying vulpine greed, passion, carbuncles and all, garnished and sustained by the author’s humorous and sardonic view of the vagaries of human nature.” *Observer*

“Highly entertaining.” *Times*

“At the centre of the novel are the adventures of two brothers, Daniel and Gaspar, Lords of Montplaisir, who each covet the beautiful young Sylvie. Their competing pursuit of Sylvie becomes entangled with the bloody intrigues of Catholics and Huguenots and is overshadowed by the dark presence of the sinister Abbé Armoise.

“Steele gives us neither the stereotypes of popular historical fiction, nor the weighty sobriety of a Tolstoy, but rather a zany, knockabout vision of history as an erotic tragi-comic farce. The black and brutal side of the murderous sixteenth century is set alongside the erotic games of the ruling class. *The Lords of Montplaisir* is a hugely enjoyable read with (in every sense) many climaxes.” *Book People*

“This is a huge book of seven hundred pages; but it wears its erudition with ease and style, never gets boring, and gave me real pleasure as I learned about Huguenots and corruption in the Catholic church, of the secret lives of French aristocracy, and of medieval sex habits. I relish the modern metaphors and style slyly deployed to reinvent history.” *Books in Scotland*

“Brimming with chutzpah – attacks its subject at full tilt and full frontally, relating princely paranoias and queenly conspiracies with an unerring instinct for the sap of lives lived in wanton precariousness. The link between copulation and population is well made. Who fathered whom, by the novel’s end, becomes a question of some moment, a matter of creation bloodily mingled with acts of ‘licensed’ chilling murder and with the slaughter of the Huguenots in 1572 when, in Paris, ‘public buildings turned sour with the warm putrid stench of evaporating blood’.

“In recreating such events and in evoking mood and explaining the tactics and repercussions of political manoeuvrings, Hunter Steele writes compellingly, informed but never imprisoned by his fastidious research into the period . . . This is a hustling bloody story stained with sweat and human indifference and obsession, told with verve and a feeling for history absent from the textbooks.” *Scotland on Sunday*

